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FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker

# Mormonism's Open Canon

## Some Historical Perspectives on Its Religious Limits and Potentials

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### Summary:

The research of John Welch and David Whittaker identifies several historical, theological, and institutional reasons why the open canon of Mormon Christianity has not become a Pandora's box. This article discusses the Apocrypha, the Latter-day Saint concept of scripture in light of modern canonical criticism, and the process of scriptural standardization.

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MORMONISM'S OPEN CANON: SOME  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ITS  
RELIGIOUS LIMITS AND POTENTIALS

By John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of  
Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta, November 24, 1986

I. Introduction

Just as three years ago Professor Davies published his insightful observations about the idea and role of canonical writings in Early Christianity and Judaism, as contrasted with Hellenism,<sup>1</sup> so he has formulated in the paper we have just heard many similarly cogent perceptions about the sacred writings and authoritative revelations revered in Mormon Christianity.<sup>2</sup> And, just as many contemporary Catholic, Protestant and Jewish theologians, such as James Sanders, James Barr, Brevard Childs, and a number of others, have wrestled recently with questions such as "what makes a text sacred?", "how did certain books become canonical?", and "are there degrees of inspiration or normativeness within the traditional canon?",<sup>3</sup> so Mormon exegetes

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<sup>1</sup> W. D. Davies, "Reflections about the Use of the Old Testament in the New in its Historical Context," JQR 74 (1983): 105-36.

<sup>2</sup> W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon,'" Christians among Jews and Gentiles, a festschrift for Krister Stendahl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), also published in HTR 79 (1986): 44-66.

<sup>3</sup> For example, James A. Sanders, From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm (1987); Brevard S. Childs, Old Testament Theological in a Canonical Context (Philadelphia: Fortress); David G. Meade, Pseudonymity and Canon (Tuebingen: (Footnote 3 Continued on Next Page



can profit by engaging in similar reflections about the so-called "standard works" of the Latter-day Saints.

Professor Davies ends his paper by suggesting an engaging point of departure for such reflections when he poses a fundamental issue: "Progressive and continuous revelation is certainly an attractive notion," he observes, "but equally certainly it is not without the grave danger of so altering or enlarging upon the original revelation as to distort, annul, and even falsify it."<sup>4</sup> Our paper today considers historical information to assess what the experience of Mormon Christianity has been. How "open" has its canon become? Have dangerous incursions into the holy scriptures been made either by the LDS standard works or by the LDS use of the Apocrypha or other non-canonical writings or revelations? Our research identifies several historical, theological and institutional reasons why the "open" canon of Mormon Christianity has not become a Pandora's box.

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(Footnote 3 Continued from Previous Page)

Mohr, 1986); Harry Y. Gamble, The New Testament Canon, Its Making and Meaning (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); James A. Sanders, Canon and Community (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); James Barr, Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983); Brevard S. Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Robert Detweiler, "What is a Sacred Text?" Semeia 31 (1985): 213-30; Walter Simonis, "Zum Problem der Kanonbildung," Catholica (1983): 133-39; Thomas A. Hoffman, S.J., "Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible," CBQ 44 (1982): 447-69.

<sup>4</sup> W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon,'" Christians among Jews and Gentiles, a festschrift for Krister Stendahl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), p. 64.

## II. Historical Roots.

Mormon Christianity arose out of the religious experiences of Joseph Smith, Jr., from 1820 to 1844, but it survived as these were given shape, substance and authority in the written records of the movement he founded. Unlike traditional Christianity, which remains a religion of the Book (the Bible), Mormonism from its beginning has been a religion of Books. This pluralistic approach to religious texts remains one of the unique aspects of the Mormon movement--one seldom appreciated and almost never understood.

Examining Mormonism's open canon from an historical perspective is a large and complex topic. Our hope is that the experience of Mormons with canonical matters for over one hundred and fifty years might be of some value to other religious traditions which, more recently, have also begun to deal with these matters.

As with so many other dimensions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the tone and direction of its approach to scripture was established by Joseph Smith, Jr., the founding prophet. The Mormon understanding of scripture is multi-layered and multi-textured. For our purposes here it is useful to begin with an examination of five stages in, or aspects of, that understanding: (1) the Book of Mormon, (2) LDS thought as it relates to Dispensationalism, Apostasy and Restorationism, (3) the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, (4) the active role of a prophet-translator, and (5) the open-ended quest for further light and knowledge, which remains at the core of Mormon thought.

### The Book of Mormon

The discovery and translation of the Book of Mormon assured from the very birth of the Church in 1830 that members were committed to a scriptural text outside the Bible.<sup>5</sup> The very process of its appearance locked early converts into at least two fundamental positions: (1) that God still spoke through prophets, and (2) that the Bible was not an exhaustive collection of canonical scripture. These positions worked inside as well as outside the Book of Mormon. The book itself cautioned its readers "because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written" (2 Nephi 29:10). It even went further:

Woe be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus sayeth the Lord God, I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth will I give more; and from them that shall say, We have enough from them shall be taken away even that which they have (2 Nephi 28:29-30).

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<sup>5</sup> The basic story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is in B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 1:69-176. The large literature on the Book of Mormon is listed in Gary Gillum and John W. Welch, Comprehensive Bibliography of the Book of Mormon (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [F.A.R.M.S.], 1982). See also John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report W&R-86; and the annotated bibliographic essay by David J. Whittaker in Mormon History Association Newsletter, No. 53 (June 1983), pp. 14-16.

