The Protestant Bible wars were fought between fundamentalists, who initially claimed for the Bible the same “truth” that Enlightenment claimed for science, and liberals, who denied that historical “truth” could be achieved at all. In the present Book of Mormon wars the opposite seems to be true: the liberal camp appears deeply rooted in the Enlightenment paradigm, while the orthodox (but not fundamentalist) position often uses postmodernist arguments, claiming that absolute objectivity is a “noble dream” never achieved nor obtainable in historical studies. The article reviews the present Mormon controversies by comparing them to the discussions on biblical interpretation in the Roman Catholic Church, as summarized in the semiofficial 1993 document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.
The Book of Mormon Wars:
A Non-Mormon Perspective

Massimo Introvigne

Abstract: The Protestant Bible wars were fought between fundamentalists, who initially claimed for the Bible the same “truth” that Enlightenment claimed for science, and liberals, who denied that historical “truth” could be achieved at all. In the present Book of Mormon wars the opposite seems to be true: the liberal camp appears deeply rooted in the Enlightenment paradigm, while the orthodox (but not fundamentalist) position often uses postmodernist arguments, claiming that absolute objectivity is a “noble dream” never achieved nor obtainable in historical studies. The article reviews the present Mormon controversies by comparing them to the discussions on biblical interpretation in the Roman Catholic Church, as summarized in the semiofficial 1993 document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” by the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

1. The Book of Mormon Wars

In 1976 Harold Lindsell, a founding faculty member of the Evangelical Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, published his now famous book *The Battle for the Bible.*

Permission has been granted by Cassell, London, to publish this expanded version of Massimo Introvigne, “The Book of Mormon Wars: A Non-Mormon Perspective,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas J. Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 25–34. The book can be obtained through Cassell, PO Box 605, Herndon, VA 22172; Tel: (800) 561-7704; Fax: (703) 661-1501.
Lindsell's book chronicled the battle for the doctrine of inerrancy of the Bible within the Southern Baptist Convention, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Fuller Theological Seminary itself, where moderately liberal Bible scholars were teaching by the 1970s. While Lindsell's book is still a favorite among American fundamentalists, Lindsell himself made clear that it would be inaccurate to reduce the large variety of Protestant positions on the Bible to two camps only—liberal and fundamentalist—since, in fact, dozens of different positions between the two extremes seem to exist. Scholarly studies on Protestant fundamentalism, not to mention the study of fundamentalism as a broader category not necessarily confined to the Protestant world, have boomed in the last two decades. Since the publication of the movement's manifesto, The Fundamentals, between 1910 and 1915, fundamentalism was often represented as a reaction against science. Recent scholarship, on the other hand, has suggested an alternative explanation, seeing fundamentalism as an attempt to secure for biblical truth the same certainty that science enjoyed according to the Newtonian and positivist paradigm.

2 Ibid., 106–21.
4 See on this perspective, the ambitious Fundamentalism Project at the University of Chicago and the five volumes published as a part of this project: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., The Fundamentalism Project. Volume 1: Fundamentalisms Observed; Volume 2: Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education; Volume 3: Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militancy; Volume 4: Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements; Volume 5: Fundamentalisms Comprehended (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991–95).
5 The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, 12 vols. (Chicago: Testimony, 1910–15). According to “A Statement by the Two Laymen,” i.e., the Stewart brothers, Lyman (1840–1923) and Milton (1838–1923), the two businessmen who financed the project, nearly 3,000,000 copies had been circulated by 1915 (“A Statement by the Two Laymen,” in The Fundamentals, 12:4).

INTROVIGNE, BOOK OF MORMON

Evangelicalism and fundamentalism M. Marsden, “a love affair with "objective scientific truths of Christian faith and the Christian c only one "true" science (needless theories), so—the fundamentalists one objective "truth" about the Fallible Word of God. Marsden ha was originally foreign to fundamen development, when science started its own paradigm. Fundamentalism particularly hostile to late moderni cations that there is no "one science", collection of conflicting points of p urposes without necessarily imp or than the other. Paradoxically, f uctivity of "scientific truth" where by mainline science itself.

Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint fundamentalists. Philip L. although they sincerely profess the Bible,

early Mormon leaders limite by (1) promulgating an ext image of what living properties, (3) representing Scri genuine among others, (4) stress received text of the Bible, a of it as uninspired.

8 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentals.
9 Philip L. Barlow, Mormons and Saints in American Religion (New York: summary is taken from Armand L. Mauss)
Evangelicalism and fundamentalism had, according to George M. Marsden, “a love affair with Enlightenment science” and hailed “objective scientific thought . . . as the best friend of the Christian faith and of Christian culture generally.” As there was only one “true” science (needless to say, not including evolution theories), so—the fundamentalists reasoned—there could be only one objective “truth” about the Bible: that it was the inerrant, infallible Word of God. Marsden has proved that hostility to science was originally foreign to fundamentalism and emerged as a later development, when science started to be secularized and to change its own paradigm. Fundamentalism, as a consequence, has been particularly hostile to late modernist and postmodernist assumptions that there is no “one science,” but that science could be a collection of conflicting points of view, often selected for practical purposes without necessarily implying that one is more “true” than the other. Paradoxically, fundamentalism maintained the objectivity of “scientific truth” when this claim was no longer made by mainline science itself.

Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints were certainly not biblical fundamentalists. Philip L. Barlow has demonstrated that, although they sincerely professed a strong general belief in the Bible,

early Mormon leaders limited the authority of the Bible by (1) promulgating an extra-biblical canon, (2) placing primacy on living prophets over received Scriptures, (3) representing Scriptures as but one source of truth among others, (4) stressing the corruptions in the received text of the Bible, and (5) dismissing portions of it as uninspired.
Only in the twentieth century did the changing use of the King James Version of the Bible by Latter-day Saints exhibit some features of a Mormon “assimilation” to the Protestant (conservative) establishment. D. Michael Quinn has emphasized the importance of the “fundamentalist” attitudes (and the association with the conservative Protestant lobby during his diplomatic career) of J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961), who served as a member of the First Presidency from 1933 to 1961. Clark was instrumental in importing the fundamentalist attitudes on the Bible into Mormonism. Recent Latter-day Saint editions of the King James Version have been “Mormonized” through specific notes, but the notes, at the same time, have guided the readers toward what has been called a “fundamentalist” interpretation. While “fundamentalism” is normally used in Latter-day Saint circles to designate the splinter groups who still practice polygamy or maintain nineteenth-century views no longer regarded as orthodox by the Latter-day Saint Church, Armand Mauss has noted in the new Mormon attitudes toward the Bible one of the features showing that contemporary Mormonism is in a phase of “re-trenchment,” where at both the popular and hierarchical levels, traits emerge that could be called “fundamentalist” in the usual non-Mormon sense of the term.

