CRITICISMS OF THE EXPANSION THEORY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON FROM THE SCRIPTURAL FUNDAMENTALIST'S PERSPECTIVE

The expansion theory of the Book of Mormon which I presented in a recent article[1] has elicited criticism from scriptural fundamentalists both pro and anti-Mormon. Scriptural fundamentalists deny that scripture is conditioned by human interpretation in terms of the times and place of authorship. Stephen E. Robinson, a religion teacher at Brigham Young University, criticizes the article, stating that his perspective is that of an orthodox Mormon. His criticisms raise several questions fundamental to the discussion of biblical scholarship and religious faith and relevant to of the philosophical issues attending hermeneutics (theory of interpretation) and biblical scholarship.

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[1] "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 20 (Spring 1987): 66-123.

Ultimately, scriptural fundamentalism is untenable and fails to account for what Judeo-Christians accept as scripture in general and for the Book of Mormon in particular.

RESPONSE TO ROBINSON'S CRITICISM

It should be understood up front that this is a response to the criticism proposed by Stephen Robinson and not to him individually. My hope is that discussions of issues concerning the scripture and scholarship can be carried out with regard and respect for one another's concerns, and especially where discussion is between brothers in the gospel.

Robinson's criticisms were stated in a paper presented at Brigham Young University's Third Annual Symposium on the Book of Mormon: Second Nephi. In Stating the thesis of the expansion theory, Robinson asserts that the expansion theory "suggests that not all of the present Book of Mormon is ancient, but that large parts of it were created by Joseph Smith under the inspiration of God out of Joseph's nineteenth century environment. (p. 1-2) (emphasis added). Robinson thus assumes that the expansion theory suggests that Joseph Smith simply introduced his ideas into the Book of Mormon text having no relation to the underlying text on the gold plates. This statement of the expansion theory critically misrepresents the theory. In contrast, the article states that "the Book of Mormon is best interpreted as an ancient text that has been translated, explained and expanded within a nineteenth-century framework." (108) In contrast to Robinson's claim that the expansion theory views the expansions as independent of the text contained on the gold plates, the theory

actually suggests that every expansion is text-dependent, or an interpretation or explanation of the text contained on the gold plates.

It is difficult to understand how Robinson could derive this view from the article, for the article repeatedly suggests a possible relation between the ancient text and the nineteenth century interpretation, and emphasizes without reservation that the translation of ancient texts necessarily involves interpretation from the perspective of the translator. (See, 68, 71, 73-78, 88-101, 106-107, 110-115). Robinson's restatement of the expansion theory is important because Robinson does not deny that Joseph Smith interpreted the Book of Mormon -- it is the extent of interpretation he challenges. It is important to see that the issue is not <u>whether</u> Joseph Smith interpreted the Book of Mormon, but to <u>what extent</u>. Once the issue is framed in these terms, it becomes clear that some form of the expansion theory is necessary, for this formulation of the issue admits that Joseph Smith influenced the content of the Book to some extent, though the precise extent is yet unknown. Indeed, such a view simply restates the thesis of the article! Further, once it is admitted that Joseph Smith influenced the translation, Robinson's criticisms make no sense.

1. <u>First Criticism: Denial of Predictive Prophecy</u>? Robinson's first criticism is that the expansion theory assumes that there is no predictive prophecy. He states:

> One hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that there can be no predictive prophecy, that is that neither God nor his

> prophets can reveal the future, and that prophets do not predict for future times; they only interpret for their own. It follows then that all apparent predictions about Christ or his message in the B.C. Book of Mormon must be "expansions" added after the time of Christ, and this logic allows the author to identify what came from Joseph and not the plates. Time and time again it is argued that Joseph must be the source of this or that passage because the Book of Mormon prophets who lived before Christ did not, could not, have known such things (p.2)

Robinson doesn't accurately represent the arguments of the article, for the article nowhere argues that prophets "did not, could not" have known the future, nor does it argue from the assumption that prophets cannot predict. I invite the reader to peruse the pages of the article cited by Robinson (80-82, 86-87, 101); none of them denies or assumes that prophecy is impossible. Indeed, Robinson completely ignores statements where I argue that revelation explains how the initially vague doctrines of the Book are developed and fleshed out (See, 78, 83, 84-86, 112-113). The Book itself suggests that the Nephite prophets clarified doctrines of the after-life, Messiah and the Devil through revelation.

Robinson apparently assumes that critical methodologies must assume that predictive prophecy is impossible. However, he does not accurately identify the assumptions of these methodologies, or the comparisons of doctrinal developments. As one of three methods of critical analysis, the article compares the doctrines of the Book of Mormon with Israelite and nineteenth century thought to see whether the doctrines of the Book are more characteristic of the ancient or the modern world. This method

of criticism, which I label "motif criticism", is premised on two assumptions: (1) there is a diversity of theological positions in the Old and New Testaments; and (2) statements of doctrine are conditioned by time and place; that is, they are expressed within terms of the culture which produced them.

These assumptions are well established both historically and in terms of Mormon theology. Mormonism teaches that all persons, including prophets, learn from revelation line upon line. Therefore, prophets may be at different points in their understanding of doctrine and their understanding may grow and develop over time. It asserts in its revelations that God speaks to persons after the manner of their language and understanding (Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). The Book of Mormon itself allows for weaknesses of human understanding and mistakes in Scripture (Ether 12:23-27; Mor. 8:12). Joseph Smith himself clearly felt free to later correct and clarify passages of the Book of Mormon, correcting especially where the assumptions brought to the text by a nineteenth century audience may lead to misunderstanding, such as when he added "the Son of the Eternal Father" where the first edition spoke of "the Eternal Father." (1 Nephi 11:21). Mormonism's views of continuing revelation and open canon help it to avoid the problems arising from the fundamentalist view of scripture as infallible and plenary. There is no reason, given the Mormon experience of continuing revelation, to believe that scripture is somehow invalidated if explained and clarified in translation by a prophet. Indeed, given Robinson's implicit view of immutable and infallible

scripture, how does he reconcile Joseph Smith's later clarifications of the Book of Mormon? Given his implicit view that God revealed a single, unified view of the gospel shared by all prophets at all times and places, including the Book of Mormon prophets, how does he account for the fact that the Book of Mormon does not mention material tri-theism, eternal marriage or the three degrees of glory? I believe that the fundamentalist view of scripture which Robinson urges as a basis to criticize the expansion theory is unable to account for either the diversity or the development of theologies in the works we accept as scripture. I have offered a view of revelation and scripture which I believe accounts for such diversity within the context of faith.

