

“White” or “Pure”: Five Vignettes

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IN 1981 THE FIRST PRESIDENCY of the LDS church changed 2 Nephi 30:6 in the Book of Mormon from “and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a *white* and delightsome people” to “and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a *pure* and delightsome people . . . ” In the following essay I present five vignettes as background to the change from “white” to “pure” in official LDS scripture.

VIGNETTE 1. RESTORING A PLAIN AND PRECIOUS TRUTH

Our story begins with the 1830 first edition of the Book of Mormon. After LDS missionaries had exhausted this first edition, Joseph Smith had Parley P. Pratt publish a second edition in 1837 in Kirtland, Ohio. Three things happened in 1839 that affect our story: (1) Joseph Smith sent the Quorum of the Twelve to England; (2) missionary work exhausted the second edition of the Book of Mormon by December 1839; and (3) on 29 December 1839 the Nauvoo, Illinois, High Council voted to publish a third edition of the Book of Mormon. After delays in fund raising, Ebenezer Robinson published the third edition in October 1840 in Cincinnati, Ohio. In this 1840 edition, for the first time, 2 Nephi 30:6 reported that the Lamanites became “a *pure* and delightsome people” rather than “a *white* and delightsome people.”

Not knowing that a third edition was being planned 4,000 miles away (the trans-Atlantic telegraph was not in operation until 1866), the Twelve held their April 1840 conference in England and voted to publish the Book of Mormon in England by the end of the year. The Twelve faithfully reprinted the second (1837) edition. Due to delays, this edition did not appear until January 1841. The church thus had two different editions at the same time: the American 1840 Nauvoo and the English 1841 edition.

Based on the English 1841, not the American 1840, edition, three more major editions of the Book of Mormon followed: 1852, 1879, and 1920. A member of the Quorum of Twelve supervised each major edition: Franklin D. Richards, in 1852; Orson Pratt, in 1879; and James E. Talmage, in 1920. The 1837, 1841, 1852, 1879, and 1920 editions retained the 1830 “white” instead of the 1840 “pure” in 2 Nephi 30:6.

In the 1970s the First Presidency established the Scripture Publication Committee composed of some members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. Its charge was to produce printed materials to help members understand the Bible and to improve doctrinal scholarship in the church. Elders Thomas S. Monson, Boyd K. Packer, and Bruce R. McConkie were among its members. A group of faculty members from Brigham Young University carried out the project. Among its members was Ellis Rasmussen, dean of the College of Religion. During their work the committee reported the 1840 “pure” versus “white” variant. The First Presidency restored this 1840 change to the Book of Mormon in 1981.

This “plain and precious truth” was restored exactly 141 years after it had been lost.

VIGNETTE 2. TWO NON-LDS EDITIONS: 1858 AND 1908

Consider the following three events of 1858 that affect our story:

1. Brigham Young, using guerrilla tactics, had earned headlines along the East Coast by successfully resisting Johnston’s Army which U.S. president Buchanan had sent to Utah in 1857 to subdue the Saints.¹

2. The twenty-eight-year non-renewable copyright for the Book of Mormon had expired.²

3. Hoping to capitalize on public interest in the Utah War, James O. Wright, a non-Mormon publisher in New York City, printed in 1858 a commercial version of the now-out-of-copyright Book of Mormon. For unknown reasons, Wright skipped the 1830, 1837, 1841, and 1852 editions and reprinted the 1840 edition (with “pure,” not “white”) in November 1858.³

1. See Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 169.

2. The twenty-eight-year, non-renewable copyright law was passed in 1790, in line with English law. In 1909 Congress enabled the copyright owner to renew copyright for an additional twenty-eight years.

3. Hugh Stocks, “The Book of Mormon, 1830-1879: A Publishing History,” M.L.S. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1979, 19.

Wright's edition did not sell well. This should come as no surprise to anyone who has tried to *give* the books away during a mission. Wright should have heeded Orson Pratt's advice to Brigham Young in September 1853: "There is no more prospect in offering our publications in the eastern cities, than there would be in offering so many cobblestones."⁴

Wright had printed, but not bound, about 4,000 copies. His edition began with an advertisement and featured a long anti-Mormon introduction on the origins of the Book of Mormon.