In contemporary Mormonism the main battle is not about the Bible. Although it would be wrong to conclude that Latter-day Saint scholars are uninformed or uninterested in non-Mormon biblical exegesis, what in other denominations is a battle for the Bible is in contemporary Mormonism. This battle is fought around the very nature of the Book claims to be? Or is it merely a product of either the two, but a fraud, exclude that join the ranks of mere anti-Mormon identical with the Protestant battle question is whether the Book of Mormon is to the Latter-day Saint debate the obvious reasons that the Book of 1830 and the circumstances of its historical research. While the Church claims that “for most purpose of study...scripture is not a part of scriptural records—which the wisdom and understanding about writings,” in fact, the “truth” is defined in conflicting ways, and the Mormon has largely become the batt Accordingly, essays on Latter-day studies of Latter-day Saint scriptural history concern the battle for the Book of Mormon. Faithful History, including so many of liberal views, was published liberal journals Dialog also publish articles by conservative to claim that they have a (the more so since the many so since the Signa in 1990 and New Appro

10 Mauss and Barlow, “Church, Sect, and Scripture,” 410–11.
12 Edward H. Ashment, “Making the Scriptures ‘Indeed One in Our Hands,’” in The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 237–64. Of course both Vogel and Ashment are part of the contemporary “battle for the Book of Mormon” on the liberal side, and their use of the word fundamentalism has raised strong objections from conservative Mormon quarters.
14 Stephen D. Ricks, “Book of Mormon” is contemporary Mormonism (New York: Macmillan, 19)
15 George D. Smith, ed., Faithful History (Salt Lake City: Signature Book
16 Vogel, ed., The Word of God.
BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES 5/2 (1996)

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10 Mormon Sectarian Retrenchment,” So-
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Clark: The Church Years (Provo, Utah: 3).
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INTROVIGNE, BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES

Bible is in contemporary Mormonism a battle for the Book of
Mormon. This battle is fought not around interpretation, but
around the very nature of the Book of Mormon. Is it what it
claims to be? Or is it merely a product of Joseph Smith’s creative
genius or religious imagination? (Those claiming that it is neither
of the two, but a fraud, exclude themselves from the debate and
join the ranks of mere anti-Mormonism.) While the debate is not
identical with the Protestant battle for the Bible, ultimately the
question is whether the Book of Mormon—not unlike the Bible in
the Protestant controversy—is “true.” Historians are more cru-
cial to the Latter-day Saint debate than to the Protestant, for the
obvious reasons that the Book of Mormon was first published in
1830 and the circumstances of its translation are more open to
historical research. While the Church-approved Encyclopedia of
Mormonism claims that “for most Latter-day Saints the primary
purpose of scripture studies is not to prove to themselves the truth
of scriptural records—which they already accept—but to gain
wisdom and understanding about the teachings of these sacred
writings,” in fact, the “truth” of the Book of Mormon may be
defined in conflicting ways, and the battle for the Book of Mor-
non has largely become the battle for Latter-day Saint histori-
ocy. Accordingly, essays on Latter-day Saint historiography—such as
those collected in Faithful History, published in 1992—in fact
concern the battle for the Book of Mormon not less than specific
studies of Latter-day Saint scripture itself.

Faithful History, including some conservative together with
a majority of liberal views, was published by Signature Books. Most
of the liberal authors had been published in the independent
Latter-day Saint journals Dialogue or Sunstone. These journals
also publish articles by conservative authors, and it would be inac-
curate to claim that they have a single, if hidden, liberal agenda
(the more so since Latter-day Saint liberals exhibit a whole spec-
trum of different nuances). Signature also published The Word of
God in 1990 and New Approaches to the Book of Mormon in

14 Stephen D. Ricks, “Book of Mormon Studies,” in Encyclopedia of
15 George D. Smith, ed., Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon
History (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).
16 Vogel, ed., The Word of God.
arguably the two most controversial liberal books in the battle for the Book of Mormon. Signature was strongly criticized, to put it mildly, by conservative Latter-day Saints, one of whom—Stephen E. Robinson—went so far as to propose a parallel between the Salt Lake City press and Korihor, "the infamous 'alternate voice' in the Book of Mormon," claiming that "in its continuing assault upon traditional Mormonism, Signature Books promotes ... precisely these same naturalistic assumptions of the Korihor agenda in dealing with current Latter-day Saint beliefs." In short, "Korihor's back, and this time he's got a printing press." Robert's criticism was published in 1991 in the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, a publication started in 1989 by FARMS, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, based in Provo, Utah, which epitomizes the conservative (or, as it would prefer to say, orthodox) Latter-day Saint side in the battle for the Book of Mormon. The battle was not merely metaphorical, since Signature asked its attorney to write to FARMS, threatening what FARMS called "the appeal to Caesar." Undeterred, in 1994 the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon devoted an entire issue to a strongly worded attack on New Approaches to the Book of Mormon. Controversies on the Book of Mormon surely had a role in the 1993–1994 excommunications of several liberal Latter-day Saint intellectuals; Metcalfe and another of the authors of New Approaches, David P. Wright, were among those excommunicated.