The assumptions of motif criticism are also well founded historically. It is clear that the Hebrew prophets expressed their messages in terms familiar to their culture. They adopted poetic allusions and metaphors from their environment. They understood their encounter with Yahweh in terms of legal procedures and customs from the ancient Near East. Paul explains his theology of justification by grace through faith in Christ in categories of Jewish law. He adopted the Jewish forensic term "justified" to explain the relation of the believing Christian to Christ. Indeed, if we find a document speaking of "justification by grace through faith in Christ," we can be relatively certain that it is post-Paul, for none of the Hebrew prophets, the Baptist, Jesus or New Testament writers ever uses the term "justification" in relation to grace. James uses

the term "justification" in relation to saving faith, but he is probably correcting a misunderstanding of Paul's doctrine. Peter Davids. Commentary on James (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1982): 130-132. The notion of justification by grace appears to be Paul's peculiar understanding arising from his unmerited call to be an apostle (though Paul's position of salvation by grace and judgment by works mirrors contemporaneous Jewish writings. See E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977): 515-518). Similarly, it is clear that Mormonism developed in its doctrinal understanding, moving from a position closer to Christian Primitivism to a more distinctive theology in Nauvoo. See e.g., Thomas Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," Sunstone 5 (July/Aug. 1980): 24-33; T. Edgar Lyon, "Doctrinal Development of the Church During the Nauvoo Sojourn, 1839-1846" BYU Studies 15 (Summer 1975): 435-46; Grant Underwood, "The Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology" Dialogue 17 (Autumn 1984): 35-74; Blake T. Ostler, "The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought" Dialogue 15 (Spring 1982): 59-78.

Robinson asserts further that the article "merely takes as given that such predictive revelation [about the Messiah or revelation] could not have happened." (p.3). He ignores the discussion of the concept of Messiah in the article which argues precisely what Robinson claims the article denies, i.e., that the knowledge of the Messiah known to the pre-exilic, non-biblical prophets Zenos, Zenock and Neum is vague, that the Messiah as

redeemer is revealed in Lehi's commissioning revelation and further developed and clarified by Nephi and later Alma through revelation. (p. 83). Contrary to Robinson's assertion, the article states: "The idea of 'a Messiah' is " introduced as a new revelation in Lehi's call...The initial Book of Mormon concept of "a Messiah" is vague, requiring Nephi's clarification...The term Christ, the Greek equivalent of Messiah, meaning the "anointed one," was first used by Jacob as a proper name after it was revealed to him by an angel." (83) In other words, the article confirms in no uncertain terms that the Nephite prophets learned of the Messiah through revelation. Nor does the article anywhere conclude, despite Robinson's assertions to the contrary, that the Nephites could not have known about the resurrection through predictive revelation. Nevertheless, it appears that Alma could not discover what happened to the soul between death and resurrection from the sources available to him (Alma 40:7-9). The article also suggests that Alma had to find that out by revelation. (p. 84-85). The fact of revelation does not mean, however, that the expression of the revelation was not conditioned by the time and place of its reception or that the translation is unaffected by interpretation. Indeed, it is clear from the Book itself that the Nephite prophets were conditioned by their culture and prior understanding.

Robinson avers that he would "jolly well" like to see the assumptions of motif criticism proven. The foregoing observations strongly support the real assumptions of the motif critical method in my opinion. Robinson goes further, however,

and suggests that no assertions of faith can ever be supported by evidence:

> The empirical approach gives scholars from different religious backgrounds common controls and perspectives relative to the data and eliminates arguments over subjective beliefs not verifiable by empirical methods. However, there is a cost to using the empirical method, for one can never mention God, revelation, priesthood, prophecy, etc. as part of the evidence or as one of the causes. An objective and critical biblical scholar by definitionand on principle cannot conclude that any effect had a supernatural cause, any more than a physicist can attribute nuclear forces to fairies or a medical researcher can attribute illness to evil spirits (pp. 3-4 emphasis added).

Robinson asserts that since empirical methodologies necessarily avoid "supernatural explanations," we should not adopt or trust the conclusions of such methodologies. I find this position untenable. He appears to urge that all persons who take physics, geology or biology seriously must, upon the pain of incoherence, be atheists. Is he suggesting that we all join the flat earth society and get rid of medical doctors in favor of exorcists and witch doctors? Robinson appears to believe that scientists and others who adopt empirical methodologies must reject beilef in God.

A coherent world view does not demand rejection of empirical methodologies, nor does acceptance of empirical methodologies require rejection of God. It must simply be realized that the types of questions that can be explored by empirical methodologies are limited to empirical assertions. Robinson assumes that religion in general and Mormonism in

particular make no empirical assertions. This assumption is clearly wrongheaded, though I believe that Robinson's comments have some validity to the extent he urges that we must understand the limitations of empirical methodologies. It must also be recognized, however, that empirical methodologies can answer questions that have a bearing upon faith assertions.

