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The term *religion* appears only five times in the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon offers a unique window to show the development of religion.

## *Two Case Studies on the Development of the Concept of Religion: The New Testament and the Book of Mormon*

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A system focused on faith in and worship of a divine being, coupled with ritual or devotional acts, composes what is usually referred to as *religion*. While many Christians in the world would readily identify their beliefs and practices as a manifestation of religion, it would surprise most that the concept of religion is never overtly mentioned in the King James Version of the Old Testament, and the term appears only five times in the New Testament. How did Christians of previous dispensations define and refine their system of worship and contrast it with the systems of competing ideologies? Did local understanding of religion adapt to local circumstances and have an evolutionary track? The Book of Mormon offers a unique window into the development of the notion of religion in partial answer to both of these questions. The present study traces the development of the concept of “religion” through linguistic and historical lenses relevant to Christians in the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, exploring at times the parallels as well as innovative turns. As will be shown, religion was a highly volatile concept in the ancient world, one susceptible to change and modification as a simple descriptor and not always a stipulating prescriber.

## Defining Religion

When ample linguistic data exist, etymological investigations usually produce fruitful insights into word meaning and development. With *religion*, however, we are instead confronted with a myriad of complexities. Social scientists, religious specialists, and philosophers alike have struggled to adequately define *religion* in any particular time period in world history. In fact, for many scholars today, the term *religion* is an academic construct “created to facilitate a conversation regarding what we intend to study from our several different perspectives and out of our many approaches or methods.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the English term bristles with historical depth, spanning numerous Western languages and cultures, many of which have contributed to its semantic development. More recent debates have played an even more crucial role in honing the meaning and concept of religion in Western societies,<sup>2</sup> such as justification<sup>3</sup> issues during the Reformation and the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

By AD 1200 the meaning “a state of life bound by monastic vows” is attested. The first plural (i.e., “religions”) reference appears 200 years later in English.<sup>5</sup> When we step back before the advent of Middle English and into Anglo-Saxon or even Roman times, however, we find a more polyvalent notion, one not solely dictated by cultural mores but fashioned and manipulated by root semantics. By the fifth century AD, etymological ambiguities in the Latin *religio* (religion) led to increased theological divisions and interpretations.

Religion is an expansive notion, and a pliable one. The supple nature of religion, especially across cultures, makes *a priori* assumptions of what it is or is not is a dangerous exercise.<sup>6</sup> Are there *essential* constituent elements of religion? Faith, belief, myth, ritual, routine behaviors, piety, ethical behavior?<sup>7</sup> The eminent sociologist Émile Durkheim defined *religion* as “a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart or forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, Durkheim proposed a functionalist theory of religion; that is, one centered on what religions *do*. Similar to Durkheim’s functionalist view, to the Latter-day Saint, religion constitutes a relationship to the Divine that is actively expressed through outward behaviors and benevolent works (see James 1:27; 2:17).

## Θρησκεία and Religion

The English term *religion* answers to the Greek θρησκεία (*thrēskeia*). Early appearances of *thrēskeia* can be found in Herodotus in the fifth century BC.<sup>9</sup> Here Herodotus uses the verb *thrēskeuō* to mean “‘religious conduct or practice’ in general, with particular emphasis on the zealotry of such practice,”<sup>10</sup> or “to perform religious observances.”<sup>11</sup> However, *thrēskeia* did not then carry all of the same semantics it developed later during the first century AD. Indeed, as Benveniste has noted, *thrēskeia* did not come to mean an “ensemble de croyances et de pratiques” (an assemblage of beliefs and practices) until the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>12</sup>

