

Contemporary Studies in Scripture



**The Anatomy of
Book of Mormon Theology**

Volume Two

Joseph M. Spencer

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Introduction

This book is one of two volumes of a larger work bearing the title *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*. Taken together, the two volumes constitute a kind of archive, an attempt to account for a decade of (my own) work in a field that has only really begun to take shape since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although people have been reading the Book of Mormon since it came off the press in 1830, and although many have done their reading with scholarly interests or intentions, the fact is that we are only right now in the midst of watching an identifiable field of Book of Mormon studies emerge. When I began writing on the Book of Mormon in earnest in about 2008, it was in no way obvious that there was such a field. A decade later, by 2018, there was little doubt that a discipline had come begun to make its way into existence. Over the course of just a few years, something hitherto unrecognizable found its way into the world. I was lucky enough to be there as this happened.

As if it were not enough to witness the emergence of a new discipline over the last decade or two, I have also looked on as an unprecedented approach to the Book of Mormon has arisen alongside that new discipline. Major parts of the newly recognizable field have clear precedents. The proliferating creation of new editions of the Book of Mormon looks back to similar efforts at the end of the nineteenth century. The assembling of reference materials, digital and analog, mirrors work done especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Historical work, undertaken with an eye to defending the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, finds strong precedent in the second half of the twentieth century. Even literary work, which has emerged with real force and has certainly felt like a novel thing, follows up on initiatives taken in the late twentieth century (especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s). What is new in the twenty-first century, it seems, is a strong and imaginative style of *theological* interpretation of the Book of Mormon. Naturally, there have been theological investigations of the Book of Mormon before. And some of what has appeared in the past

few decades looks like work done by previous generations. But there is much in recent theological work that appears to be wholly unprecedented, formally and materially.

The first—or really, the *other*—volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* gathers essays that could be said to follow twentieth-century precedents, at least to a certain extent. It principally contains essays that deal with relatively traditional theological questions and concerns. That volume traces my sometimes hesitating steps as I worked my way over the course of a decade into an emerging field of Book of Mormon studies and sorted out the Book of Mormon's theological commitments. It has turned out, however, that those same sometimes-hesitating steps have been on a path toward the creation of new styles of theological interpretation. It is a path I have traveled with good friends and smart interlocutors. And so this second—or really, this *further*—volume gathers essays that directly exemplify what is new in Book of Mormon theology. Where the essays in the other volume aim just to broach the subject of doing theology with the Book of Mormon, the essays in this volume ask about what new worlds might be discovered in doing theological work on the Book of Mormon.

This volume opens with a transitional essay, meant to serve as a kind of threshold between the other volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* and this one. Presented as a prologue of sorts, it directly raises questions of method, asking what interpretive options are available to the would-be Book of Mormon theologian. It puts into its rightful place the relatively traditional style of theological interpretation represented in the other volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*. It then goes on, though, to introduce two more experimental kinds of theological interpretation, those represented more fully in this volume than in its companion. The essay introduces the first of these more experimental styles of theological interpretation only briefly, a style I have here labeled “microscopic” theology. This is a style of theological interpretation I have helped to develop in conversation with other theologians, and especially with all the many scholars who have been involved with the Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar (once called the Mormon Theology Seminar) over the years. The essay then introduces at greater length the second more experimental style of doing theology with the Book of Mormon, which I here call “macroscopic” theology. This is a style of theological interpretation I have developed in many ways on my own, although I have done so thanks to and in conversation with the adjacent sub-disciplines of intertextuality and reception history.

After the introductory prologue of sorts, then, this volume presents two sets of essays in succession, a first set dedicated to microscopic theology and a second set dedicated to macroscopic theology. Essays in the first set examine no more than a verse of the Book of Mormon—more often just a single phrase or two—to see what theological implications lie within the details of the text. This is what microscopic theology of the sort sponsored by the Latter-day Saint Theology Seminar looks like, and most of the essays in that section of the book were direct products of my ongoing involvement in the Seminar. Essays in the second set ask questions about the shape and intentions of the whole of the Book of Mormon, as this can be discerned through the ways it deploys biblical texts—and especially the writings of Isaiah. This is what macroscopic theology looks like, explained in detail in the prologue essay. (It is best not to go into a detailed explanation of how either microscopic or macroscopic theology works in this introduction. I leave to the prologue essay and the two sets of essays following it to explain and then to exemplify these.)