Assertions such as "God exists," or "God caused this earthquake" or "the Holy Spirit inspires me" are not subject to empirical falsification. However, such assertions as "a civilization descended from Israelites existed in ancient America," or "this book is a translation of an ancient record," or "a person named Jesus lived in Galilee" <u>are</u> empirical and are subject to empirical investigation. Robinson has made a logical category mistake to the same extent as one who assumes that all questions are scrutable by empirical methodologies; he assumes that no assertions related to faith are empirical. The assertion that the Book of Mormon is an historical work by Israelite descendants can be investigaged by the methodologies of biblical scholarship used in the article. Robinson argues that such methodologies "by definition" preclude God. Though empirical methodologies cannot show either that God was or was not involved in the production of the Book of Mormon, they <u>can</u> investigate whether the evidence is consistent with the claim that the Book is a translation of an ancient work. Finally, the assertion that "X accurately predicted Y event before it occurred" is an empirical assertion! Empirical methodologies can thus investigate whether predictive prophecy sometimes occurs

as opposed to simply assuming that it cannot as Robinson claims.

2. Second Criticism: Relevant Evidence Limited to Pre-exilic Sources? Robinson also (mistakenly) asserts that the article assumes that only pre-exilic Israelite or Jewish sources are relevant to identify the expansions of the Book. He states:

> A second implied assumption of the expansion theory, not totally unrelated to the first, is that our judgment of Nephite civilization and culture must be controlled and limited by our knowledge of pre-exilic Judah and Israel, and conversely that the Book of Mormon alone does not constitute reliable evidence for what Nephites believed anciently. This a priori is clearly revealed by the author's method of accepting Book of Mormon evidence for Nephite belief and practice if and only if a similar belief or practice can also be found in pre-exilic Israelite sources...The assumptions, of course, are that the Book of Mormon is not itself a pre-exilic work, that genuine Nephites were in all things clones of pre-exilic Israelites, and that we in the 20th century have a perfect knowledge of pre-exilic Israelite beliefs.

In response, Robinson has misconstrued the use of pre-exilic sources to show expansions. Robinson asserts that the article argues: "If x idea cannot be found in pre-exilic sources, then it follows that x is not a pre-exilic idea." This argument commits the fallacy of hasty generalization. However, nowhere does the article use this argument. Instead, the article relies on the reverse of the argument: "If x idea does not appear in known pre-exilic sources, then x has not been shown (conclusively) to be a pre-exilic idea." (68, 81-86). This argument is a valid statement about the lack of affirmative evidence; not an argument from negative evidence for which

Robinson mistakes it. The best evidence of what pre-exilic Israelites did and believed clearly derives from pre-exilic sources. However, circumstantial evidence from enduring tradition may also be relevant. For example, I refer to Ezra's post-exilic covenant renewal festival as circumstantial evidence for what pre-exilic Israelite practices may have looked like. (90). The point here is one of relevance. Sources from 100 A.D., such as 2 Baruch cited by Robinson, are far from convincing proof regarding pre-exilic Israelite beliefs. Since Lehi left Jerusulem in about 587 B.C., the Nephites would not have had access to doctrinal developments and sources post-dating the fall of Jerusalem. Hence,Robinson's assertion that I assume that the Book is not evidence of pre-exilic ideas is true, of course, because the Book does not claim to be written until after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The Book claims to have no contact with Israel after the fall of Jerusalem, except for the Mulekites who had no scriptural records, and Jesus.

The assertion that the article assumes that the Book is not in all instances evidence of Nephite beliefs is somewhat misleading. The article asserts that the Book is the translation of an ancient work but in nineteenth century terms. The expansions are thus an indication of what Nephites believed as seen through the spectacles of a nineteenth century prophet. Further, the article does not assume nineteenth century influences; it demonstrates them explicitly. For example, the influence of the KJV on the Book demonstrated in the article is undisputed by Robinson. To the extent of Joseph Smith's

influence on the Book as its translator, and Robinson admits that he did influence the translation to some extent, the Book is not evidence of what Nephites believed. If Robinson sees a problem here, it is a problem with which he too must deal. Such influence may well be an insurmountable problem if one adopts a scriptural fundamentalist position; it is not a problem, however, in light of the expansion theory.

Finally, the assertion that the article assumes that we have an exhaustive knowledge of pre-exilic sources is clearly false when the article's arguments are accurately understood. Indeed, the article explicitly states precisely the contrary of what Robinson claims it states: "There is too much that we do not know to claim anything like a definitive analysis of the issues discussed." (102)

In a connected argument, Robinson claims that the article concludes on page 82 "that the Book of Mormon doctrine of the fall is an expansion because 'the fall of Adam was never linked with the human condition in pre-exilic works, as it is in the Book of Mormon.'" In reality, the article does not identify any doctrine as an expansion on page 82, nor does it draw the conclusion that Robinson himself draws from the statement of the evidence. The article only claims that there is no evidence that pre-exilic Jews linked the human predicament to the fall of Adam (a fact which Robinson implicitly acknowledges is true). Robinson then asserts that the article argues "something like" the following:

A. The Book of Mormon links the fall of Adam with the human condition.

B. But we know from other sources that such an idea was unknown in ancient Israel.

C. Therefore, on this topic the Book of Mormon does not reflect ancient Israelite ideas and must be a modern expansion. (7)

Premise A of the argument is clearly true and is found on page 82 of the article. However, premises B and C are fabricated by Robinson.[2] Nowhere does the article assert that "it can be shown from other sources" that the notion of the Fall linked to the human condition is unknown in pre-exilic Israel. It would be epistemologically impossible to show from any source that an idea is absent in pre-exilic Israel. It is possible to show, however, that we do not know of a pre-exilic source which presents the idea of the Fall linked to the human condition. Thus, the conclusion C is true as modified:

C' The Book does not reflect known ancient Israelite ideas with respect to the human predicament as a result of the Fall of Adam.