It would be tempting—and the non-Mormon press has occasionally succumbed to the temptation—to label as "fundamentalists" the authors writing for FARMS publications (including the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies) and as "modernists" those published by Signature Books and by the independent Latter-day Saint journals, simply regarding the battle for the Book of Mormon as a Latter-day Saint version of the Protestant fundamentaist/modernist controversy. A broad comparison would, however, be out of place. A Latter-day Saint conservative today exists a commitment to sacred scripture and to the importance of national hierarchies, and, to some extent, a上岗 that they would agree fundamentally with liberal Protestants on some issues. More deeply, the basic equation of conservatives is entirely different. We have mentioned earlier that Protestant fundamentalists, in their scholarly interpretations, are in fundamental concepts of "objective modern," anti-Enlightenment epistemology, the Enlightenment emphasis on knowledge and the "world." He approvingly quotes, for example, the dictatorial command: Obey! This, however, not understanding the peculiarities of the Enlightenment, few historians would agree with the Enlightenment scholarship and with the Enlightenment to see "stand vail." This is, however, not understanding the peculiarities of the Enlightenment, unlike many Protestant modernists who were persuaded that, thanks to Enlightenment concept of "science" and "truth," empirical, "scientific" conc...
introduction/modernist controversy and battle for the Bible. The comparison would, however, be only partially accurate. Of course, Latter-day Saint conservatives share with Protestant fundamentalists a commitment to sacred scriptures, to the support of denominational hierarchies, and, to some extent, to tradition. It is also probable that they would agree more readily with Protestant fundamentalists than with liberal Protestants on issues like abortion or homosexuality. On these and similar attitudes and preferences, conservative Latter-day Saints would, however, also agree with many Protestants who would never call themselves fundamentalists. More deeply, the basic epistemology of Latter-day Saint conservatives is entirely different from the fundamentalist paradigm. We have mentioned earlier that—contrary to popular prejudice—Protestant fundamentalists, according to the most recent scholarly interpretations, are in fact deeply committed to Enlightenment concepts of “objective knowledge” and “truth.” Postmodern, anti-Enlightenment epistemology is favored by their liberal counterparts. Not so in the Mormon controversy. Liberals, to start with, are staunch defenders of the Enlightenment. Edward Ashment credits the Enlightenment with having “introduced a new morality of knowledge which is similar to that of today’s scholarly world.” He approvingly quotes Van Harvey to the effect that “the Enlightenment was what one scholar has called a ‘declaration of independence against every authority that rests on the dictatorial command: Obey, don’t think.’ ”21 Of course, very few historians would agree with such a caricature of pre-Enlightenment scholarship and with the idea that the world had to await the Enlightenment to see “standards of truth and honesty” prevail.22 This is, however, not the point. More crucial, in order to understand the peculiarities of the Mormon controversy, is that—unlike many Protestant modernists—Latter-day Saint liberals are persuaded that, thanks to Enlightenment rationalism, an objective concept of “science” and “truth” may allow them to reach factual, empirical, “scientific” conclusions on the Book of Mormon.

and its origins. Not surprisingly, the transition from a religious to this truly secularized perspective of history and knowledge has been described by David P. Wright as a “conversion experience.” He has offered a typical conversion narrative of how he “grew up as a traditional Mormon,” in college “found that many of the traditional historical assumptions that [he] held did not make sense,” and finally “by the end of [his] graduate education” came “to own the critical framework.”

On the other hand, the late modernist and postmodernist position that knowledge is by no means objective and that “true,” universally valid historical conclusions could never be reached, is held by Latter-day Saint conservatives. One of the most articulate expositions of this point of view has been advanced by David Bohn, a professor of political science at Brigham Young University. Bohn—in a 1994 Sunstone article summing up his position—argues, quoting Jacques Derrida and other postmodernist luminaries, that historical conclusions are not “true” photographs of the reality but politically negotiated narratives. When liberal historians such as D. Michael Quinn use “professionalism as a defense,” Bohn retorts that they do not seem “to understand that these methodological claims of professional historiography are precisely what are in question.” It would do no good, Bohn insists, to retreat to a moderate position where objectivists may argue that “they are only trying to approximate neutrality and objectivity.” No, “they miss the point altogether,” because “neutrality and objectivity cannot even be approximated.” Bohn denies that we could work “within some absolute universe”; we could only work “within agreed-upon universes whose boundaries and standards of measure are a product of history, defined by conventions which for one reason or another we decide to use.”

Bohn goes on to attack the Enlightenment paradigm, using the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the hermeneutics of INTROVIGNE, BOOK OF MORMON WARS

Hans-Georg Gadamer. Similar against the same targets by Louis Professor of political science at Brigham largely presupposed in many of the criticizing Metcalfe’s New Appro. Bohn’s approach is not really typi on postmodernism. Most FARMS se ested in postmodernist theories, wou ate approach. Conservative Latter-Peter Novick’s indictment of objecti can historiography, Novick is ref of theoretical historiography claim the historian is an objectivistic prej to be achieved. Interestingly, Novi intellectuals at the 1988 Sunstone S

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 53–58.
28 See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson, Books on the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 97–123.
the transition from a religious to a scientific view of history and knowledge has been termed a “conversion experience.” Bohn’s narrative of how he “grew up in a world that many of the traditional [he] held did not make sense,” and how graduate education came “to modermist and postmodernist positions, is illustrated by the fact that the phrase could never be reached, is atives. One of the most articulate w has been advanced by David Melton at Brigham Young University. His article summing up his position—one and other postmodernist luminares is not “true” photographs of the actual world. When liberal historians use “professionalism as a defense” not seem “to understand that professional historiography are not real.” It would do no good, Bohn insists, where objectivists may argue approximate neutrality and objectivity point altogether, because not even be approximated.” Bohn in some absolute universe”; we live upon universes whose boundaries: a product of history, defined by us or another we decide to use.”

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Criticism: A Necessary Element in the History of the Book of Mormon (September 1992): 28. The essay by Melton and the Book of Mormon: A Personal 64, tells of a similar “conversion” the

Hans-Georg Gadamer. Similar arguments have been used against the same targets by Louis Midgley, a recently retired professor of political science at Brigham Young University, and are largely presupposed in many of the essays by FARMS scholars criticizing Metcalfe’s New Approaches. Interesting as it is, Bohn’s approach is not really typical of the position of FARMS on postmodernism. Most FARMS scholars, while remaining interested in postmodernist theories, would rather favor a more moderate approach. Conservative Latter-day Saints also often quote Peter Novick’s indictment of objectivism and positivism in American historiography. Novick is representative of a whole school of theoretical historiography claiming that “objective truth” for the historian is an objectivist prejudice, a “noble dream” never to be achieved. Interestingly, Novick addressed Latter-day Saint intellectuals at the 1988 Sunstone Symposium.

At this stage, an outside observer expecting conservative Latter-day Saints to adopt a fundamentalist view of truth, and liberal Latter-day Saints to adopt a postmodernist one, may easily claim that something should be wrong. The attitudes are in fact almost reversed. Historical truth is regarded as a mere social product by Latter-day Saint conservatives, while a rather naive sociology of knowledge claiming that historical-critical methodologies may indeed achieve “truth” lies behind the liberals’ attitude. The “love affair with Enlightenment science” of American fundamentalists described by Marsden does not find a counterpart among Latter-day Saint conservatives; conversely, Enlightenment’s claim for certainty and objectivity is still defended in the liberal camp. It is not surprising that liberals accuse “Mormon apologists” almost of cheating.

