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## COURAGEOUS REVIEWER

I'M WRITING THIS LETTER TO SEND praise and appreciation for Tania Lyon's insightful and well-written review of Martha Beck's book, *Leaving the Saints* (SUNSTONE, March 2005). I find it the most intelligent, honest, and unbiased review written on the book to date.

I have read Beck's book, and as a convert to the Church, I found the book disturbing but fascinating. Being an open-minded person, I tried to piece together her story the best I could. However, because I do not have Rands's educational background in sociology, much of what she brought out in her review proved extremely valuable in making my own assessment of the book's validity.

I want to applaud Rands for the courageous approach she takes in responding to the book. As much as I struggle with supporting the type of "memoir" that Beck has written by purchasing the book, I did buy it and read it. I feel Tania Lyon's personal and sociological critique of the book is exceptional.

LISA OLSEN

Redding, California

## DIFFERENT STANDARDS

I READ WITH INTEREST DAN VOGELS "Is a 'Paradigm Shift' in Book of Mormon Studies Possible?" (SUNSTONE, March 2005). Like most other Book of Mormon commentators, Vogel seems to view the question of the book's historicity in black and white terms and sees those who do not accept his "scientific" views as somehow naïve, un-scholarly, dense, or deluded. Vogel prejudices his argument against apologists by using such words as "extreme," "immoderate," "weak," "unpersuasive," "unreasonable," "irrational," "unscientific," and "untenable"—adjectives which, to be fair, apologists often use to describe the arguments of naturalist critics.

What Vogel seems not to allow is that some of us are using our best scholarly skills, our best cognitive and spiritual sensibilities, and our most balanced judgment to try to come to terms with this complex and challenging text. It is possible, for example, to be impressed with and even challenged by some arguments naturalistic critics make without being fully convinced by their arguments and what they put forth as evidence. For example, it is possible to think deeply about the

implications of recent DNA findings without concluding that we currently have the whole picture of genetic markers. It is possible to puzzle about Book of Mormon geography without concluding that the inability to find an exact alignment between what the book suggests and what we presently know about the geography of the Americas proves that the book is fiction. And it is possible to weigh issues of composition (e.g., the use of the King James Version language and scriptures) without concluding that Joseph Smith was simply plagiarizing.

Some Book of Mormon scholars who, using other scientific tools, especially those of linguistic, narrative, and textual analysis, are convinced that certain elements of the Book of Mormon could not have come from Joseph Smith's information environment. And, just as these scholars cannot satisfy naturalist critics on such matters as Book of Mormon geography and DNA analysis, they feel that naturalist critics have not paid sufficient attention nor respect to issues they consider germane to Book of Mormon historicity. These scholars (not all of whom can be neatly classified as "apologists") believe that naturalist critics have not provided convincing evidence that Joseph Smith wrote or could have written the Book of Mormon. As Hugh Nibley has stated, "And of course everyone, including ourselves, has avoided the big question: How did he do it? Local mobs chased him down country roads and broke into his house at night. But nobody was able to explain where he got the book." And they still haven't.

Vogel chastises those who are convinced (even if tentatively) that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text as ignoring "evidence that would count against" the paradigm they have chosen. But surely Vogel recognizes that the same charge can be laid at the feet of naturalist critics. That is, it is not sufficient to claim that Joseph Smith could have written the book without explaining exactly how he could have known or even had access to some of the fields of knowledge and information contained in the book (e.g., Egyptian culture and olive horticulture). In exactly which books and which libraries did Joseph find (or have time to find) some of the esoteric and arcane elements in the book? In my article, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon and the American Renaissance" (*Dialogue* 35, no. 3 [2002]), I argue that Joseph Smith lacked the education, literary imagination, talent, expressive maturity, and

sophistication to have written the Book of Mormon. I also argue that the knowledge base available to him was not sufficient to account for some elements in the book. While these are debatable matters, they are significant and, to my mind, have not been satisfactorily addressed by naturalist critics, along with many other issues. Thus, it seems to me that Vogel and others hold those who believe the Book of Mormon to be authentic to a different standard than that to which they hold themselves.