Elsewhere in the article, however, the notion of original sin is identified as an indication of expansion. The argument to establish the expansion does not resemble the argument Robinson imputes to me in the least:

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[2] Similarly, the argument presented on page 8 of Robinson's paper is a straw man. Robinson asserts unsupported allegations about the assumed premises of the argument-he ought to support such naked assertions.

1) Mosiah 16 states that humans are "carnal and devilish by nature" as a result of the Fall (98).

2) The language of Mosiah 16 relies on KJV I Corinthians 15:55-56 and is influenced by Calvinistic theology (98)

3) Mosiah 16:6-7 assumes that Christ had already come into the world (98)

4) Therefore, Mosiah 16 is probably an expansion (98).

This argument is inductively valid, that is, the premises tend to support the conclusion 4). The conclusion could be further supported by C'. However, Robinson fails to distinguish between deductive and inductive logic. Premise C' does not logically entail 4), but simply provides some evidence that 4) is true. This distinction is important because Robinson's entire criticism here is that (A) and (B), even if true, do not deductively entail (C). However, the arguments of the article are not deductive but inductive, they generalize from specific facts to conclusions.

3. Third Criticism: Is Salvation History Necessarily Divorced From History? Robinson asserts that the expansion theory is premised upon a third unacceptable assumption:

> A third hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that many historical claims of the Book of Mormon are not historical after all....[because] the expansion theory compromises the Book of Mormon as "real history" but leaves it intact as "salvation history"...Although the author devotes little attention to the concept of salvation history, it is such a dangerous notion that even the camel's nose must be vigorously resisted. (p. 9)

Robinson's argument is simply that the notion of salvation history is dangerous. Robinson claims that "history is what

actually happened, but 'salvation history' is what we believe happened. Salvation history has nothing to do with the reality of the event at all, but only with the reality of the traditions, the beliefs, the myth spawned by the event. It is not history at all, but an interpretation of history." (p. 9-10 emphasis added). This view of the view of salvation history is misleading. Robinson has raised a very important topic, however, that deserves further explanation.

Robinson's caricature of "salvation history" as a denial of "real history" is oversimplistic. It is true that some who adopt the view of the Old Testament theology as salvation history also insist, quite incidentally, that in the historical-critical presentation of Israel's history no premises of faith or revelation are taken into account since the historical-critical method works without God as hypothesis. See e.g., Gerhard von Rad "Offene Fragen im Umkreis einer Theologie des AT," Theologische Literaturzeitung 88 (1963): 409. However, Walther Eichrodt vehemently rejected von Rad's establishing a dualism between "the true history of Israel" and "Israel's faith about God working through history," for he claimed that the faith of Israel was "founded on the facts of history" and only then could Israel's salvation history have "any kind of binding authority." (in Theologie des Alten Testaments (4th ed: Gottingen, 1961): 517-519. Further, Wolfhart Pannenberg, professor of systematic theology at Munich, broadens von Rad's concept of salvation history (Heilsgeschichte) to be identical with "universal history," a true understanding of the

meaning of the actual facts of history in the total scheme of things. See his, "Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte" Kerygma und Dogma, v (1959), 218-237, 259-288 and in Pannenberg, ed., Offenbarung als Geschichte (2d ed: Göttingen, 1963). There is thus no monolithic meaning to "salvation history" among scholars; contrary to Robinson's definition of salvation history which gives the impression that scholars are united in the view of salvation history which he attacks.

Notwithstanding that numerous scholars define salvation history to mean Israel's faith on God's revelation through the actual facts of history, Robinson (mistakenly) argues that all scholars necessarily divorce "real history" from "salvation history." He also asserts that salvation history is always false:

> The proponents of "salvation history" would have us believe that when Joseph Smith is put into the box and sworn and asked "Did you see God," or "Did you translate the Book of Mormon from ancient texts," that the rules of true and false somehow change, that Joseph can swear to a thing that didn't really happen, and by labelling the lie "salvation history" somehow not be guilty of perjury.

Just who are the proponents of salvation history that Robinson has in mind? I believe that this characterization misrepresents what I mean by salvation history and also is not representative of the views of numerous other scholars. In the article I define salvation history as "interpreting historical events as God's acts." I further state that "revelation is not merely a historical chronical of God's acts, for interpretation of the event as God's act requires the prophet to see what others

do not perceive and to reveal about history what is not evident from the mere occurrence of the events or historical evidences." (108 emphasis added). Thus, I argue that scriptural history is not secular history as such, but there is absolutely no implication that it is less true or not involved with real history. Instead, salvation history is real history as perceived by the prophet privy to God's plan, who can thus see God's hand in history, real history, in a way not available to secular historians. The notion of salvation history presented in the article is more akin to Pannenberg's than to von Rad's, and looks nothing like the notion criticized by Robinson.

It should be noted that Robinson's demands for faith are contradictory. He asserts without reservation that empirical methodologies preclude mention of God, and then criticizes "scholars" for not adopting a notion of God acting in history that makes empirical, either true-or-false assertions. Such a contradiction is common in the fundamentalist approach to scripture and history. Fundamentalists want a religion immune from scientific and empirical investigation, but also want a religion that asserts concrete, verifiable, historical facts. Scriptural statements are taken as axiomatic statements about reality, as the basis of physics, biology, geology and history - but also totally different from the world revealed by physics, biology, geology and history. As Raymond Brown commented,

> Whatever "fundamentalism" meant at its origin, the term now describes a mindset wherein the expression of divine revelation is thought not to be time conditioned. For most fundamentalists unconditioned revelation is found in the Bible; for some

> Roman Catholics it is enshrined in the decrees of their Church; for some Jews, I suspect, whether or not they would use the language, it is enshrined in the Torah, The Mishnah, or The Talmud....A religious tragedy resulting from fundamentlism in the biblical sphere is that through it the Bible is brought into irreconciable conflict with the majority scientific views of our time. For instance, one cannot read Genesis 1-2 as an absolute statement about how God brought into being this world and its inhabitants and accept evolution. A fundamentalist will reject the sciences that have proposed evolution in favor of the higher truth of the Bible; a religious non-fundamentalist will recognize that the author of Genesis shared the views of his time about the <u>way</u> in which God created and will be open to accepting evolution as a more informed view of that way. What the Bible teaches the latter person is that no matter what was the way (which is a question where science has the dominant voice), God is responsible for all. (<u>Recent Discoveries and the Biblical World</u> (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983): 15).