The Book of Mormon further claims that it is only one of many books to come forth in the "last days" to more fully establish the record of God's dealing with his children through the ages. (1 Nephi 13:39). Additionally its pages contain interpretations, additions and corrections to chapters from Isaiah, as well as quotations from otherwise lost prophets of ancient Israel, not to mention a moving account of the personal ministry of the resurrected Jesus among inhabitants of ancient Mesoamerica.<sup>6</sup>

By their belief in the Book of Mormon, early converts had their conceptions of scripture greatly expanded, but not unlimitedly so. For several reasons, belief in the Book of Mormon has not produced the result of an unlimited canon. First, the Book of Mormon is unique. Other records like it may someday come forth (as 2 Nephi 29:13 foretells), but until they do, the Book of Mormon is a discrete addition to ancient scripture that is not open-ended. Second, the Book of Mormon's position on the Bible is highly supportive. It corroborates the fact that the biblical texts were transmitted to us with remarkable accuracy, as is entailed by its inclusion of several Isaiah texts highly supportive of the Hebrew text.<sup>7</sup> Third, the Book of Mormon

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<sup>6</sup> These are Zenos (1 Nephi 19:10, 12, 16; Jacob 5; Alma 33:3-11; Alma 34:7; Helaman 8:19; 15:11; and 3 Nephi 10:15-16) and Zenock (1 Nephi 19:10; Alma 33:15-16; Helaman 8:19-20; 3 Nephi 10:16). The account of Christ's personal ministry is in 3 Nephi 11-26. Isaiah material is mainly in 1 Nephi 20-21; 2 Nephi 7-8, 12-24; Mos. 14.

<sup>7</sup> See John A. Tvedtnes, "The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon," in Isaiah and the Prophets (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1984); expanded version available from F.A.R.M.S.

promotes faith in the Bible. Mormon 7:9 declares that the Nephite records were written "for the intent that ye may believe [the Israelite scriptures]." Fourth, in the one place where a Nephite prophet was critical of the Bible, the problem prophesied about had little to do with the texts which we have, but more with the texts that have been lost. 1 Nephi 13:26-28 prophesies that, after the death of Jesus, parts will first be taken away from the gospel, and second that covenants will be lost, and then as a result ("wherefore") the Bible will not be complete when it is finally compiled.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Mormon Christianity has never seen the Book of Mormon as anti-Bible; instead to Mormons it is a supplement to it and a confirmation of their belief that God communicates to his children in all ages.<sup>9</sup>

#### Mormon Dispensationalism

Much of the LDS approach to scripture emerges out of the larger historical world-view of early Mormonism, which saw the history of the world in terms of a series of "dispensations." Beginning with Adam, each dispensation began with divine communications but each ended in apostasy; thus, in time, periodic restorations were required when divine power and

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<sup>8</sup> Historically a case can be made that this is what happened in Early Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> Studies on the role of the Bible in early Mormonism include Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830's," Brigham Young University Studies 13 (Summer 1973): 473-88; Timothy L. Smith, "The Book of Mormon in a Biblical Culture," Journal of Mormon History 7 (1980): 3-21; and Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," BYU Studies 9 (Spring 1969): 351-72.

revealed records were again restored to earth.<sup>10</sup> In Mormon thought, Joseph Smith was the divinely chosen instrument for opening another such dispensation. Restoring lost texts of earlier dispensations was a central part of this process. Thus, in December 1830, just eight months after the organization of the Church, Joseph recorded:

It may be well to observe here that the Lord greatly encouraged and strengthened the faith of His little flock, which had embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, as revealed to them in the Book of Mormon, by giving some more extended information upon the Scriptures, a translation of which had already commenced [i.e. the Book of Moses]. Much conjecture and conversation frequently occurred among the Saints, concerning the books mentioned, and referred to in various places in the Old and New Testaments, which were now nowhere to be found, the common remark was "they are lost books;" but it seems that the Apostolic Church had some of these writings as Jude mentions or quotes the Prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam. To the joy of the little flock, which in all . . . numbered about seventy members, did the Lord reveal the following doings of olden times, from the prophecy of Enoch. HC 1:131-33, Dec. 1830.

Such an outpouring was a meaningful part in the "Restoration of All Things," as Mormonism saw itself (thus fulfilling Acts 3:21). It was, in fact, an expected dimension of such a new dispensation. At the same time, however, this was not without boundaries, for only divine revelations given in previous eras could be added to scripture through this process of restoration.

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<sup>10</sup> A good summary of the LDS understanding of world history via dispensations is in B. H. Roberts, "Introduction," History of the Church, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret, rev. ed. 1956), 1:XXIV-XCIV.

The restoration of "lost books" continued in early Mormonism beyond the translation of the Book of Mormon. The writings of Enoch, Abraham and Moses were given to the church during the lifetime of Joseph Smith (most were first published in LDS newspapers, then in 1851 in the Pearl of Great Price, a volume that was added to the LDS "standard works" in 1880).<sup>11</sup>

#### The Joseph Smith Translation

In none of this, however, did early Mormons think any less of the Bible, so long as it was "translated correctly".<sup>12</sup> While stated in 1842, this principle was put into practice as early as 1830 when Joseph Smith began to revise the King James text. He considered his work a "branch of my calling," and from 1830 to 1833 he spent many hours studying and emending the Bible.<sup>13</sup> While the bulk of his exegesis was done in the books of Genesis, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the very process further suggests just how broad Mormonism's attitude was toward the biblical

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<sup>11</sup> Much of the story of the Book of Mormon peoples concerns their keeping and then "hiding up" sacred records which are to be given to a latter, more righteous people. The basic history of the Pearl of Great Price is in James R. Clark, The Story of the Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Article of Faith, #8. First printed in Times and Seasons 3 (1 March 1842): 709.