In his SUNSTONE essay, Vogel makes what seems to me a disingenuous argument about prophets. That is, after stating that Joseph Smith was a kind of prophet (using a definition that would make most believers prophets, and ignoring the overwhelming evidence that Joseph Smith considered himself a prophet in the biblical sense of the word), he argues we shouldn't be all that concerned if Joseph Smith was deceptive since other prophets have been deceptive. He then cites several Old Testament incidences in which, under certain conditions, some prophets either lied or were deceptive (e.g., Abraham not telling Isaac about the true nature of the sacrifice they were preparing). But these circumstantial deceptions cannot be compared with what Vogel accuses Joseph Smith of doing—truly believing himself to be a prophet (by the weak standards Vogel cites) but trying to persuade his followers to believe he was a different kind of prophet (one would assume that Vogel refers here to the major miracles of the Restoration). Had Moses admitted that he made up the Ten Commandments, if the sacrifice of Isaac turned out to be Abraham's imaginative storytelling, and if the parting of the Red Sea was a fable borrowed from other traditions, we would see these prophets in a much different light than we do.

The reason I find such an argument disingenuous is not only that Vogel, from his extensive research for his recent biography of Joseph, has a clear understanding of how Joseph Smith regarded his prophetic powers, but also because I doubt Vogel would apply the same standard to scientists. That is, the fact that some scientists engage in questionable scientific experi-

ments or manipulate their data to produce more spectacular outcomes should not leave us sanguine about any scientist who does the same. If we cannot trust scientists or prophets to tell the truth, then we have no basis for trusting their pronouncements.

Another example of Vogel's disingenuousness, I believe, is his use of the term "inspired fiction." Vogel never defines what he means by this term, but he argues that what Joseph Smith meant by it is based on Moroni's statement that "everything which inviteth to do good, and to persuade [others] to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ" (Moroni 7:6). To convince us that Joseph Smith was motivated by such an argument and tried to persuade his followers that the Book of Mormon was historical when he knew otherwise, Vogel states, "In other words, since all good comes from God, and the Book of Mormon tries to persuade humankind to be righteous and believe in Christ, it is consistent with this line of reasoning that the Book of Mormon is true and inspired independent of whether, in the final analysis, it is considered historical."

I suspect Vogel does not believe that the inspiration for such "inspired fiction" comes from God, especially since he feels that the statement he uses from Moroni to define inspiration was Joseph Smith's invention. One

wonders whether Vogel's slavish reliance on science even allows for the possibility that God could have inspired Joseph Smith.

At the conclusion of his article, Vogel speaks of "future generations of Mormons who will no doubt tire of holding to the untenable scientific and historical positions of their ancestors." Since most Mormons are held to the Book of Mormon by its spiritual messages, especially those centered on Christ, and its relevance to contemporary religious and spiritual life, it is highly doubtful that questions of science and history will produce the response about which Vogel speculates. That is, because it speaks directly and powerfully to their souls, most believing Mormons do not tire of the Book of Mormon. Until some incontrovertible evidence that truly challenges the Book of Mormon's historical claims (such as a manuscript version of the Book of Mormon written in 1795), it is unlikely that the evidence naturalist critics have marshaled to this point against the book will be sufficient to overturn the conviction of most believers in the book's authenticity. And the same can be said about the odds of changing the minds of naturalist critics (without the discovery of a fragment of the Book of Mormon text on a Central American stele). In other words, given the present differences (if not hostility) between those who



*"Thank you for your desire to bear your testimony. Please follow the printed guidelines as to what constitutes a testimony. Please remember you will be timed and, oh yes . . . follow the Spirit"*

see the Book of Mormon as historical and those who see it as a product of nineteenth century American culture, a paradigm shift in either direction seems unlikely.

In his last book, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, Stephen Jay Gould, distinguished professor of zoology and geology at Harvard, argues that science and religion represent what he calls NOMA (Non-overlapping magisteria, or domains of authority and teaching). As Gould says, "The magisterium of science covers the empirical realm: what the universe is made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over ques-



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tions of ultimate meaning and moral value." Gould suggests that as long as science and religion keep to their own magisteria and respect one another, dialogue is possible. It is that possible dialogue that I keep hoping will flower among apologist and naturalist critics—and those of us who find ourselves somewhere in between.

