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**A Brighter Future for Mormon
Theology:
Adam S. Miller's Future Mormon**

Jeff Lindsay

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**A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR MORMON
THEOLOGY:
ADAM S. MILLER'S *FUTURE MORMON***

Jeff Lindsay

Review of Adam S. Miller, *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2016)

Adam S. Miller's *Future Mormon*, his collection of "Essays in Mormon Theology," is one of the most intriguing reads I've encountered in LDS studies. It is a book intended to make students of Mormonism, especially those within the Church, challenge lazy assumptions in our theological thinking and rethink our approach to help us build a stronger faith. Some of Miller's work here will be readily grasped and appreciated by LDS students, while other parts may be more radical or opaque. From my perspective, the gems should make the book a valued addition to any LDS library, in spite of my occasional disagreement and failure to grasp a few sections. I look forward to more from this author.

Miller's writing spans many disciplines and topics, ranging from philosophy, science, psychology, biblical exegesis, modern literature, several aspects of science, and even network theory. Miller delivers significant insights on the kind of topics one might expect from a book on "Mormon theology": treatments of charity and grace with analysis of Paul and modern LDS scriptures, free agency, the role of materialism in a religion that disavows an immaterial God and declares that all spirit is matter, dealing with our theological opponents, the role of the Book of Mormon in our religion, and the integration of evolution with faith. In two essays he responds to works of Terryl Givens, a highly appropriate author to include. On the other hand, readers may be challenged for the good by treatments of topics far outside the scope of what we might normally place under the label of theology. This includes a detailed

discussion on Lacanian psychoanalysis and a review of some themes from a modern novelist, Cormac McCarthy.

A strength of Miller's is his ability to reframe questions in ways that expose lazy assumptions or hidden agendas behind a question that ultimately is weak or "thin." Thus, in his shortest essay, "The Body of Christ" (Chapter 12), he reveals that the perpetually raised question, "Is the Church true?" is really the kind of question about an institution that an institution would like to be asked, for it serves the institution well. Miller is not a dissident anxious to spray-paint a loud "No!" on anybody's wall of faith. But as a faithful teacher who accepts and understands the divine origins and authority of the Church, he wisely asks us to reconsider where our inquiry should be focused, and that is on Christ:

If we want to get the right kind of answer to our questions about the church, we shouldn't ask first about the church. We should first ask about Christ.

If your life depends on the question you're asking, then ask a question that is rich enough to cover the whole span of that (messy, unfinished, broken, vulnerable) life. Rather than asking if the church is true, ask something like: Is this the body of Christ? Is Christ manifest here? Does his blood flow in these veins? Does his spirit breathe in these lungs? Does forgiveness flourish here? Can I see, here, the body of Christ?

This is an appropriately thick question, a load-bearing question.

Load-bearing questions are frequently encountered in this volume.

Deep Reading of Scripture

For my perspective, the first few essays were among the most helpful. His third essay, "Reading Signs or Repeating Symptoms: Reading Jacob 7," powerfully illustrates both his abilities to challenge assumptions, to reframe questions, and to provide deep readings of the scriptures. There he surprised me by swiftly criticizing Jacob's rather unchristian behavior in defending the "doctrine of Christ" (Jacob 7:3) from the apostate Sherem. Miller's treatment sidesteps one of the most frequently discussed issues in this incident: who was Sherem? Was he a Jaredite, as suggested by Nibley and Milner;¹ a Lamanite; a Mulekite trader, as Kevin Christensen

¹ Alan C. Miner, *Step by Step Through the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2 (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996); http://stepbystep.alancminer.com/jacob_7.

proposes;² one of the New World's indigenous peoples amalgamated into Nephite society; or a Nephite, perhaps a descendant of Zoram, whose identity is suppressed in the text to avoid giving him added credibility, as plausibly suggested by A. Keith Thompson?³ His unstated identity is not vital for a deep reading of Jacob's account, where, in light of Miller's analysis, the real meat may lie not in Sherem's story but in Jacob's.

Miller at first raised red flags with me by suggesting that "Jacob appears more interested in defending a certain kind of Christian doctrine than in enacting a certain kind of Christian behavior."⁴ Further, Jacob is said to not provide the courtesy of listening to Sherem, who has made strident efforts to seek out the unwilling Jacob. When they do converse, Jacob only sees Sherem as a stereotype of an apostate, not as a human being with genuine concerns who should at least be heard before being condemned. The criticism of the great prophet Jacob seemed harsh and initially made me wonder about Miller's intent. Those assessments were subjective and could be debated. But then Miller led me to a relatively objective conclusion from the text that I had not previously considered: Jacob was simply and clearly *wrong* when he predicted that even if God did give Sherem a sign, it would not change him, and indeed, he would deny it because he was "of the devil" (Jacob 7:14). Jacob did use his prophetic power to call down a divine smiting upon Sherem, who then does exactly the *opposite* of what Jacob said he would do: he repents and confesses he was wrong, bearing witness of God's power, and brings many souls to Christ before he dies (Jacob 7:21–23). Sherem's deathbed conversion apparently was far more effective in converting the Nephites than Jacob's preaching.

I was astonished that I had not seen it this way before. I had overlooked the complexity of a text that, while written by a man who saw the Sherem incident as a one-dimensional story of a good guy vs. a bad guy in serious need of smiting, offered much more than meets the eye. A deeper reading shows Jacob, in spite of being the Lord's authorized leader and defender of the faith, was wrong in assessing Sherem and probably overly harsh, aloof, and judgmental. His defense of the doctrine

2 Kevin Christensen, "The Deuteronomist De-Christianizing of the Old Testament," *FARMS Review*, 16/2 (2004), 86–88; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1459&index=4>.

3 A. Keith Thompson, "Who Was Sherem?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 1–15; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/who-was-sherem/>.

4 Adam S. Miller, *Future Mormon: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 27.

of Christ missed the Christlike behavior that is always more important than the theology.