A third set of essays follows the two on microscopic and macroscopic styles of theology. To this final set I have given the title “Theological Invitations.” It collects essays of two related sorts. Some are essays I wrote about some of the most interesting readers of the Book of Mormon who nonetheless work outside the boundaries of theology, usually by deploying some kind of literary style of interpretation. For me, these essays are invitations to blur the boundaries that separate different styles of Book of Mormon scholarship, so that, for example, it becomes difficult to know where literary reading ends and theological reading begins. The other essays in the same section are ones I wrote about the person I regard as the most interesting Latter-day Saint theologian who nonetheless works (or tends to work) outside the boundaries of Book of Mormon studies. I refer, here, to Adam Miller. The several essays on Miller’s writings are therefore invitations to bring all Latter-day Saint theology back in the end—explicitly and overtly—to the Book of Mormon. Together, then, the third section of this volume calls on Book of Mormon scholars to move closer to theology and calls on theologians to move closer to the Book of Mormon.

Finally, the volume closes with what I have called an epilogue of sorts. It is an essay—included in some ways just for the fun of it—on the uses of the Book of Mormon in a few films from early in the twenty-first century, and on what such uses suggest about the theological stakes and status of the Book of Mormon. Including that essay allows the whole project of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* to conclude with a discussion of

Napoleon Dynamite, a film that is experimental in all the ways I hope my own efforts in theology are experimental.

I note in the other volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology* that I have decided against revising or even touching up the essays in this collection. The point of gathering them together is, as I have said, to create a kind of archive, and it seems fitting to leave the timestamp of each essay's original form in place. This decision means that I need to make a caveat here, as I do in the other volume. Because everything here was originally written before President Russell M. Nelson clarified the importance of using the proper name of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and therefore of avoiding the slangy use of “Mormon” as an adjective or “Mormon(s)” as an identifying noun—these essays occasionally use terms I would avoid today. I hope that readers who are particularly sensitive to this issue will be understanding.

I should also note again here that, although I have not altered the essays in these two volumes, I have added occasional footnotes that might prove useful in orienting readers. Added footnotes (as opposed to original ones) are marked by being surrounded by square brackets. Further, each essay opens with an added introduction that explains the original occasion of its creation between 2008 and 2018, the decade I aim to archive with this collection. Full bibliographical information for previous published essays can be found in those brief introductions to each essay.

I offer a few words of thanks and a dedicatory word in the introduction to the other volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*. Here I just wish to note once more the remarkable friendship I share with Chris Thomas, to whom these two volumes of essays are dedicated.

Chapter One

Toward a Methodology for the Theological Interpretation of the Book of Mormon

During the second half of the twentieth century, theology was something Latter-day Saints often said they did not do. And in important ways, that was true—especially for intellectually inclined Latter-day Saints. The latter tended to give themselves either to the study of Latter-day Saint history, to the intellectual defense of the Church's faith claims, or to the systematic investigation of doctrine. Historians often and explicitly claimed that history takes—and ought to take—the place in our tradition that theology holds in other Christian traditions. Defenders of the faith took their cues from critics of the Church, who tended to build their own cases around historical issues rather than theological ones. As for those interested in doctrine, they often contrasted what they studied, which they understood as principles revealed through prophets, with theology, which they understood as a merely human endeavor, the uninspired results of abstruse reasoning.

Today, there is more space for theology. And theology is no longer being construed as a faithless appeal to reason that would usurp the place of revelation. That is, it is becoming clearer that, rightly pursued, theology is reflection on revelation. It is a way of receiving the revealed in faith, consecrating the mind by asking earnestly about the realest implications of what God has revealed in the course of the Restoration—and through scripture in particular. What might we say about the shape of the life of Latter-day Saint faith? What does it mean, really, to repent and give ourselves to the God who reveals himself in the Restoration? These are the kinds of questions driving Latter-day Saint theologians right now. But another question has to be answered before—or at least while—we answer such questions: What is the best way to go about doing theology? I wrote this essay after about a decade of reflection on that question. It was an attempt to think through that decade of reflection, drawing some consequences from what I had found. It seeks to systematize all the kinds of things pursued in the

two volumes of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*. It also serves here to introduce the essays that make up this volume.