ROBERT A. REES  
Brookdale, California

## STACKING THE DECK

**I**N THE DECEMBER 2004 SUNSTONE, we witnessed a philosopher (Blake Ostler) critiquing the logic of what an anthropologist (Thomas Murphy) had written about anthropology. Then, in the March 2005 SUNSTONE, we were treated to Murphy's attempt to clarify his philosophical positions and Ostler's attempt to respond to an anthropological claim (about "principal ancestors"). With such a show looming, I'm sure others thought as I did, "Pop the popcorn, and take a seat, it's going to be interesting."

But the show was a dud. I was very interested to see what Ostler would say to Murphy's clarification of his position, but I was disappointed to find that Ostler chose instead to twist everything into a Gordian Knot with hair-splitting statements such as: "Murphy acknowledges implicitly that the Book of Mormon does not teach that 'all' inhabitants of ancient America are of Hebrew descent." Whether Murphy acknowledged this or not, Ostler is certainly aware that a plain reading of the Book of Mormon leaves readers with the clear impression that its characters were sequestered from any and all non-Israelites (2 Nephi 1:9), and this concept that Ostler belittles is exactly what LDS prophets have always taught and still teach today. The 1980s change in the wording of the introduction to the Book of Mormon may have been an attempt to hedge against an "all indigenous Americans descend from Book of Mormon peoples" position, but this does not change the obvious intent of the Book of Mormon narrative nor its interpretation by Church leaders for 175 years.

Another Ostler argument took on Murphy's claims made in a video produced by an evangelical Christian ministry instead of directly focusing on what Murphy had written in his letter clarifying his position. This came across to me again as an attempt to sidetrack discussion away from the traditional Mormon understanding of Indian origins and the authoritative pronouncements of Church leaders. It felt like Ostler would rather muddy the waters than try to clarify

what, if anything, the Book of Mormon teaches us about what actually happened in ancient America. I hope that his future writing on the Book of Mormon will rise above this kind of philosophical gamesmanship and focus instead on an attempt to find real answers.

A more important issue for SUNSTONE readers, however, is that in granting him the opportunity to respond to every critic of his essay, SUNSTONE appears to stack the deck in favor of Ostler's positions. Furthermore, by publishing Ostler's responses immediately after each letter, SUNSTONE has insulted the intelligence of the readership, not trusting its readers' abilities to see holes or flaws in the letters' positions for themselves. I believe this new practice by SUNSTONE's editor, who can usually be relied on to be more clear-headed, marginalizes those who write a letter to the magazine. It seems to me important to allow readers time to digest the criticism (or praise) before allowing a respondent to slam-dunk their ideas.

I very much look forward to reading any of Ostler's follow-up essays, if his positions are less defensive and are designed to clarify rather than muddy issues. But watch: my letter, too, will be followed by an intemperate blast from Ostler, inserted below.

TOM KIMBALL  
American Fork, Utah

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: *Thanks to Tom Kimball for his letter touching on several important matters. I will not respond directly to his review of the "Ostler & Murphy Show" that played out in the past two SUNSTONE issues, nor have I invited Ostler to respond here to his claim that Ostler seems intent on hair-splitting and philosophical gamesmanship instead of furthering Book of Mormon discussions. Though written without a knowledge of Kimball's letter, Part II of Ostler's article on DNA and the Book of Mormon (see pages 63–71 of this issue) directly addresses many of the issues Kimball raises, including other ways to interpret 2 Nephi 1:9, and Ostler's position on how to proceed when confronted with differences between what Church leaders have taught about the Book of Mormon and what the text claims about itself.*

*Rather, my response here is to share the reasoning behind my editorial decision to allow Ostler to respond to each letter submitted to SUNSTONE critiquing Part I of Ostler's essay. Before this, however, let me state that Kimball's challenges are issues the SUNSTONE staff and I discussed among ourselves before proceeding as we did. We worried that giving so much space to Ostler's responses might strike readers in just the way it did Kimball—as overkill or as our favor-*

ing Ostler's positions over those of his critics. Hence, I'm grateful to Kimball for the chance to give a brief history of our decisions.

First, please know that we were very excited by the number of letters that came in response to Ostler's essay. It served as a barometer for us, indicating that this topic and the diversity of opinions about how to interpret DNA findings in relation to Book of Mormon claims are of vital concern for many of our readers. We had already planned six pages in that issue for Part II of Ostler's essay, so once we realized that letters and responses would take up quite a bit of space, we decided to free up space in our page plan by postponing Ostler's Part II to our May issue.