Miller's deep reading of the text takes us further into Jacob's soul. I have long been intrigued by how different Jacob sounds from other writers. As others have noted,⁵ Jacob is much more concerned with issues of feeling and uses unique expressions to describe the souls of people who are, for example, figuratively pierced with daggers (Jacob 2:9) as a consequence of the bad behavior of the men in their lives. But after reading Miller, I realized that his sensitivity to the victims of immorality and other sins was not matched by sensitivity to Sherem. Toward Sherem, as Miller points out, something sets off Jacob from the start, opening old wounds and making it impossible for Jacob to see Sherem as anything other than an imposing shadow of his abusers and enemies, Laman and Lemuel. Like Sherem, Laman and Lemuel were defenders of the ways of Jerusalem when they left it with its focus on the law and not the Messiah. Most interestingly, after Sherem's defeat and repentance, Jacob for the first time mentions making efforts to reach the Lamanites (Jacob 7:24). Miller closes swiftly, almost abruptly, as he often does in this volume, with a carefully stated point that opens the mind and leaves us wanting more and thinking more: "Then, for the first time in decades, Jacob dares to hope that his brothers aren't lost forever. This is the doctrine of Christ."

At this point, I couldn't wait to discuss this essay with my wife and realized I was going to enjoy learning more from Adam Miller.

I was also impressed with his reading of 1 Nephi 1 and the visions of Lehi mentioned there. He shows from the context that Lehi most likely was offering sacrifice upon an altar when "there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him, and he saw and heard much" (1 Nephi 1:6). Lehi had heard the Lord's call to preach repentance and was "going forth" — but going where and why? Miller plausibly fills in the gaps by suggesting that he was going forth into the desert to offer burnt offerings for the sins of the people. And there, upon the altar, the pillar of fire, like other pillars of fire in the scriptures, is associated with sacrifice, altars, and revelation.

5 John S. Tanner, "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 251–69; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/book-mormon-jacob-through-words-mormon-learn-joy/literary-reflections-jacob-and-his>.

In a subsequent vision shortly after the encounter with the pillar of fire, Lehi sees One descending from heaven with twelve others following Him, and that One comes to Lehi and gives him a book. Miller again casts new light on this scene by asking good questions. Why give Lehi a book to communicate when the Lord is there and can simply speak directly? “Why does the one descend from heaven in power and glory only to accomplish the mute handoff of a text?”⁶

There is not an easy answer to this question and a variety of related ones that Miller raises. But a meaningful response can be found in Nephi’s writings, even in his opening verse, which Miller carefully analyzes to show that Nephi is teaching the “mysteries of God,” such as the mystery of how it is possible to suffer many afflictions and yet be “highly favored” of the Lord. The detours, the complexities of God’s dealings with us, whether it is being forced to deal with a text well removed from its divine origins rather than communing face-to-face with God, or having to travel eight years through the Arabian Peninsula instead of taking a quick, direct route to the Promised Land, or even the mystery of why God couldn’t just save Jerusalem instead of allowing it to be destroyed and requiring Lehi’s family to flee it, are all part of a greater pattern in how God deals with man. Giving us what we think we want, such as leaving the gold plates around to impress modern scholars, would not give us what we really need. It would not address the real problem. Miller reminds us that the real aim of God’s dealings with man and of the Gospel itself “is to show us what we thought we wanted isn’t what God, in all his goodness and wisdom and mercy, is actually trying to give.”⁷

Advances in Understanding Grace and Charity

The theme of charity or love comes up frequently in Miller’s discourses, and with good reason. He thoroughly understands how central charity is to the real substance of the Gospel. In exploring its role, he challenges old paradigms and adds new vitality to our understanding of God’s love and the role of grace. His lead essay, “A General Theory of Grace,” appears to have a bold objective that I feel is ably fulfilled. Miller argues that grace is already given, that it is and always has been at the core of Who God is and how He does things. The universe abounds in grace offered to us. Sin, though, is a departure from grace, a refusal to accept the gift that is offered. Miller suggests that the temptation to reject grace comes at least

6 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 20.

7 Ibid., 24.

in part because each new aspect of grace that God tries to give us seems like a loss of something we felt we already had, so we shrink away from added grace.⁸ One tactic we often use to resist grace is to seemingly put God in *our* debt by our obedience, imagining that He owes us for our righteousness. As a result, “religion may be, in some aspects, sin’s most successful strategy.”⁹

A true understanding of the relationship between grace and the law must be founded on the love of Christ. The law is a vehicle of grace. Like our lives, like this earth we live on, like the wonders of nature that surround us, the law itself is a gift from God to bless us. But we injure the truth if we think we of our own selves can fulfill the law.

Only grace can fulfill the law. We fulfill the law when we receive what is given as the grace that it is, and, then, when we respond with grace in turn. In other words, the end of the law is love and only love can fulfill the law. ... The point of the law is love. ... [O]bedience in itself cannot fulfill the law.¹⁰

I like the way Miller expresses grace as rooted in love and fulfilled in love. Understanding grace not as a backup plan but as God’s basic *modus operandi* at numerous levels deepens the eternal significance of grace and reveals its inherent linkage to charity. I disagree, though, with Miller’s treatment of the issue of compulsion associated with the law:

Normally, the point of the law is to compel obedience, not love. As a result, making love the point of the law introduces a kind of knot — a kind of torsion or structural catch-22 — into the heart of the law itself because love, if compelled, is no longer love. Love that is not freely given is not love. Love, as the end of the law, divides the law against itself. Love hamstringing the law in relation to its own assigned end because the law, working to compel obedience, cannot, in this instance, be fulfilled by way of obedience. It can, instead, only be fulfilled by a love that cannot — and must not — compel. The law must compromise its own integrity in order to achieve its assigned end. The law, compromised in this way, is broken. Not only is the law broken by our individual acts of disobedience but the

8 Ibid., 3–4.

9 Ibid., 6.

10 Ibid.

law is, in general, broken by the grace that fulfills it. The law is too small, too weak a vessel to contain it.¹¹

In the next section of the essay, the issue of compulsion comes up again:

We find ourselves, then, in a bind. Not only are we incapable of perfect obedience but perfect obedience, were it possible, still could not fulfill the law. The law cannot be fulfilled by way of obedience. It can only be fulfilled by a love that, unlike obedience, must be freely given and cannot be commanded or compelled. As Dieter F. Uchtdorf puts it, it is clear that “salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience.” What, then, is to be done? We must love. The law must be rescued from itself by way of love.¹²

I agree with much of Miller’s essay, but the treatment of *compulsion* confuses me. Love can be commanded and frequently is commanded. The purpose of a commandment is not to compel — that would seem to defeat the grace that is behind the law. Rather, I see the commandments God gives us as tools to teach, to guide, and to *encourage* rather than compel or force desirable behaviors in us, including charity. Is love no longer love if encouraged? If urgently taught? If rewarded? If commanded? There are different levels of love, reflecting different grades of spontaneity, commitment, and purity. If some of us need reminders and frequent pleading through God’s various instruments of grace, the commandments included, to help us move from love in theory to practice, from love in its infancy to mature fullness, I suggest that this does not destroy love. It points the way God in His grace helps us develop love.