Second, Robinson's definition of history as "what actually happened" is another category mistake. Robinson believes that scriptural statements are somehow identical with the historical events themselves. He seeks a written statement about historical events devoid of human interpretation - but there is no such thing. All statements, even those by prophets or empirical historians, are necessarily interpretations of historical events which fall short of capturing the totality and the actuality of the event itself. Robinson's naive realism (the view that there is no distinction between the apparent and the real) is inadequate because it fails to understand that language and apprehension of even the most basic events involve human interpretation. Robinson in fact recognizes that both

faithful and secular statements of history involve a priori assumptions about the nature of reality, as he demonstrates by discussing those very assumptions, but then he turns around and ignores this insight when he criticizes scholars for recognizing that such assumptions are involved in scriptural accounts of history.[3]

Finally, Robinson ignores that I explicitly state that the salvation history of the Book of Mormon is the way that the Nephites interpret history. Robinson's discussion of salvation history states that I use the term for Joseph Smith's "false" stories about the Nephites, who may as well have never existed.[4] Such a statement is an egregious misrepresentation of my position. As the article clearly states:

> In sum, the message of the book is also historical. It is a warning to us from a people so concerned with wealth and war that they were unable to escape self-annihilation. The grief of Mormon for the total destruction of his once-great nation is a vivid reminder to our own culture which has the capacity to destroy every living creature on the face of the earth. The salvation history of the Book of Mormon is a prologue to our own experience, a gift given in the hope that we can escape their fate. (114)

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[3] Nevertheless, there are "stories" in the Old Testament that clearly were intended as mythical statements, the story of God battling with the dragon Rahab for example. Such myths should not be confused with actual history. The garden myth is, from an official Mormon interpretation, the story of a ritual drama which is "figurative insofar as the Man and the Woman are concerned."

[4] Robinson (mistakenly) states that salvation history "is a way to have your cake and eat it too: Joseph's claims are true; they just aren't historically true. He told the truth, but what he wrote was fiction, the divine fiction of salvation history."

In other words, the Book of Mormon prophets had eyes to see the moral meaning inherent in historical events, real events. They can tell us how the divine plan is fulfilled in history and reveal the moral causes and effects of history that empirical historians cannot. Salvation history is, then, an added dimension to history - real history. Only prophets -true prophets - can write salvation history.

4. Fourth Criticism: Does Form Criticism Necessarily Assume an Oral Tradition? As a final criticism of the assumptions underlying the methodology of biblical scholarship, Robinson argues that form criticism cannot be applied to the Book unless one assumes

> Joseph's account of receiving or translating the Book by supernatural means. Since empirical scholarship rejects supernatural explanations, scholars must explain the Book in terms that do not involve a pre-literary history, and without a pre-literary history there can be no form criticism. (p. 16)

Perhaps Robinson should reassess his assertion that critical methodologies must not assume supernatural explanations, for here he asserts precisely the opposite: applications of form criticism to the Book necessarily require one to assume Joseph Smith's supernatural explanation of the Book! Indeed, Robinson admits that "a believer could attempt a form critical analysis of the Book of Mormon, but it would entail accepting the faith claims for the Book's origins, thus going 'beyond conclusions justified by the evidence or allowed by logic.'" (p. 16 n. 18).

In reality, an application of form criticism to the Book does not necessarily require one to assume either that Joseph

Smith did or did not get the Book by "supernatural means." Robinson overlooks the fact that a form critical analysis might also discover nineteenth century forms underlying the Book's presentation. Form criticism certainly cannot establish that Joseph Smith spoke with God -- or that he didn't -- but that doesn't mean that it therefore cannot tell us anything (as Robinson seems to claim). Form criticism can test the empirical hypothesis that "the Book of Mormon derives from an ancient culture descended from Israel." If the forms in the Book reveal a Sitz im Leben, a setting in life, consistent with derivation from an Israelite culture, then one can conclude that Joseph Smith's explanation of the Book is consistent with empirical data. If it is consistent only with the nineteenth century milieu, however, then it is not. I find strong evidence supporting the view that the Book is ancient, but I also find evidence of nineteenth century influences including use of the KJV as a source. Hence, the evidence requires, in my opinion, a theory accounting for both modern and ancient aspects of the Book.

It should be noted that Robinson's adoption of the "natural/supernatural" dichotomy is a heresy in Mormonism, for Mormonism believes that all things are ultimately a spiritual continuum. See Doctrine & Covenants 29:34-35. Mormonism rejects the notion of miracle adopted by apostate Christianity as a supernatural suspension of natural law and accepts the view that God works through natural laws. See e.g., James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith (SLC: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1927 ed): 220-223. The importance of this

point should not be underestimated because Robinson's adoption of this false dichotomy allows him to assert without argument that the Book was translated in a way that does not involve natural means and human limitations, for it is "supernatural" and therefore beyond investigation by empirical methods. Once this dichotomy is seen to be false, however, then Robinson's criticisms can be seen to be false, for they all assume the natural/supernatural dichotomy in one way or another. The rejection of this false dichotomy was a major impetus for my adopting a notion of revelation which does not suspend human freedom and interpretation, or the laws of nature. (p. 111).