<sup>13</sup> The standard study of the JST is Robert J. Matthews, A Plainer Translation, Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary (Provo: BYU Press, 1975). An essay which surveys the larger literature is David J. Whittaker, "The Joseph Smith Translation: A Selective Bibliography" Mormon History Association Newsletter, No. 52 (February 1983): 7-10.



canon. Approximately 3700 verses in the Bible were altered by Joseph Smith--about 10% of the total.<sup>14</sup> While several of these changes are theologically significant, most are relatively slight textually, adding insights and clarity often in Targumic fashion. This process was an on-going matter of correctly understanding the meaning of the text; it did not produce a definitive "final" version. In 1842, after working on revising the King James Version, Joseph still found value in the German translation, and despite the interest of Joseph Smith in producing a more accurate translation of the Bible, Latter-day Saints have held to the King James Version of the Bible.<sup>15</sup> What they were comfortable having a prophet like Joseph do, they would not be willing to have any scholar do.

#### Prophet, Seer and Revelator

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<sup>14</sup> See Robert J. Matthews, A Plainer Translation, pp. 424-25, 434. Joseph Smith continued to revise the biblical text up to his death in June 1844. His wife and closest colleagues said that he never considered his work finished.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Smith's comments on the German translation are in History of the Church 6:364. In 1868 it was decided not to use the JST as the standard LDS Church Bible. This decision grew out of the need for the LDS Church to take a position on the 1867 printing of Joseph Smith's Bible revisions as published by a church then lead by his son Joseph Smith III. See the account in Reed C. Durham, Jr., A History of Joseph Smith's Revision of the Bible (Ph.D. dissertation, BYU, 1965), pp. 245-73. See also the minutes of the "Provo School of the Prophets," 20 June 1868, MS in Historical Dept., LDS Church, SLC, Utah. In 1981 the LDS Church officially added most of the major revisions to their new edition of the Bible, not in the text but in footnotes and an appendix. The basic story is told in Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publications of the Standard Works--1979, 1981," BYU Studies 22 (1982): 387-424.

In addition to restoring or correcting ancient texts, Mormonism claimed that modern prophets could reveal God's will for their own times. Thus Joseph Smith regularly dictated revelations addressed to a variety of problems the church and her members faced.<sup>16</sup> The earliest revelations deal with the sacred task of translating the Book of Mormon, but similar practical and doctrinal instructions soon followed on other matters, such as the organization of the church, the conduct of its members, the building of temples, and missionary work. Most of these revelations were eventually compiled into a volume titled, after 1835, the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>17</sup>

In the earliest years this collection was a steadily growing one; hence the volume of contemporary revelations was not seen to be closed-ended. Practical considerations in transcribing and publishing prevented every revelation from being added to the volume, and there are at least 40 known revelations given to Joseph Smith that have never been included.<sup>18</sup> But this was

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<sup>16</sup> An historical overview of the early understanding of the office of "prophet, seer, and revelator," is D. Michael Quinn, "The Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church," Journal of Mormon History 1 (1974): 21-25.

<sup>17</sup> The best studies of the history and textual development of the Doctrine and Covenants are Robert J. Woodford, The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, 2 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, BYU, 1974); and Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Provo, Utah: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981).

<sup>18</sup> A chronological list of 34 of the uncanonized revelations of Joseph Smith is in Cook, The Revelations of Joseph Smith, pp. 361-64.

handled by the early--and still followed--practice of holding regular conferences wherein living prophets give the members doctrinal counsel and instructions about institutional changes. Thus many of the most unique teachings of Joseph Smith and his successors do not appear in the Doctrine and Covenants,<sup>19</sup> but were given to members in conference sessions and then printed in official reports where they could be studied at greater length.<sup>20</sup> At the present, such instruction, which is viewed as normative by church members, is almost always scripturally grounded in applying scriptural propositions or requirements to contemporary situations. Thus here, too, history bears out that this process is not radically open-ended. The doctrine and instruction of the General Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is substantially contained de facto by scripture, by prior

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<sup>19</sup> For example, see his "King Follett Discourse" of 7 April 1844, most completely found in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. The Words of Joseph Smith (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), pp. 340-62. See also the three articles in BYU Studies 18 (Winter 1978). Similarly a large percentage of Brigham Young's speeches, while written, were not published in the Journal of Discourses.

<sup>20</sup> Conference minutes first appeared in early LDS newspapers, then more completely in the Journal of Discourses (1854-1886), and after 1898 in the regularly issued Conference Reports. With the emergence of better communication systems, the Church has made every effort to use radio, television, and satellite technology to broadcast these messages throughout the world. A useful study of the General Conferences is Jay R. Lowe, A Study of the General Conferences of the Church . . . 1830-1901 (Ph.D. dissertation, BYU, 1972). A useful compilation of the "Official" policy statements of Church leaders to 1951 is James R. Clark, Messages of the First Presidency, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-1975).

precedents, by stare decisis, by the requirement that the collective judgments of the Quorum of the Twelve be unanimous in order for them to be authoritative (D&C 107:27), and by the necessity of obtaining the common consent of the general membership of the Church for any substantive changes (D&C 26:2). This circumstance can be compared favorably with the similar functioning of the Oral Law in Judaism which existed side-by-side with the written Torah,<sup>21</sup> or the role of Tradition in Catholicism which is the overriding "yardstick" or "norm for the interpretation of Holy Scripture,"<sup>22</sup> but even more with the Anglo-American Common Law (which is always open to innovation or adaptation).

Another aspect that contributed to the early Mormon approach to scripture was the practice of adding material to or emending already written revelations. Scholars of the Mormon scriptures have suggested at least four main reasons for these changes: (1) changes which further clarified the original text; (2) changes which softened language which for various reasons had caused public relations problems for the Mormons with their non-Mormon neighbors; (3) changes which reflected the organizational growth

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<sup>21</sup> See Davies, "Reflections about the Use of the Old Testament in the New in its Historical Context," pp. 132-34.