What could Wright do with his 4,000 unbound copies? Turn them into a pro-Mormon edition and sell the entire printing to an LDS splinter group. Wright removed his long anti-Mormon introduction and had Zadock Brooks, a schismatic Mormon elder who controlled the abandoned Kirtland temple, write a short pro-Mormon introduction. He then sold the entire set of newly bound copies to Russell Huntley, another schismatic Mormon appalled by the Utah church's practice of polygamy. By 1862 the Huntley-Brooks faction had disbanded. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints inherited and used Huntley's copies of Wright's 1858 reprint of the 1840 edition for their worship needs.⁵ In 1874 the RLDS church removed Brooks's introduction and faithfully reprinted this 1858 (1840) edition as their first official edition of the Book of Mormon.⁶

Jump now to 1906, the year the RLDS church decided to print a new edition of the Book of Mormon in response to three events with LDS connections.

1. In 1879 Orson Pratt divided the various books comprising the Book of Mormon into shorter chapters, and divided its long narrative paragraphs into short verses. This LDS version was easier to use; its verses now looked like Bible verses instead of a novel.

2. When Oliver Cowdery separated from the LDS church in 1838, he kept the printer's manuscript⁷ of the Book of Mormon. Cowdery rejoined

4. Pratt to Young, 10 Sept. 1853, Brigham Young Papers, archives, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

5. Stocks, 20.

6. Richard Howard, *Restoration Scriptures* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1969), 53.

7. There were two manuscripts of the Book of Mormon: the original dictated manuscript and a back-up copy, the printer's manuscript. This second copy could be left overnight with the printer since the original was still in Joseph Smith's possession. In the printer's manuscript, the printer and others marked paragraphs, added punctuation, established capitalization, and cleaned up the grammar. The original dictated copy was placed in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House where over time it was severely damaged. Portions of the original manuscript are now in the possession of the LDS church and the Marriott Library at the University of Utah.

the LDS church in October 1848. However, before he died at the home of his brother-in-law David Whitmer in 1850, he gave the manuscript to Whitmer. When Whitmer died in 1888, the printer's copy passed to George Schweich, his grandson. In 1901 William F. Benjamin offered it through Samuel Russell to the LDS church. In a 19 March 1901 letter to Russell, LDS president Joseph F. Smith declined to purchase it.⁸ In 1903 the RLDS church bought it from George Schweich for \$2,450.

3. From 1904 to 1906 the U.S. Senate conducted hearings to decide whether Reed Smoot, a monogamous Mormon apostle, could serve as senator from Utah. The hearings focused on polygamy, an issue for which the RLDS church had considerable antipathy.

With this background, the RLDS Council of Twelve Apostles charged a committee to produce a new edition of the Book of Mormon with (1) better versification, (2) a text as nearly as possible consistent with the printer's manuscript, and (3) restored anti-polygamy verses (see, for example, Jacob 2:6). The RLDS church therefore removed words from the 1840 edition not found in the 1837 version or in the printer's manuscript. In particular, the 1908 RLDS edition replaced "pure and delightsome" with the original "white and delightsome." In fact, in their preface, they list this change as the first of six⁹ scriptures restored to their earlier, more pristine state. Subsequent RLDS versions have kept this reversion. Thus while the LDS church had accidentally omitted the 1840 wording, its cousin had used the words for forty years, then deliberately altered them.

8. Smith to Russell, 19 Mar. 1901, Samuel Russell Collections Correspondence, 1863-91, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Smith wrote:

The manuscript in the hands of Mr. Benjamin possesses no value whatever. It has been repeatedly offered to us and numerous false reports have been put in circulation with regards to our desire to obtain possession of it, but we have at no time regarded it of any value, neither have we ever offered any money to procure it, all the stories to the contrary notwithstanding, for we have always known it was not the original, as aforesaid, and as many editions of the Book of Mormon have been printed, and tens of thousands of copies of it circulated throughout the world you can readily perceive that this manuscript is of no value to anyone. There is no principle involved in its possession, there could be nothing lost if it were utterly destroyed, it can neither add to or diminish aught from the word of God as contained in the printed work which has already gone to the world and been translated into many languages. Indeed, it is not worth the time and paper I am using to convey these thoughts to you.