Concerning the larger issue of fairness to letter writers when SUNSTONE publishes author responses immediately following their letters, I point to long-standing precedent—it's not a "new practice" as Kimball claims but something SUNSTONE has done for years before I came. A quick check of just the past year's SUNSTONE issues yields several examples of exchanges between a SUNSTONE contributor and a letter writer who directly challenged the author or artist's work, tone, or conclusions (see the May, July, and October 2004 issues). From my perspective, the only thing different about Ostler's responses in the March issue is simply the sheer number of letters to which he responded, not the fact that we chose to host such exchanges.

Yet Kimball raises concerns worth considera-

tion. Kimball is concerned that publishing a response immediately after a letter may (1) be a disservice to the letter writer, who may feel blindsided, having not expected the ideas in the letter to draw an immediate response; and (2) insult the intelligence of SUNSTONE readers by short-changing their ability to judge the fairness of a critique for themselves. SUNSTONE never intends either to upset the letter writer nor to deny our readership the opportunity to digest and wrestle with any position. Imagining myself in the position of a SUNSTONE reader (which I was for some time before becoming the editor four years ago), I know I would prefer to see both perspectives at once rather than being forced to wait to see a response until the following magazine issue. But I'm fully aware that others may disagree. Readers, what is your opinion? I'd be happy to consider amending SUNSTONE policy on this matter should I learn that something like Kimball's is the consensus position on this question.

Again, my thanks to Tom Kimball for taking time to offer his feedback.

## NO DISCERNIBLE TRACE

**I**N HIS RESPONSE TO MY LETTER ON the topic of DNA (SUNSTONE, March 2005), Blake Ostler suggests that 10,000+ year separation times apply only to the first ancestors of Native Americans, not to those who arrived later.

Below is a table of the number of DNA sequence differences (in a certain "control region" of mitochondrial DNA) among a sample of eight individuals of the "X" lineage, including four from North America (NA) and four from Europe (CE). In addition, the Cambridge Reference Sequence (CRS), which is taken as the standard Caucasian sequence, is also included. Based on known mutation rates, a single difference corresponds to a separation time of roughly 10,000 years. (This is based on data from Brown et al., *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 63 [1998]: 1852-61.)

This data shows that Native Americans with the X lineage are separated from Caucasians by at least 100,000 years and from Europeans with the X lineage by at least 60,000 years. Only within the population of Native Americans are the separation times smaller, and even these are roughly 20,000 years.

We can debate how one should analyze such data (such as whether to use a multiplier of 10,000 years or a slightly different number), and we can examine similar data for the A, B, C, and D lineages which, together with the X lineage, account for 99% of Native Americans. But at this point in time, the overall conclusion is clear: All major Native American lineages have been separated from present-day people in Europe and Asia for many thousands of years. Lehi's small band left no discernable genetic trace.

More important, what is the point of trying so hard to defend a traditional reading of the Book of Mormon? I have yet to hear anyone declare that solving the anthropological origin of Native Americans was central to their decision to change their life and accept baptism. I think LDS scholars would do much better to try to understand the spiritual message and power of the Book of Mormon and use it to live cleaner, happier, more charitable lives. That is a cause that can unite us all.

DAVID H. BAILEY  
Alamo, California

## OF GOD AND DNA

**I**N ALL THE INTELLECTUAL POSTURING regarding DNA studies and the Book of Mormon, I haven't seen a single mention (in SUNSTONE, FARMS, nor FAIR discussions) of one idea that, at least for me, defuses the whole argument and renders it irrelevant. The idea is simple and obvious—namely, the Book of Mormon text tells us that God tampered with the DNA of the Lamanites. The curse that brought a dark skin upon the

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	CRS	NA1	NA3	NA14	NA18	CE1	CE3	CE8	CE12
CRS	0	19	16	18	16	16	14	15	9
NA1	19	0	5	11	9	11	13	12	12
NA3	16	5	0	8	6	6	10	9	9
NA14	18	11	8	0	2	8	10	9	9
NA18	16	9	6	2	0	6	8	7	7
CE1	16	11	6	8	6	0	4	7	7
CE3	14	13	10	10	8	4	0	9	5
CE8	15	12	9	9	7	7	9	0	6
CE12	9	12	9	9	7	7	5	6	0

Lamanites was obviously a genetic alteration, and God warned the Nephites against intermarriage with the Lamanites because the curse would be transmitted to their children (2 Nephi 5:21–23). Sounds like a dominant genetic trait to me.