<sup>22</sup> "The ultimate foundation for Christian doctrine, which was opposed to every error in the early days of Christianity, was not the proof based on Holy Scripture alone, much less that based on theological reasoning, but the appeal to tradition." Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, ed. Karl Rahner, trans. Geoffrey Stevens, nihil obstat Jeremiah O'Sullivan, The Teaching of the Catholic Church (New York: Pauline Fathers, 1967), pp. 54-56.

of the Church; and (4) changes which reveal growing insights regarding the doctrines of the Church.<sup>23</sup> But for whatever reasons these changes were made, they are considered by most Latter-day Saints to have been relatively minor. So while the making of such textual changes to revelations from God committed Mormons to a notion of scripture that allowed for refinement, growth and clarification, it did not open the door to wholesale revision.

Converts who read the first section (given by revelation as the preface to the 1833 publication of Joseph's revelations) were prepared for this open approach to sacred texts. Several verses specifically spelled out the purpose of scripture:

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; and inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent; and inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. D&C 1:24-28.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Woodford's textual studies of the D&C show how the major textual changes fall into these four areas. See particularly his "A Survey of Textual Changes in the Doctrine and Covenants," in Seventh Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, Jan. 27, 1979), pp. 27-36. See also Melvin J. Peterson, "A Study of the Nature of and Significance of the Changes in the Revelations as Found in a Comparison of the Book of Commandments and Subsequent Editions of the Doctrine and Covenants (MA Thesis, BYU, 1955); and James R. Harris, "Changes in the Book of Moses and Their Implication Upon a Concept of Revelation," BYU Studies 8 (Summer 1968): 361-82.

In a sense this counsel made all scripture contemporary, to be read and studied and made "living" to the student who did his or her work in humility and prayer.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps no Mormon leader more fully reflected this idea than Brigham Young. While he consistently proclaimed his love and reverence for the Bible,<sup>25</sup> he always tempered this with a belief that reflected the Mormon approach to scriptures:

I have heard ministers of the Gospel declare that they believe every word in the Bible was the word of God. I have said to them "You believe more than I do." I believe the words of the Devil are there; I believe that the words of men and the words of angels are there.<sup>26</sup>

President Young again encouraged a broad approach to the scriptures when he told another audience:

Do you read the Scriptures . . . as though you were writing them a thousand, two thousand, or five thousand years ago?

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<sup>24</sup> Compare 1 Nephi 6; 1 Nephi 10:17-19; 1 Nephi 19:22-23; and Moroni 10: 3-6.

<sup>25</sup> A sampling includes JD 1:243 (discourse of 24 July 1853); 3:335-36 (15 June 1856); 9:297 (25 May 1862); 12:259-60 (9 August 1868); 13:174-75 (29 May 1870); 13:213-214 (17 July 1870); 13:236 (20 Feb 1870); 14:113 (7 May 1871); 14:135-36 (21 May 1871); and 14:226-27 (27 August 1871). Compare Charles W. Penrose, Millennial Star 55 (21 August 1893): 544.

<sup>26</sup> JD 14:280 (discourse of 3 July 1870). This again shows the Mormon belief that even within the canon there are levels of truth and accuracy. It was this position Joseph Smith reflected when he rejected the Song of Solomon as "uninspired writings" in his textual work on the Bible. See Robert J. Matthews, A Plainer Translation, pp. 87, 215, citing JST, OT MS 3, p. 97.

Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so that you may be as familiar with the spirit and meaning of the written<sup>27</sup> word of God as you are with your daily walk and conversation.

The heart of the sacred text was its message; he did not want "mere phraseology" to get in the way.

Is there anything in the Bible that should not be read by the scholars [i.e. the youth] in schools? If there be, leave out such parts, or rather replace the language there used, with phraseology more in accordance with modern usage, so that the principles contained in the Bible may be taught in your catechisms or other books . . . . The mere phraseology there used is not of much convenience, it is the true principle which that book teaches which renders it so valuable.<sup>28</sup>

For Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the written word must not get in the way of living leaders. Neither one wanted or allowed a summa theologica to be written,<sup>29</sup> for the holy priesthood was not to be confined to a set of books.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> JD 7:333 (discourse of 8 October 1859).

<sup>28</sup> JD 13:174-75 (discourse of 29 May 1870).

<sup>29</sup> See the analysis in David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering," Journal of Mormon History 4 (1977): 35-49.

<sup>30</sup> Brigham Young said that the books were not enough, JD, 7:332 (8 October 1859), and that the scriptures point to the fountain of light, and by implication, were not to take the place of modern revelation. See JD 8:129 (22 July 1860). In 1897 Wilford Woodruff taught the same idea, attributing his remarks to Brigham Young. See Conference Reports (October 1897): 22-23. Compare the comments of Apostle John A. Widtsoe, "The message of the scripture is divine; The words in which it is clothed are human. Failure to make this distinction has led to much misunderstanding. Intelligent readers will separate the message of the scripture from the forms of its presentation." Articles of Faith in Everyday  
(Footnote 30 Continued on Next Page



## The Apocrypha

One outgrowth of Joseph Smith's role as a living prophet was the counsel he revealed to members about the use of the Apocrypha. The issue arose as he was revising the Bible. When he asked God what should be done with these books that Protestants were coming to consider as extracanonial he was told:

There are many things contained therein that are true, and it is mostly translated correctly; there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men. Verily, I say unto you, that it is not needful that the Apocrypha should be translated [as part of Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible]. Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited. Therefore it is not needful that it should be translated. D&C 91:3-6.