9. Other changes included: wading to wandering, inherit to enter, where to whence, and armies to servants.

VIGNETTE 3. TEXTUAL VARIANTS AND PRINTING TECHNOLOGY

Readers today may better understand the rise of textual variants in the Book of Mormon editions of 1830, 1837, 1840, 1852, 1879, 1920, and 1981 by learning something of the state of printing technology during these years.

The 1830 Edition

When the church exhausted the 5,000 copy print run of the 1830 first edition, why did they produce a completely retypeset second *edition*, rather than simply order a second *printing* of the first edition? To answer this question, I will review how Egbert Grandin, a small upstate New York printer, printed the 1830 first edition. Grandin handset the type for each sixteen-page signature, proofread these sixteen pages while printing the 5,000 copies of that signature,¹⁰ broke up the signature, and salvaged the type to set the next sixteen-page signature. Grandin could *never* issue a second printing; he salvaged its type every sixteen pages.

The 1837 Edition

So why does Parley P. Pratt's 1837 Kirtland edition of the Book of Mormon have over 3,000 textual changes from the first edition? The 1837 preface explains: "Individuals acquainted with book printings, are aware of the numerous typographical errors which always occur in manuscript editions. It is only necessary to say, that the whole has been carefully re-examined and compared with the original manuscript . . ." ¹¹ Consider the following five reasons for the existence of textual variations in the second edition of any book having both a printer's manuscript and a printed first edition.

1. *Time pressures.* Scarce money-generating resources encourage quick proofreading. A sixteen-page signature takes up space in a small print shop; signatures consume the limited supply of each type face and font size. The sooner a printer finishes corrections, the sooner he can print a signature; the sooner he prints a signature, the sooner he can salvage the type; the sooner he salvages the type, the sooner he can accept additional

10. Corrections were made during the run, creating many variants. Before binding, the sheets were collated but in an unknown order. Since each of the 5,000 copies was bound from sheets each containing different variants, constructing the "true" text of the 1830 edition has not yet been done. In this sense we do not have a copy of *the* 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Instead, we have possibly 5,000 different textual copies. Royal Skousen of Brigham Young University is currently working on the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project whose goal, among others, is to produce a list of all 1830 variants.

11. The one-and-a-half page preface was signed by Parley P. Pratt and John Goodson.

print jobs; the sooner he accepts additional print jobs, the sooner he can make money; and time is money.

2. *Complicated proofreading.* Book of Mormon proofreaders were not able to line up old pages and new pages and compare line to line and word to word. The page height of the 1830 Book of Mormon is 15.5 centimeters. That of the 1837 edition is 12.5 centimeters. The 1830 edition has forty-three lines per page; the smaller 1837 edition has forty-seven lines. The page width of the 1830 edition is 9 centimeters; that of the 1837 edition is 6.5 centimeters. The 1830 edition averages sixty characters per line; the 1837 edition averages fifty-four. In addition, the greatly reduced font size of the 1837 edition hampered proofreading.

3. *Precedence.* When the 1830 edition differed from the 1830 printer's manuscript, which took precedence? Even more problematic, during the years after 1830, Joseph Smith recorded some grammatical and doctrinal corrections directly on the original printer's manuscript. Thus the printer's manuscript contained corrections made *before* the 1830 printing and corrections made *after* the 1830 printing. The 1837 text could differ from the 1830 printed version, from the printer's manuscript, from the pre-printing corrections to the printer's manuscript, from the post-printing corrections to the printer's manuscript.

4. *Modernized language.* Joseph Smith modernized some of the language of the 1837 edition, changing (1) "which" to "who" 707 times; (2) "saith" and "sayeth" to "said" 229 times¹²; and (3), after revising the Bible and deciding he had overused the term "and it came to pass," crossed-out that phrase on many pages of the printer's manuscript.¹³ Continuing Joseph Smith's trend to modernize the language of the Book of Mormon faces an uphill battle. Elder J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency wrote the book *Why the King James Version* to discourage use of modernized Bible translations. In his April 1993 general conference address, Elder Dallin Oaks discouraged modernizing the language of prayer and encouraged the continued use of a "special language of prayer."

5. *Doctrinal clarification.* Joseph Smith had many additional revelations from 1830 to 1837. During these years his understanding of the nature of the Godhead developed. Some changes in the 1837 edition were made to clarify his concept of the Godhead.