Building on the concept of grace as the ongoing basic work of God, Miller also points out that the Atonement, “properly understood, is a mode of creation. Atonement is an aspect of God’s *ongoing* creative work.”¹³ I think this is a vital point with interesting implications that could be further explored and applied to, say, speculative theories of the universal vs. non-universal scope of the Atonement of Christ.

Miller then brings his insight about the Atonement back to the issue of love and the law:

11 Ibid., 6–7.

12 Ibid., 8.

13 Ibid.

Christ saves us from sin — from our active suppression of God’s grace — by displaying in an incomparable fashion the very thing we had sinfully been trying to hide by hijacking the law: the fact that God’s grace is already and overwhelmingly available. Displaying what we’d suppressed, Christ gives *again* the grace of creation (and re-creation) that God was already giving.¹⁴

Then, when we can accept his sometimes terrifying grace, we are recreated in Christ and become capable of love and of properly fulfilling the law. We are created again, born again, capable of becoming more like Christ through this ongoing creative work based on grace. This strikes me as a well-rooted expression of solid LDS and Christian theology, and I congratulate Miller for this valuable addition, in spite of my not quite following some arguments made along the way.

Grace is also the topic of his essay in Chapter 7, “Reflections on President Uchtdorf’s ‘The Gift of Grace.’” Here he further discusses the relationship between creation, redemption, and grace. Creation, he explains, “is a present-tense, ongoing event,”¹⁵ and grace is at the heart of it:

Grace is this massive, ongoing act of divinely organized creation that involves an uncountable host of agents, human and nonhuman, embedded in irreducible webs of stewardship, consecration, sacrifice, and interdependence. “Glory” is one name for God’s grace as it continually brews out these massive, creative networks of divinely enabled agents.¹⁶

I like this description of creation and grace as a brew with “massive, creative networks.” Sin is also given new light, or new darkness, in this framework:

Sin is our rejection of this original and ongoing grace. Sin is our refusal of some part of creation. It is a refusal of our having to be part of creation. Or, even better, it is a refusal of our own createdness. Sin is our proud and fearful refusal of our dependence on a world that we didn’t ask for, can’t control, and can’t escape.¹⁷

14 Ibid., 9.

15 Ibid., 67.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

Miller deftly deals with the issue of grace versus works by explaining why we are often asking the wrong question in such discussions. We normally frame the debate by asking how we get the salvation that we want — is it by works, by grace alone, or some combination? But asking about how we get what we want misses the point by emphasizing what we want:

It isn't a question of whether I'll get what I *wanted* either by way of works or by way of grace. It's a question of whether I'll assent to the grace of what I did *not* want to get and to the grace of who I did *not* want to be. Foremost among the things God is trying to give me is, well, me — this body, this mind, this weakness, this hunger, this passing away. Redemption involves my willingness, first, to just be this hungry, weak, failing thing that I already am. Redemption involves my willingness to accept that gift and treat it as a gift. This grace is free but it's certainly not cheap.¹⁸

Miller sees God's grace as abundant, ongoing, willful, intense, and even obvious, "hidden in plain sight," in our lungs and beneath our feet, already given from a God who is waiting for us to accept it and receive more.¹⁹

Overall, there is much to appreciate in his treatment of grace, a vital aspect of LDS theology that we Latter-day Saints often discuss too casually.

Incidentally, sometimes Miller's use of scriptures that refer to the law might benefit from explicit recognition that the phrase "the law" often refers to the Law of Moses and not the concept of law and commandments *per se*. From a theological perspective, fulfilling the Law of Moses may have significantly different meaning and implications than the concept of keeping God's commandments in general, and I felt that at least a brief discussion addressing those issues would have been helpful to some readers.

18 Ibid., 68.

19 Ibid., 69–70.

The Advanced Fruits of Grace in This Life: “Early Onset Postmortality”

I love the title of Miller’s fourth essay, “Early Onset Postmortality.” Here he notes that receiving God’s grace in this life can bring us to a condition where we enjoy many of the benefits of the next life right now. While many Latter-day Saints question fellow Christians who claim they have already been saved, Miller points out how salvation can and should be experienced now “as a present tense reality” that he calls *early onset postmortality*, a state in which we discover our day of judgment has already come before our life ends. In this state, free from worrying about whether we are reaching our goal or not, we are “no longer mortal but not yet immortal,” and in this state can “discover what it means to be human.”²⁰ While death is on its way, it has passed and been rendered toothless.²¹

This essay is valuable if only to help Latter-day Saints better appreciate the feelings of fellow Christians who feel they are already saved and need not be worried about their eternal state. At the same time, I am unclear on how we or our fellow born-again Christians can accept this state of salvation without recognizing the possibility of falling from grace, as Paul fervently warns (e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:27, 10:12; Romans 11:21–22; Galatians 5:4; Philippians 2:12, 3:12–14; Hebrews 3:12–14, 4:1,11,16, 6:4–6).

Miller delves into different kinds of time, discussing “messianic time,” “operational time,” “secular time,” and a “second ‘operational’ time.” In spite of interesting appeals to science-based analogies such as the dark light of stars so distant and moving away so fast that their light will never reach us, I found the discussion of these types of time to be opaque and beyond my grasp. Yet I did enjoy the creative use of material from *Moby Dick* to further illustrate the fearless life we can live in whatever time remains for us here after accepting the riches of God’s grace, and eventually realized that what Miller was writing in this essay was more poetry than analytical discourse. I do not understand it fully, but found it rich and probably worth coming back to later to digest once again.

20 Ibid., 35.

21 Ibid., 36.

Room for Debate

Miller offers a variety of perspectives meant to topple conventional ways of thinking. His approach asks new questions and shows that some widespread theological views based on common interpretations of LDS scriptures are open to further discussion, refinement, and debate. Naturally, as part of this debate, some of his views can be challenged, which I think he would welcome as part of the conversation his work should stir.

For example, in two essays, he reviews works by Terryl Givens (*The God Who Weeps* in Chapter 5 and *Wrestling the Angel* in Chapter 6). He shows great respect for those important works but points out some flaws and offers a few alternate views. These essays of Miller's set an excellent example of thoughtful and respectful disagreement in a conversation that can engage others and broaden thinking. But in some cases, I think the critique of Givens is flawed.