26 Ibid., 53–58.
27 See, for example, Louis Midgley, “The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” in Faithful History, 189–225.
Edward Ashment, the Enlightenment enthusiast contributing to Signature Books publications, whom FARMS prefers to describe as “a California insurance salesman who once studied Egyptology,” is suspicious of Latter-day Saint conservatives who “adopt a deconstructionist strategy when it serves their purpose” and accuses them of being “relativistic.” While accusing others of “relativistic” attitudes is a strange claim from scholars claiming to be part of the modern secular historiographic tradition, it is true that Latter-day Saint conservatives, having embraced postmodernist attitudes on the social construction of “truth,” should find a way to save the idea that the religious tenets of Mormonism are, nevertheless, “true.” At least some of them are well aware of the methodological and philosophical problems involved. First, they claim that once contemporary sociology of knowledge has proved that all scholarly enterprises are politically conditioned, they, as Bohn writes, “much prefer research in which no effort is made to hide the guiding prejudice of the writer over that which feigns neutrality.” They could also resort to “the Mormon view of God, time, and agency, . . . incompatible with traditional eschatologies and their metaphysical assumptions,” and remind us that, after all, “Mormonism does not hold that God is the final cause of every historical fact,” thus allowing for a certain contradiction both in history and in human ability to grasp historical facts. Ultimately, however, Latter-day Saint conservatives are persuaded that “the truth of the Restoration . . . stands beyond the power of secular discourse to authorize or annul.”

This position may easily be dismissed as a mere claim to faith and probably would be regarded as such by many scholars socialized in the secular tradition. It is, however, not unique. While conservative Latter-day Saints use Gadamer and Husserl, other religious scholars, including Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the most prominent scholars in the Catholic Church before becoming one of the main officers in that denomination, have used the ideas of Karl Popper and his school in order to natural and social, does not produce theories capable of being “falsified” though still provisional, new theories. Remains of course an important tool claims are somewhat bracketed. Altho may have thought otherwise, Ratzinger has proposed that the argument secular science, while religion is situ domain where the Popperian paradi mately, such use of Popper (or, in a d premised on general metaphysical ar are, in turn, difficult to evaluate in t eny rate—although secular scholars it—there is a rich religious literature truth and arguing that “true” or “false beliefs in the field of theology and reli where they have lost their meaning claims) in both natural and social field, Professor Harold A. Netland favor of “Christian exclusivism” such as Paul Knitter or Wilfred Can Catholic world the absolute val postmodern world has been forceful II in the most philosophically orient Splendor (“The Splendor of Trut both Evangelical texts such as Net are not “fundamentalist” in any s stalists, in fact, do not even bother to and would not accept the idea

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 52.
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35 Hugh W. Nibley has cited Karl Popper on a number of occasions, i.e., in The World and the Prophets (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 275, and in Since Camorah, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), xi–xiii, 227.

(including the sociology of science) have deconstructed the notion of “truth” with respect to our knowledge of both nature and history. As we mentioned earlier, fundamentalists in general are rather entrenched in the defense of a general objectivistic paradigm of knowledge and would claim that “legitimate” or “good” science is still capable of letting us know the “objective truth.”

On the question of truth and the respective claims of science (natural and historical) and religion, Latter-day Saint conservatives are more similar to Catholic and moderate Evangelical conservatives than to fundamentalists. They have, however, two problems that Latter-day Saint intellectuals, liberal and conservative alike, will probably be compelled to explore more deeply in years to come. The first problem is peculiar to Mormonism. The Evangelical, and conservative Catholic, claim for religious truth in the age of postmodernity ultimately appeals to a theological premise connected with the sovereignty of an omnipotent God. “Truth” in religion is a participation of the absolute truth of God. It has been argued that the Latter-day Saint concept of a limited God does not allow for such claims. If God is limited, theological “truth” should be less provisional than historical or scientific “truth” as restricted by postmodern criticism. This argument has been advanced by anti-Mormons such as Latayne C. Scott in a rather trivial way, mentioning the Latter-day Saint “open canon,” the appeal to the “burning in the bosom” and even the exaggerations of Elder Paul H. Dunn as evidence that Latter-day Saints do not really believe in “truth.” Not all anti-Mormons, however, present their case in such a simplistic way. Francis J. Beckwith, a lecturer on philosophy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has argued more astutely against any possible claim for an absolute truth in Mormonism starting from the Latter-day Saint concept of a limited God. Ultimately, I perceive Beckwith’s arguments, but perhaps scrutiny.

A second problem is common to Christian conservatives. Is the epistemology of Gadamer, Popper, or postmodernism average, everyday Church members remain folks in the pews not only, of cot of the very names of the likes of Gk probably persuaded that both science and history) and religion produce “truth” in religion and science.

Postmodernist defenses of Christ well remain of limited sociological reage Church member is not even av “truth” that history or science may proaches to the “truth” of religion, Mormon are not, however, anachroni tell us that even among professionals, and medical doctors, belief in witchcraft Popular faith in science is decreasing tries like Italy, what is probably an al as a reaction to the Enlightenment p socially relevant. In this context Gi household name, but the possibility lairy) may produce “truth” safer th will be increasingly questioned. And


41 See, for the United Kingdom, Tani Witch’s Craft: Ritual Magic and Witchcraft (Blackwell, 1989).

42 See, for a comment based on data and Massimo Introvigne, La sfida infinita (1994).
INTROVIGNE, BOOK OF MORMON WARS

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and the respective claims of science, religion, Latter-day Saint conservatives and moderate Evangelical conservatives. They have, however, two problems: dualism, liberal and conservative alike, to explore more deeply in years to secular to Mormonism. The Evangelicals’ claim for religious truth in the age appeals to a theological premise concerning an omnipotent God. “Truth” in the absolute truth of God. It has been int concept of a limited God does not has limited, theological “truth” than historical or scientific “truth” criticism. This argument has been aded as Latane C. Scott in a rather latter-day Saint “open canon,” the bosom and even the exaggerations bence that Latter-day Saints do not

ionism is not conducted in the name of a on behalf of an alternative, “creationist” Numbers, The Creationists: The Evolution (Kneff, 1992); and Christopher P. Toomey, in a Secular World (New Brunswick, N.J.: monism and the Question of Truth,” Chris-

ultimate, I personally am not impressed by Beckwith’s arguments, but perhaps they deserve a closer scrutiny. A second problem is common to Latter-day Saint and other Christian conservatives. Is the epistemological argument premised on Gadamer, Popper, or postmodernism in touch with what the average, everyday Church members really feel and think? Common folks in the pews not only, of course, ignore or are unaware of the very names of the likes of Gadamer or Popper, but are probably persuaded that both science (including social science and history) and religion produce “truth,” without being aware of the semantic differences between the respective concepts of “truth” in religion and science.