The 1840 Edition

The first edition, which lasted seven years, took six months to typeset

12. Howard, 41.

13. *Ibid.*, 38.

and proofread. The second edition, which lasted two years, took one winter to typeset and proofread. To reset and proofread the Book of Mormon all over again just to print another couple of thousand copies was both tedious and time consuming. Fortunately, a new technology from England had made its way to the American Midwest: stereotyping.

In stereotyping, the printer sets the text in type, presses a mat into the type, pours metal into the wetted mat, and produces a metal plate. After the type is salvaged, the plate continues to exist. Stereotyping separates the typesetting process from the printing process. Stereotyped plates last a long time, provide economies of scale, permit identical printings of the same edition, and permit printing by different printing companies.

The 1852 Edition

The plates to the stereotype edition printed in Nauvoo, Illinois, were lost during the Saints' 1846 exodus west.¹⁴ Franklin D. Richards arranged for new plates while presiding over the church in England. For almost thirty years, from 1842 to 1871, the LDS church printed its copies of the Book of Mormon in England and shipped them to the United States.¹⁵

The 1879 Edition

In the early 1870s the Deseret News Press in Salt Lake City began to assert itself as the primary source of printed material for the church.¹⁶ The 1852 stereotype plates were shipped to Salt Lake City. After a few years, however, the heavily used plates were unusable. Again, technology came to the rescue. England had developed electroplating to produce longer lasting plates. But, again, new plates had to be made from scratch. Elder Orson Pratt went to England to have the plates set again.

The church used this opportunity to change the page layout. As noted, Pratt divided the internal books of the Book of Mormon into shorter chapters, and divided the long narrative paragraphs into short, memorizable verses.

14. Stocks, 15.

15. In January 1853 Orson Pratt was on a mission to Washington, D.C. With the confirmed loss of the Nauvoo stereotype plates, Brigham Young instructed Pratt to get copies for the Utah Saints. After obtaining estimates for printing the Book of Mormon in New York City, he wrote to Young: "The printing and binding can be done in England and the books transported to this country and the duties paid on the same, as cheap, if not cheaper, than to have it done in this country."

16. Stocks, 8.

The 1920 Edition

Electroplates do not last forever. Forty years later the First Presidency stated: "So many imprints have been taken from the several sets of old plates that all of these have become defectively worn, and the preparation of a new set of electrotypes was deemed imperative."¹⁷ No new technology was involved in the 1920 edition, but new plates had to be made. The church again used this opportunity to alter the page layout. They placed the verses in double columns, making it look more like the King James Bible. A committee under Elder James E. Talmage was charged with correcting textual variants.

The 1981 Edition

Printing technology did not directly change the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon. The 1973 Bible Aids Project at Brigham Young University had created aids for the Bible and other LDS scriptures.

It soon became evident that computer assistance in the collection of the information, collating, sorting, and printing the organized data would be helpful . . . A complete tape file of the Standard Works . . . has been extremely helpful in speeding up entries, avoiding errors, and reducing the necessity of proof-reading.¹⁸

How did the committee, charged with producing biblical aids, take on the Book of Mormon? Church officials had instructed the Scripture Publication Committee to oversee the addition of a vision of Joseph F. Smith and a vision of Joseph Smith to the Pearl of Great Price, and turned to the BYU Bible Aids Project for the legwork. The BYU committee asked Elder Bruce R. McConkie if they should add footnotes to these revelations similar to those already used in the triple combination or use the new system that had been devised for the Bible. McConkie was adamant: "Don't use the old Pearl of Great Price cross-reference system. It drives me crazy!"

The old triple combination cross-reference system used lower-case letters that were not tied to a specific verse. To find the verse to which the cross-reference "v" corresponded, readers had to search through the whole chapter looking for the tiny super-scripted letter. As one who now uses trifocals, I can commiserate with Elder McConkie and others who found this an infuriating process.

With McConkie's encouragement, the committee prepared the two

17. Official Announcement, *Deseret News*, 25 Dec. 1920.

18. Committee Notes on Bible Aids Project, manuscript copy; copy in my possession.

new revelations for inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price under the new system that had been established for the Bible. After the work began, church leaders decided that the two visions would not be put in the Pearl of Great Price but would be placed in the Doctrine and Covenants instead. Approval was given to re-do the entire triple combination with the new cross-reference system.