Givens and Nietzsche

In “*The God Who Weeps: Notes, Amens, and Disagreements*,”²² Miller critiques Givens' discussion of the importance of the premortal existence in Mormon theology. In typical discussions of LDS theology, Latter-day Saints point to our co-eternal nature and ancient premortal roots as vital in understanding free agency, for if our nature and soul or intelligence were entirely created and determined by God, how could we truly be responsible for what we choose and do? Understanding our ancient status as premortal beings and our eternal nature helps us appreciate who we are in this life. But Miller suspects our theology here may not be as clear and logical as we like to think. He suggests that when Givens speaks of our need to have “an identity that lies deeper than our body, moored beyond actions, reaching past memory,” his approach verges on nihilism:

You must, of course, decide for yourself, but I endorse Nietzsche's sharp critique of our Christian tendency to devalue the present world by anchoring its true meaning and substance in another. The irony, in this respect, is that *Weeps* is well aware of the Nietzschean critique and it, too, wants to agree with Nietzsche. ... But a sensitivity to this Nietzschean problem never shows up in any of the book's many celebrations

22 Ibid., Chapter 5, 45–55.

of the doctrine of a pre-world as an essential supplement to this world's poverty.²³

Miller then criticizes the “ideal pre-self” he attributes to Givens, though in my reading, that ideal state is not our pre-self but being in the presence of the Father.²⁴ Speaking of the veil of forgetfulness that divides us from the full knowledge of God that we once had in his presence, Givens approvingly quotes Philip Barlow, who writes that the veil “funnels the bulk of our attention to the here and now: on the time, people, problems, and opportunities of this day, this moment.”²⁵ Givens’ emphasis on our eternal nature and premortal existence is not an ironic neglect of the Nietzschean problem but an explanation of a vital element in LDS theology that helps us avoid that very problem and seek to build Zion here and now.

While we look forward to the glories of eternity and recognize that our individual roots and identity trace back to the premortal existence, this knowledge drives us to make the most of this life, not to neglect it. We do not droop in fatalism. We do not resent being here. We do not overlook the needs of the present day or ignore the suffering around us knowing that heaven will solve these problems later. Our knowledge of who we are motivates us to serve others in real, practical ways now, to solve mortality’s problems here, because we know we are all sons and daughters of God, and how we treat one another reflects who we are and who we wish to become. We see this time not as a meaningless episode or a quick test that depends on making just one big decision and all the rest does not matter. We see mortality as a time we have looked forward to for eons, a time to become the best we can be, to overcome challenges, to grow, and to learn how to love more fully in the present world, knowing that the gains made here have lasting and essential value.

The LDS knowledge of the premortal existence compels us to avoid the behavior Nietzsche complained of and moves us to dig in all the more vigorously in making the present world a better place. Our knowledge of the premortal existence does not represent blinders or even a blindfold in mortality but rather serves as a scope to help us better appreciate, navigate, and improve the present terrain.

23 Ibid., 49.

24 E.g., Terryl L. Givens and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Makes Sense of Life* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2012), 38–54.

25 Philip L. Barlow, “The Veil,” unpublished manuscript in Givens’ possessions, as quoted by Givens, *Ibid.*

Nietzsche complained that “The Christian decision to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad.”²⁶ But Latter-day Saints learn in the LDS temple and in our theology that this world is “glorious and beautiful” and that we have a duty to make it better for those around us, a drive that is shared by many other Christians and good people among many other religions. From the irrigation early Mormons are famous for to our modern emphasis on food storage, humanitarian work, getting all the education we can, and building Zion here, Mormons are keen on joyfully living in the present world and improving it, though we know we are pilgrims and strangers here on a path to a different destination that may, after all, be much like the present world but coupled with eternal glory (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2). I am sure that Miller feels the same, and my differences in his discussion of Nietzsche and Givens are a minor quibble.

The LDS view on the eternal value of the human body, which differentiates us from many fellow Christians, is also relevant here and is an important part of Givens’ discussion that might have been further considered by Miller. In Chapter 3 of *Weeps*, Givens reminds us that mortality is not retrogression but progression.²⁷ Obtaining a physical body is a vital part of our eternal progress. It is not something to regret or to abandon as soon as possible but a priceless gift that we receive with gratitude and plan on retaining, in upgraded form, for eternity. As a result, Givens explains that we look upon this mortal phase with joy and celebration, not with regret, again distancing us from the Nietzschean problem that Miller treats. LDS theology thwarts that problem, rather than falling ironically into its trap.

Materialism and Law or Material Laws?

Givens is questioned for the proposition that Mormonism offers radical materialism. Miller argues that traditional idealism creeps into our theology because even though we argue that spirit itself is material, “this material monism is then immediately paired with a second claim about the nature of the *laws* governing this materiality.”²⁸ For Miller, “these eternal laws seem to be *ideal*. . . [T]he philosophical vacuum created by

26 Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, vol. 3, section 130, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 123; <https://archive.org/stream/TheGayScience/The%20Gay%20Science#page/n151/mode/2up>.

27 Givens, *The God Who Weeps*, 55–76.

28 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 58.

God's materiality, by his loss of immaterial ideality, is immediately filled by the ideality of these eternal laws."²⁹ Miller argues that in LDS theology, our materiality just moves some pieces around without removing us from the basic structure of idealism. "Given our thoroughgoing materialism, laws can certainly be real, but if they want to exist, they have to be material. . . ." ³⁰ Here I must differ.

The existence of abstract laws to me is no different than the existence of abstract concepts such as shape and quantity. And once we admit that our material objects may be countable using the ideal concept of positive integers, we must also recognize the existence of zero and negative integers, then fractions, irrational numbers, transcendental numbers such as e and π , of which the latter also naturally arises from consideration of the simplest of shapes. We then must contemplate even "imaginary" numbers incorporating i , defined as the square root of negative 1. The vast and eternal realm of mathematics, abounding with ideal beauty such as the majestic relationship $e^{i\pi} = -1$, cannot be stripped from any imaginable universe, whether purely material, abstract, or dualistic. Numbers and the world of mathematics are always there, and do nothing to dematerialize a material universe or upend the notion of Mormonism's radical materialism.