## Θρησκεία in the New Testament

In New Testament times, the notion of *thrēskeia* rested squarely upon outward ordinances and ritual acts. Thayer’s Greek lexicon<sup>13</sup> defines *thrēskeia* as “apparently primarily *fear of the gods*” and “*religious worship, esp. external, that which exists in ceremonies.*” Vine defines the adjective *threskos* as “religious, careful of externals of divine service.”<sup>14</sup> While *thrēskeia* appears in the works of Herodotus connoting “religious worship” or “religion,”<sup>15</sup> its use in later papyri suggests a meaning of “ritual” or “worship,” with a stronger focus on “reverence” for the gods.<sup>16</sup>

Uses of *thrēskeia* were positive and signified “religious zeal,” “worship of God,” or “religion,” such as Josephus’s use of it in *Antiquities* 1.13.1: “They (Syrians) feared their wives, all of who, with a few exceptions, had gone over to the Jewish religion.”<sup>17</sup> The term employed by Josephus for *religion* here, *thrēskeia*, really signifies “cult,” suggesting that the women were attracted to the *rituals* of the synagogue.<sup>18</sup> In addition, *thrēskeia* can also have a negative usage, such as in Colossians 2:18, when Paul warns against the “worshipping of angels” (θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων, *thrēskeia tōn angelōn*). Here *thrēskeia* more properly means “religious excess” or “wrong worship.”<sup>19</sup> (There are, however, grammatical considerations that could alter this interpretation.<sup>20</sup>) Thus, *thrēskeia* was not uniquely applied to orthodox notions of religion, but rather to various forms of worship.<sup>21</sup>

The term *religion* does not appear in the King James Version (hereafter KJV) of the Old Testament. *Thrēskeia*, however, does occur in the apocrypha of the Septuagint in the book of Wisdom of Solomon (14:27) and in 4 Maccabees 5:7 and 13. In the Wisdom of Solomon the RSV translates it as “worship”: “For the worshipping (θρησκεία) of idols not to be named is the

beginning, the cause, and the end of all evil” (ἡ γὰρ τῶν ἀνωγύμων εἰδώλων θρησκεία παντὸς ἀρχῆ κακοῦ καὶ αἰτία καὶ πέρας ἐστίν). In 4 Maccabees 5:7 the tyrant Antiochus applies the term *thrēskeia* to the “religion of the Jews” (τῆ Ἰουδαίων . . . θρησκεία) and again indirectly in verse 13.<sup>22</sup>

The term *religion* appears only five times in the KJV of the New Testament (Acts 26:5; Galatians 1:13, 14; James 1:26, 27).<sup>23</sup> In two of the five cases, *θρησκεία* (*thrēskeia*) is translated as “religion” (Acts 26:5 and James 1:27). In addition, the adjective *religious* occurs twice: once in a translation of the Greek word *σεβῶ* (*sebō*) in Acts 13:43, and once for the Greek *θρησκός* (*thrēskos*) in James 1:26. A more detailed examination of these instances, including the occurrence in Colossians 2:18 previously discussed, sheds light—albeit precious little of it—upon the question of how religion was defined in New Testament times.

When Paul was standing before Agrippa answering the accusations leveled against him by the Jews, he recounted how he once lived according to the strict customs and religious practices of the Jews. In Acts 26:5 in the KJV, Paul, speaking of the Jews, states, “Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” The term *religion* in Greek is *θρησκείας* (*thrēskeias*), here applied to the rites and forms of worship of the Jews at the time, indicating in Paul’s day the term was not exclusive to Christianity in the minds of early Christians. This appropriately follows Old Testament-era usage in which *thrēskeia* refers to the Jewish worship in Maccabees 5:6, 13 but also to pagan worship in Wisdom of Solomon 14:18, 27.