Postmodernist defenses of Christianity, or Mormonism, may well remain of limited sociological relevance insofar as the average Church member is not even aware of problems with the “truth” that history or science may offer. Postmodernist approaches to the “truth” of religion, the Bible, or the Book of Mormon are not, however, anachronistic. Sociological inquiries tell us that even among professionals, such as computer operators and medical doctors, belief in witchcraft and magic is growing. Popular faith in science is decreasing and approaching, in countries like Italy, what is probably an all-time low. Postmodernity as a reaction to the Enlightenment paradigm is becoming more socially relevant. In this context Gadamer may not become a household name, but the possibility that science (including history) may produce “truth” safer than that produced by religion will be increasingly questioned. And, if the socialization of the

42 See, for a comment based on data from southern Italy, Luigi Berzano and Massimo Introvigne, La sfida infinita (Sicily: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 1994).
postmodern paradigm advances, conservatives will enjoy a tactical advantage over liberals in future stages of the battle for the Book of Mormon.

2. A Non-Mormon Perspective

Although it is obvious that the Book of Mormon has its peculiarities and its interpretation is both similar and dissimilar from the interpretation of the Bible, I believe that it may be useful to compare the Latter-day Saint approach to the Book of Mormon with the Roman Catholic approach to the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church is, in fact, different from the Protestant churches insofar as it teaches that the Bible is not the only source of the Faith and that it coexists with the Tradition interpreted by the infallible magisterium of Rome. While the Catholic canon is closed in contrast to the open Latter-day Saint canon, it is perhaps not entirely inappropriate to compare (not to identify) the Catholic infallible magisterium with the living prophets in the Latter-day Saint Church. In both churches the relationship between a living magisterium and the scriptural canon should be continuously negotiated. Accordingly, the Roman Catholic approach to the Bible may offer an interesting comparison for the Latter-day Saint approach to the Book of Mormon. Perhaps the approach by the Church hierarchy (conveniently—even if not always appropriately—summarized by the expression “the Vatican”) is more interesting than the approach by professional Bible scholars. The latter are today socialized into a professional tradition including Catholic, mainline Protestant, and secular scholars and may ignore the problem of the coexistence of the Bible as a source of authority in Catholicism with the Tradition and the magisterium altogether. Without this coexistence, however, the Catholic Church would not exist as a distinctive community.

According to Pope John Paul II, two key documents by the magisterium have appeared on the Catholic approach to the Bible (apart, of course, from the constitution Dei Verbum of Vatican II). The first is the encyclical Providentissimus Deus, published by

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Pope Leo XIII in 1893. John Paul II acknowledges that the purpose of his predecessor was “especially to protect Catholic interpretation of the Bible from the attacks of rationalistic science.” Providentissimus appeared in a period marked by vicious polemics against the Church’s faith. Liberal exegesis gave important support to these polemics, for it made use of all scientific resources, from textual criticism to geology, including philology, literary criticism, history of religions, archeology and other disciplines besides.\footnote{John Paul II, “Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” 23 April 1993. The address, given to commemorate the centenary of Providentissimus Deus and the fiftieth anniversary of Divino afflante Spiritu, has been republished as an introduction to The Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” English ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 7–21; quotation from 9.}

Against this offensive “one could have reacted by anathematizing the use of science in biblical interpretation.” John Paul II attests that Providentissimus, however, “did not take this route” and rather tried to disassociate legitimate science from “preconceived opinions that claim to be based on science, but which in reality surreptitiously cause science to depart from its domain.”\footnote{Ibid., 10.} One result was, however, in the subsequent fifty years (1893–1943), a growing Catholic interest in the so-called “mystical” exegesis, which scorned science in favour of experience and spirituality. The Church reacted with another important encyclical, Divino afflante Spiritu, published by Pope Pius XII in 1943. Divino, in turn, could have simply condemned the wild use of mysticism and “spiritual” interpretations, suggesting to take more seriously the historical-critical method, by then largely used by Catholic scholars. According to John Paul II, however, “Pius XII deliberately avoided this approach.” On the contrary he emphasized “the close unity of the two approaches,” historical-critical and spiritual: each cannot deny the legitimacy of the other. John Paul II’s conclusion is that Providentissimus and Divino,
despite the great difference in the difficulties they had to face, ... are in complete agreement at the deepest level. Both of them reject a split between the human and the divine, between scientific research and respect for the faith, between the literal sense and the spiritual sense.\textsuperscript{46}

This middle ground was reiterated by Vatican II in \textit{Dei Verbum}. In 1993—one hundred years after \textit{Providentissimus} and fifty years after \textit{Divino}—the Pope asked the Pontifical Biblical Commission to prepare a new position paper on the status of biblical interpretation in the Church. The report—"The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"—is not, strictly speaking, an official document of the Catholic magisterium. The Commission subsequent to Vatican II

is not an organ of the teaching office [magisterium], but rather a commission of scholars who, in their scientific and ecclesiastical responsibility as believing exegetes, take positions on important problems of scriptural interpretation and know that for this task they enjoy the confidence of the teaching office.\textsuperscript{47}

That it is not a document of the magisterium is clearly reflected by the mention of a dissenting opinion on one point (on the "feminist approach" to the Bible) within the Commission.\textsuperscript{48} On the other hand—legalities aside—the document was published with an endorsement by the Pope who recommended it as an "excellent work"\textsuperscript{49} and with a "Preface" by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church in matters of faith and doctrine. Accordingly, the document could safely be taken as representing the present position of the Catholic hierarchy on biblical interpretation. I will discuss its general structure and its possible relevance for the Book of Mormon.

The two parts of the document are primarily between exegesis and hermeneutics. Exegetes offers more on the relationship between the two is important, according to the document, relationship of exegesis and hermeneutics. Hans Geir martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur, all today Saint controversy) is quoted as exorcism, but relevant for exegesis only because of the "absolute necessity of hermeneutical model of interpretation."\textsuperscript{50} The first part examines six styles or traditions of exegesis, but none of them is "neutral"; epistemological and theological presuppositions must be identified, and some of them are incompatible with the Christian faith. The first part of most approaches are not automatically implied that all conclusions within these traditions should be rejected fully analyzed, and the identification of an agenda should help the reader not to accept "true" or universally valid, but as a complex picture.