This counsel has remained central to the LDS approach to both apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, while the LDS attitude toward such non-canonial writings encourages an open-ended quest for further light and knowledge by promising that reading the Apocrypha can be beneficial, it also places the entire burden upon the individual to sift spiritually and

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(Footnote 30 Continued from Previous Page)

Life (Salt Lake City: Presiding Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1951), p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley has been suggesting the implications of this for decades in his own work. A useful introduction to the larger issues is C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), and generally the essay by Gerald E. Jones therein.

intellectually the wheat from the chaff in these texts, a process which is not unlike the general LDS approach to seeking wisdom "out of the best books" (D&C 88:118) and to embracing truth wherever it can be found. Historically, this attitude led immediately to considerable use by Latter-day Saints of extracanonical works in the early years of the church, and that use continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

For example, in July 1840, Parley P. Pratt, the first editor of the LDS Millennial Star in England, used excerpts from the Laurence edition of the Book of Enoch to strengthen Mormon claims regarding the Book of Mormon.<sup>32</sup> In 1841, Charles Thompson wrote:

"The truth of this book is established by a recent discovery of the Book of Enoch, which contains an evident prophecy of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the mission of the Elders of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which they are now performing among the nations of the earth."<sup>33</sup>

In September 1843, Samuel Downes, a Mormon missionary in Manchester, England, published an English edition of The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, which he viewed as additional

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<sup>32</sup> "The Aprocryphal Book of Enoch," Millennial Star 1 (July 1840): 61-63. The Book of Enoch is also quoted in Times & Seasons (1 November 1840): 193-96, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Thompson, Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon (Batavia, New York: Waite, 1841), pp. 125. The prophecy speaks of the "tablet of heaven" and the "books of joy" given to the saints, as well as of the suffering and persecution of the righteous, pp. 126-32.

support to the LDS approach to scripture.<sup>34</sup> An editorial notice in the Millennial Star noted that while the Testaments were not an official publication, they were "a relic of antiquity, containing many portions of truth."<sup>35</sup>

As early as June 1840 the Times and Seasons, the Church's religious newspaper in Nauvoo, Illinois, called readers' attention to the Book of Jasher.<sup>36</sup> In 1885 a Salt Lake City publisher published the Book of Jasher for the LDS audience and it has been read widely by Church members ever since.<sup>37</sup>

In 1898, another Mormon magazine printed "The Apocalypse of Abraham," as translated from German by Professor G. Nathaniel Bonwetsch. It had appeared in Leipzig the year before.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Downes, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Manchester: Ralph J. Bradshaw, 1843). See particularly his Preface, pp. ii-iv, dated 18 September 1843.

<sup>35</sup> The editorial comments are in LDS Millennial Star 4 (October 1843): 96.

<sup>36</sup> Times and Seasons 1 (June 1840): 127.

<sup>37</sup> Issued by J. H. Parry and Co., Salt Lake City, Utah. A full study of the LDS use of the Book of Jasher is Edward J. Brandt, The History, Content, and Latter-day Saint Use of the Book of Jasher (Ph.D. dissertation, BYU, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> See "The Book of the Revelation of Abraham," Improvement Era 1 (August and September 1898): 705-14, 793-806. The editorial comments in the October issue, pp. 896-901, manifest the LDS approach to apocryphal literature: "How many of his writings may have been distorted by the folly and traditions of men, we are at a loss to know; and how much of truth is in this or that writing attributed to him, we cannot say; but certainly it is both interesting and of importance to take what has been brought to light of the old patriarch's writings by the great Mormon prophet, and note the points of comparison between them," pp. 898-99.

In 1852, the Millennial Star also excerpted from the Jewish Chronicle material from Reverend Menson's The History of Marriage Among the Jews and The Departure of the Israelites from Egypt, which included long quotations from the Talmud and other Jewish records.<sup>39</sup>

The early Mormon use of these kinds of materials usually came in a missionary context. Convinced that their approach to ancient scripture was correct, these missionaries stressed the notion that they believed in other religious writings or books outside the Bible. They urged both the "lost books" and "continuing revelation" themes as the basis for true religion,<sup>40</sup> and they used these recently discovered apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works as felicitous exhibits. But in several respects the content of these records was less significant than was the fact of their existence, preservation and reappearance.

### III. Modern Latter-day Saint Usage of Non-Canonical Writings

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<sup>39</sup> See LDS Millennial Star 14 (8 May to 12 June 1852): 171-74; 187-89; 202-204; 218-20; 233-35; 251-53. See also 14 (1 February 1852): 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Charles Thompson, Evidence in Proof of the Book of Mormon (Batavia, New York: D. D. Waite, 1841), pp. 11, 125-32 (citing Laurence's edition of Book of Enoch); Parley P. Pratt, An Address...to the Citizens of Washington (1840), p. 3. The inquiry may arise whether we believe in other writings or books besides the Bible? To which we reply in the affirmative;" Parley P. Pratt, An Address...to the People of England (Manchester, NY 1840), p. 3; and the extended arguments in Orson Pratt, Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon (1851). Not all uses were of a missionary nature, however, as is seen by John Taylor's use of the Book of Enoch in his volume entitled The Mediation and Atonement, noted by Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1957), ch. 16, p. 399, n. 2.

In recent years, Mormons have made limited use of ancient non-canonical writings to confirm or support their beliefs. It is important to note that these writings have not been used as a source of doctrine. They are of interest only to the extent they are consistent with the teachings the Church. They have proved intriguing to Mormons in several ways.