Early in the project on Bible aids, the BYU faculty committee began to incorporate cross-references to Joseph Smith's Inspired Translation of the Bible. Although committee members can no longer recall the exact sequence, at some point they also began to include Joseph Smith's known revisions of the text of the Book of Mormon. In the course of identifying the textual variants, the committee reported the 1840 "pure" versus "white" variant.¹⁹

VIGNETTE 4. WHY NOT THE 1852, 1879, 1920, OR 1966 EDITION?

I know of no account of the revision process left by those people in charge of the 1852, 1879, and 1920 editions. Nevertheless, a paper trail exists, one that we can verify. We will summarize the textual variants listed by Jeffrey Holland²⁰ for selected verses from the 1830, 1837, 1840, 1852, 1879, and 1920 editions.

The 1852 Edition

Holland identifies four verses in the 1852 edition which are identical to the 1840 edition but which are not in the 1830 or 1837 edition:

1 Nephi 8:18, p. 50²¹:

And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come to me *and partake of the fruit*.

19. I am a professor in the BYU Computer Science Department with a background in natural language text processing. This background was one of the reasons that I investigated the topic of this essay. Considering the extensive use the Bible Aids Committee had made of computers, I had assumed that the following standard computer techniques for natural language text processing were responsible for the discovery of the "pure" versus "white" variant: (1) Put the printer's manuscript, the 1830, 1837, 1840, 1852, and 1920 editions onto computer readable tapes; (2) Write a program to find and print out all textual variants; and (3) Visually inspect the output, looking for significant variants. I was surprised to learn that these well-know techniques were not used; the different editions had not and have not yet been converted to machine readable form.

20. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "An Analysis of Selected Changes in Major Editions of the Book of Mormon—1830-1920," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, Aug. 1966.

21. Page numbers refer to pages in Holland's thesis.

Alma 20:4, p. 91:

Now Lamoni said unto him, Who told thee that *thy* brethren were in prison?

Alma 46:40, p. 99:

to remove the cause of diseases *to which men were subject* by the nature of the climate.

3 Nephi 21:16, p. 109:

and I will cut off witchcrafts out of the *land*, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers.

The 1879 Edition

Holland identifies six verses in the 1879 edition which are identical to the 1840 edition but which are not in the 1830, 1837, or 1852 edition:

1 Nephi 10:18, p. 52:

for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever; and the way is prepared for *all men* from the foundation of the world.

2 Nephi 7:4-5, p. 66:

He waketh mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath *opened* mine ear, and I was not rebellious.

Jacob 5:21, p. 72:

How comest thou hither to plant this tree, or this branch of the tree? for behold, it was the poorest spot in all the land of *the* vineyard.

Mosiah 5:4, p. 76:

And it is the faith which we have had on the things which our king *has* spoken unto us, *that has* brought us to this great knowledge.

Mosiah 26:23, p. 82:

and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth *until* the end, a place at my right hand.

Alma 56:5, p. 101:

it *sufficeth* me that I tell you that two thousand of these young men *have* taken their weapons of war.

He also identifies two verses which overturned the 1852 corrections based on the 1840 edition:

1 Nephi 8:18-19, p. 50:

And it came to pass that I saw them, but they would not come unto me [omitted *and partake of the fruit*].

3 Nephi 21:16, p. 109:

and I will cut off witchcrafts out of thy *hand*, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers.

The 1920 Edition

Holland identifies four verses in the 1920 edition which are identical to the 1840 edition but which are not in the 1830, 1837, 1852, or 1879 edition:

1 Nephi 18:18, p. 60:

yea, even they were near to be cast, *with sorrow*, into a watery grave.

1 Nephi 20:1, p. 61:

Hearken and hear this, O House of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, (*or out of the waters of baptism*), who swear by the name of the Lord.

Alma 11:19, p. 87:

Now an antion of gold is equal to three *shiblons*.

Ether 13:31, p. 118:

all the people upon the face of the land were shedding blood, and there was none to *restrain* them.

