Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

Arrington Annual Lecture | Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lectures

12-16-2013

# Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History

Gregory A. Prince

Recommended Citation
Prince, Gregory A., "Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History" (2013). 19th annual Arrington Lecture.

This Lecture is brought to you for free and open access by the Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lectures at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arrington Annual Lecture by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

LEONARD J. ARRINGTON
MORMON HISTORY LECTURE SERIES
No. 19

# Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History

*by*

Gregory A. Prince

*Sponsored by*

Special Collections & Archives
Merrill-Cazier Library
Utah State University
Logan, Utah

9579_Arrington#19INT.indd 1 12/16/13 10:49 AM

Arrington Lecture Series
Board of Directors

F. Ross Peterson, Chair
Gary Anderson
Susan Madsen
Jonathan Bullen
Richard "Skip" Christenson
Bradford Cole
Wayne Dymock
Kenneth W. Godfrey
Sarah Barringer Gordon
Philip Barlow

Copyright © 2014 Gregory Prince

ISBN 978-0-87421-957-9 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-87421-958-6 (e-book)

Utah State University Press
*Logan*

# *Foreword*

F. Ross Peterson

The establishment of a lecture series honoring a library's special collections and a donor to that collection is unique. Utah State University's Merrill-Cazier Library houses the personal and historical collection of Leonard J. Arrington, a renowned scholar of the American West. As part of Arrington's gift to the university, he requested that the university's historical collection become the focus for an annual lecture on an aspect of Mormon history. Utah State agreed to the request and in 1995 inaugurated the annual Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture.

Utah State University's Special Collections and Archives is ideally suited as the host for the lecture series. The state's land grant university began collecting records very early, and in the 1960s became a major depository for Utah and Mormon records. Leonard and his wife Grace joined the USU faculty and family in 1946, and the Arringtons and their colleagues worked to collect original diaries, journals, letters, and photographs.

Although trained as an economist at the University of North Carolina, Arrington became a Mormon historian of international repute. Working with numerous colleagues, the Twin Falls, Idaho, native produced the classic *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* in 1958. Utilizing available collections at USU, Arrington embarked on a prolific publishing and editing career. He and his close ally, Dr. S. George Ellsworth, helped organize the Western History Association, and they created the *Western Historical Quarterly* as the scholarly voice of the WHA. While serving with Ellsworth as editor of the new journal, Arrington also helped both the Mormon History Association and the independent journal *Dialogue* get established.

One of Arrington's great talents was to encourage and inspire other scholars or writers. While he worked on biographies or institutional



9579_Arrington#19INT.indd 3 12/16/13 10:49 AM

histories, he employed many young scholars as researchers. He fostered many careers as well as arranged for the publication of numerous books and articles.

In 1972, Arrington accepted appointments as the official historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Lemuel Redd Chair of Western History at Brigham Young University. More and more Arrington focused on Mormon, rather than economic, historical topics. His own career flourished with the publication of *The Mormon Experience*, coauthored with Davis Bitton, and *American Moses: A Biography of Brigham Young*. He and his staff produced many research papers and position papers for the LDS Church as well. Nevertheless, tension developed over the historical process, and Arrington chose to move full time to BYU with his entire staff. The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of History was established, and Leonard continued to mentor new scholars as well as publish biographies. He also produced a very significant two-volume study, *The History of Idaho*.

After Grace Arrington passed away, Leonard married Harriet Horne of Salt Lake City. They made the decision to deposit the vast Arrington collection of research documents, letters, files, books, and journals at Utah State University. The Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives is part of the university's Special Collections. The Arrington Lecture Committee works with Special Collections to sponsor the annual lecture.

# *About the Author*

Gregory A. Prince received an associate degree at Dixie College (1967) and two graduate degrees at UCLA (DDS, 1973; PhD, Pathology, 1975) prior to moving to Maryland for a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health. His four-decade career in medical research focused on respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), the primary cause of infant pneumonia worldwide. He pioneered the prevention of RSV disease in high-risk infants through the use of genetically engineered antibodies, an approach that is now the standard of care in the form of Synagis®. He is CEO and cofounder of Virion Systems, Inc., a biotechnology corporation. His avocation as a consumer and then producer of Mormon history spans the same four decades. His overall record of publications includes over one hundred and fifty scientific papers; three United States patents; twenty articles, chapters and book reviews in the field of Mormon studies; and two books: *Power from On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (1995) and *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (2005). His current project is a biography of Leonard J. Arrington.

He and his wife of forty years, JaLynn Rasmussen, are the parents of three children. He and JaLynn cofounded the Madison House Autism Foundation, named after their youngest child, to address the lifelong needs of adults with autism.