I first presented this previously unpublished essay at “Book of Mormon Studies: Toward a Conversation,” a conference held at Utah State University in October 2017.

There are, perhaps, two obvious ways to go about producing a theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon. It might be useful to present these as extremes. One approach, largely on the model of the old history-of-religions program, seeks modestly but rigorously to identify the basic theological ideas on offer within the Book of Mormon. This first approach would lay the heaviest emphasis on questions of history and context, demanding that analysis of the Book of Mormon’s theological commitments be worked out with intense care for the immediate setting of each relevant pericope. The purpose of such work would be to show, within the Book of Mormon, a kind of “history of ideas” (whether or not any particular contributor to the field regards the “history” in question as real). This first approach we might call *tracing theologies within* the Book of Mormon.¹

The second obvious approach to theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon seeks to mobilize the text of the book for the purposes of setting it in conversation with the extratextual theological concerns of the present. This approach would seek to do its hermeneutic work as responsibly as possible, but it would lay its heaviest emphasis on the theological task to which contemporary Mormonism assigns it, with care first and foremost for the discernible needs of those who confess faith in the book’s truth. The purpose of such work would be to allow the authority granted to the Book of Mormon by the confessing community to play a role in shaping contemporary Mormonism, wherever texts from the Book of Mormon might address most profitably the needs of the body of Christ. This second approach we might call *producing theologies through* the Book of Mormon.²

1. If a name must be assigned to this first approach, it might be best to use that of Grant Hardy. In a talk delivered at the annual meetings of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology in 2012 (but, to my knowledge, as yet unpublished), Hardy outlined what he called “the promise of Book of Mormon theology,” defending an approach along exactly these lines.

2. If a name must be assigned to this second approach, it might be best to use that of Adam Miller. In an essay titled “A Manifesto for Mormon Theology,” published in 2012, Miller has argued for a Mormon scriptural theology, speculative in nature, that roots itself in charity. See Adam Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 59–62.

In the course of this paper, I wish to argue for a third, perhaps less obvious approach to the theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon. I have no argument to make *against* these first two approaches. I hope to see them continue, and I hope to borrow heavily from their insights in doing my own work. Indeed, I hope in many ways myself to contribute directly to work done in both veins.³ Nonetheless, I wish to outline a rather different theological project here, as well as to argue for its necessity and for why it should be privileged above other theological approaches to the Book of Mormon. Although the nature of the project will have to become clear over the course of the following discussion, perhaps we can give it a name from the outset. Rather than *tracing theologies within* the Book of Mormon or *producing theologies through* the Book of Mormon, I wish to promote the task of *constructing a theology of* the Book of Mormon.⁴ The choice of preposition—“of,” rather than “within” or “through”—is important to me here, but so are the presence, the singularity, and the indefiniteness of the qualifying article. I wish to promote the construction of *a* theology of the Book of Mormon, not so many *theologies*. All this, naturally, I will have to clarify.

I might productively begin by identifying a key presupposition for the argument I will present. I recognize that some might contest this presupposition, but I believe it is solid and so will not argue for it here. I take it, instead, as a given. The presupposition is this: Scriptural theology in its most robust sense must ultimately work toward the *unity* of scripture. What does this mean? For biblical theology, narrower by definition than Mormon scriptural theology, addressing this question would require producing some account of the relationship (or lack thereof) between the two biblical testaments. It would also require an assessment of the idea that there is (or is not) either a center or an organizing scheme at work in the Christian Bible as a whole.⁵ For a Mormon scriptural theology, addressing the question of scripture’s unity would require in addition some account of the relationship between uniquely Restoration scripture and the Christian

[My own experiments in this sort of theological reading are those categorized in this volume as “microscopic” theology.]

3. [Essays I have intended to contribute to this sort of theological project can be found in the other volume of *The Anatomy of Book of Mormon Theology*.]

4. [My own experiments in this sort of theological reading are those categorized in this volume as “macroscopic” theology.]

5. For some helpful discussion of the range of contemporary approaches to these questions, see James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 62–68, 74–80.

Bible, as well as of any relationships among uniquely Restoration volumes of scripture. One would, moreover, have to include some assessment of whether or how uniquely Mormon scripture complicates or replaces the Bible's supposed theological center or organizing scheme. All this, it seems to me, deserves the sustained attention of any would-be Mormon scriptural theologian. Put succinctly, scriptural theology in general (like Mormon scriptural theology in particular) requires some kind of investment in—or some kind of sustainable argument against—the idea that scripture works together to communicate God's word to the world.⁶ This I take for granted.