The laws of mathematics do not need to materialize to exist in a purely material universe, no more than any other eternal laws that may exist or potentially non-eternal, divinely created governing laws that currently govern the matter of the cosmos as we know it, such as the laws relating mass and energy, the law of gravity, the laws of electromagnetism, and other laws of and relationships between the fundamental forces that govern matter. Miller's critique of Givens is flawed in this respect, in my opinion, though the gist of the argument is worthy of discussion.

Free Agency and the Premortal Existence

Miller notes that our tendency to appeal to the premortal existence as a source of our free agency only pushes back a fundamental problem. Or, more particularly, in responding to Givens' explanation that true freedom in this world depends upon having chosen to accept the conditions here in a previous life, Miller observes that Givens' explanation of free agency pushes back the problem of free agency into the premortal existence but does not adequately explain its origins and nature. Did we then choose

29 Ibid., 58.

30 Ibid., 60.

to accept the conditions in the premortal existence before entering that sphere of existence? Miller offers an intriguing counter-proposal:

I'm inclined to think that our doctrine of co-eternality means just the opposite of what *Weeps* proposes. Rather than safely positioning us (and God) beyond the reach of any unchosen conditions, co-eternality guarantees that there is no such unconditional place. Co-eternality guarantees that the only thing unconditional is the unconditioned imposition of always already existing and unchosen conditions. ...

Does this rule out real agency? No. Just the opposite. Unchosen conditions are the condition of possibility for any meaningful agency. The limits that constrain agency enable it. ... Mortality makes agency meaningful because it *limits* our knowledge and *constrains* our agency. "We need the continuing spiritual friction of difficulty, opposition, and hardship. ..."³¹ Friction is the thing. I'm empowered to act by the unchosen and uncontrollable frictions that compose me and oppose me. Agency isn't simple and internal, it's complex and distributed. Agency is niche-dependent. It is a situated gift dependent on context. Agency isn't a kind of autonomy but a peculiar, reflexive, and responsible kind of heteronomy. My agency is always given and enabled by something other than myself (cf. 2 Nephi 2:26–27).

Agency isn't possessed, then, but borrowed. It isn't a freedom from the conditioned world but a freedom *for* that world. ... "Free" agency is a myth. Freedom is never free. Agency always comes at a cost. And that cost is often paid by others. This is why charity is the greatest virtue.³²

Here again, Miller helps illustrate the centrality of charity in our theology. I think he offers much here that we should reflect upon and discuss in the future.

The nature of our free agency or freedom to choose is a complex issue. While I agree that common LDS explanations may just be pushing the problem back by an appeal to the premortal existence, and while I very much like Miller's recognition of the relationship between constraints and agency, I feel there is vastly more that we must learn before we can

31 Givens, *The God Who Weeps*, 62, as cited by Miller.

32 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 54–55.

appreciate what it is to be free to choose and responsible for our choices, or to know how that gift is given.

We have some degree of agency here in mortality, but we also had agency enough in the premortal existence to choose God or rebel openly against him “because of [our] agency” (Doctrine & Covenants 29:36). Since the nature of our observable mind here in mortality is still a great mystery in many aspects, and since we have even less knowledge of the spirit mind or the concept of intelligence or whatever it is that makes us co-eternal with God, we are left largely with hopelessly inadequate speculation on these matters. Perhaps we will better understand free agency as we advance in developing artificial intelligence and neural networks that ultimately transcend their starting conditions and programmed algorithms, or perhaps not. Meanwhile, our common simple explanations, though inadequate, may be the best we can do. We have free agency here, and can sense that and the responsibility that comes with our freedom, but how and why is still a mystery, at least to me.

Givens vs. Darwin

Miller also disputes Givens’ views on Darwin. Givens, while accepting the findings of science, sees wonder in the delights that nature offers as utilitarian solutions to problems of various species also add beauty, fragrance, flavor, and joy for man:

The human body and human soul alike seem to be constituted by their Maker for the amassing of experience in ever greater variety and intensity. A dog or a carrion-eating bird will ingest anything capable of sustaining its beating heart one more day. But the human palate is refined enough to register infinite grades of difference among fine wines. Our sense of smell strikes us as almost entirely superfluous, since we don’t need it to hunt prey or be alerted to danger — but it does register the difference between a rose and a lily, the aroma of Christmas pine and fresh-baked bread, and it lets us know when we have escaped the smog of the city and can relish the cleansing air of the country. If we are made in God’s image, we can see His joyful nature reflected in the arsenal of access He gave us, to a variegated world of color and sound and texture and taste and smell.

Darwin was sure that even those spectacles of nature that overwhelm us by their beauty, from the peacock's tail to the fragrance of an English rose, serve not man's purpose but their own, which is survival and reproducibility. If anything in nature could be found that had been "created for beauty in the eyes of man" rather than the good of the possessor, it would be "absolutely fatal" to his theory.³³

Givens sees the hand of God in this outcome, while Miller suggests that the very issues Givens raises as evidence of the divine express the essence of naturalistic evolution without necessitating the existence of higher purpose or design.

While Miller loves the way Givens expresses the superabundance of Creation as a perfect expression of the giftedness grace, he argues that Givens actually provides "a stunning account of exactly how evolution does work, not a rebuttal that is 'absolutely fatal' to its credibility."³⁴ First, note that it is Darwin, not Givens, who in Chapter 6 of *The Origin of Species* warned that something "created for beauty in the eyes of man" would be "absolutely fatal" to his theory.³⁵ Darwin would argue that such beauty is accidental and of no consequence, arising merely from utilitarian symmetry or other functional benefits which we may perceive as beautiful but which surely were not designed with us in mind. Givens suggests there is cause for gratitude and wonder, which I find reasonable.

Miller states that "the fundamental process [of evolution] is one in which gratuitous features are purposely generated *and then these features get repurposed by extant systems for some other productive end*" [emphasis original].³⁶ The multiple benefits that arouse wonder in Givens "epitomize how natural selection works." Miller sees irony: "What does it mean if something *Weeps* sees as key to defending the *gospel* ends up being key to defending *evolution* itself?"³⁷

From my perspective, the irony isn't there. I don't read *Weeps* as denying science or evolution. Rather, it recognizes that there is a giftedness or superabundance in nature that should inspire gratitude for the grand Creator behind it all, regardless of what tools He has put in

33 Givens, *The God Who Weeps*, 35–36.

34 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 52.

35 Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, first edition, Chapter 6, <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/origin/chapter6.html>.

36 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 52.