Passing from criticisms of methodology to substance, Robinson claims that my application of form criticism to the Book is necessarily flawed because

> without a period of <u>oral transmission</u> or free circulation within a community there can be no form criticism, for the forms must have been shaped and preserved by a community in order to give any valid information about the community. Yet for virtually all of the Book of Mormon, we are given to understand that the record keeping was contemporary with the events, and that the official records never circulated in the public domain before being recorded. (p. 19)

Robinson confuses New Testament form criticism with Old Testament form criticism. Ignoring that Robinson has previously conceded that a believer <u>could</u> successfully apply form criticism to the Book, he now claims that form criticism of the Book is impossible because form criticism necessarily assumes an <u>oral</u> transmission prior to being reduced to writing. New Testament form critics do indeed attempt to discover the oral

traditions underlying sayings (logia) in the gospels. See e.g., Rudolph Bultmann and Karl Kundsin, Form Criticism, trans. F.C. Grant (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962); R.C. Briggs, Interpreting The New Testament Today (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1973): 95-101.

However, Robinson's criticism overlooks the fact that form criticism is not limited to oral traditions. While it is true that form criticism requires a pre-literary form, Robinson's criticism is inapplicable to Old Testament form critical analysis which attempts to identify not only oral traditions, but also legal, ritual and literary forms underlying the text. See e.g., Klaus Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method, trans. S.M. Cupitt from 2d German ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969); Gene M. Tucker. Form Criticism of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); G.H. Livingston. The Pentateuch and Its Cultural Environment (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974): 241-60. The form critical analysis in the article clearly does not assume a pre-literary oral tradition; rather, it investigates the legal forms underlying Abinadi's indictment of King Noah in his Court (93-97); the literary form of the prophetic commission underlying Lehi's commission (98-99) and the ritual form underlying King Benjamin's coronation and holy convocation. Hence, Robinson is mistaken; the form critical analysis of the article does not assume a pre-literary oral stage of transmission.

Hence, the form critical analysis assumes two reasonable premises: (1) the Nephites observed legal, ritual and literary

traditions; and (2) the traditions observed by the Nephites were similar to Israelite tradition. Assumption (1) is reasonable because real societies have such traditions. Assumption (2) is reasonable (and entails (1)) and is to be expected if the Nephites observed the Law of Moses. However, it should be noted that the form critical analysis of the article differs in its purpose from most form critical studies because its primary purpose is not merely to identify life setting and function. Rather, the article accepts premises (1) and (2) as hypotheses to be tested. There is a third premise of the form critical argument which is stated expressly in the article: (3) it is unlikely that Joseph Smith could define and place in the proper setting the legal, ritual and literary forms found in Israelite works. Therefore, to the extent legal, ritual and literary forms can be identified in the Book, the proposition that Joseph Smith is solely responsible for the Book is disconfirmed. Further, the presence of such forms tends to indicate an Israelite life setting, thus confirming Joseph Smith's claims regarding the Book.

Robinson also claims that I "completely confused form with Sitz im Leben, and [my] method degenerates into farming for parallels between historical events of the same kind." (20). Robinson overlooks, however, that the occasions of the holy convocation (usually a festival of covenant renewal) and royal coronation are part of the ritual form being identified. The occasion defines the purpose of the actions performed, i.e., defines the unit of the ritual form. Hence, comparing ritual

actions performed at ~~Nephite~~ Israelite convocations with ritual actions performed at Nephite convocations helps to define the form and is a defensible methodology of form criticism.

5. Fifth Criticism: Nineteenth-Century Theological Influences? Robinson next claims that the similarities between the Book of Mormon and Arminian theology in the nineteenth century indicated in the article prove nothing because "Arminian" describes any theological view that rejects "the deterministic logic of Calvinism and teaches that Christ died for all men and not just for those predestined to be saved." (20). Robinson's treatment of nineteenth-century Arminian theology, however, is seriously inadequate. He quotes only generalizations about the broad outline of Arminian thought from secondary sources. Further, those sources comment only about the thought of Jacobus Arminius, the sixteenth century Remonstrant who gave rise to "Arminianism." However, the works of Arminius are not directly relevant to understand nineteenth century influences on the Book of Mormon, for Joseph Smith probably never read any of Arminius's works. Rather, the works of later theologians in the Arminian tradition such as John Fletcher, Nathan Banks and Timothy L. Merritt, which had a significant influence on nineteenth century Methodist doctrines, are more directly relevant. Joseph Smith apparently joined the Methodists in 1828, and he was therefore probably aware of and influenced by Methodist thought.

The distinctiveness of Arminian theology is hardly exhausted by the doctrines of universal salvation and rejection of predestination; rather, the article discusses possible

Arminian influences in the Book of Mormon notions of the paradoxical "Fortunate Fall of Adam," the salvation of children and the atonement delivering persons from depraved nature to categorical freedom. (81-82) It is essential to understand that a doctrine of atonement delivering persons from depravity to moral responsibility is a response to Augustinian/Calvinistic theology. Augustine viewed the Fall of Adam as incapacitating the will. Adam's Original Sin delivered a fatal blow to human moral freedom. Before the Fall, Man was able to refrain from sinning -- in the status of posse non peccare. After the Fall, however, Man was unable to refrain from sinning - he was in the status of non posse non peccare. Man was evil by nature after the Fall. Choosing good would be contrary to the nature of Fallen Man. Man was therefore unable even to freely accept the grace offered by Christ. It followed that Christ had to initiate the movement of the will to accept saving grace. Christ's grace was therefore prevenient, or before Man's choice to accept. Further, Christ's grace was irresistible, for Man had no say given his injured will. Either Christ chose to initiate and complete the saving act, or Man remained in his Fallen State. Thus, Christ offered irresistible grace to the elect; but chose not to save the damned and reprobate. Christ predestined from all eternity those whom He would save. See, De predestinatione; De corroptione et gratia; De gratia et libero arbitrio.