9579_Arrington#19INT.indd 5 12/16/13 10:49 AM

9579_Arrington#19INT.indd 6 12/16/13 10:49 AM

# Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History

When Leonard gave the first of these lectures in 1995 he used the title, "Faith and Intellect as Partners in Mormon History." With full attribution to him, I have given my lecture a title differing from his by only one word: "Faith and *Doubt* as Partners in Mormon History." Faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin, the interplay between the two is essential to a complete religious life, and scholars are uniquely qualified to leverage the inherent value of doubt. When they succeed, their articles and books don't add bricks to existing paradigms; they change those paradigms, thereby becoming agents in Mormonism's foundational tenet: "continuing revelation."

Leonard grew up on a farm in Twin Falls, Idaho, isolated enough from the world that when he arrived in the Big City—Moscow, Idaho—to begin college at the University of Idaho, he encountered three total novelties: milkshakes, Coca Cola, and intellectual struggle. (I listed those in random order.)

His intellectual innocence was challenged during the first semester. The class was biology; the subject was biological evolution. Although the LDS Church did not—and still does not—have an official, doctrinal position on evolution, influential church authorities who sat at high levels were unrestrained in condemning it in the strongest terms, not bothering to nuance their statements as personal opinion rather than official policy. As a result, church members, particularly in rural regions, were often of the impression that evolution was not only incorrect, but evil. Leonard was of that impression.

Bombarded in his college classes by science that cast doubt on things he had been taught in church, he turned for help to George Tanner, director of the LDS Institute of Religion. Leonard recalled,

> He attempted to expose us to the very best religious scholarship and learning, and his superiors gave him complete freedom in determining the course of study and the most useful textbooks and readings . . . . Above all, he wanted us to realize that deep religious faith can be perfectly consistent with genuine academic scholarship. His policy was one of intellectual



9579_Arrington#19INT.indd 1 12/16/13 10:49 AM

> openness, one fully supported by Elder [Joseph] Merrill and, at that time, by Elder [John] Widtsoe and the First Presidency. George was a "liberal" and not afraid to declare it. "Liberals," he said, "are people who are not afraid to think independently, even though this thinking may lead in a little different direction from orthodox Mormon teaching."[1]

Decades later, Tanner recalled their first meeting:

> I said, "Now Leonard, you're not the first of our young men to come up here and get upset, and you certainly won't be the last to come. But I want to tell you just a little bit of the way I'm looking at this thing. There are a lot of classes here at the University in which evolution will appear . . . . There will be so many of the courses you take that evolution will simply be taken for granted, and for someone to completely try to dodge the question of evolution is just quite out of the question and can't be done . . . . This institution thinks that the courses being taught are good or they wouldn't put them in. So why don't you go ahead and study here . . . and when you're through with it, you'll be so much better prepared then to decide whether evolution is good than to pre-judge it . . . . If you don't want to believe it, that's up to you." . . .That was forty years ago, but I remember that conversation very vividly.[2]

The lesson took, and the following semester, in a paper for his freshman English class entitled "Two Arringtons," he wrote words that set him apart not only from his age peers, but also from the vast majority of his coreligionists both then and now:

> I am not the same Leonard Arrington I used to be. I can now make that statement with fairness both to my former self and to my present self. It would be well to compare these two selves at this stage of my college career—the Leonard Arrington that left his hopeful parents for college, and the Leonard Arrington that will go back home for the first time this June after almost a year of college influence and training . . . .
>
> The major change has come about through my acceptance of much of the teachings of science in preference to some of the doctrines of fundamentalists. I now accept the main outlines of the theories of evolution and behaviorism, both of which I formerly violently opposed.[3]

The decade of his life following undergraduate studies was divided between graduate school in North Carolina and World War II military service in North Africa and Italy. Both experiences reinforced a liberal worldview generally foreign to Great Basin Mormons. Writing to his

wife Grace from Italy in 1944 less than a year after their marriage, he restated his skepticism towards religious fundamentalism:

> A big mistake is always made when one attempts to interpret the Scriptures literally . . . The Scriptures are contradictory, and inconsistent and any theology based upon them cannot help but be inconsistent and illogical . . . . It comes back to the fact that people must use their reason as well as their faith. No faith is useful or lasting unless it is based upon the most mature thought of which an individual is capable . . . . Our faith must not be blind; it must be guided by Reason. That is why God endowed us with a mind as well as a will and a conscience.[4]

He valued the right to doubt, to the point of removing BYU from his list of universities with which to affiliate, noting to Grace:

> One of the reasons I want us to settle down in Boise is that I feel we will be so much freer to do and say as we wish, with no external compulsion. The atmosphere, weather and all would be better in Provo but I'm afraid the intellectual atmosphere there would be stifled by the dogmatists of the Church. If the Church disapproves of certain portions of a book, we wouldn't use it for a textbook, etc. We would be criticized for not being true LDS, not having faith, etc. In Boise, on the other hand, we are far enough removed from Salt Lake to be able to do and say as we please. Our living will not be controlled by the Church . . . . Thus we shall be perfectly free.[5]

Leonard and Grace wound up in Logan rather than Boise, within the Great Basin but distant from what he termed the "stifling intellectual atmosphere" of Provo. And he brought along his doubt.

## *Doubting Mormon History*

Leonard's record on doubt was mixed. Twice in his career he engaged doubt and, in the process, transformed paradigms and set new standards for Mormon historiography. And twice he took a pass, leaving the doubting—and the paradigm transforming—to others.

His two major forays into doubting the received history of Mormonism occurred early in his academic career, in both cases resulting in some of his most significant challenges to the *status quo*. The first was the reworking of his doctoral dissertation into a book, *Great Basin Kingdom*; the second, a reassessment of one of Joseph Smith's revelations, the Word of Wisdom.

Leonard recalled the genesis of *Great Basin Kingdom* in his diary:

> In July 1945, two months after the surrender of Germany, I was located at Milan and began to think about what would happen when I was finally discharged and could return to North Carolina to complete graduate work and write a dissertation. I find in my files the carbon of a letter I wrote at that time to Dr. John A. Widtsoe, former president of the Utah State University and the University of Utah, and then an apostle of the LDS Church, in which I asked him if he thought a dissertation on the economic institutions and activities of the Mormons would be practical. He replied, in a letter I still prize, that such a study would be desirable, that there was ample material, and that he was aware of the difficulty of gaining access to the materials in the Church Archives.[6]
>
> He suggested that I proceed very quietly, ask at first only for printed works, then for the Journal History of the Church, and, as I built their confidence in me as a reliable scholar, gradually move into the manuscript sources. He was sure, to use his image, that I could proceed as the Arabian camel that first stuck its nose in the tent, then its face, then its front, and, moving in gradually, eventually carried away the whole tent. As you can guess, this bashful Idaho farm boy did not react against engaging in such a campaign.[7]

Leonard cherished:

> The weeks I spent in the Church Archives, 1946–54, going through the manuscript minutes, letters, diaries, and other documents. Without them, we would be restricted to histories passed down by oral tradition and by official histories which were inevitably selective in nature. I saw Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and so many others—not as pastiche creations but as real persons, battling persecution, dissent, evil, misunderstanding, and wickedness. Putting their stories together into *Great Basin Kingdom* and subsequent books and papers helped me to understand what they were about and who they really were. I had a first-hand view of Mormon history.[8]

Reading primary sources was essential, but Leonard was not the first to have done so. What differentiated him from his predecessors, most notably Joseph Fielding Smith, was his ability to digest those sources, doubt earlier narrative histories, and synthesize a new history based on data instead of dogma. "I did not start my study with the assumption that church authorities were a bunch of rascals; neither did I start with the assumption that church authorities were angels. I hunted for all the

evidence I could to determine the facts, and then presented them."[9] While not *a priori* removing God from the picture entirely, he insisted that environmental factors be taken into account, thereby distancing himself from earlier apologists. He explained this approach in the introduction to *Great Basin Kingdom*:

> The true essence of God's revealed will, if such it be, cannot be apprehended without an understanding of the conditions surrounding the prophetic vision, and the symbolism and verbiage in which it is couched. Surely God does not reveal His will except to those prepared, by intellectual and social experience and by spiritual insight and imagination, to grasp and convey it. A naturalistic discussion of "the people and the times" and of the mind and experience of Latter-day prophets is therefore a perfectly valid aspect of religious history, and, indeed, makes more plausible the truths they attempted to convey. While the discussion of naturalistic causes of revelations does not preclude its claim to be revealed or inspired of God, in practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is objectively "revealed" from what is subjectively "contributed" by those receiving the revelation.[10]

Having stated his approach, Leonard plunged into the history of nineteenth century Mormonism, all the while keeping his eyes wide open to economic aspects of the history. "Mormon economic policies," he wrote, "could have sprung from nowhere but America—that fruitful, bubbling, inventive America of the 1830s. Each phase of the Mormon system was 'in the air.' A sister movement, communitarianism, drew inspiration from the same sources . . . . One is tempted to conclude that, while the Mormons boasted of being a 'peculiar people,' their economic program was definitely 'unpeculiar' in the America of its birth."[11]