For example, the Doctrine & Covenants, at one poignant moment in Joseph Smith's life, stressed life's brevity in comparison with eternity (121:7). Thus, Apostle Neal A. Maxwell in General Conference could fervently quote a reported statement of Jesus in the Apocryphon of James to the same effect that "life is one single day and your sufferings one single hour."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Mormons believe that all mankind lived in a pre-mortal existence with God and Christ. References to similar ideas in 4 Ezra, 2 Enoch, or the Hymn of the Pearl, have attracted Mormon interest, as have frequent references in this literature to Adam.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the Mormon belief in the Book of Mormon as the Stick of Ephraim coming through Joseph Smith, and the Bible as the Stick of Judah has found companionship in the idea of the "two Messiah"

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<sup>41</sup> Conference Reports (October 1985), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> O. Preston Robinson, Christ's Eternal Gospel (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), p. 180; Hugh Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), p. 267; Joseph McConkie, "Premortal Existence, Foreordinations, and Heavenly Councils," in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints, pp. 173-80; S. Kent Brown, "The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective," *ibid.*, p. 259.

doctrine, one for Joseph and another for Judah, present in Pseudepigrapha.<sup>43</sup>

Such materials have been used by Mormons for several purposes, but these have been secondary to, or supportive of, their doctrines. One venerable tradition exists to use these writings to show ways in which Joseph Smith might be considered a restorer. This is done, for example, by identifying aspects of Mormon Christianity which are also distinctive of Early Christianity,<sup>44</sup> or their use of similarly patterned esoteric rituals.<sup>45</sup>

Another endeavor is to show that Joseph Smith was ahead of his time. For example, the intervening years and textual discourses have borne out his interest in restoring ancient texts and his prediction that many other books relevant to God's

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<sup>43</sup> Hugh Nibley, Since Cumorah (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1967), pp. 223-34; Joseph McConkie, His Name Shall be Joseph (Salt Lake City: Hawkes, 1980).

<sup>44</sup> See Hugh Nibley, The World and the Prophets (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1953).

<sup>45</sup> See Hugh Nibley, "Early Christian Prayer Circles," BYU Studies 19 (1978): 41-78; and "Treasures in the Heavens," in Old Testament and Related Studies (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1985), and Message, pp. 263-86. For esoteric practices in Early Christianity, see also Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (New York: Scribner's, 1966), pp. 125-37. In the Gospel of Philip, the ritual of the bridal chamber resonates distantly with the Mormon ritual of temple marriage. The Gospel of Philip is discussed by Jorunn Buckley, "A Cult-Mystery in the Gospel of Philip," JBL 99 (1980), 569-81, and S. Kent Brown, "The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective," in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints, pp. 260-62.

dealing with ancient Israel and with Early Christianity would yet come forth.

Elsewhere in Mormon scholarship, parallels have been adduced between the so-called Forty-day literature in the Apocrypha and the post-resurrection discourses of Jesus in the Book of Mormon,<sup>46</sup> or between the Enoch literature and Joseph Smith's revelations about Enoch in the Pearl of Great Price,<sup>47</sup> as well as similarities between the Narrative of Zosimus and the visions of Lehi and Nephi in the early portions of the Book of Mormon.<sup>48</sup> These comparisons have been used to show that the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses are not unlike, if not superior to,<sup>49</sup> other extrabiblical ancient Jewish and Christian writings, in ways which would have been difficult for a person in the early nineteenth century to have predicted.

Nevertheless, although interesting to some Mormons, such uses have not become dominant or even widely known among the general Church membership. No doctrines, let alone waves of heresy, have

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh Nibley, "Christ among the Ruins," in Noel Reynolds, ed., Book of Mormon Authorship (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), pp. 121-41.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Nibley, Enoch the Prophet (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> John W. Welch, "Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 22 (1982): 311-332.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Imitation Gospels and Christ's Book of Mormon Ministry," in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints, pp. 53-107.



entered Mormonism through these channels.<sup>50</sup> It appears that the lure toward such materials has not proved to be very great, probably because their inherent religious value is, in most cases, palpably less than that of the Bible, Book of Mormon, and the other writings accepted by the Latter-day Saints as authoritative.

Nor are Latter-day Saints conscious of any diminution in their respect for the Bible due to their acceptance of additional writings either as scriptural or beneficial. LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie said, "There are no people on earth who hold the Bible in such high esteem as we do." He says this in the Mormon tradition by which they consider themselves in a better position than others to interpret the Bible in light of what they consider their fuller comprehension of the Gospel. As indicated above, the major problem Mormons see with the Bible (or any other book of scripture, for that matter) is the frank realization that such books can only at best contain "a small branch from the great redwood of revelation that God has given in ages past."<sup>51</sup> This

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<sup>50</sup> An interesting experience centered around the claims of Charles B. Thompson in the early Church. Claiming secret meetings with angels having special names possibly drawn from apocryphal literature, he tried to organize his own church in Iowa in the early 1850s, but ultimately attracted very few followers. See David J. Whittaker, "Substituted Names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith," BYU Studies 23 (1983): 103-12.

<sup>51</sup> Bruce McConkie, "The Bible, a Sealed Book," CES Symposium on the New Testament (1984), p. 2.

sentiment is echoed in John 21:25, that "if [the things which Jesus did] should be written, every one, . . . even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." (See also 3 Nephi 19:32; 26:6.) Thus, it is not what the Bible contains that raises any concern for Mormons; it is only the parts the gospel, the covenants, and the texts (mostly still unknown) that did not get included that one misses in the Bible (1 Nephi 13:26-28).

At the same time, however, Latter-day Saints recognize that all scripture is not of equal worth. Genesis, Isaiah, the four Gospels, and the letters of Paul, James, and the Epistle to the Hebrews especially receive emphasis in Mormon thought, while it has also been said that "Job is [only] for people who like the book of Job" and the Song of Solomon is not inspired writing.<sup>52</sup> It is unclear to what extent, if any, the Latter-day Saint acceptance of non-canonical works (from the perspective of traditional Protestantism), such as the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine & Covenants, has directly contributed to their willingness to grade canonical writings in this way, but this too is consistent with the general Mormon view that all things must be understood with the spirit of the Holy Ghost, correctly perceiving the plan of salvation and knowing how God deals with man in general.