The Book of Mormon responded to the human predicament in the same way that nineteenth-century Arminian theologians did.

Man would be captive of a depraved nature (2 Ne. 9:7; Mosiah 3:19; 4:5; Alma 41:11; 42:9-10) or an angel to the devil (2 Ne 9:8-9; Alma 34:34-35), but as a result of the atonement, Man is delivered from his Fallen State and rendered morally free to be judged according to this works (2 Ne. 2:8-10, 26; 9:15; Mosiah 5:9-10; Alma 42:23-24). The Fall is actually a fortunate part of God's plan to allow Man a probationary period and growth toward perfection through experiencing opposition (2 Ne. 2:21-27; 9:26-27; Alma 12:22-24; 42:4-5). The atonement delivers all men unconditionally from temporal death and from spiritual death on conditions of righteousness (2 Ne. 9:10-14; Alma 42-7).

But why does the Book of Mormon respond to a notion of depravity foreign to Hebrew thought that clearly presupposes Hellenistic views about immutable nature and free will? As E. P. Sanders, a leading scholar on late Jewish thought stated, "it is important to note that the Rabbis did not have a doctrine of original sin or the essential sinfulness of each man in the Christian sense." Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 114. If the Book responds to problems that arise only in a post-Augustinian/Calvinist theology, and it responds in the precise way that nineteenth-century Methodists did, and the entire problem makes no sense in Hebrew thought and is in fact not found there, is it not reasonable to view the text as influenced by Arminian thought? It seems reasonable to me to understand the Book in this way. Of course, it is logically possible that the Nephites just happened to express themselves in the same terms and modes of thought as nineteenth-century

Methodists - but then any thought is logically possible. The Nephites could also have had a theory of the relativity of space-time exactly like Einstein's, but it is highly unlikely. However, it is sure that these Book of Mormon doctrines resemble nineteenth century thought far more than known pre-exilic Israelite thought.

Robinson attempts to qualify the distinctiveness of Arminian theology by suggesting that Pelagianism, semi-Pelagians and 2 Baruch, a pseudepigraphic work dating to the first century A.D., are Arminian in the same sense as the Book of Mormon. This suggestion is not correct. Pelagius did not teach that the atonement freed persons from depraved nature like the Book of Mormon; rather, he denied that persons had a depraved nature and asserted that the atonement was not necessary because persons were capable of meritorious works without grace. Pelagius, De libero arbitrio; Augustine, De gesitis contra Pelagium, c.xxv. The semi-Pelagian view of the double efficacy of divine grace and human will more closely resembles Arminianism and the Book of Mormon; but they still held that "man does no good thing which God does not cause him to do (quae non Deus praestet, ut faciat homo)." Cassianus, De institutionibus coenbitorum. XII, xvii. Pelagian theological views are clearly very different from the Book's and any phase of Ariminan throught.

Robinson's assertion, that 2 Baruch is Arminian in the same sense as the Book of Mormon, is without merit. 2 Baruch never discusses Christ's atonement and certainly does not teach that persons are inherently depraved or that the atonement frees

persons from depraved nature.

6. Sixth Criticism: A Medieval View of Atonement? Robinson concludes his substantive criticisms by arguing that although there are "striking" similarities between the Book of Mormon view of the atonement and the satisfaction theory first fully elucidated by Anselm in 1098 A.D., there are also important differences, so the Book of Mormon isn't really influenced by this scholastic doctrine of the atonement. Robinson asserts that "the concept of satisfaction actually predates Anselm, being found in early Christianity and in pre-Christian Judaism." Robinson doesn't cite a single source for this important assertion, nor does he state what he means by "the concept of satisfaction." However, I am not aware of any discussion of the atonement pre-dating Anselm which discusses the atonement as satisfaction of ontologically necessary attributes of mercy and justice, as does the Book of Mormon and Anselm.

Robinson argues that while both Anselm and the Book of Mormon speak of the atonement in terms of "justice, mercy and infinite atonement, they are not parallels which would indicate dependence or borrowing since the meaning of the words and the substance of the arguments expressed in the two documents are significantly different." He argues (1) that "infinite" atonement in Anselm means only that an infinite being has been affronted by sin, whereas in the Book of Mormon it means merely that "the atonement must be infinite to overcome death, i.e. to communicate immortality (infinity) to those it claims and so that the sacrifice can supersede the Law of Moses, which will not

allow one mortal to be sacrificed in place of another." (See Alma 34:10-13); (2) In Anselm the satisfaction must be greater than the sin to pay the penalty of an affront to God. Robinson claims, "it is this additional payment beyond the 'cost' of the sin itself that man is unable to satisfy"; (3) He claims that "Anselm dismisses mercy as a form of injustice" while in the Book of Mormon "justice is appeased by mercy so that mercy (the atonement) may claim its own"; (4) He claims that "in Anselm's theory God must act as he does, since he is acting out of justice and not out of mercy" whereas "the Book of Mormon emphasizes that Christ is a volunteer redeemer."

Robinson's statement of Anselm's doctrine is seriously defective. The claim that Anselm believed that Christ acted out of compulsion or "involuntarily" is astounding in light of the fact that Anselm devotes no less than five chapters discussing how Christ voluntarily died and atones not out of necessity, but out of divine free-will (I, 9-10; II, 16-18). Anselm argued:

> Therefore, God did not compel Christ to die, for in Christ there was no sin. Instead, Christ willingly underwent death....Now, whatever things are said about Him which are similar to what has been said must be construed in such way that He is believed to have died not out of necessity but out of

> free will. (in Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Cur Deus Homo, 61, 65).