It was one thing to assert that Mormonism's economic system was not exceptional; it was quite another to label sectors of it as having been outright failures—and failures that might have been averted had ecclesiastical leaders not insisted on micromanaging industries and technologies of which they had little or no knowledge. Sugar, iron and lead provide three graphic examples:

> The [sugar] factory was a failure. Over a seven-week period more than 22,000 bushels of beets were ground into molasses, but the production of sugar was "a complete failure." . . .While the First Presidency sought "the blessing of the Lord, that no failure of the kind will again thwart our wishes, and that we shall soon be able to furnish, from the beet, sugar

> sufficient for home consumption," they eventually became convinced . . . that the enterprise was not worth the effort required to establish it . . . . The direct loss to the church and the investors was about $100,000.[12]

The Iron Mission, established in Cedar City in the early 1850s, struggled for nearly a decade to produce iron from a mountain containing 200,000,000 tons of 52 percent iron ore. "Almost ten years of labor, and the direct expenditure of approximately $150,000, had resulted in nothing more than a few andirons, kitchen utensils, flat irons, wagon wheels, molasses rolls, and machine castings. Small, volunteer, cooperative industry was simply unable to cope with the problems associated with developing a major resource."[13]

The Las Vegas Lead Mission was no more successful. "Many impurities … caused much of the lead to burn up during the smelting, and washing was impractical since the nearest stream was twelve difficult miles away."[14] The mines were abandoned in 1857, with only sixty tons of ore having been mined. To add insult to injury, only four years later non-Mormons discovered a fabulously rich vein of silver nearby, thus founding the Potosi silver mines.

Of these and other failed economic ventures of the Church, Leonard gave a brutally candid analysis:

> [The failures were] due partly to the lack of private capital, and partly to the belief that all institutions in Mormondom ought to be under the influence of the Priesthood. While this assured a concentration of efforts in building the Kingdom, it also involved the danger of tying the hands of the "experts" who were engaged in the active management of these enterprises. Brigham Young and his appointed lay leaders were outstanding colonizers, and there can be no doubt that they were dedicated to the Kingdom, but the more the specialists depended on them for leadership, the more the specialized industries were apt to suffer from inexpert direction . . . . It is quite possible that the sugar, iron, and lead enterprises, and perhaps others, would have been more successful if knowledgeable private interests had been allowed a freer hand in the day-to-day direction, and a stronger voice in the making of basic decisions.[15]

Far removed from the apologetic histories that had hitherto prevailed, Leonard's made the case that Mormon exceptionalism derived less from God's favoring his chosen people, and more from gritty church members in the trenches who prevailed in the face of a harsh natural environment coupled with economic mismanagement by ecclesiastical leaders.

Doubting the received history of the movement had been the first step in formulating a new and enduring paradigm.

One colleague commented,

> This was a new approach, because Leonard asked new kinds of questions. They weren't really questions that dealt with whether the faith was true or not, nothing that he felt he had to support or sustain. It was always clear, from the beginning, that he was a good, active Mormon, but different kinds of questions. In looking at those questions, he'd look at the successes and failures, and the problems involved. Most people would look at the successes, but he'd look at the trials and errors. You see that all the way through his book.[16]

A colleague in the Community of Christ spoke similarly:

> I think that his book, *Great Basin Kingdom*, is the best book that has ever been written on Latter-day Saint history. It was . . . a new approach, in terms of economics interpreting historical religious functions, which was not done; you always had to have something else, the Spirit in there, as being the motivator. He was saying, "Well, part of the time it's economics."[17]

Reaction to the book from the LDS hierarchy was mixed: Hugh Brown of the Quorum of the Twelve and Levi Edgar Young of the First Council of Seventy wrote supportive letters, while others made no comment.[18] One colleague asked, "How did you get away with what you said in *Great Basin Kingdom*?" Leonard replied, "Well, I got away with it because none of the General Authorities ever read it."[19]

A second focus of Leonard's doubt was the Word of Wisdom. Noting that for decades after the revelation "there is considerable evidence that many Mormon leaders and members believed that the Word of Wisdom meant only a piece of good advice and nothing more,"[20] he placed it in the context of the American Temperance Movement by quoting from a little-noticed doctoral dissertation written in 1929:

> A survey of the situation existing in Kirtland when the revelation came forth is a sufficient explanation for it. The temperance wave had for some time been engulfing the West . . . . In 1826 Marcus Morton had founded the American Temperance Society . . . . An [1830] article from the Philadelphia *Journal of Health* . . . most strongly condemned the use of alcohol, tobacco, the eating intemperately of meats . . . . On October 6, 1830, the Kirtland Temperance Society was organized with two hundred

