

Book Review

Eugene England, ed., *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*

By Susan Easton Black

Review of Eugene England, ed., *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), vi + 201 pp., with index of names, \$10.95.

Originally published: *FARMS Review* 2, no. 1 (1990): 74–76.

THE BOOK OF MORMON has inspired and changed thousands of lives from 1830 to the present. Knowing the conversion impact of this holy scripture, President Ezra Taft Benson stated, “I challenge our Church writers, teachers, and leaders to tell us more Book of Mormon conversion stories that will strengthen our faith and prepare great missionaries.”<sup>1</sup> Brigham Young University English professor Eugene England accepted this challenge.

England contacted Deseret Book to ascertain their interest in publishing a volume on conversion stories. Receiving encouragement, he wrote to mission presidents, colleagues, friends, and associates asking for accounts of Book of Mormon conversion stories. The response was favorable and England received a variety of testimonies from a broad spectrum of people. These testimonies have been compiled in *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*.

England divided the testimonies into three categories: (1) a history of the Family-to-Family Book of Mormon Program; (2) conversion testimonies of those whose lives were changed by their contact with the Book of Mormon, and (3) reconversion testimonies of those whose faith was rekindled by their reading of the Book of Mormon.

The Family-to-Family category traces the history of sending “The Book of Mormon on a Mission” from its earliest individualist beginnings in 1969 to the present Churchwide, accelerated pace. England’s insights into this innovative Church program are enriched by his personal contacts with most of the program originators. Within this section are testimonies that were inserted into copies of the Book of Mormon and sent throughout the world. The variety of responses to the inserted testimonies illustrates gratitude as lives improve through prayerful study of the Book of Mormon.

The conversion category includes thirty-one testimonies from converts who witnessed a noticeable change in their lives as a result of the Book of Mormon. England purports in his introductory comments that these “testimonies span 160 years.” I counted only 147 years, but I am more concerned with the implication of

the statement that leads readers to expect a broad range of testimonies from all historical eras. Such is not the case. Only three contributors are not contemporary: Parley P. Pratt (1830), Margaret Schutt (1885), and Karl Ivar Sandberg (1932). Twenty-seven note that their experience with the Book of Mormon occurred between 1966 and 1977.

A careful reading of the conversion stories reveals a two-step conversion pattern. Typically, converts were first impressed with the wholesome decency and example of a missionary, a friend, or acquaintance of the convert. Second, converts read the Book of Mormon and were prompted or inspired to alter their lifestyles. Dustin H. Heuston illustrates this representative pattern. He first noted, “Chuck was Mormon and so intrigued me through his kindness, intelligence, and remarkable character that I was determined to learn about his church” (p. 107). After acquiring a Book of Mormon and reading a portion of its contents, Heuston observed: “More than half a year later we had only read one hundred twenty pages, but our lives had been changed forever” (p. 108).

The reconversion category includes thirteen testimonies of contemporary, lifetime members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each contributor continues to rediscover the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. For example, Robert A. Rees stated, “My experience with it over the years has been the same as with the other standard works: the more I read them, the more riches they yield” (p. 192).

*Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* is an important compilation of testimonies from a variety of contributors. However, the title lacks clarity in defining the book’s contents. This is especially true with respect to the words “Converted to Christ.” Although all the testimonies cited refer to the Book of Mormon, very few refer to being converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon. With the exception of Moroni 10:4, there appears little evidence of specific passages from this scripture influencing the convert.

On the whole, England’s editing of the volume was both professional and helpful. I did note a few deficiencies, however. The inclusion of an explanation regarding place names listed next to each contributor would have been useful. Only after careful reading of the testimony does the place mentioned take on meaning. Most of the places listed describe the location in which the contributor first heard of the Book of Mormon, not the primary residence of the witness. However, this is not consistent. England’s strategic use of place names may cause the reader to assume that the compilation is representative of a worldwide Church. This is not the case, however, as the majority of the contributors are currently residing in the Provo/Salt Lake City area.

The inclusion of a brief biographical sketch highlighting commitment to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the part of each contributor would help the reader better understand and respond to the expressed testimony. Likewise, a careful index including all of the individuals mentioned would enhance this text. For example, the names of Roman Andrus and his wife Irva, Elder Claypool, Elder McMurtury, and Kurt Vonnegut do not appear in the index. An expanded index that included thematic information other than names would have been appreciated by

many readers. The most noticeable editing weakness is the lack of a conclusion. A summary note combining the continued impact of the Family-to-Family Program, conversion stories, and reconversion stories of the Book of Mormon would have strengthened the book.

Despite these weaknesses, *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* provides a contribution of lay member witnesses that has not previously been gathered. England has made a commendable effort to gather and compile testimonies. His book is a significant initial response to President Benson's challenge.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* 18 (November 1988): 5.

© 2010 Eugene England Foundation. All rights reserved.

How to cite this essay: Susan Easton Black, Review of Eugene England, ed., *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*, *FARMS Review* 2, no. 1 (1990): 74–76.

The Eugene England Foundation expects website users to follow carefully the Fair Use of Copyrighted Materials guidelines. Please contact [www.eugeneengland.org](http://www.eugeneengland.org) website administrators for questions or support, to submit or view thoughtful and responsible comments, and to donate to the nonprofit Eugene England Foundation.