He also notes that the 1920 edition re-overturned the 1879 edition's overturning of the 1852 corrections based on the 1840 edition: 1 Nephi 8:18-19, p. 50, and 3 Nephi 21:16, p. 109.

Although only twelve years had passed since the RLDS church identified the "pure" versus "white" 1840 variant, the 1920 LDS committee did not make a marginal notation for this verse in its revision copy of the Book of Mormon.²²

Perhaps a perusal of three hymns from the 1927 LDS hymnal can re-

22. Part of the donation made by the James Talmage family to Brigham Young University, now housed in the Lee Library, was a 1911 edition of the Book of Mormon which had been used as a "manuscript" for changes to be made to the 1920 edition. On the inside front cover is written, "Committee Copy—Containing all changes adopted by the Book of Mormon Committee—April, 1920."

create certain cultural attitudes of the period.

O stop and tell me, *Red man* . . .
to *idle Indian* hearts
And quit their *savage* customs.²³

Great Spirit, listen to the *Red man's* wail
Not many moons shall pass away before
the *curse of darkness* from your skins shall flee²⁴

the *red* untutored Indian
seeketh here his *rude* delights.²⁵

This may not have been the time to restore the verse. But what about 1966?

On 5 August 1966 Jeffrey Holland finished his master's thesis at Brigham Young University on selected changes in the Book of Mormon text: "[T]his study has been limited to 'selected changes,' defined as major modifications in format and addition, deletion, or change of words within the text which could alter the meaning of the passage."²⁶ Although he examined 156 major²⁷ modifications, he made no mention of the "pure" versus "white" variant. Two factors may explain this omission.

1. Some members of the Quorum of the Twelve preached that a physical change would turn the skin of Indians from red to white. Six years before, Joseph Fielding Smith had published: "When the Lamanites fully repent and sincerely receive the gospel, the Lord has promised to remove the dark skin. . . . Perhaps there are some Lamanites today who are losing the dark pigment. Many of the members of the Church among the Cat-awba Indians of the south could readily pass as of the white race."²⁸

2. On 31 May 1966, two months before Holland's thesis, the *Arizona Republic* had run a four-part article²⁹ on BYU's policy of not recruiting blacks for its athletic teams. The 1960s were a time of national concern over blacks and civil rights; the church had been under considerable

23. 1927 LDS hymnal, no. 64, "O Stop and tell me, Red Man," vv. 1, 3, 4.

24. *Ibid.*, no. 77, "Great Spirit, Listen to the Red Man's Wail," vv. 1 and 9.

25. *Ibid.*, no. 118, "For the Strength of the Hills," v. 4.

26. Holland, 1.

27. Holland (121) identifies 97 changes in the 1837 edition, fifteen in the 1840 edition, fifteen in the 1852 edition, six in the 1879 edition, thirty-five in the 1920 edition, and six changes between the 1920 and 1966 editions.

28. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1960), 3:122-23.

29. See the articles by Dave Hicks, in the 29-31 May and 1 June editions.

pressure to explain its practice of denying black men the priesthood. The church's explanation—"We don't know why"³⁰—complicated BYU's position. Within days of the Arizona articles, BYU's president Ernest L. Wilkinson took BYU into a defensive mode. The situation escalated; Stanford and the University of Washington refused to play BYU; major disruptions occurred at Wyoming and Colorado State games. Confrontations declined with the appointment of Dallin Oaks as president of BYU in 1971. Under his leadership, the university made a concerted effort to stress black civil rights. BYU changed its unwritten athletic policy and actively recruited blacks for its athletic teams.

In 1974, when Stan Larson's BYU master's thesis³¹ re-investigated the topic of textual changes in the Book of Mormon, he spent considerable time discussing the "pure" versus "white" variant. Two years later he published an article in *Sunstone* in which this variant was one of the passages examined.³² Two years later worthy black males were given the priesthood. Three years after that the First Presidency replaced "white and delightful" with "pure and delightful."

VIGNETTE 5. WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE BOOK OF MORMON?