> thirty-nine members . . . . It is not improbable, though not known as certain, that these temperance workers had relatives among the Saints, even if they themselves were not Mormons. This society at Kirtland was a most active one.[21]

Perhaps more significantly, he coupled its gradual transition—from advice to commandment—to economic exigencies within the newly colonized Great Basin, not the least being the need to channel cash into the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. "The way to obtain cash for the emigration fund—was to use moral sanction against the importation and use of such 'wasteful' commodities as tea, coffee, tobacco, liquor, fashionable clothing, and elegant furniture."[22] In other words, "It was not so much a moral principle as a matter of sound economic policy."[23]

Although his views on the Word of Wisdom were clearly articulated in *Great Basin Kingdom*, they did not attract attention from the church hierarchy until a year later when, in the inaugural issue of *Brigham Young University Studies*, Leonard published an article entitled, "An Economic Interpretation of the 'Word of Wisdom.'" Elder Mark Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve, in particular, took great offense at the article, "saw to the suspension of that publication for a full year,"[24] and thereafter "always had questions about my loyalty and orthodoxy and judiciousness."[25] Nonetheless, Leonard's interpretation of the Word of Wisdom has been thoroughly vindicated by over a half-century of subsequent research.

## *Taking a Pass on Doubts*

Despite Leonard's audacity in writing *Great Basin Kingdom* and "An Economic Interpretation of the 'Word of Wisdom,'" there were other important aspects of Mormon history that he chose not to doubt, instead accepting conventional wisdom uncritically while letting others do the doubting. Two of the most important were the ban on ordination of blacks, and the historicity of *The Book of Mormon*.

Leonard's years of residence in North Carolina marked an abrupt change from the rural Idaho of his youth. "When I went to Chapel Hill in September 1939," he wrote, "I had to learn a whole new set of social behavior, one that my experiences had not prepared me for. I had to learn that . . . one never sat down to a meal with a colored. One never

sat in the back of a bus or a streetcar; that's where the coloreds sat."[26] However, his courtship and subsequent marriage to Grace Fort exposed him to the softer side of race. "I remember during the Christmas season of 1941, shortly after we started going together, that she took me with her out to see a former maid that she was fond of and took a basket of fruit to. They hugged and kissed, much as a mother might do her daughter. I was impressed with this personal warmth."[27] Of an evening of discussion with black intellectuals from North Carolina universities he wrote, "I never forgot this experience, which had a lasting influence on my views toward blacks. I had never been condescending toward them, but could never become so after this evening."[28]

His military service in Italy further expanded his awareness of race—including integrated showers on the Army base. He was particularly impressed with the color blindness of Brazilian troops that contrasted so markedly with the discrimination he saw within the ranks of the American Army: "Take 10 Brazilian soldiers. 3 will be black, 1 will be yellow, 2 will be brown, and 4 will be white, but brunette. They all live, sleep and eat together without any noticeable regard for color, race, creed or background."[29]

Upon moving to Utah after the war, Leonard saw first-hand the inferior status of blacks within the State. To a BYU professor he wrote:

> Your paper on the religious status of the Negro in Utah was one of the finest things I have ever heard a scholar do. That magnificent stroke probably did more to elevate your university in the eyes of members of the Academy than any single work of scholarship by your faculty members in recent years. It was scholarly, literary, and fearless. And as for the Church, such probity on the part of one who was reared in Mormon culture almost atones for all the injustices and wrongs which Mormons may have done to colored people in the name of religion.[30]

And yet, while he was aware of the ban on ordination and referred to it in 1957 as "one of the biggest stumbling blocks for some of the 'liberals' in the Church,"[31] he did not see himself either as a liberal on the issue or as one for whom it was a stumbling block. Prior to 1973, when he met Lester Bush and discussed Bush's manuscript that was subsequently published in *Dialogue*, he gave no suggestion that the ban was a policy—not a doctrine—and therefore mutable, and that it began with Brigham Young and not with Joseph Smith. And, he never questioned

the validity of the policy nor challenged the received history. After meeting with Bush in 1973, Leonard noted in his diary:

> I am impressed that Dr. Bush is sincere and devout and prayerful. Also that he sincerely believes that the prophets and Church leaders have occasionally made mistakes and feels that they did make a mistake in the case of the Negro doctrine. He says it is very clear to him as a result of his research that the Negro doctrine was not established by Joseph Smith but by Brigham Young, and that a study of our history will demonstrate that it is the product of a series of circumstances rather than the clear voice of the Lord to one of his prophets.[32]