The first approach examined by the critical method that studies "the through the use of linguistic and semantic analysis, from historical philology, and the personality of the biblical writer." The Commission, if we want a "proper Bible," the historical-critical method is the other hand, Christians could not ignore historical-critical method are conscious-
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structure and its possible relevance for the present controversies
on the Book of Mormon.

The two parts of the document are premised on a distinction
between exegesis and hermeneutics. Exegesis tries to collect as
much information as possible about the text, while hermeneutics
offers more on the relationship between the text and its readers. It
is important, according to the document, not to confuse questions
of exegesis and hermeneutics. Hans Georg Gadamer (as well as
Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur, all mentioned in the Latter-
day Saint controversy) is quoted as enormously relevant for her-
meneutics, but relevant for exegesis only as far as the latter is in
"absolute necessity of hermeneutical theory" for "a broader
model of interpretation."50 The first part of the document ex-
amines six styles or traditions of exegesis. All are (partially) ac-
ceptable, but none of them is "neutral"; they are based on philo-
sophical and theological presuppositions. These presuppositions
should be identified, and some of them should be exposed as in-
compatible with the Christian faith. The fact that the philosophical
presuppositions of most approaches are not acceptable does not
automatically imply that all the conclusions reached by scholars
within these traditions should be rejected. They should be care-
fully analyzed, and the identification of their hidden philosophical
agenda should help the reader not to regard each approach as
"true" or universally valid, but as a component of a more
complex picture.

The first approach examined by the document is the histori-
critical method that studies "the historical processes which
gave rise to biblical texts," by comparing manuscripts, submitting
texts to linguistic and semantic analysis, using the knowledge de-
rivered from historical philology, considering the literary genres
and the personality of the biblical writers involved. According to
the Commission, if we want a "proper understanding" of the
Bible, the historical-critical method is "indispensable." On the
other hand, Christians could not ignore that scholars using the
historical-critical method are consciously or unconsciously so-
cialized into a tradition dominated by rationalism and secularism.

50 The Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible
in the Church," 75.
This tradition has often been reductionist: trying to reduce the biblical text to its context. Although the historical-critical method remains somewhat necessary, the Catholic scholar should correct the reductionist trends of its tradition “through the application of a more diversified semantics.”\(^{51}\) These comments seem to be relevant for the discussion on the Book of Mormon. Some liberal Latter-day Saint scholars have insisted on the application of the historical-critical method as the only method of legitimate “scientific” interpretation.\(^{52}\) When applied to the Book of Mormon, the historical-critical method normally means that the activities of Joseph Smith connected with the translation and publication of the text should be considered, usually within the context of his time. Some liberal Latter-day Saints, as we mentioned earlier, describe their “conversion” to the historical-critical method as a transforming experience and seem to believe that it is the only method accepted today by the scholarly community. As the Catholic document of 1993 emphasizes, this is not the case. When dealing with the Book of Mormon we could perhaps agree that the use of a historical-critical method is not less “indispensable” than when dealing with the Bible. The circumstances connected with its translation and publication are not irrelevant, but very relevant, and historians have a very legitimate task to perform. On the other hand, Latter-day Saint scholars could not ignore the agenda of most historical-critical scholars with its rationalistic and secularist prejudices. In order not to become a victim of these prejudices, the best thing Latter-day Saint scholars can do is not to regard the historical-critical method as “the” final and “true” method to approach the Book of Mormon. This method could, however, be extremely useful, particularly when its results are not taken uncritically at face value but are submitted to the examination of an appropriate sociology of knowledge, capable of dealing with them in light of their methodological presuppositions.

Above all, it is important to realize that within the field of exegesis (to be coordinated, additionally, with the parallel field of hermeneutics) the historical-critical method is not the only method adopted in modern scholarship: “The historical-critical method cannot claim to be totally sufficient...”\(^{53}\) We have aside many aspects of the writings which, at the present time, are proposed which serve to explore aspects worthy of attention.”\(^{54}\) The statement by the Vatican document uses “new methods,” including rhetorical analysis, narratology, and semiotic analysis. These methods should be used as carefully as the historical-critical method. The third approach discussed in the 1993 document is the biblical texts as flowing from one another, and its reading in the history of the community’s interpretation of the text in Jewish and Christian texts. The method considered so far takes into account the historical nature of the Book of Mormon—without immediately going back to the Bible—one could examine how the Book of Mormon is used in the history of the community throughout its development. No serious scholar would today regard the interpretation of the text itself.


\(^{52}\) See Wright, “Historical Criticism.”


been reductionist: trying to reduce the method cannot claim to be totally sufficient. . . . It necessarily has method cannot claim to be totally sufficient. . . . It necessarily has to leave aside many aspects of the writings which it studies. It is not surprising, then, that at the present time, other methods and approaches are proposed which serve to explore more profoundly other aspects worthy of attention. The second approach examined by the Vatican document uses “new methods of literary analysis,” including rhetorical analysis, narrative analysis or narratology, and semiotic analysis. These methods read the text as a whole, without considering immediately the historical context. Again, more often than not, this approach is conditioned by the prevailing philosophy in its tradition, structuralism. It should be used as carefully as the historical-critical method but, showing that the text is “obedient to a precise linguistic mechanic of operation,” it contributes to “our understanding of the . . . Word of God expressed in human language.”

The third approach discussed in the 1993 Catholic document regards the biblical texts as flowing from one great tradition, considering each text within the context of scripture as a whole, comparing the interpretation of the text in Jewish and Christian exegesis and its reading in the history of the community. The relevance of this approach for the Book of Mormon should be obvious if one considers the historical nature of the Latter-day Saint faith. Again—without immediately going back to historical-critical problems—one could examine how the Book of Mormon (perhaps in comparison with the Bible) has been read by the community throughout its history, obtaining results no serious scholar would today regard as irrelevant for the meaning of the text itself.


54 The Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” 49. Within these limits it seems that rhetoric, narrative, and semiotic analysis of the Book of Mormon (some examples have been produced by the faculty at Brigham Young University and by FARMS itself) could be useful to develop a better understanding of the Book of Mormon as a text, without being immediately drawn to historical-critical problems.
The fourth tradition studied by the Vatican document includes the “approaches based on the human sciences”: sociology, anthropology, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Here the risk of reductionism is of course apparent: each human science could easily argue that the biblical text could be reduced to its sociological, ethnoanthropological, or psychological contexts. This reductionism is today a serious problem in the Catholic Church—witness the problems caused in Germany by the disciplined theologian Eugen Drewermann—particularly in respect to psychological reductionism. One of the problems is the lack of a “single form” of psychological exegesis. In fact, “proceeding from the different fields of psychology and from the various schools of thought, there exists a whole range of approaches” and “to absolutize one or other of the approaches taken by the various schools of psychology and psychoanalysis would not serve to make collaborative efforts [with biblical theology] in this area more fruitful, but rather render it harmful.”