In Galatians 1:13–14, however, Paul uses a different word, Ἰουδαϊσμῶ (*Ioudaismō*), to refer to the religious practices of the Jews: “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion [Ἰουδαϊσμῶ], how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews’ religion [Ἰουδαϊσμῶ] above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” Paul uses *Ioudaismō*, not *thrēskeia*, to denote the ritual observances and lifestyle of the Jews.<sup>24</sup>

The final two occurrences of *religion* in the KJV of the New Testament are found in James 1:26–27: “If any man among you seem to be religious [θρησκός, *thrēskos*], and brideth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion [θρησκεία, *thrēskeia*] is vain. Pure religion [θρησκεία καθάρη, *thrēskeia kathara*] and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Verse 26 is the only case in which the adjective *religious* (*thrēskos*)

is used in the Bible. Here, though, James is speaking against those who feign “religious” character through lip service and “bridleth not” their tongues. He then reminds the self-deemed pious that “pure religion” (*thrēskeia kathara*) is to be found in *doing*, not in verbal platitudes. Thus, it is through Christlike behavior that we fully express our religious devotion; to do otherwise would, in James’s words, render one’s religion μάταιος (*mátaios*, ‘worthless’). Finally, James adds that a true pious believer should remain “unspotted” (*áspilios*, lit. ‘not-stained’) before God, concordant with religion itself being “undefiled” (*amiantos*) before God. For James, then, *thrēskos* is an action-oriented term representing proper Christian behavior. According to James, religion is not just a set of beliefs but also an *expression* of one’s “religiosity.”<sup>25</sup>

The New Testament occurrences of *thrēskeia* suggest a focus on ritual activities and those related to good works or service.<sup>26</sup> James’s use of the term provides perhaps the clearest insight into just what *religion*<sup>27</sup> could mean to first-century Christians, while Paul’s usage assures us that Christianity did not hold a monopoly on the application of the term.

### Religio in the Roman World

As noted above, the English term *religion* has a complex history, and there is little agreement on its true etymological origins. Remarkably, almost none of the languages of the world have a word with similar semantics to *religion* and its Latinate antecedents. The enigmatic development of the term leaves several questions unsatisfactorily answered. First, what is the correct derivation of *religio*, the term from which the English word *religion* is derived? Also, at what point in history does the Latin *religio* come to represent our present-day definition of religion? Finally, what is the relationship between *religio* and *superstitio* (superstition) in the Roman and early Christian world?

The most common propositions for the origin of the term *religion* are that it is derived from either the Latin *legere* (gather, collect,<sup>28</sup> pick out), or stemming from *ligare* (bind, tie, fasten). Cicero (106–43 BC) was the first to attempt a full explanation of the etymology for *religio* in his work *De natura deorum* (II, 28, 72).<sup>29</sup> Cicero connected *religio* to the Latin *relegere* (reread, retrace, or consider again).<sup>30</sup> He also gave other descriptions of its meaning being related to *elegere* (select): *leger* (picking out), *diligere* (care for), and *intellegere* (understand). Cicero interpreted this etymology to suggest the need to repetitively “go through the proper motions”<sup>31</sup> (e.g., read scriptures carefully and reread them again and again as a prerequisite to being

a member). Furthermore, in Cicero's view, we choose God by "re-choosing" (*re-legere*) him continually.

While Cicero's etymology had many supporters, it had many more detractors. The apologist Lactantius derided Cicero's naïve understanding of *religio*, offering a different explanation for its origin. Lactantius, in an interpretation supported by Sulpicius Rufus and Tertullian, linked *religio* to the Latin *religare*, 'to bind back.'<sup>32</sup> For Lactantius, *religio* represents "the bond of piety by which we are joined and 'linked back' to God" (*DI* 4.28.3).<sup>33</sup> While this subtle shift in root vowel and meaning could be seen as of minor significance, Kumar argues that the implication of this new interpretation was profound: "With Lactantius's view of *religio*, we have a glimpse of how religion was emerging as a universal category with a 'normative paradigm' for distinguishing true and false religion."<sup>34</sup> This moved the very notion of *religion* toward "an acultural and transcendent category," not merely a cultural or traditional construct.<sup>35</sup>