Now, if this presupposition is a good one, then the first and most fundamental question every effort at interpreting the Book of Mormon theologically must ask would be this: How might the Book of Mormon's interaction with the Bible clarify the theological center or organizing scheme at work within the larger canon of Mormon scripture—if, in fact, any such center or scheme can be discovered? Note how this question draws together into a single configuration the two major facets of what it would mean to pursue a Mormon scriptural theology, as I have just described these. The question assumes that some account of the relationship between uniquely Restoration scripture and the Bible has been worked out (this is the first facet), but then it asks how this account might itself be put to work in assessing how Restoration scripture reconfigures the Bible's theological center or organizing scheme (this is the second facet). The point here is to see how the two major tasks of a Mormon scriptural theology—or at least of a Mormon scriptural theology aimed ultimately at the unity of scripture—work together. How does the relationship *between* the Book of Mormon and the Bible help to determine the *overall* theological shape of the Mormon scriptural canon?

I need to clarify an important point before providing anything like an answer to the question I have now posed. In the preceding discussion, I have played fast and loose with the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the remainder of Restoration scripture. That is, I have spoken at times just of the relationship between the Book of Mormon and

6. Mormons might want to introduce into such a formulation a caveat recognizing the openness of the Mormon scriptural canon, Mormonism's commitment to continuing revelation. See, for instance, the crucial arguments in James E. Faulconer, *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute Press, 2010), 87–136. I fully concede the importance of this concern, but I do not believe that it requires anything more than that every fully articulated Mormon scriptural theology recognize its own provisionality.

the Bible, but I have spoken at other times of the relationship between all uniquely Restoration scripture and the Bible. Which is it? Unfortunately, the answer must be both. I hope I have outlined the most general project of a Mormon scriptural theology, one that would take into account *all* of uniquely Restoration scripture, along with the Bible. But I also mean here to narrow my focus to what might be called a “canon within the canon.”⁷ The Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price, key volumes in the specifically Latter-day Saint canon, are a good deal more canonically unstable than is the Book of Mormon or the Bible.⁸ Further, these other volumes of Mormon scripture are not embraced universally across the various branches of the larger Restoration movement. Some recognize different versions of these volumes, while some do not at all recognize one or both of them. Some branches embrace still other volumes of scripture.⁹ For all these reasons, it seems to me that the first step in establishing a Mormon scriptural theology—whether limited to the Latter-day Saint tradition from which I hail or not—is to consider first and as exhaustively as possible a scriptural theology that takes in the relationship just between the Book of Mormon and the Bible.¹⁰ On such a foundation, each branch

7. For some discussion of the use of such a formulation within New Testament theology, see Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 68–73.

8. When Latter-day Saints speak of the canon as open, it is usually with reference to these two volumes of scripture.

9. It might be added that the Book of Mormon itself is not equivalent in all branches of the Restoration movement. Slight differences in the actual text, as well as rather major differences in apparatus and paratext, distinguish the several major traditions’ experience with the book. Helpfully, Royal Skousen’s work on a critical text of the Book of Mormon allows for the possibility of a Book of Mormon theology that might be amenable to all (or at least most) of the various branches of the Restoration movement. See, naturally, Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); as well as Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 pts. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–2009).

10. In yet a further complication, the Bible is not necessarily standard across all branches of the Restoration movement. Because of Joseph Smith’s work between 1830 and 1833 on the “New Translation” of the Bible (commonly known as the “Joseph Smith Translation” in the Latter-day Saint tradition and as the “Inspired Version” in other Restoration traditions), some branches of Mormonism use a Bible fundamentally different from the standard Christian Bible. Here I focus solely on the Bible available to Joseph Smith in 1829, during the period of the

within the Restoration movement might pursue a further elaboration of its particular form of scriptural theology.¹¹

The question, therefore, that I will answer here is how the Book of Mormon's interaction with the Christian Bible might serve to clarify the theological center or organizing scheme at work within the minimal canon of Restoration scripture constituted by the Christian Bible and the Book of Mormon. How might such a question be answered?