Leonard met with Bush again the following day, noting in his diary,

> He reports that he has had an additional conversation with Brother [Boyd] Packer, yesterday afternoon with Brother [Joseph] Anderson, and this morning with Hartman Rector. It would appear that the purpose of these additional interviews was to attempt to sell him on the idea that there is absolutely no doubt among the Brethren on the "Negro Doctrine" of the Church, and that any research and writing on this subject is superfluous, wasteful, and potentially harmful. They do not see historical research on this question as making it easier for the Church to solve the "Negro Problem;" the doctrine is solved and settled . . . . There seems to be unanimity among all the brethren on this question and no desire to alter the Church policy and practice in this regard.[33]

Unlike Bush, however, Leonard did not question the policy. Instead, he defended the *status quo* whenever the question arose in a public setting—which it did on many occasions during the six years he was Church Historian prior to the 1978 revelation that reversed the ban:

> In talks to public groups, almost inevitably the question is asked "Why . . . ?" My reply in such public discussions has been pretty much as follows: For the believing Mormon it is sufficient to know that the Lord's servants—those empowered to interpret His will—have said the Lord has not sanctioned giving the Priesthood to blacks. As to why, we don't know, nor do the Lord's servants know. We accept it as one of the inexplicables like why the Lord permits suffering, or permits sinners to prosper.[34]

Although it gradually became clear that Bush's scholarship had been a significant factor in Spencer Kimball's quest to change the policy, Leonard never acknowledged that scholarship might even have played a role. While he rejoiced at the revelation and devoted an entire chapter of his

autobiography to it, he chose not even to mention Bush's *Dialogue* article. Bush's comment to me several years ago suggested that the heat of the kitchen, rather than an absence of intellectual curiosity, kept Leonard at a safe distance:

> I did ask Arrington [in 1973] why, for all their new professionalism, none of the heavyweight historians had undertaken a study of the Negro doctrine—so that amateurs like myself wouldn't have to try to work things out on our own. He said that my ongoing experience with the Authorities—meaning right then—provided the answer to the question.[35]

The second issue that Leonard chose not to doubt was the historicity of *The Book of Mormon*. While the issue had a much lower profile during his lifetime than it does now, it affected him much more deeply than the ban on ordination because it was an internal, rather than external, issue. Indeed, for many—perhaps most—Latter-day Saints then and now, the personal encounter with *The Book of Mormon* is foundational to one's religious life, and even the possibility of a paradigm shift can be existentially unsettling.

Leonard's graduate studies, by his own account, gave him the framework for accepting *The Book of Mormon* either as a literal or a metaphorical work:

> As I look back on my reading about religion, which was particularly important when I was at the University of North Carolina in 1939–41, and at North Carolina State College, 1941–1942, perhaps the key reading was in Santayana's *Reason in Religion*, which I had purchased at the University of Idaho in 1938–39, and which I had read in at that time, and continued to read or re-read in Chapel Hill and Raleigh. I was struck with the notion that religious truth may be symbolic, like poetry; that religious truth may be like myth, representing an epic which explains matters which are otherwise unexplainable. Santayana offered the possibility of a functional interpretation of truth. Not to be preoccupied with what happened in a historical sense, but to have an explanation which is true like poetry is true, like Shakespeare is true, like great fiction is truth. Moral truth, epic truth, universal truth. We have a Christian epic which is "true," beautiful, praiseworthy, important to believe and accept. In that same sense we have a Mormon epic, which is "true," beautiful, praiseworthy, important, and which we can in good conscience accept and believe.[36]

Nonetheless, when it came to *The Book of Mormon* Leonard was never able to let go completely of a literal model. The first serious challenge to that model occurred in 1978:

> This morning Davis Bitton brought me a copy of *Book of Mormon Difficulties* by B.H. Roberts . . . . None of us have heard of the existence of this document until the last few weeks. As far as we are aware, it is not in our vault and we've never heard it mentioned in the vault of the First Presidency or the Joseph Fielding Smith safe . . . .
>
> I have not had a chance to look through the publication, of course, but Davis has and he is impressed with two things: 1. B.H.'s absolute honesty in pursuing the difficult questions, with courage and determination. 2. That he came to grips with every aspect of it and did not hesitate in coming to conclusions warranted by the evidence despite what they might do to traditional beliefs. For example: he admits quite candidly that *The Book of Mormon* could have been the production of one mind.[37]