37 *Ibid.*, 52.

nature's toolkit over the eons to bring us and nature to the amazing state we now encounter.

Further, I disagree with Miller's assessment of the mechanism of evolution. Givens is right in recognizing that in evolution, the natural selection process regarding mutations that help solve, say, a problem of pollination involving a flower and a bee are indifferent to how the flower looks and smells to a human (and, I would add, to how the honey tastes). The delight we find in the multiple purposes achieved in such solutions is not readily explained as fundamental to evolution. Random mutations in evolution are usually failures that tend to be eliminated. These mutations are not "gratuitous features" that "are purposely generated" but occur without intended purpose or design. Some tend to be selected if they provide a competitive advantage under existing (and frequently changing) circumstances. If gratuitous, there is pressure to remove them. If the feature serves a non-gratuitous purpose by chance that outweighs the cost and disadvantages of the mutation, it may be favored enough to survive and persist. There is no mechanism that should lead us to expect beauty or delight to uninvolved third parties to occur, though by chance they may be perceived as pleasant. It is, of course, left to us to weigh the results and determine if there is cause for gratitude to a Creator or not. Thus, Givens is not illustrating the fundamental mechanism or purpose of evolution, and we need not apologize for feeling gratitude to God for the superabundance of nature with remarkable blessings, beauties, and side-benefits not directly related to survival of the genes doing the work.

Evolutionary theory allows for beauty to *exist* as incidental byproducts of chance. This theory, however, seems insufficient to many to readily account not only for the existence of something beautiful, but for the existence of *consciousness* that can perceive and find joy in that beauty, especially when what seems beautiful is not needed for our survival. This is suggested by Givens in the leading sentence of the passage quoted above: "The human body and human soul alike seem to be constituted by their Maker for the amassing of experience in ever greater variety and intensity." The ability of the soul/body to experience the world in such intensity is a product of our consciousness.³⁸ Givens' gratitude for the work of the Creator is based in part on the fact that we have the ability to consciously appreciate and evaluate the creative designs and inventions of nature, and to find joy in them.

There is nothing inherent in the laws of physics and matter that should naturally lead to the rise of conscious beings who can experience

38 Givens, *The God Who Weeps*, 36–37.

joy in watching a sunset or smelling a rose. There is nothing that should necessarily give rise to advanced brain functions that allow us to not just enjoy but to fully participate in creating music, poetry, and philosophical discourse. This is not the argument of fundamentalists or religious apologists but a serious matter faced by secular philosophers and scientists. Christopher Wills in *The Runaway Brain* attempts to deal with the perplexing gap between the refined wonders of the human brain and the blunt instrument of natural selection.³⁹ Among others grappling with such problems, a recent one of note is Thomas Nagel and his fascinating *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*.⁴⁰

Dr. Thomas Nagel, an atheist, has been described as the most famous and celebrated philosopher in the United States. He has an endowed chair at New York University as a University Professor. He sincerely does not want there to be a God and considers religion to be quite backward, yet feels compelled to speak out on the shortcomings of modern science in failing to explain the rise of consciousness from inanimate matter, and not just consciousness alone but also the existence of *value* in the lives of some of these conscious beings.

Our ability to experience joy, wonder, and reverent awe, whether inspired by nature, by music, by poetry, or by Miller's brilliant essays, ultimately points to something far more than random mutations and natural selection, and this view resonates with Nagel's work, which even touches upon the issue of freedom:

The problem, then, is this: What kind of explanation of the development of these organisms, even one that includes evolutionary theory, could account for the appearance of organisms that are not only physically adapted to the environment but also conscious subjects? In brief, I believe it cannot be a purely physical explanation. . . . The claim I want to defend is that, since the conscious character of these organisms

39 Christopher Wills, *The Runaway Brain: The Evolution of Human Uniqueness* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

40 Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Also see Jeff Lindsay, "Thomas Nagel's Apostasy: Mind and Cosmos," *Mormanity*, April 7, 2013, <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/04/thomas-nagels-apostasy-mind-and-cosmos.html> and also Jeff Lindsay, "Faith, Reason, and the Resurrection," *Mormanity*, April 4, 2013, http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/04/faith-reason-and-resurrection_4.html.

is one of their most important features, the explanation of the coming into existence of such creatures must include an explanation of the appearance of consciousness. That cannot be a separate question. An account of their biological evolution must explain the appearance of conscious organisms as such. Since a purely materialist explanation cannot do this, the materialist version of evolutionary theory cannot be the whole truth. ... In other words, materialism is incomplete even as a theory of the physical world, since the physical world includes conscious organisms among its most striking occupants. ...⁴¹

Something has happened that has gotten our minds into immediate contact with the rational order of the world, or at least with the basic elements of that order, which can in turn be used to reach a great deal more. That enables us to possess concepts that display the compatibility or incompatibility of particular beliefs with general hypotheses. ... What this means is that if we hope to include the human mind in the natural order, we have to explain not only consciousness as it enters into perception, emotion, desire, and aversion but also the conscious control of belief and conduct in response to the awareness of reasons — the avoidance of inconsistency, the subsumption of particular cases under general principles, the confirmation or disconfirmation of general principles by particular observations, and so forth. This is what it is to allow oneself to be guided by the objective truth, rather than just by one's impressions. **It is a kind of freedom — the freedom that reflective consciousness gives us** from the rule of innate perceptual and motivational dispositions together with conditioning. Rational creatures can step back from these influences and try to make up their own minds. I set aside the question whether this kind of freedom is compatible or incompatible with causal determinism, but it does seem to be something that cannot be given a purely physical analysis and therefore, like the more passive forms of consciousness, cannot be given a purely physical explanation either. ...⁴²

This, then, is what a theory of everything has to explain: not only the emergence from a lifeless universe of reproducing

41 Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, 44–45.