The first step, rather obviously, lies in determining the nature of the *interaction* between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. This matter might be approached in various ways, just as the relationship between the two testaments of the Christian Bible has been variously conceived in biblical theology, as well as in biblical studies more generally. From among the methodological models on offer in the latter field, one seems to me the most promising by far for constructing a theology of the Book of Mormon. I have in mind here the study of intertextuality. From the moment the volume first appeared, the Book of Mormon's close relationship to the Bible has invited the accusation of plagiarism. Mark Twain in fact famously described it in precisely such terms, although he added the word "tedious" to the word "plagiarism."¹² Despite the cheap appeal of such accusations, however, the category of plagiarism does not fit in the case of the Book of Mormon. Its use of biblical passages and turns of phrase, as well as Elizabethan language and an unmistakably King James

Book of Mormon's production: the King James Version. It is this upon which the Book of Mormon relies, and any assessment of the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the Bible (or Bibles) resulting from Joseph Smith's editorial work must ultimately depend first on an investigation of the relationship between the Book of Mormon and the King James Bible.

11. I recognize the still-further difficulty of disentangling the Book of Mormon fully from at least the earliest of the revelations Joseph Smith received—those received before, during, and shortly after the production of the Book of Mormon. It seems to me nonetheless that one must consider the complications these early revelations introduce only once the actual text of the Book of Mormon has been investigated in relation to the Bible.

12. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad / Roughing It* (New York: Library of American, 1984), 617. For a much more recent and pretentiously systematic argument that the Book of Mormon is a work of plagiarism, see Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2010).

style of speech, hardly hides itself from its readers.¹³ The Book of Mormon deploys instead what Nicholas Frederick has recently called a “rhetoric of allusivity,” a range of interactions that deliberately trade on the familiarity of biblical language and expressions for the volume’s readers.¹⁴ Rather than unreflective or deceptive thievery, the Book of Mormon exhibits an interest in artful recontextualization of biblical narratives, themes, and expressions. The study of this artful work of redeploying texts already regarded as authoritative is the study of intertextuality.

The word “intertextuality” itself can mean several things. In Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva it has reference to the impossibility of isolating any particular discourse from the larger web of discourses within which it occurs. The very condition for the possibility of communication lies in the way that any particular attempt at communicating with others deploys figures that reproduce the recognizable contours of the total (inconsistent) network of language and talk.¹⁵ To some extent, this more strictly literary notion of intertextuality is relevant to the Book of Mormon, since there are obvious ways in which its consistent use of King James diction and phrasing—especially when drawing from the New Testament—suggests principally a struggle to communicate meaningfully with a nineteenth-century audience whose basic form of discourse is thoroughly infused with the Authorized Version of the Bible. I wish nonetheless to restrict the definition of intertextuality here to something narrower, as does Richard Hays in his seminal work on Saint Paul’s uses of scripture. That is, here I mean to focus just on the Book of Mormon’s “actual citations of and allusions to specific texts.”¹⁶ It seems to me necessary to distinguish between deliberate marshaling of specifiable biblical passages and more obviously

13. As Grant Hardy (not entirely felicitously) puts this point, “the Book of Mormon *wants* to be seen as a companion to the Bible.” Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5; emphasis added.

14. See, naturally, Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016).

15. This notion of intertextuality is discussed throughout Barthes’s work, although it is in Kristeva’s *Word, Dialogue, and Novel* that the word made its first appearance. See Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 39. For a good collection of Barthes’s writings, see Susan Sontag, ed., *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2009).

16. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 15.

formulaic uses of biblical language. Important work has already been done on establishing a solid methodology for drawing such distinctions.¹⁷

Now, by what criterion might it be decided that intertextuality offers the ideal model for understanding the interaction between the Book of Mormon and Bible? What secures its value, in my view, is simply the fact that it uniquely allows for a fully *immanent* investigation of the relations between the two volumes of scripture. Intertextual study distinctively avoids idealizing theological approaches that would insist on taking the Book of Mormon and the Bible to be self-contained distinct wholes that then have to be put into relation to one another—perhaps through the abstract work of comparing the supposedly discernible thematic commitments of each volume. Further, such an approach refuses to regard either of the two volumes as inherently superior to, and therefore determinative of the status of, the other—whether the Bible as the more obviously sophisticated of the two, or whether the Book of Mormon as the more immediately trustworthy of the two. In short, an intertextual approach to the interaction between the Book of Mormon and the Bible recognizes their inseparability. The Book of Mormon cannot be understood independently of a close investigation of the uses to which it puts biblical texts of various sorts. And the Bible cannot be understood within the Mormon canon independently of the ways that it offers its texts and themes and language to the Book of Mormon for complex redeployment and recontextualization.¹⁸