While this scripture has changed, people have not. As I have shared the above vignettes with friends, neighbors, and colleagues, I have repeatedly encountered those who quoted, in no uncertain terms, Book of Mormon scriptures that (1) righteous Lamanites had their skin changed to white (3 Ne. 2:15-16); (2) Jesus and Mary were white-skinned (1 Ne. 11:13; 3 Ne. 19:30); (3) gentiles who came to the Americas were white-skinned (1 Ne. 13:1); (4) white skin is physically and spiritually desirable (2 Ne. 5:21; Mormon 9:6); and (5) in the resurrection the whiteness of our skins will be an indication of our righteousness (Jacob 3:8). "Ignore the small changes and follow the broad themes of the Book of Mormon," they said. So I have.

As translator, Joseph Smith used the word "white," "whiter," and "whiteness" twenty-eight times in the Book of Mormon. I have arranged the twenty-eight references into six usages: (1) robes and garments, (2) fruit, (3) stones and hair, (4) Mary and Jesus, (5) gentiles, and (6) white Nephites.

30. See, for example, the First Presidency statement, dated 15 Dec. 1969, and published in the *Church News*, 10 Jan. 1970: "Negroes . . . were not yet to receive the priesthood for reasons which we believe are known to God, but which he has not made fully known to man."

31. Stan Larson, "A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon, Comparing the Original and the Printer's Manuscripts and the 1830, the 1836, and the 1840 Editions," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974.

32. Stan Larson "Early Book of Mormon Texts: Textual Changes to the Book of Mormon in 1837 and 1840," *Sunstone* 1 (Fall 1976): 44-55.

The first involves clothing: garments and robes.

- 1 Nephi 8:5 he was dressed in a *white robe*
 1 Nephi 12:10 *garments* are made *white* in his blood
 1 Nephi 12:11 *garments* were *white* even like unto the Lamb of God
 1 Nephi 12:11 These [*garments*] are made *white* in the blood of the Lamb.
 1 Nephi 14:19 dressed in a *white robe*.
 Alma 5:21 *garments* are washed *white*
 Alma 5:24 *garments* are cleansed and spotless, pure and *white*.
 Alma 5:27 *garments* have been cleansed and made *white* through the blood
 Alma 13:11 *garments* were washed *white* through the blood of the Lamb
 Alma 13:12 *garments* made *white*, being pure and spotless before God.
 Alma 34:36 *garments* should be made *white* through the blood of the Lamb.
 3 Nephi 11:8 clothed in a *white robe*.
 Ether 13:10 *garments* are *white* through the blood

These verses suggest that “white” garments are metaphors for purity and cleanliness. A physical cleansing agent removes stains, soils, dirt, disease, and impurities from clothing. Clothing washed in physical blood does not appear white. Just as the washing of clothing in the Blood of the Lamb is metaphorical, so the whiteness of clothing is a metaphor for cleanliness and purity.

The second usage involves fruit.

- 1 Nephi 8:11 *fruit* thereof was *white* to exceed all the *whiteness* that I had ever seen.
 1 Nephi 11:8 (*fruit*) the *whiteness* thereof did exceed the *whiteness* of the driven *snow*.
 Alma 32:42 *fruit* thereof which is most precious, which is *sweet* above all that is *sweet*, and which is *white* above all that is *white*, yea *pure* above all that is *pure*.

“White” fruits are metaphors for luminosity. Yellow peaches, red apples, green grapes, blue blueberries, orange oranges, black blackberries, and purple plums are desirable. A brilliant fruit that glows, dazzles, radiates, and shines is certainly an alluring symbol. But few people like pale, unripe, paper-colored, washed-out, leprous, ashen, or cadaverous-like fruit.

The third usage involves stones and hair.

Ether 3:1 *stones; and they were white and clear even as transparent glass.*

3 Nephi 12:36 *thou canst not make one hair black or white.*

Transparent glass is not white; it is clear. White glass is opaque.

The fourth usage involves two historical personages, Mary and Jesus.

1 Nephi 11:13 [*Mary*] *was exceedingly fair and white*

1 Nephi 11:15 [*Mary*] *was most beautiful and fair [not white]*

3 Nephi 19:25 *they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea ever there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof.*

3 Nephi 19:30 *and behold they were white, even as Jesus.*

I suggest that "whiteness" for Mary and Jesus refers to a countenance that is exquisite, radiant, awe-inspiring, and not to blue-eyed, blond-haired, white-skinned Aryans.

The fifth usage involves gentiles.