Robinson's claim that Anselm dismisses mercy as a form of injustice is equally erroneous. Anselm claims that mercy cannot ignore the demands of justice and can be applied only on the condition of repentance. (See Cur Deus Homo I, 12). The doctrine of Alma 42:14-25 is virtually the same, where Alma Concludes, "What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so God would cease to be God." Mercy is allowed to satisfy justice through the atonement only for those who repent: "For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved." (Alma 42:24-25).

Further, Anselm does not dismiss mercy as unjust, but precisely the opposite; he argues against the very position Robinson asserts that he maintains![5]

> We have discovered that God's mercy - which, when we were examining God's justice and man's sin, seemed to you to perish-is so great and so harmonious with His justice that it cannot be conceived to be more great or more just. (Cur Deus Homo II, 20).

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[5] Robinson relies on Alistair McGrath, Iustitia Dei (CUP: Cambridge, 1986), 58 for his belief that Christ atones out of necessity. However, Robinson apparently doesn't understand the distinction drawn by Anselm between the necessity of the divine attributes and the freedom of the divine will. (See Cur Deus Homo II, 5).

The argument that the Anselmian notion of infinite atonement as necessary to satisfy the infinite nature differs from the Book of Mormon meaning of infinite atonement is accurate. However, Robinson's distinction is rather Pyhrric because later Arminian theologians rejected Anselm's notion of infinite atonement and emphasized the notion of infinite atonement as a sacrificial offering of the infinite nature, infinitely greater than animal sacrifices, in the same manner that Amulek does in Alma 34:19-15. As the Arminian Remonstrant Curcellaeus explained in his Institutio Religionis Christianae (Liber V, Cap. xix. 15), "God saw fit under the Law of Moses to symbolize remission of sin through the death of a lamb or goat." He states that "the sacrifice of an animal is inadequate to substitute for the penalty demanded by justice." The Arminian theologian Limborch stated that "Jesus Christ may be said to have been punished (punitus) in our place, in so far as he endured the greatest anguish of soul, and the accursed death of the cross for us which were the nature of a vicarious punishment in the place of our sins (quae poenae vicariae pro peccatis nostris rationem habuit) and it may be said that our Lord satisfied the Father for us by his death, and earned righteousness for us, insofar as he satisfied, not the demands and the exactitude of the divine justice, but the just as well as the merciful will of God (voluntati Dei justae simul ac misericordi)." (Theologicae Christianae, III, xxii, 2) Thus, while Robinson is correct that the Book of Mormon notion of "infinite" atonement differs from Anselm, it nevertheless agrees with the Arminian

interpretation of the satisfaction theory of atonement.

In conclusion, Robinson's discussion of the satisfaction theory seriously mistreats Anselm. Further, the differences he identifies between Anselm and the Book of Mormon turn out instead to be striking similarities.

CONCLUSION

Robinson has misconstrued the article and the issues it treats at numerous, critical points. In his oral presentation at Brigham Young University, he admitted that he responds to a worse-case-scenario of the implications of the expansion theory. He has in fact caricatured the article as an unwilling agnostic, or at best as liberal Protestantism in drag. This caricature is unjustified. He complains that critical methodologies must disregard faith assumptions and then claims that anyone who would apply such methodologies to the Book must accept its faith claims. He remonstrates that we must not disregard God in history, and then complains inordinately when scholars adopt a view of salvation history which is cognizant of the role of faith in understanding historical events. He maintains that treatment of scripture cannot and should not avoid assumptions of faith, and then chastises me for bringing faith assumptions into the discussion after assessing the evidence. Indeed, he complains that I assume the Book's faith claims and then asserts that the inevitable result of the expansion theory is a loss of faith in the Book.

Robinson also admitted in his oral presentation that Joseph Smith may have interpreted the Book and used the KJV, but

he draws the line at adding anything not contained on the gold plates. How can one interpret a text without adding cognitive content not in the interpreted text? To what extent did Joseph Smith interpret in translation of the Book? Perhaps if Robinson addressed these issues at the very heart of the article's thesis he would see that some form of expansion theory is essential to explain the book.

Robinson's discussion of nineteenth century is shallow at best - misleading at worst. His assessment of Arminian thought is simply a diversion. His argument that others before Arminius thought Arminian ideas leads him to misrepresent Pelagius, the Semi-Pelagians and 2 Baruch. His discussion of Anselm's satisfaction theory is deficient.

Robinson does, however, raise some issues that needed clarification. The article was but an introductory statement to a subject and a Book that require, and deserve, further elucidation and criticism. The limitations of empirical research are important to understand. Nevertheless, Robinson appears to have misunderstood some limitations and overlooked the legitimate uses of such methodologies. In fairness, Robinson appears at times not to respond directly to the article but to tendencies among some biblical critics to claim too much and overlook their assumptions. However, he confused the methods of the article with the unbelief of some scholars. There are also believing critical scholars. Critical methodologies are neither anti-nor pro-Christian. They are tools that are incapable of answering some questions. The fact that critical methods don't

help to answer which shirt we should wear to school today does not mean, however, that they are useless or that conclusions derived from such methodologies have no validity.

Robinson has criticized me for both believing too much and not believing enough. I plead guilty to bringing assumptions of faith to the article. As I stated up front, I am a believer. I do not believe that anyone can totally escape his or her assumptions, culture, time and place. But then, isn't Robinson adopting my thesis of inherent interpretation as a basis for criticizing me? The result of the expansion theory is not loss of (informed) faith, but a faith aware of human limitations. The challenge of the expansion theory is not to reject scripture because it was written and interpreted by humans, but to accept the prophets precisely because they delivered the scripture to us despite their limitations. The effect of the expansion theory is not to reject the prophets because of their limitations, but to bring us to a consciousness of our own.

Blake T. Ostler