This immanence of the Bible to the Book of Mormon and of the Book of Mormon to the Bible is, from my perspective, the key contribution of intertextual study to the task of theological interpretation. But what does such textual immanence mean for theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon? This question is, actually, a more specific version of the question

17. See, in addition to Frederick's *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity*, his crucial recent article: Nicholas J. Frederick, "Evaluating the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon: A Proposed Methodology," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 1–30.

18. Here I largely reproduce the basic understanding of the relationship between the two testaments in intertextual study of the Christian Bible—study, as it is often put, of the "uses" of the Old Testament in the New—although I have displaced this relationship from its position between the two testament to a position between the Bible and the Book of Mormon. For what has quickly become the standard systematic work on intertextuality in the Christian Bible, see G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

I have already asked: How does the Book of Mormon's interaction with the Bible clarify the theological center or organizing scheme at work within Restoration scripture? If it is agreed that intertextual relationships make up the hard core of the interaction between the two volumes, then it must be asked how this sort of interaction might give shape to their joint theological investigation. It should be clear to anyone reading the Book of Mormon with an eye to intertextual concerns that there can be no *one* answer to such a question. There emphatically is *not* one sort of interaction between the Book of Mormon and the Bible. The quotation of whole Isaiah chapters in literarily complex contexts and riddled with significant variants is something quite different from the use of formulaic phrases and decontextualized theologoumena drawn from the Gospels or from Paul. I think, though, that it would be a mistake to decide for that reason that nothing of substance can be said by way of a general schematization of the Book of Mormon's many intertextual ties to the Bible. It is entirely possible to establish a relatively stable typology of sorts of intertextual interaction, to discern patterns in the several sorts' usage and distribution, and to produce by such a means a general schema of the Book of Mormon's use of the Bible. And it is with a schema of this sort that serious theological work might be done.

Much work remains to be done, of course, in actually producing such a schema, but perhaps a few of its major features can already be enumerated. To be given pride of place in the schema are, certainly, the explicit uses of and discussions about the biblical books of Isaiah and Revelation. Nearly a third of the book of Isaiah appears in the Book of Mormon in one form or another, and several major voices within the book explicitly identify Isaiah as of foundational importance to the Book of Mormon project.¹⁹ Further, the Book of Mormon explicitly associates its most grandiose vision accounts with the book of Revelation and promises a full clarification of John's apocalypse to anyone who follows the example of its prophets.²⁰ Far more subtle but no less essential in the schema is the role

19. [I have labored elsewhere on the role of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. I have labored on the subject also in many of the essays in the section titled "Macroscopic Theology" in this volume. For work I have undertaken elsewhere, see Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2016); and Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016).]

20. [I recently published a first attempt at sketching the issues surrounding the book of Revelation in the Book of Mormon. See Joseph M. Spencer, "A Moderate

played in the Book of Mormon by the Gospel of John. Preliminary work has already shown John's importance to the Book of Mormon's theological commitments,²¹ and there is much low-hanging fruit on this point.²² In a kind of second tier of the schema should be included explicit references to other biblical texts (references attended by citation formulas of some sort) and unmistakable replications or manipulations of longer biblical passages,²³ as well as deliberate reproduction of biblical type-scenes.²⁴ In a third or final tier there would fit formulaic usage of biblical phrasing, with some privilege given to formulas that appear more often and seem to reproduce the contexts of their biblical sources.²⁵ Mobilizing a several-tiered schema such as this, one could begin to extract from the Book of Mormon's many intertextual interactions with the Bible a kind of "world-view-story." And with this move, one begins to move from nailing down the interaction between the Book of Mormon and the Bible to the search for the theological center or organizing schema of Mormon scripture.

Millenarianism: Apocalypticism in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Religions* 10, no. 5 (2019): 339.]

21. See especially Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 139–54; and Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity*.