There still remains, of course, the possibility of fraudulent works being used by some in the Church, given the generally open

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<sup>52</sup> Bruce McConkie, "The Bible, a Sealed Book," CES Symposium on the New Testament (1984), p. 3.

attitude Mormons have toward works claiming to be ancient. It is surprising, however, how few such works get used by Church members. LDS writers, editors, scholars and administrators have been alert to prevent misuse of apocryphal or non-canonical materials.<sup>53</sup> The recent "Archko" volume is a case in point; its identification as a fraud by an LDS scholar seems to have stopped all use of it in the Church.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. The Latter-day Saint Concept of Scripture in Light of Modern Canonical Criticism

In recent years, a number of scholars have concerned themselves profoundly over the question: "What is scripture?" Various concepts, such as Christuserfahrung, inspiration, normativeness, community, and canonicity have entered this discussion. We shall not attempt to survey this extensive body of writings on canonical criticism or to relate it to the Mormon concept of scripture, but a few observations are in order.

One is that the possibility of additional scriptures has been recognized by some. For example, as Thomas Hoffman summarizes:

B. Brinkmann has suggested that it is theoretically possible that a lost epistle of an apostle could still be accepted into the canon, although practically the church regards the canon as closed. This at least implies the possibility of the existence of a book presently outside the canon which

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, S. Kent Brown, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Mormon Perspective," BYU Studies 23 (Winter 1983): 49-66; Ariel L. Crowley, "The Epistle of Kallikrates and Baptism for the Dead," Improvement Era 48 (July, 1945), 386, 430 (giving notice that this letter, published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1928, is not authentic).

<sup>54</sup> See Richard L. Anderson, "The Fraudulent Archko Volume," BYU Studies 15 (Autumn 1974): 43-64.

would possess the [attributes of inspiration and normativeness]. A reading of the history of the canonization of our NT suggests that possibly such books as the Shepherd of Hermans, the First Epistle of Clement, or the Epistle of Barnabas might have [these attributes] and simply lack [canonicity]. The reasons why they were eventually dropped from the canon are not that clear. The larger OT canon of the Orthodox churches also suggests the same possibility."<sup>55</sup>

The Mormon concept of scripture over the past 157 years is thoroughly in harmony with this assessment.

Second, other studies have considered the self-defining meaning of scripture for religious communities. In certain respects, belief in the Book of Mormon serves as an important "symbol of peculiarity" which has made the Mormon community into a persistent and enduring people.<sup>56</sup> James A. Sanders' study, Torah and Canon, somewhat similarly suggests that the Jewish canon had a function of self-definition in the ancient Israelite community, especially in times of crisis. His concept is applicable in some ways to 19th century LDS revelations, because much of the Mormon scripture grew out of concrete historical circumstances in which Mormons defined their sense of uniqueness and covenant relationship to each other and their God, but it is less applicable to the Book of Mormon, which far more acted to

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<sup>55</sup> "Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible," CBQ 44 (1982): 462-63, citing B. Brinkmann, "Inspiration und Kanonizität der Heiligen Schrift in ihrem Verhältnis zur Kirche," Scholastik 33 (1958): 209-33, cited in R. E. Murphy, "The Old Testament Canon in the Catholic Church," CBQ 18 (1966): 193.

<sup>56</sup> Compare Mark Leone, "Mormon 'Peculiarity,'" in Persistent Peoples: Cultural Enclaves in Perspective, G. Castile and G. Kushner, eds. (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1981).

create and define the religion, rather than being canonized by an existing community.<sup>57</sup> While many of Joseph Smith's revelations came in times of crises (such as persecution from without or apostasy from within), they were not canonized during the great episodes of crisis in Mormon history, such as in 1838 (the height of the Missouri persecutions) or 1844 (the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and the succession crisis that followed) or in 1856 (during the Reformation and the Utah War) or in 1887 (the year the Edmunds-Tucker Act disincorporated the Church at the height of the federal anti-polygamy prosecutions). One does not find new scripture being canonized in these crisis years primarily because the Mormons' concept of canon from the beginning ran counter to a closed canon. When the Pearl of Great Price was accepted as a "standard work" in October 1880 it had already been used extensively in the Church for almost thirty years. In a sense, members (particularly British converts who had grown up using the volume) were ratifying the use of scripture that was already in place.

Third, the Mormon period of textual and canonical fluidity in its early years hearkens back to conditions which W. D. Davies has found in early Christianity. As Davies has concluded:

Owing to our familiarity with a fixed authoritative canon, confined in Protestantism to the Hebrew Bible, it is easy to

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<sup>57</sup> Thus, Robert Detweiler, "What is a Sacred Text?" Semeia 31 (1985): 217-18, misunderstands LDS history in this respect. In another sense, however, the Book of Mormon was composed at a time of crisis in Nephite civilization--at the time of its demise--as also was the book of Ether. The plates of brass became closed and canonical out of the crisis in Jerusalem from which Lehi fled.

conceive of the engagement of the early Christian movement, especially before 70 C.E., in too simplistic terms. They did use written Hebrew Scripture which they regarded as sacred, but these were still undefined in detail and had not yet achieved the express authority of "the canon," and above all they coexisted with a vast tradition of Oral Law and subtle and infinitely varied exegetical-interpretive traditions."<sup>58</sup>

As mentioned generally above, similar comments aligning Mormon and early Christianity were made over thirty years ago by Hugh Nibley: "The early Christians did not regard the canon of the scripture as closed," citing Hilary, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others.<sup>59</sup> Further studies of canonical history are therefore likely to be of continued interest to Latter-day Saints.