42 Ibid., 83–84.

organisms and their development by evolution to greater and greater functional complexity; not only the consciousness of some of those organisms and its central role in their lives; but also the development of consciousness into an instrument of transcendence that can grasp objective reality and objective value. ...⁴³

However, our direct access to value comes from human life, the life of one highly specific type of organism in the specific culture it has created. The human world, or any individual human life, is potentially, and often actually, the scene of incredible riches — beauty, love, pleasure, knowledge, and the sheer joy of existing and living in the world. It is also potentially, and often actually, the scene of horrible misery, but on both sides the value, however specific it may be to our form of life, seems inescapably real. Our susceptibility to many of these goods and evils plays a vital role in our survival and reproductive fitness — sexual pleasure, physical pain, the pangs and satisfactions of hunger and thirst — but they are also good and bad in themselves, and we are able to recognize and weigh these values. Initially we recognize them in our own lives, but it cannot stop there. In looking for a historical explanation, a realist must suppose that the strongly motivating aspects of life and consciousness appear already freighted with value, even though they find their place in the world through their roles in the lives of the organisms that are their subjects. The pleasures of sex, food, and drink are **wonderful, in addition to being adaptive**. Value enters the world with life, and the capacity to recognize and be influenced by value in its larger extension appears with higher forms of life. Therefore the historical explanation of life must include an explanation of value, just as it must include an explanation of consciousness.⁴⁴ [*emphasis added*]

Nagel marvels at our consciousness and the pleasure and pain, the good and the evil that it can experience and evaluate. He finds standard Darwinian materialism to fail in accounting for the abundant consciousness of life and for the rise of reason, morals, and values. The various aspects of life that are “wonderful, in addition to being adaptive”

43 Ibid., 85.

44 Ibid., 119–120.

to Nagel, as with Givens, are not an obvious corollary of evolution doing what it is supposed to do but a reflection of a serious gap in what science has been able to explain so far. Nagel wants better science to fix that gap and explain why nature is disposed to give rise to conscious life as we know it. Givens wants reverent respect for its Creator. Both yearnings are reasonable. Darwin, meanwhile, does not adequately explain the abundance of conscious, value-rich, human life with the inherent potential to have joy. At least there is plenty of room for intelligent debate on this matter.

Other Essays

Though Miller's book is brief, only 134 pages long, I found more substance there than I often encounter in much longer books. Almost every page evoked abundant notes, marks, and reflection on new things. There is much in this book to be digested. Here I'll briefly comment on some of the additional essays not mentioned above.

Chapter 8, "A Manifesto for the Future of Mormon Thinking," calls for more charity and understanding in engaging our enemies. In the opening sections of this essay he lays out theory for engaging the world and facing our enemies, but the practical application of the theory was difficult for me to grasp. What does it mean to apply Mormon love and Mormon thinking to secularism?⁴⁵ I somehow had the sense that this advice was not being given by one with frequent front-line exposure to the attacks that are made against the LDS faith.

In his call for loving and understanding our secularist opponents, he urges us to understand secularism more fully and recognize that "religion is not, fundamentally, about supernatural stuff."⁴⁶

This is not to say that supernatural things aren't real or that your neighbor down the street may not be entertaining angels. But I think it's fair to say that, even if granted, such things are pretty rare and peripheral. I think it's fair to say that they are clearly not what a Sunday service is aiming at.

Church isn't magic and prayers aren't incantations. You can sit in church for three hours each Sunday for decades and never see anything supernatural. You can read and pray everyday for a lifetime and never see anything supernatural. You can birth and bless and bury whole generations and never see anything supernatural. Does this mean religion is a sham?

45 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 73.

46 Ibid., 77.

That it's broken? That it doesn't work? Or does it mean that something else, in plain sight, is going on instead?⁴⁷

Perhaps Miller is defining the “supernatural stuff” as that which requires dramatically choreographed visitations of angels or Hollywood-style parting of the waters, but for many Latter-day Saints, and I suspect for Miller, too, the supernatural stuff is far more important and common than Miller's passage acknowledges, and without it, our religion would seem relatively broken. Mormonism's supernatural stuff involved not only the few moments of theophany that began Joseph's ministry and later gave him the gold plates from a rarely seen angel, who later showed them to other witnesses. That was accompanied by day after day of seemingly more mundane but actually full-fledged supernatural stuff in front of numerous witnesses as Joseph dictated page after page of what we now hold and cherish as 500-plus pages of supernatural stuff in print that continues to yield miracles and wonders, such as the stunning finds in the Arabian Peninsula of candidates for Nahom, Bountiful, and the River Laman, or the ongoing discovery of clever Hebraic wordplays in the Book of Mormon, many of which have been revealed for the first time here at *The Interpreter*. The supernatural stuff goes beyond the pages of scripture right into lives and the worship experience of our members, and yes, that should be a goal of those planning and organizing our meetings.

In my experience, Latter-day Saints sitting each Sunday in church tend to get frequent doses of the supernatural stuff both in the personal stories and testimonies that are shared in our sacrament meetings and classrooms, in the workings of the Spirit in our lives, and also in our service work. Some of the most profound miracles I've experienced in my life have occurred in seeking to fulfill home teaching duties or in other service events where the hand of the Lord was joyously evident. But it is possible to sit through services and be a Mormon all one's life without seriously listening to such accounts, without noticing the small miracles that are taking place, and without seeking and experiencing an answer to prayer. Possible but tragic. If that's happening, something is broken, in my opinion. If we use a reasonably broad definition of “supernatural,” we should find that such stuff abounds in our faith and has long been an important element.

After Miller's earlier essay about accepting the grace of salvation and having our calling and election made sure so that we can experience

47 Ibid.

“early onset postmortality,” I was confused by his desire to downplay the supernatural so that we can better engage and respect our secular enemies. I hope he might later revise this essay to clarify his words or more fully recognize the significant role of the supernatural stuff in the life of many Latter-day Saints, from recent converts to life-long members.

Chapter 9, “Network Theology: Is It Possible to Be a Christian but Not a Platonist?” scored points with me for introducing concepts from network theory into religious discussion. Considering the nature of complex networks leads to concepts that are resonant with the Christian message in a way that Platonism is not,⁴⁸ and this recognition makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the Restoration and its departure from some of the Hellenistic elements of mainstream Christian doctrine. Miller asks intriguing questions in this essay, such as “What if truth is an ongoing process, not a static product?”⁴⁹ Or even, “What if the soul is a network?”⁵⁰ I would say that while the soul certainly participates in networks, and that the perception of the self may be linked to network systems, as discussed by Karl Popper and John C. Eccles in *The Self and Its Brain*,⁵¹ I cannot grasp how the soul itself could be a “localized network” as Miller explores with cautious speculation. Still, I applaud him for the many insights and questions he raises in this essay.

Chapter 10, “Jesus, Trauma, and Psychoanalytic Technique,” a treatment of Lacanian psychoanalysis that responds to a related book by Marcus Pound, was the most difficult and least helpful read for me, undoubtedly due to my lack of knowledge and interest in the topic.