22. Stendahl argues that the Sermon on the Mount as reproduced and lightly edited in 3 Nephi 12–14 makes of the Matthean sermon a Johannine text. Similar gestures—as yet unexplored in the literature—can be found throughout Third Nephi, among them implicit contrasts between the synoptic and fourth gospel conceptualizations of the events of the night of Jesus's arrest. The interest Third Nephi further exhibits in the idea that John the Beloved is immortal, unlike Jesus's other disciples, confirms this pattern.

23. Examples of the former would include occasional citations of Genesis 12:2 (as in 1 Nephi 15:18; 22:9; 3 Nephi 20:25, 27) or Deuteronomy 18:18–19 (as in 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:23). Examples of the latter would include the development of Romans 11:11–28 (in Jacob 5) or 1 Corinthians 13 (in Moroni 7:44–48).

24. Here one might think of the unmistakable relationship the Book of Mormon posits between the escape and travels of Lehi's family and the Exodus story. [I am not sure why I did not include in this footnote before major contributions on this question. It is worth noting, though, that many have written on this subject.]

25. This third or final tier would require the most difficult work of all, to be sure. See the helpful preliminary comments in Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 26–32.

I borrow the term “worldview-story” from Edward Klink and Darian Lockett, who use it to explain a general methodology shared by a variety of contemporary theological readers of the Bible: Richard Hays, N. T. Wright, John Goldingay, Richard Bauckham, and Ben Witherington, among others.²⁶ Such interpreters “find an underlying story line running through and between the O[ld] T[estament] passages [that New Testament authors] cite.”²⁷ Sifting the New Testament’s uses of Old Testament texts, such interpreters reconstruct a story assumed by the New Testament (this regarded as a loosely coherent whole) to be at work in the Old Testament. Thus, the Old Testament finds a unity in the assumptions of the New Testament’s characters (such as Jesus or Peter), authors (such as Paul or John the prophet), and editors (such as the gospel writers). If, as N. T. Wright says, “the retelling of [Israel’s Old Testament] story . . . is a necessary part of the task” of the New Testament, then something much the same might be said with regard to the Book of Mormon.²⁸ Just as the New Testament, through its multifarious uses of Old Testament texts, leaves traces of a “worldview-story” that it assumes as a starting point for its own intervention, the Book of Mormon, through its multifarious uses of the whole Christian Bible, leaves traces of its own “worldview-story” that it assumes as a starting point for its intervention. The first task of a serious Book of Mormon theology would be, therefore, to reconstruct the relatively unified story the Book of Mormon assumes to be at work in the Christian Bible, and thereby to develop a solid account of the basic worldview the Book of Mormon presupposes.

It is here, I think, that the potential *unity* of Mormon scripture emerges. Inasmuch as the Book of Mormon presupposes a relatively coherent and consistent worldview, and inasmuch as it organizes this worldview through an articulation of the singular story it finds in (or imposes on) the Bible, the unity of Mormon scripture arises. Thus, the immanence of the Bible to the Book of Mormon and vice versa guarantees the fundamental unity of Mormon scripture, or at least of the canon within the canon with which I am here concerned. The unity of Mormon scripture, as I

26. See Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 93–107.

27. Klink and Lockett, 99.

28. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 142.

understand it, is therefore *hermeneutic* in nature.²⁹ Within the Book of Mormon's biblical hermeneutic both a basic worldview and a set of biblical stories take shape—a worldview that presupposes a series of Christian symbols and practices, along with a set of stories about Israel's and then Christianity's global history.

Of course, as N. T. Wright emphasizes, one feels the real force of such worldview-storytelling only where its polemical intentions become clear. “Once we grasp the storied structure of worldviews in general,” he explains, “we are in possession of a tool which, though not often used thus, can help us to grasp what was a stake in the [theological] debates” of particular eras in history. The theological tradition of the Abrahamic faiths has thus always been “a controversy about different tellings of the story of Israel's god, his people, and the world.”³⁰ This is no less true with the Book of Mormon than with the Bible. Like the New Testament, the Book of Mormon *explicitly* identifies certain worldviews it aims to contest: “churches which are built up and not unto the Lord,” as one passage has it (2 Ne. 28:3); people who “hiss” or “spurn” or “make game of the Jews” or “any of the remnant of the house of Israel,” in another passage (3 Ne. 29:8); “the gentiles” who “mock” at things like the Book of Mormon itself, elsewhere in the text (Ether 12:25). These worldviews are, quite clearly, to be understood as built on or sustained by certain readings of the Bible and of post-biblical Christian history. Thus, there are those who “deny the revelations of God” and do so because they have “not read the scriptures” or at least do “not understand them” (Morm. 9:7–8). One voice in the Book of Mormon insists that if people in modern times “had all the scriptures,” they would “know” that Israel's redemption “must surely come” (3 Ne. 28:33). And it is only because there are those who “teach with their learning and deny the Holy Ghost” that “their priests . . . contend one