#### V. The Process of Standardization.

In the midst of the open Mormon attitudes toward scripture, there also evolved a standardizing of LDS thought, suggesting one other way in which Mormonism is reliving some of the experiences of the early Christian Church which also saw a standardizing of doctrine in its early centuries.<sup>60</sup> In Mormonism, this process can be traced through the appearance of such key works as Parley P. Pratt, A Voice of Warning (1837), John Jaques, Catechism for

<sup>58</sup> Davies, "Reflections about the Use of the Old Testament," pp. 135-36.

<sup>59</sup> Hugh Nibley, The World and the Prophets (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1953), pp. 184-85.

<sup>60</sup> Particularly enlightening are the studies of John G. Gager, Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), some of which he applied specifically to the Mormons in his essay "Early Mormonism and Early Christianity: Some Parallels and their Consequences for the Study of New Religions," Journal of Mormon History 9 (1982): 53-60.

Children (1854), Parley P. Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology (1855), Franklin D. Richards, A Compendium of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church (1857), and James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith (1898). All of these volumes drew heavily upon the "standard works" of the Church, but all subordinated the written work to the spoken word of living leaders through whom God speaks.<sup>61</sup>

In the 20th century, this order of primacy has been largely reversed. With the works of James E. Talmage in the early part of this century, it appears the term "standard works" was introduced into the Mormon vocabulary and a Mormon concept of canon emerged.<sup>62</sup> In the 1950s, the instructions of J. Reuben Clark were also influential in reinforcing the King James Version

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<sup>61</sup> While we do not pursue it here, this emphasis on loyalty to living leaders has meant placing the issues of orthodoxy and heresy more on the institution than on doctrine. This "boundary maintenance" in Mormonism tends to be focused mainly on administrative support (i.e. loyalty to living leaders and current programs) than on doctrinal matters (which can and have shifted through the years). No study has fully examined this, but useful comments are in Robert R. King and Kay Atkinson King, "The Effect of Mormon Organizational Boundaries on Group Cohesion," Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought 17 (Spring 1984): 61-75.

<sup>62</sup> The words "standard works" were used in 1867 to mean regular Church books in general by George A. Smith, Journal of Discourses 11:363-64 (7 April 1867). The phrase appears to have been first used by Talmage in his lectures on the Articles of Faith in 1896, and then in his book by that title, to refer to the Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Soon after, the phrase was similarly used by George Q. Cannon in his instructions in 1900 to Sunday School teachers, "Outside Literature," Juvenile Instructor 36 (15 February 1901): 110, and by Joseph Fielding Smith, "Our Standard Church Works," Improvement Era 7 (January 1904): 201-7.



of the Bible,<sup>63</sup> and in defining some limits on when a prophet speaks as a prophet, admonishing members to submit prophetic statements to confirmation by the Holy Ghost and, implicitly, to scrutiny in light of existing scripture.<sup>64</sup> Thus, while the possibility certainly exists for Latter-day Saints that God will yet reveal many important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God,<sup>65</sup> there is little practical concern among them that such future revelations would be inconsistent with existing scripture or fundamental doctrine.

#### VI. Conclusions.

In conclusion, we would focus attention on the four following points reflecting the balance which has existed historically in Mormonism between open and closed aspects of its Canon:

1. From the beginning in 1830, the doctrine of inerrancy of scripture has had no place in the Latter-day Saint church. The

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<sup>63</sup> J. Reuben Clark, Why the King James Version? (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1953).

<sup>64</sup> J. Reuben Clark, "When are the Writings or Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?" Deseret News, Church News Section (31 July 1954), reprinted in Dialogue 12 (1979): 68-81.

<sup>65</sup> Articles of Faith, #9. See also the insightful essay by Peter Crawley, "The Passage of Mormon Primitivism," Dialogue 13 (1980): 26-37, which looks at the origins in Mormonism of the balance between the canonical and the inspirational, qualities which in large measure came from a creedless faith and an informal theology. There is also a general expectation among Latter-day Saints that other texts will still be forth coming, including the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon and the scriptures of the ten tribes.

very growth of Mormon scriptures, both progressively, through time, and textually through corrections and emendation, prevented a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy from developing. Sacred volumes are to serve men, not the other way around, and listening to God's living authorized spokesmen is essential to one's understanding of His will.

2. On the other hand, in spite of the LDS openness to the possibility of new scripture, there is also a firm conviction that Joseph Smith gave the church a core set of texts which are used to judge or measure other religious texts. Thus, the idea of the standard works has prevented a scriptural openness to just any text that comes into public view. Mormons regularly renew their commitment to be bound by the Bible and other books of scripture through sacred covenants in temples. Thus, the use of noncanonical sacred writings by Mormons, although intriguing and confirmatory of some Mormon teachings, has remained peripheral and secondary.

3. Institutionally, the early practice that "all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the Church" and unanimity of the Quorum of the Twelve (D&C 28:13; 26:2; 107:27), as well as the unique role of the prophet as the spokesman of the Lord (D&C 28:2-3, 7), and the effect of precedent and scripture, also have provided norms that have prevented the openness of Mormonism to revelation and to new scripture from becoming very widely open. Few scriptures have been added in the last one hundred years, although those that have been are viewed as significant; and

4. From an individual member's point of view, the idea of scripture in the LDS church from the beginning has focused the definition of scripture on the oral messages of church leaders when they were "moved upon by the Holy Ghost" (D&C 68:3-4). A burden equal to that of the speaker is upon the individual hearer or reader, who must in such cases be the final judge of what constitutes scripture and how it is to be understood. In a very real sense, one has to be a prophet to recognize one. Much of Mormonism's strength has come from maintaining these balances and from placing this burden of spiritual discernment on each individual.

In conclusion, the Thirteenth Article of Faith provides guidelines useful in these matters. "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." Quoting Paul, Joseph Smith told his people on another occasion to "prove all things and hold fast to that which is true." No better advice is possible for those who anticipate future tasks and additional textual discoveries relevant to Christianity.