The appeal of Lactantius's idea soon spread, and important figures such as Lucretius and later Augustine agreed with this interpretation. Augustine fully embraced the notion of our being "bound" to God as the essence of the term *religion*. As Smith notes, "Augustine . . . is the last writer before the Renaissance to evince a significant interest in the concept. He took up one of the senses in which the term had come to be used, and that a highly important one. On it he wrote a book. This is the first time that a Christian writer had undertaken to explicate a notion of *religio*, rather than using the term somewhat incidentally."<sup>36</sup>

For Augustine, religion was more than just overt practices and observances; it was instead "a vivid and personal confrontation with the splendour and love of God."<sup>37</sup> Augustine also recognized the utility and possible pitfalls in calling up *religio* as a translation of the Greek *thrēskeia*. His personal reflections on this translation issue are revealing:

The word "religion" might seem to signify more specifically not any worship of God; and our translators have therefore used this word to render the Greek term *theskeia*. In ordinary Latin speech, however—and not only of the ignorant, but even of the most learned also—we say that *religio* is to be observed in human relationships, affinities and friendships of every kind. The term therefore does not escape ambiguity when used in discussing the worship of the deity; for we cannot strictly speaking say that *religio* means nothing other than the worship of God, since we should then be unjustifiably disregarding the sense in which the word applies to the observance of duties in human relationships.<sup>38</sup>

When Augustine speaks of "our translators," he is likely referring primarily to Jerome, the most linguistically gifted biblical translator of his age. Jerome, Augustine's contemporary and often ideological combatant, is credited with first including the term *religio*, however sparingly, in a Bible version: the Latin Vulgate. In eight cases Jerome used *religio* or a cognate form of it in his elegant translation (see Acts 2:5, 10:2, 13:50, 26:5; Colossians 2:18; James 1:26–27). Jerome usually (but not always) used *religio* to translate all three Greek words KJV translators rendered as "religion" or "religious," but primarily for *thrēskeia*.<sup>39</sup> More than perhaps any other early Christian writer save Augustine, Jerome helped to seal the importance of *religio* into Western Christian tradition with the inclusion of these mere eight words in his translation.<sup>40</sup>

Before Jerome or even the time of Christ, *religio* had enjoyed a long history of shifting use in the Roman world. "*Religio*, indeed," states Saler, "was at least as multivocal among the later Romans as *religion* is among us."<sup>41</sup> While in the pre-Roman Latin language *religio* expressed solely the notion of a divine, higher power,<sup>42</sup> the term evolved over millennia to come to represent what we today define as *religion*. It was its adoption by Christianity that further expanded its range of meanings, while simultaneously shrouding it ever more in semantic intricacies.<sup>43</sup> The development of *religio* from a term employed by Christians for other Greco-Roman practices to one pregnant with Christian-specific nuances shows the remarkable semantic extensions it underwent, not at all unlike the journey of the Greek *thrēskeia*.<sup>44</sup> An even later innovation for *religio* was its application to the organization of the Church itself.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the term *religion* is not finished evolving in meanings and uses even today.