29. As with the work of theological readers of the New Testament, there are “unintended consequences” of this approach. If “O[ld] T[estament] texts not taken up in the N[ew] T[estament] are deemphasized” in this sort of approach to the Christian Bible, it is not surprising that certain biblical texts not taken up in the Book of Mormon will be deemphasized in the approach defended here. Similarly, if “O[ld] T[estament] texts that are mentioned in the N[ew] T[estament] are usually read *only* as the N[ew] T[estament] understands them” in such approaches, it is not surprising if this theological approach will largely ignore readings of biblical texts not pursued, at least implicitly, by the Book of Mormon. Clink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 101.

30. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 76.

with another” about the meaning of the Bible (2 Ne. 28:4). The Book of Mormon clearly exhibits awareness of its involvement in some kind of theological controversy.

It is necessary to underscore the fact that the controversy in which the Book of Mormon thus involves itself has less to do with particular points of traditional theology (with, say, basic Christian tenets) than with the whole reading of the Bible. Although passages within the book directly take issue with things like infant baptism or hedonistic universalism, the *primary* and certainly the *most sustained* polemic in the book concerns the general shape of the biblical story. Through its massively complex interaction with its scriptural predecessor, the Book of Mormon first and foremost presents itself as a polemic against certain non-covenantal appropriations of the Christian Bible. It outlines over and over again a history of Israel from the sixth-century before Christ to the end of time, and it repeatedly rails against gentile (European) appropriation of Christianity for its own self-serving ends—an appropriation it usually envisions as taking the shape of so-called “replacement theologies.”³¹ This point must be understood if the task of constructing a Book of Mormon theology is to become fully clear. Theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon cannot be reduced to investigation of *particular* doctrines of interest in the polemical context of nineteenth-century American Christianity.³² To do so is to miss the point of the Book of Mormon’s *systematic* interaction with the Bible. What is at stake, instead, is a whole worldview inextricably interwoven into a story about Israelite and Christian history.

With this last point clear, the whole task of constructing a Book of Mormon theology becomes plain. The task is to become clear about the nature of the immanence of the Book of Mormon to the Bible, to discern the ways in which that immanence articulates a coherent and singular worldview, and to set that worldview into polemical relationship with rival worldviews rooted in rival hermeneutic appropriations of the Christian

31. For a good overview of replacement theology, see Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010).

32. In many ways, the exactly *wrong* approach to clarifying the nineteenth-century bearings of the Book of Mormon was already exemplified by Alexander Campbell’s 1831 critique, and it has largely continued into the present. See Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832).

Bible. I believe I have made clear along the way of articulating such a project its basic motivations. All that remains to be said here by way of closure is something about why such an approach to the task of theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon should be privileged above other obvious approaches. In light of the foregoing, this point might already be obvious. Simply put, every other form of theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon text will be richer for positioning itself as a part within the whole whose construction I call for here. Themes and theologoumena, like isolated passages that might serve as spurs to philosophical and theological reflection, find their most determinate meanings only within the larger coherent whole of the Book of Mormon. To ignore this determining whole—fixed and guaranteed in many ways by the authorial and editorial control emphasized within the Book of Mormon—is to miss the most forceful theological shape of the Book of Mormon as a totality.³³

Obviously, much more can and needs to be said about the nature of the project outlined here. And much more can and needs to be said by way of justifying it in relationship to other possible theological approaches to the Book of Mormon. I believe I have, nevertheless, outlined the key argument for a substantially fuller Book of Mormon theology than has yet been attempted. What is needed is a serious engagement with the Book of Mormon's coherence and continuity with the Bible. When this is uncovered, theological interpretation of the Book of Mormon can begin in earnest.

33. For a helpful, but preliminary, analysis of authorial and editorial control in the Book of Mormon, see Terry L. Givens, *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–12. For a fuller analysis of what this kind of control looks like, see Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*.

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