Chapter 11, “Every Truth Is a Work, Every Object Is a Covenant,” argues that “the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is a work to be done, not a fact in evidence.” Thus, “it is our work to make the Book of Mormon be true in as many ways and in as many worlds as we are able.”⁵² I am grateful for the call to apply the Book of Mormon, to use it more fully in our lives, and thereby to bring out its truth as we apply it, but there are some views on truth in this section that puzzle me.

Miller sees truth in science and other fields as something of a popularity contest, where truth is what is backed up by abundant sources, measurements, charts, funding, etc. Truth is established by

48 Ibid., 80.

49 Ibid., 84.

50 Ibid., 87.

51 Karl Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1977).

52 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 105.

getting out the vote and building broad support in multiple fields. So let's work to make the Book of Mormon true by using it, applying it, examining it, from many perspectives. I agree with the call to action but am uncomfortable with the discussion of truth, especially this: "The work of making truths — the work engaged in by scientists, lawyers, teachers, doctors, politicians, religious leaders, and entrepreneurs alike — is simply to get out the vote."⁵³ I believe his point is that profound truths and principles will withstand the challenges of peer review and gradually find growing support and application in many other fields. This does sometimes happen, but I think there is a world of difference between the popular adoption of paradigms, truthful or not, and the process of discovering truth in the first place, especially in light of the frequent unpopularity of some truths that may be vigorously suppressed or opposed. Perhaps Miller is thinking of the need for many strands of evidence to overcome the inertia of old paradigms and help bring about a revolution in thinking, as outlined by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,⁵⁴ who shows how major scientific truths, ones that overthrow old paradigms, are often strenuously resisted at first and require extensive evidence showing the failure of the old paradigm before the revolution in understanding finally takes place.

But again, the *discovery* of the truths that lead to such revolutions is not a matter of popular opinion. As with Ignaz Semmelweis and his discovery that something unseen but removable (what we now know as germs) was causing infection,⁵⁵ scientific truth often begins with one lone voice challenging the establishment and frequently being pummeled by it. That truth may be actively resisted by those with the power to control the funding, the publications, the votes, etc. Only after years, decades, or sometimes centuries (two centuries for the cure for scurvy to be recognized by the British Navy, with thousands of sailors perishing unnecessarily in the meantime)⁵⁶ does the truth become irresistible and recognized in the popular vote of the scientific establishment. Once

53 Ibid, 109.

54 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962; second edition 1970).

55 Ignaz Semmelweis, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis.

56 Jeff Lindsay, "Lessons from the British Navy: Why the Cure for Scurvy Took 200 Years to Be Implemented," *Innovation Fatigue*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.innovationfatigue.com/2016/05/british-navy-scurvy/139-142>, and Jeff Lindsay, Mukund Karanjikar, and Cheryl Perkins, *Conquering Innovation Fatigue* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 108–111.

established, incremental advances can continue with peer review and broad consensus helping to solidify things, but there will always be a need for lone voices to stand against the tide and declare unpopular truths. The Book of Mormon is marked for unpopularity in this age. But yes, let's explore it from many angles and help bring out its power and truths in new ways.

When Miller speaks of "making the Book of Mormon true," I think he means something more than dissemination of its truths to increase popular acceptance. But in practical terms, I am not quite sure what that something more is:

Don't assume the Book of Mormon is or isn't historically true. History is not one thing. *Make* the Book of Mormon historically true in as many times and as many places and to whatever degree you're able. Shop it around the world. Do the research, visit the sites, search the texts, gather the agents. Sit the gathered agents down and hammer out as binding a multilateral agreement as the motley crowd will, in each instance, allow. There will never be perfect agreement. That's fine. Work harder. Gather more signatures. Promise more in return. ...

Don't assume that the Book of Mormon is or isn't scientifically plausible. *Make* the Book of Mormon scientifically plausible. Does its account square with evolution? With Native American DNA? With geology on a scale of billions of years? With light years of empty space? Let them pollinate each other and see what things grow.⁵⁷

From my perspective, there is much value in exploring the Book of Mormon's claims in terms of their plausibility. This has led to many refinements in our understanding of its geographical scope and our understanding of the text. This has led to gems in many areas that can and should be used to "get out the vote." But there are many truths yet to be discovered that will involve work and toil in the right disciplines looking in the right areas and asking the right questions. This process is not a free-for-all where every discipline can just go out and gather support to make truth, whatever that means. But I thoroughly welcome Miller's invitation for all of us to take the Book of Mormon more seriously and increase understanding of that sacred text.

57 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 111.

Miller's final essay, "Silence, Witness, and Absolute Rock: Reading Cormac McCarthy," is a tribute to a highly celebrated novelist of our day. Having read only one of McCarthy's books, *All the Pretty Horses*,⁵⁸ which I enjoyed, I am not prepared to say much about this essay. He discusses three types of characters often found in McCarthy's works, the mute, the dreamer, and the witness. Several aspects of his essay related well to the sole McCarthy novel I have read and I found Miller's explorations enlightening but somehow out of place in a volume on LDS theology. He does make an interesting connection to Mormonism at the end of the essay in quoting and applying a passage from McCarthy where an ex-priest introduces himself as Mormon-born:

"I was a Mormon. Then I converted to the church. Then I became I don't know what. Then I became me." Such is the role of the witness.⁵⁹

More loyal McCarthy fans are likely to find greater value in this essay.

In general, the essays are valuable, well written, and worthy of much discussion.

As a minor point, the book has been carefully edited. Nevertheless, Romans 7:21 quoted on page 9 should be Romans 3:21. It would also have been helpful to inform readers that biblical passages are typically from the NRSV Bible, not the KJV.

Future Mormon is a book for the future of Mormonism, and I hope it and other writings of Miller will continue to play a growing role in our discourse and thinking. I applaud Miller for a fine collection.

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58 Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (New York: Vintage International, 1993).

59 Miller, *Future Mormon*, 129.

Paper Science and (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. He then spent several years at Innovationedge in Neenah, Wisconsin, helping many companies with innovation and IP strategy. Jeff has been in China for five years, where he works with various APP companies and mills in advancing their intellectual property and innovation. He is active in the chemical engineering community and was recently named a Fellow of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. He is also listed as a leading IP strategist by Intellectual Asset Magazine in their global IAM300 listing. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission and currently serves as counselor in the district presidency of the Shanghai International District. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have eight grandchildren.

