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# Tribute

*By John P. Mitton*

It is with pleasure that I share a few thoughts in connection with this compilation of my father's published essays. I join others in our family in congratulating him on a lifetime of achievements and acknowledge the significant contribution of our mother Ewan Harbrecht Mitton in supporting this research and scholarship.

During my formative years, Dad and I would often spend quality time together spinning the dial of his shortwave radio to listen for broadcasts emanating from distant stations around the globe. My mother and I eventually set up a licensed amateur radio (a.k.a. "ham radio") station in Dad's library, where we were able to make two-way communications with other amateur operators in faraway places. Pursuing this fascinating hobby caused me to spend considerable time in Dad's library, which by then had become a wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling repository for his book collection. I have vivid memories of the enthusiasm he would exude whenever a new book would find its way onto the shelves of our shared library and "radio shack," especially if his new find pertained to one of the four topics in this Interpreter Foundation compilation of essays.



**Figure 1.** *The Mitton library "radio shack," 1976.*

Having been literally surrounded by Dad's research, over time I began to develop an interest in it, and by the time I left for college I had read a number of books written by Hugh Nibley, Leonard Arrington, and others within Dad's circle of friends and acquaintances. Over the years and during my mission service in Japan, I pondered these things and came to appreciate the importance of what Dad had uncovered pertaining to the role of our Savior as both Redeemer and Judge, along with underappreciated aspects of the gospel Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Our family would often encourage Dad to write up his research so that others might also have their faith strengthened by this knowledge, as we had been richly blessed by it over the years. It wasn't until many decades later that I came to understand and appreciate why he was hesitant to do so.

In 2018, while searching through some family records, I came across a file folder that contained an essay that Dad had typed up in July 1969 on the "Crucifixion as a Witness of the Judgment."

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THE CRUCIFIXION AS A WITNESS OF THE JUDGMENT

An important and neglected facet of the Crucifixion is its function as a vivid reminder of the Final Judgment. A general recognition of this relationship could be helpful at this juncture, allowing the Lord's suffering to reawaken a sense of reality in regard to the Judgment, that it may be a constructive and vital influence in the maintenance of Christian morality.

Recently, in a significant comparative study, S. G. F. Brandon has traced the great antiquity and pervasiveness of the belief that man will undergo a judgment after death. In contrast with much of the past, he sees our own age as one of growing secularization with a declining consciousness of the Judgment, a trend that "has had serious consequences for the traditional moral law."<sup>1</sup> Since the consequences are very great, Christians, and indeed all men, may well ponder anew the scriptural evidence for the Judgment, considering whether men are being "liberated" or are discarding from their common heritage a realization of overpowering importance. No more forceful witness can be conceived than that of the Crucifixion--that central event which yet has the power to stir the souls of men.

In this connection, the Book of Mormon offers a portentous insight. There, the future Judgment is related in a remarkable manner to the Crucifixion of Christ and its purpose. The doctrine is effectively

Figure 2. First page of the original typewritten essay.

Along with this essay, I found the letter from Hugh Nibley dated three years earlier, which is reproduced within Dad's preface to this volume. In it, Hugh encouraged Dad to pursue this research, indicating that the aspect of a two-way judgment is "exciting" and that he hoped Dad would "stay hot on the trail of these things." But alas, alongside these materials I also found responses from the editors at both *Dialogue* and *BYU Studies* to

whom Dad had submitted this essay for consideration. Neither agreed to publish the work, *Dialogue* indicating that it was too doctrinal for their audience and *BYU Studies* dismissing it without comment. Although I was vaguely aware that Dad had tried to publish in the past, it wasn't until this discovery—a “resurrected book,” if you will—that I was able to appreciate what a blow it must have been for him to have put three years of effort into researching and typing this up, only to be rewarded with such cursory dismissals.

As soon as this manuscript appeared, I immediately got to work entering the text and extensive footnotes into an editable format, surprising Dad with the discovery the next day. We both felt that, for some reason, the Lord must have wanted these insights to remain in a dusty folder for the past half century. And as I reflect on the sequence of events, it is clear to me that the experiences Dad passed through of disappointment, further enlightenment, and service with the FARMS and Interpreter organizations were necessary preparation so as to expound upon these four topics in a manner that could not have been accomplished earlier in his life.

Although the common thread among these essays has to do with preparation for the Judgment, I would propose to add another one along the lines of Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf's oft-quoted phrase “Doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith.”<sup>1</sup> There are many times when Dad would be in the midst of researching aspects of Church history and the doctrines of Christ when he would uncover things that troubled him. To his credit, Dad's response to such encounters was to simply dig a little broader and deeper, seeking additional light and knowledge from above, all the while exercising faith that ultimately a satisfactory answer would become apparent. It is impressive to me how he dealt with these historical and doctrinal struggles while yet maintaining his testimony of the restored gospel, serving faithfully in Church callings, and rearing his children to be faithful followers of Christ. For he knew that our mortal attempts to make sense of God's purposes are necessarily limited, and that God will eventually make all things known to His children if we will patiently await divine answers to our questions. Through all of this, Dad learned that resolution

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1. “Come, Join with Us,” *Ensign*, November 2013, 21.

can often be found by simply viewing the matter at hand from a different pair of lenses.

Examples of otherwise troubling matters that are addressed within these four essays include the following:

Questions	Insights
<p>Why did Joseph Smith place a blanket or curtain between himself and his scribe? Was it there to deceive the scribe into thinking there were plates when there were none?</p>	<p>The curtain was a provisional veil with ritual significance; a continuation of angelic direction accompanying the Book of Mormon translation effort.</p>
<p>What was the purpose of gold plates, if much of the Book of Mormon text was revealed by the Urim and Thummim (stones)?</p>	<p>As a <i>resurrected book</i>, the plates and text are a type of Christ, and witness Christ's Resurrection in a special way.</p>
<p>Why did Joseph Smith engage in ritual treasure hunting and other "folk magic" practices during his youth?</p>	<p>The evil power was setting the stage for a ritual (or magical) contest such as other prophetic figures have encountered in the past. Joseph triumphs over this contest by bringing forth the Book of Mormon.</p>
<p>Didn't Joseph Smith simply copy elements of Freemasonry in his temple rituals?</p>	<p>This was yet another contest of rituals. The intensely Christian temple ritual revealed to Joseph stands the test of time and is in harmony with recently discovered information about ancient temples.</p>

I suppose that when all is said and done, no matter our individual vocations or areas of inquiry, such efforts eventually conform to the wisdom taught by Book of Mormon prophet Amulek, who testified that "this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors" (Alma 34:32). My three siblings will no doubt concur that our parents had this end in mind as they went about their lives. On occasion our mother would share with us knowledge she obtained from a near-death incident and other experiences

that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and how loved ones will warmly greet us once we have passed through this mortal life.

I hope you enjoy reading these essays as much as I have enjoyed being part of getting them organized and published. There is much to digest here, and my desire is that current and future generations of scholars will pick up the trail and continue with additional research and dissemination of these important insights.