### **Religio vs. Superstitio**

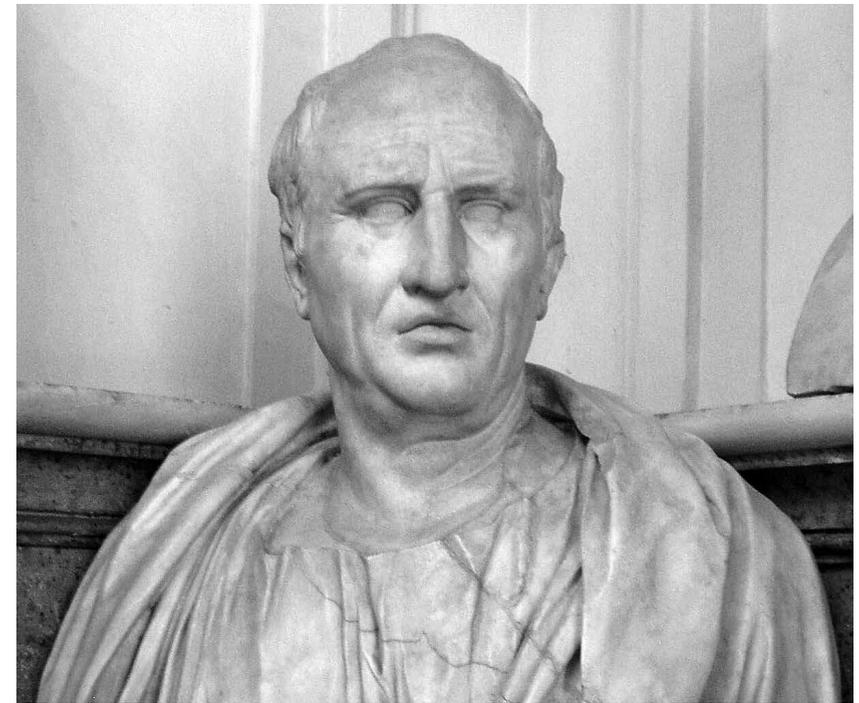
While Cicero espoused devoted, repetitive acts towards God (*relegere*), he made a calculated distinction between *religio* and the broadly defined, competing ideology of *superstitio*. Essentially Cicero viewed *superstitio* as any mystic tradition or practice other than *religio*. In fact, for Cicero, they were diametrically opposed.<sup>46</sup> Benveniste concurs, stating that the "contemptible religious beliefs" that were *superstitio* at the time stood "in opposition" (*il s'oppose*) to *religio*.<sup>47</sup> In the early empire, however, Boyarin sees *superstitio* as "not so much the opposite of *religio* as a type of *religio*, simply a dangerous and illegitimate excess of *religio* itself."<sup>48</sup> This was Cicero's position: *superstitio* was "too much *religio*" or "misdirected *religio*."<sup>49</sup>

It was only later in the Christian era that *religio* became associated with the notion of a belief in orthodox truth.<sup>50</sup> Sachot similarly finds that it is “*Dans la bouche de chrétien religio renvoie désormais non plus seulement à pratiques et à des institutions individuelles, familiales ou civiles, mais aussi et avant tout à un rapport absolu a la vérité*” (‘In the Christian mouth *religio* now refers not only to practices and institutions, be they individual, family, or civil, but also and above all an absolute relation to the truth’).<sup>51</sup> In Lactantius’s own words, “*Religio* is worship of the true god, *superstitio* of a false”: one true system, while all others are false. Traditional Roman culture did not make such distinctions of ritual practices or belief systems being “true” or “false”; rather they debated the different types of human relationships with the gods.<sup>52</sup> Lactantius’s definition of religion as being “linked back” to God informs this new dichotomy.

Augustine came to view the concept of “true religion” as one “by which the soul binds itself again to the one and only God and reconciles itself to him from whom it had torn itself away, as it were, by sin.”<sup>53</sup> Augustine’s evolving understanding of *religion* towards *one true* set of beliefs and practices is apparent in the adjectives he begins to use with *religio*: *uera* (true), *catholica* (orthodox),<sup>54</sup> *orthodoxa* (orthodox), *perfecta* (perfect), and *sacrosancta* (sacrosanct).<sup>55</sup>

In the Roman world, the distinct qualities of *religio* and *superstitio* that Cicero labored to establish began to shift in Vespasian’s day—and indeed to collapse, as Vespasian’s ascendancy came to be viewed in terms of *superstitio* and not *religio*. Vespasian’s narrative of ascendancy incorporated aspects of *superstitio* such as believing an emperor could perform magic and in omens that prognosticated his success—a departure from the more “religious” discourse found in Cicero’s Republic.<sup>56</sup> However, the impact of the distinction from Lactantius’s time helped to redefine both ideas in the short term and influenced their semantic evolution over time.