Of course we have no idea how extensive this DNA alteration was, but it may have been sufficient to thoroughly muddy the Israelite gene pool in the Americas. Throughout the record, there was much intermarriage, and the curse was later removed among the righteous Lamanites (3 Nephi 2:13–16). Perhaps this was not simply a reversal of the genetic alteration, but a further alteration. We don't know. We also don't know whether the original curse or a similar one returned when there again began to be Lamanites in the land (4 Nephi 1:20). Probably the Lord, knowing the end from the beginning and obviously desiring the Book of Mormon to be a matter of faith rather than scientific proof, muddied the gene pool intentionally, so that we would be left to the one sure method of finding out the truth:

prayer and personal revelation.

Also, as a sidenote, all this talk by apologists about the Book of Mormon peoples inhabiting only a small geographical region, presumably in Central America (or was it Malaysia?) conveniently ignores the many comments made by Joseph Smith, the Angel Moroni, and even the Lord, referring to the American Indians as Lamanites (see, for instance, Joseph Smith—History 1:34; D&C 28:8; D&C 32:2). Unless you believe that these were not revelations or that the Lord didn't know what he was talking about, you pretty much have to admit either that the “former inhabitants of this continent” were descendants of Lehi and current Native Americans are indeed Lamanites—or that Joseph Smith was a fraud. There is really no middle ground. Again, we're left to the one sure method of discovering the truth. And those who have enjoyed the unimpeachable witness of the Spirit regarding such matters as the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's call as prophet of the Restoration aren't troubled by what the DNA

studies do or do not show. We assume that in the end, when all is finally revealed regarding the history of this mortal existence, everything will make sense. Until then, we have more important things to worry about—such as applying the Atonement in our lives and serving others.

ROGER TERRY  
Orem, Utah

## TREASURE—A CLICK AWAY

I READ THE DECEMBER 2004 “FROM the Publisher” column, “e-Volution,” by William Stanford, with great interest.

Although I am a long-time Sunstone subscriber, distance and expense have prevented me from attending any symposiums. Happily, modern technology now allows me to “time shift” and “location shift” as I listen to a 2001 or 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium presentation in the comfort of my island home. I have found the symposium downloads to be a treasure trove of Mormon thought and perspectives.

Years ago, I enjoyed reading Keith Norman's article, “The ‘T’ Word: Trading our Birthright for a Mess of Certainty” (SUNSTONE, April 2002). To be able to listen to his 2001 symposium presentation (and the accompanying response from Toby Pingree) has left me with an even stronger and lasting impression of his perspective.

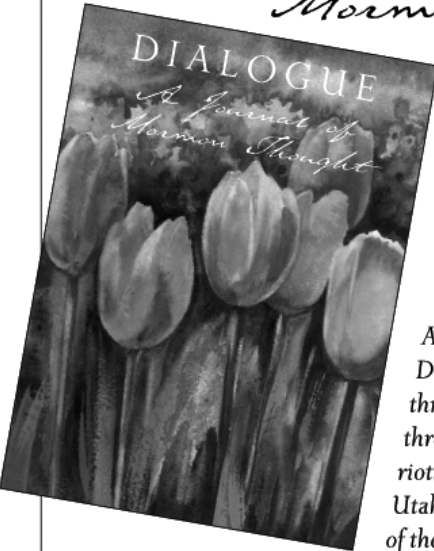
Another 2001 Symposium presentation I enjoyed was the two-essays-plus-response session, “The Evolution of Belief: Reconciling through Faith Crises” and “The Evolution of Belief: A Skeptical Sojourn” by Camilla Smith, George Smith, and John Sillito (SL01–357). Listening to these mature, thoughtful speakers reflect on their faith journeys has broadened my personal definition of “faith” and “belief.” Since I do not recall seeing a published version of this presentation in SUNSTONE magazine, the “e-Volution” Sunstone is undertaking is truly a means, as Stanford says, “to economically share Sunstone with the world.”

I am looking forward to many more years of SUNSTONE magazine and symposiums as a way for me to explore the richness of Mormon thought and culture.

JUDY ESAKI  
Kaneohe, Hawaii

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