Written in the early 1920s by Roberts in response to a series of questions from a non-Mormon, it focused on three basic problems in accepting *The Book of Mormon* as a literal history of Ancient America. First, linguistics—that is, how did the indigenous languages of the New World evolve so rapidly beginning in 400 A.D., the time in *The Book of Mormon* when the people still spoke the Hebraic language that they brought from Jerusalem, and at the same time lose all traces of that language? Second, the pre-Columbian presence in the New World of domestic animals, iron and steel, silk, wheat and wheeled vehicles, none of which could be documented from archaeological evidence. And third, the origin of the Native American races. The problems were sufficiently daunting that although Roberts gave it his best shot, he admitted to his fellow General Authorities that he was stumped, and he asked for their assistance, which was not forthcoming. Privately, he acknowledged that he had begun to doubt the historicity of *The Book of Mormon*, in spite of having been perhaps its most forceful advocate in earlier years. Two months before his death, Roberts discussed with a former missionary his doubts:

> Roberts went to work and investigated it from every angle but could not answer it satisfactorily to him self . . . . He swings to a psychological explanation of *The Book of Mormon* and shows that the plates were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith, that his exceptional imagination qualified him psychologically for the experience which he had in presenting to the world *The Book of Mormon* and that the plates with the Urim and Thummim were not objective . . . . Instead of regarding it as the strongest evidence we have of Church Divinity, he regards it as the

> one which needs the most bolstering. His greatest claim for the divinity of the Prophet Joseph Smith lies in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.[38]

Leonard was troubled by the manuscript—and later lamented when it was published in book form—but rather than engage the questions himself, he heaved a huge sigh of relief when, only two months after he first saw the manuscript, BYU professor John Sorenson gave him a manuscript that he later published as *An Ancient American Setting for The Book of Mormon*. Leonard devoured the manuscript, took a pass on the many questions raised by the Roberts manuscript that were not addressed by it, and jubilantly wrote to his children:

> I have just had a tremendous intellectual experience and want to share it with you . . . . All of the intellectual problems I have had with *The Book of Mormon* have now been put to rest as the result of reading that book. My understanding of New World history and archeology is now perfectly reconciled to *The Book of Mormon* accounts.[39]

Although Leonard continued to plow around doubts about an ancient *Book of Mormon*, new scholarship challenged the Sorenson paradigm. Nine years after Sorenson's book was published, Leonard rejoiced that another scholar had, in his mind, saved the day by constructing a new paradigm that accommodated both ancient and modern aspects of the book:

> I found time over the weekend to read the very important article in the new *Dialogue* on *The Book of Mormon*. By Blake Ostler. Up to now the scholars have tended to view it either as a pious fraud written by Joseph Smith from information available in his environment, or as a legitimate ancient scripture. Ostler, in a sixty-page article offers a theory of *The Book of Mormon* as Joseph Smith's expansion of an ancient work by building on the work of ancient prophets to answer nagging problems of his day. The result is a modern worldview and theological understanding superimposed on *The Book of Mormon* text from the plates.
>
> It is an exciting new approach which allows one to believe in the gold plates, as I have done (the evidence is overwhelming that they existed), and in the evidences of ancientness in the text (there are lots of those), and at the same time have a suitable explanation of the modernisms (and there are certainly some of those). It also fits in with a view of revelation which the historian is almost forced to accept, which he calls the creative co-participation theory of revelation.

> It is, as I say, an important article, takes care of nearly all of the problems that have arisen, and helps believers like myself reconcile with scholarly problems.[40]

The Ostler paradigm was sufficient to carry Leonard through the remainder of his life, although if he had lived longer he would have seen that it has wilted in the face of increasingly sophisticated scientific studies, particularly DNA sequencing.

## *Doubt Going Forward*

At a time of deep sorrow and introspection just one month before his wife Grace died after a prolonged illness, Leonard reached deep into his soul and penned for his children his innermost thoughts about doubt:

> Having doubts, having fears, having reservations about counsel is not necessarily an opening wedge toward the loss of faith. Indeed, it might be the avenue to renewed faith, deeper faith, greater understanding. "No one truly believes who has not first served an apprenticeship of doubt." (Will Durrant) This being true, we should be more open and honest—with ourselves, with those we love and respect—about our intellectual and spiritual problems. There is a close relationship between integrity and openness to truth and compassion and love. The attempt to suppress problems and difficulties, the attempt to intimidate people who raise problems or express doubts or seek to reconcile difficult facts, is both ineffective and futile. It leads to suspicion, mistrust, the condescending slanting of data. The more we deny or appear to deny certain demonstrable "facts," the more we must ourselves harbor serious doubts and have something to hide. However, your optimistic, buoyant father believes it is important, after recognizing that doubts and problems should not be kept back, to not forget the sun for the sunspots. We must also reaffirm the good, that with which we have no problem. We must not be chronic complainers, or always raising questions. A good sense of appropriateness of time and place is important.[41]

And yet, Leonard chose his battles, confronting directly some of his own doubts, while bypassing others and hoping that someone else would do battle and produce scholarship that would circle back to benefit him, as happened with ordination of blacks, and *The Book of Mormon*. Perhaps the song we learned in Primary sums it up: "For some must push, and some must pull." Some are producers; some are consumers.