With this caution, sociology, ethnology, anthropology, and psychology could always help in understanding a text, particularly when it is—as sacred scriptures often are—expressed in symbolic forms open to a psychological reading and since it was originally offered by Joseph Smith to a community of believers with its sociological and ethnological features. Psychological reductionism has often been mentioned in Book of Mormon controversies, and it seems that a balanced approach may be useful in this field in order not to destroy the meaning of the text as scripture through an inappropriate reductionism, while not renouncing the additional insights that psychology (and other human sciences) may offer.

The fifth tradition considered by the Vatican document includes “contextual approaches,” either politically or gender-oriented. Politically oriented readings of the scriptures have been proposed mostly by liberation theology; they may—according to the document—“include elements of undoubted value” but also involve “some risks” when liberation theology is connected to “the Marxist principle of the class struggle.” The feminist approach to the Bible was a sensitive topic in the Pontifical Biblical Commission, and eight of the nineteen members of the Commission recorded their dissent to the first feminism and Matthew 20:28 because it is a preconceived judgement, runs the risk of textual texts in a tendentious and thus debatable exegesis can be useful to the Church does not fall into the very traps it den to note that contextual approaches, but could work independent of the historism there are not many examples of a pol the Book of Mormon (although ap contemporary issues are not entirely has been proposed by Latter-day Sair the Signature Books catalogue. As the American Commission shows, there is no way of sacred scriptures less controversial bate, a feminist reading of the Book been combined with a secularizing method, thus adding fuel to the fire of lic document shows, a feminist read assiated with the objectivist claim method (and, as a consequence, not the “scientific” interpretations of the science may more easily find some sort

The sixth tradition examined by the mission is fundamentalism. The doc ment that there is not only one fundamen fundamentalism that “actually invite lectional suicide.” On the other hand malmentalism may be the “right to insist the Bible, the inerrancy of the Word truths included in [the] five fundame

55 Ibid., 63.
56 Ibid., 68–69.
57 See Maxine Hanks, ed., Women and Feminism (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).
sion recorded their dissent to the final text, which reads that "feminist exegesis has brought many benefits" correcting "certain commonly accepted interpretations which were tendentious and sought to justify male domination of women." On the other hand, "feminist exegesis, to the extent that it proceeds from a preconceived judgement, runs the risk of interpreting the biblical texts in a tendentious and thus debatable manner.... Feminist exegesis can be useful to the Church only to the degree that it does not fall into the very traps it denounces." 56 It is interesting to note that contextual approaches, both liberationist and feminist, could work independent of the historical-critical method. While there are not many examples of a politically oriented reading of the Book of Mormon (although applications to controversial contemporary issues are not entirely absent), a feminist theology has been proposed by Latter-day Saint liberals and is featured in the Signature Books catalogue. 57 As the very attitude of the Vatican Commission shows, there is no way to make feminist exegesis of sacred scriptures less controversial. In the Latter-day Saint debate, a feminist reading of the Book of Mormon has probably been combined with a secularizing use of the historical-critical method, thus adding fuel to the fire of controversy. As the Catholic document shows, a feminist reading of sacred scriptures is not associated with the objectivist claims of the historical-critical method (and, as a consequence, not claiming to offer "true" or "scientific" interpretations of the scriptures, but only a point of view) may more easily find some sort of acceptance.

The sixth tradition examined by the Pontifical Biblical Commission is fundamentalism. The document judiciously observes that there is not only one fundamentalism. There is an extreme fundamentalism that "actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide." On the other hand, a more moderate fundamentalism may be the "right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the Word of God, and other biblical truths included in [the] five fundamental points [of the American

56 Ibid., 68–69.
Biblical Congress held at Niagara, New York, in 1895].”58 While fundamentalism as a method is not acceptable, it is not unacceptable to look in the scriptures to abstract from them some non-negotiable “fundamentals” and defend them vigorously against any secularizing attempt. This approach may rightly define the traditional mainline Latter-day Saint position toward the Book of Mormon.59 As we mentioned earlier, fundamentalism in the technical sense of the term is foreign to Latter-day Saint culture, but nonnegotiable “fundamentals” are clearly defended by the Latter-day Saint hierarchy (as by any other Christian hierarchy, except the very liberal ones in contemporary Protestantism). On the other hand, what Armand Mauss has called “folk fundamentalism,” influenced by Protestant fundamentalism, is growing at the grassroots level in the Latter-day Saint Church, and may import into contemporary popular Mormonism elements foreign to its own history and tradition.60

The second part of the document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” deals with hermeneutics. It is remarkable that a semiofficial document by the largest Christian denomination takes seriously modern philosophical hermeneutics and discusses Gadamer’s position at length. Gadamer’s idea (much quoted, as we have seen, in the Latter-day Saint debate) that “anticipations and preconceptions affecting our understanding stem from the tradition which carries us” is quoted approvingly.61 The document then examines Gadamer’s idea of hermeneutics as a dialectical process, based on Horizonverschmelzung (the fusion of the differing horizons of text and reader) and Zugehörigkeit (“belonging” as a fundamental affinity between the interpreter and his or her object). Since both literary and historical criticisms are necessary but not sufficient, in the scholarly context of postmodernism the Commission notes “a hermeneutical theory which allows for methods of literary and historical criticism of interpretation.” “All exegesis is done on its own terms...” 62 It is also somewhat familiar to the Latter-day Saint view that “hermeneutics must be something that is an integral part of the study of the Bible, the study of the natural sciences.” On the other hand, that hermeneutics still needs exegesis detached from historical and literary studies is a subjective reading.63 This criticism of Umberto Eco (a deeply secular author, the Vatican document) that interprets postmodernist times seem to claim and postmodernity for themselves do.64 Eco’s book is interestingly aimed at literary and philosophical at the esoteric tradition that has in it an interest in the history and the development of religious thought. Perhaps the most important thing that emerges from this text is the influence of Family of man: the formation of modern man. It is assumed as the starting point of all sociological fact as the current crisis and science—postmodernity, for the event—look for an epistemological perspective to make sense of this changed