1 Nephi 13:15 [*Gentiles*] *were white and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.*

The "whiteness" of gentiles is also metaphorical. To see this, consider the question, who are the gentiles in the Book of Mormon? The prophet Mormon gives us an answer on the title page. As did the Jews, Mormon divides the world into two: Jews and gentiles. Gentiles are the non-Jews. Black Africans, brown Hispanics, yellow Vietnamese, black Melanesians, fair-skinned Scandinavians, or olive-complected Italians are not Jews. Lehi spoke of gentiles in 2 Nephi 1:6: "Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophecy according to the Spirit which is in me, that there shall *none* come unto this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord." Negro slaves, Vietnamese refugees, Irish potato famine people, Japanese sugar cane laborers, Chinese railroad workers, Haitian boat people, El Salvadorean sanctuary refugees have been brought to this land. And "none come unto this Land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord." In what way, then, are they, the gentiles of 1 Nephi 13:1, "white like unto my people before they were slain"? Black-skinned gentiles, brown-skinned gentiles, yellow-skinned gentiles, and white-skinned³³ gentiles are white like

33. The only white-skinned people are albinos. They can be found as descendants of any racial group. Caucasians may be pinkish, tanned, ruddy, or swarthy, but they are not white-skinned. When Caucasian explorers and slave-traders penetrated Africa, they were referred to as "red-skinned" by the inhabitants.

unto the Nephites in that they have been brought here by the hand of the Lord to become beautiful, pure, and righteous.

The sixth usage involves white Nephites.

2 Nephi 5:21 as they were *white*, and exceedingly fair and delightful, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a *skin of blackness* to come upon them

Jacob 3:8 I *fear* that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be *whiter* than yours, when ye shall be brought before the throne of God.

3 Nephi 2:15 and their curse was taken from them, and their *skin* became *white* like unto the Nephites.

3 Nephi 2:16 and their young men and their daughters became exceedingly *fair*, and they were numbered among the Nephites.

White-skinned Nephites and *black*-skinned Lamanites are metaphors for cultures, not for skin color. The church teaches that the descendants of the Lamanites inhabited the Americas when Columbus arrived. But Lamanites are not black-skinned; they are not even red-skinned. As the “skin of blackness” is a metaphor, so too is the white skin of the Nephites. Perhaps 3 Nephi 2:15-16, in which the Lamanites have the curse taken from them, fulfills 2 Nephi 30:6. In these verses the Lamanite has become “white and delightful” not “pure and delightful.”

I do not believe the Lord changed their physical skin to white in the twinkling of an eye. These Lamanites lived with city-dwelling Nephites and became cultural Nephites. The significance of 3 Nephi 2:16 is that the historian of 3 Nephi, raised in a culture preoccupied by racial differences, records that the Lamanites, who could be distinguished from the Nephites on physical grounds, were nevertheless numbered among the Nephites.

Let us look at two final instances of white in the Book of Mormon: Mormon 9:6 and 2 Nephi 26:33. These verses capture Joseph Smith’s cross-cultural translation of white:

Mormon 9:6 ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and *white*, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb,

It is Moroni in Mormon 9:6 who gives this fervent prayer as to what our condition may be on the day of resurrection: spotless, pure, fair. And white, not white skinned. Not Aryan. Not Caucasian. But cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb.

2 Nephi 26:33 He denieth none that cometh unto Him, *black* and *white*, bond and free, male and female.

This verse relates salvation to sets of opposites. Salvation transcends gender, social condition, and race. Christ's gospel is intended to overcome our narrow biases.

In the words of Spencer W. Kimball, former president of the LDS church, who approved all changes to the Book of Mormon text in 1981, who was known as the apostle to the Lamanites, and who extended the priesthood to black males,

From the dawn of history we have seen so-called superior races go down from the heights to the depths in a long parade of exits. . . Is the implication of Mrs. Anonymous justified that the white race or the American people is superior? John the Baptist, in forceful terms, rebuked a similar self-styled superior group: "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9).³⁴

Why this final vignette? Because words change. Meanings and significance change, and old meanings can hurt. Even when words describe the physical world, they may have associations that go beyond the literal. They may do evil even when used unconsciously or unintentionally.

34. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Evil of Intolerance," 6 Apr. 1954, *Improvement Era* 57 (1954): 423.