The question that Leonard's career poses to us in not *whether* to doubt, but *which* doubts to engage. The field of doubt is particularly "white already to harvest," due to the combination of rapidly escalating interest in Mormon studies, increasingly sharp scientific tools, and the disseminating power of the Internet. Serious questions concerning *The Book of Mormon*, Book of Abraham, polygamy and polyandry, Freemasonry and the temple ceremony, the First Vision, LGBT issues, women and priesthood—to name but a few—are turning out to be major causes of a faith crisis that, in the words of one General Authority, is greater than at any time since the Kirtland of 1837. Only doubting of the *status quo* will produce the level of scholarship needed to respond adequately to these questions in an Internet-driven world. At times, Leonard led the charge; at others, he cheered on those who chose to do battle. Retreat was not—and cannot be—acceptable. I conclude with his words, which may be as relevant today as they were in 1987 when he wrote them:

> Faith, we were taught, was consistent with thought, learning, and the use of the intellect. This is still primary in my belief and in the belief of my friends and associates, but I have seen a retraction from it among various younger educators who give greater emphasis to Scriptural literalism. "Listen to your heart, not your head; to your ecclesiastical superiors, not to your own mind; to Church publications rather than works of 'outside' scholarship." I regret this tendency.[42]

## *Endnotes*

1. Leonard J. Arrington, Farm Boy at the University of Idaho, 1935–39, 5.
2. George S. Tanner, interview by Rebecca Cornwall, June 15, 1976. In Leonard J. Arrington Diary of the same date.
3. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 22 April 1936, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
4. Leonard J. Arrington to Grace Arrington, 16 and 21 March 1944, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
5. Leonard J. Arrington to Grace Arrington, 1 April 1944, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
6. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 4 May 1988, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
7. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 8 March 1992, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
8. Leonard J. Arrington to Children, 29 November 1989, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
9. Leonard J. Arrington to A. R. Mortensen and Everett Cooley, Utah State Historical Society, 3 June 1959; Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series X Box 11 fd. 12.

10. Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), ix (hereafter GBK).
11. GBK, 35.
12. GBK, 119–20.
13. GBK, 127–9.
14. GBK, 127–8.
15. GBK, 129.
16. James Allen interview, 12 January 2006.
17. Alma Blair interview, 20 May 2009.
18. Leonard J. Arrington to Dr. S. Kent Christensen, April 6, 1964, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University; Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series X Box 75 Fd. 2.
19. Bert Wilson interview, August 12, 2009.
20. "An Economic Interpretation of the 'Word of Wisdom,'" Brigham Young University Studies 1(1):37–49, 1959.
21. Dean D. McBrien, "The Influence of the Frontier on Joseph Smith," Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1929,147–9.
22. GBK, 240.
23. GBK, 223.
24. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 13 January 1984, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
25. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 30 April 1978, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
26. Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series X, Box 5, fd. 13.
27. Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series X, Box 5, fd. 13.
28. Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series X, Box 5, fd. 13.
29. Leonard J. Arrington to Grace Arrington, 10 October 1944, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
30. Leonard J. Arrington to Gaylon Caldwell, 22 November 1954, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University; Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series IV, Box 16, fd. 5.
31. Leonard J. Arrington to Thomas O'Dea, 7 October 1957, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University; Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archive, Utah State University, Series V, Box 3, fd. 6.
32. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 31 May 1973, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
33. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 1 June 1973, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
34. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 9 June 1978, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
35. Lester Bush to Gregory Price, 25 October 2008, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
36. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 26 April 1981, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
37. Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 19 September 1978, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
38. Wesley P. Lloyd, Personal Journal, 7 August 1933. In: B. H. Roberts, Studies of *The Book of Mormon* (Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1985), 23–4.
39. Leonard J. Arrington to Children, 13 November 1978, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
40. Leonard J. Arrington to Children, 16 March 1987, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

41. "Thoughts About Religion, For the Family," Leonard J. Arrington Diary, 11 February 1982, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.
42. Leonard J. Arrington to Children, 21 October 1987, Leonard J. Arrington Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.