60 Mauss, The Angel and the Beehive.
62 Ibid., 75.
63 Ibid., 77.
64 See Umberto Eco, I limiti dell’intelletto (1990); also published in English as The Limits of Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).
modernity the Commission notes “the absolute necessity of a hermeneutical theory which allows for the incorporation of the methods of literary and historical criticism within a broader model of interpretation.” “All exegesis . . . is thus summoned to make itself fully complete through a ‘hermeneutics’ understood in this modern [i.e., Gadamer’s] sense.”62 Entering directly into controversies not unfamiliar to the Latter-day Saint community, the Vatican Commission states that “contemporary hermeneutics is a healthy reaction to historical positivism and to the temptation to apply to the study of the Bible the purely objective criteria used in the natural sciences.” On the other hand, the Commission thinks that hermeneutics still needs exegesis. Hermeneutics entirely detached from historical and literary studies may generate “purely subjective readings.”63 This criticism is not far from the warnings of Umberto Eco (a deeply secular author and one not quoted in the Vatican document) that interpretation has its limits, and some postmodernists at times seem to claim that simply any interpretation would do.64 Eco’s book is interesting since its criticism is not only aimed at literary and philosophical postmodernism, but also at the esoteric tradition that has in turn influenced many points of view on religion. Eco’s criticism, of course, is valid only when applied to the more radical postmodernist theories, particularly of the deconstructionist variety, while it would be unfair to argue that the more moderate approaches favored by both conservative Catholics and Latter-day Saints are uninterested in the question of truth. Perhaps the most important difference between the radical and the moderate postmodernist theories is their starting point. Radical postmodernists start from philosophy and regard their theories as new epistemological insights universally valid. Moderate postmodernists assume as their starting point the historical and sociological fact of the current crisis of popular faith in reason and science—postmodernity, for them, is first of all a historical event—and look for an epistemological and hermeneutical perspective to make sense of this changed climate.

62 Ibid., 75.
63 Ibid., 77.
64 See Umberto Eco, I limiti dell’interpretazione (Milan: Bompiani, 1990); also published in English as The Limits of Interpretation (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990).
I have examined at length the Vatican document of 1993 since I regard it as a fair and balanced assessment of the contemporary mainline Catholic position on the Bible (although neither archconservatives nor archliberals in the Catholic Church would readily agree with it). Of course, it would be inappropriate from a nonmember to offer suggestions to the Latter-day Saint community on how to deal with the present Book of Mormon controversies. It is perhaps less inappropriate for the non-Mormon scholar, however, to offer comparisons with what is being culturally negotiated in other Christian communities. The Roman Catholic experience may offer a useful comparative perspective on at least three points.

First, it could show that it is naive to claim that the historical-critical method is the only method acceptable to approach the text of a sacred scripture. Exegesis in the contemporary, scholarly sense of the word is larger than the historical-critical method, and also includes other methods (literary analysis, approaches based on tradition and community, studies based on the human sciences, contextual approaches both liberationist and feminist) which could work to some extent independently from historical criticism. It is also useful to remember that the historical-critical method is often packaged with all the elements of a secularizing tradition inherently hostile to religion and the supernatural. It would seem that at the exegetical level a better understanding of the Book of Mormon could take advantage of studies based on approaches other than the historical-critical method, where the problems of the historical criticism may be temporarily set aside. Each method, of course, should be in turn considered, taking into account its own inherent limitations and the agenda of those who propose it in the scholarly community. This seems to be particularly true for psychological, psychoanalytical, and feminist interpretations. Fundamentalism, in turn, is equally foreign to the Roman Catholic and Latter-day Saint traditions, but there is one point where its message deserves to be heard, when it insists that some “fundamentals” should remain nonnegotiable by scholars if a church should avoid the risk of collapsing altogether.

Second, the historical-critical method—when approached by knowing what it is and what the agenda, or agendas, of many of its proponents may include—remains useful. No appeal to herme-

neutics could make historical and critical and how the Book of Mormon was transl nineteenth century irrelevant (these studies attempt to determine what “trans may mean). Hermeneutics without exegesis calls “the infinite interpretation,” a so no less destructive to a Christian comm render to historical-critical exclusivism as “true” and “objective” reconstructions claim to be able to offer universally valid of debunking or confirming the relig scripture, historical-critical studies remain psychological, symbolic, or contextual extent, any hermeneutical effort) on a fir

Third, although “pure” hermeneutics run the risk of extreme subjectivism (and by Gadamer), ultimately hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle of Horizonzvit hörigkeit that each of us will encounter text’s and God’s voice, and decide what toward the narrative. Exegesis is needed be that crucial decision is not uninform merely emotional. On the other hand, en enough not to pretend to break the herm is with only one alternative. Sciences, in ous sciences, could only debunk the tot he same time, confirm the relative value approach, leading us to the center of the h we are there, we are alone with ourselves a

65 Ibid., 326 (Italian ed.).
neutics could make historical and critical studies on Joseph Smith and how the Book of Mormon was translated and published in the nineteenth century irrelevant (these studies, of course, would include attempts to determine what “translation,” in this context, may mean). Hermeneutics without exegesis risks to offer what Eco calls “the infinite interpretation,” a sequel of subjective claims no less destructive to a Christian community than the naïve surrender to historical-critical exclusivism and to its claim to generate “true” and “objective” reconstructions. As long as they do not claim to be able to offer universally valid “truths” capable either of debunking or confirming the religious claims of a sacred scripture, historical-critical studies remain useful to establish any psychological, symbolic, or contextual exegesis (and, to some extent, any hermeneutical effort) on a firmer ground.

Third, although “pure” hermeneutics without exegesis would run the risk of extreme subjectivism (and was not even advocated by Gadamer), ultimately hermeneutics is crucial. It is, after all, in the hermeneutic circle of *Horizontverschmelzung* and *Zugehörigkeit* that each of us will encounter a sacred text, hear the text’s and God’s voice, and decide what attitude we want to take toward the narrative. Exegesis is needed by hermeneutics in order that this crucial decision is not uninformed, purely subjective, or merely emotional. On the other hand, exegesis should be modest enough not to pretend to break the hermeneutic circle and leave us with only one alternative. Sciences, including social and religious sciences, could only debunk the totalitarian claims (and, at the same time, confirm the relative value) of each tradition and approach, leading us to the center of the hermeneutic circle. When we are there, we are alone with ourselves and God, and no science could decide for us.