Thus, in the early Christian era, the concept of *religio* underwent significant modification from its pre-Roman antecedent. What emerged by the sixth century AD was a notion of religion that emphasized our bound nature to God and ordinances and practices that were an outward demonstration of that relationship. Religion (*religio*) was, as *thrēskeia* had also become, an expression of our commitment to God through proper acts of piety and orthodox rituals and beliefs.



Bust of Cicero, Musei Capitolini, Rome.

### **Religion in the Book of Mormon**

The development of the concept of religion among the peoples of the Book of Mormon shows both parallels to its development in biblical thought and interpretation as well as moments of great innovation. An effort to track the development of religion in the Book of Mormon faces many of the same obstacles one encounters in a similar quest in the Old Testament or New Testament. As noted earlier, no term *religion* appears in the KJV of the Old Testament, and only five cases are found in the New Testament, severely hampering a meaningful examination of concept. Some scholars have even suggested that *religion* is inappropriately applied to ancient Israel or to the earliest Christianity because of the rarity of such terms in the Old Testament and New Testament.<sup>57</sup> Saxbee goes so far as to aver that “the concept of religion does not sit comfortably with biblical thought.”<sup>58</sup>

Early sections of the Book of Mormon may not be so different. In the first five centuries in the New World, no mention of the term *religion* appears in the text, suggesting an alternate emphasis or identity marker for those who

were believers and followers of the prophets at the time. Yet, considering the first five centuries are recorded on the small plates of Nephi, this is somewhat surprising because of the spiritual focus of those plates.

Some thirty years after leaving Jerusalem, Nephi began recording both the spiritual and civil history of his people. The Lord commanded that the large plates of Nephi be used to write “an account of the reign of the kings, and the wars and contentions” (1 Nephi 9:4). The small plates, on the other hand, were reserved more for spiritual matters, “for the more part of the ministry” (1 Nephi 9:4), and for things which were “pleasing unto God” (2 Nephi 5:32). Jacob further states that he would add to the small plates only that “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying” (Jacob 1:4). From 1 Nephi to Omni, prophets and scribes recorded principally the spiritual history of the people, yet the term *religion* never appears. Was the notion of religion not in place in Nephite society during this time? How did the Nephites refer to their spiritual system? Was the notion of “church” an equivalent or a predecessor to “religion”?

We may infer from this lacuna in the first part of the text that religion was an evolving concept, one that was based on aspects of the revealed gospel and its accompanying practices. Without any doubt Lehi and Nephi would have had the terms available to discuss their belief system, even if that did not include the term *religion*. Indeed, it is important to state that not all cultures have a word for *religion*.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it is not necessarily surprising that the term does not appear in the text of the Book of Mormon until the days of Moroni<sub>1</sub>. I suggest that the notion of religion did in fact develop over time as the structure of their God-led society adapted to emerging political realities, ever increasing populations, and a new emphasis on individual rights and liberties. Perhaps a more direct causality can be assigned: it cannot be a mere coincidence that the appearance of the term *religion* comes on the heels of the organization of the first “churches” in the land (Mosiah 25:19).

### **Church and Religion**

While “church” is mentioned numerous times in 1 and 2 Nephi, most mentions refer to the “great and abominable church,” the church in Jerusalem, or future mentions of churches in the world. None denotes an organization of believers calling themselves a “church”; that does not appear in the Book of Mormon until the days of King Noah, a leader steeped in wickedness and debauchery.

In about 146 BC, Alma<sub>1</sub>, a former priest of Noah, fled before Noah’s priests, repented, and began to teach the doctrines Abinadi taught before his death and the doctrines of other prophets (see Mosiah 18:19). Alma<sub>1</sub> baptized 204 individuals, who made up the official members of the first church since the arrival of Lehi<sub>1</sub>’s original group: “And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward” (Mosiah 18:17). Note that baptism is the gateway to “belong to the church of God.” In other words, conversion and acceptance of ordinances now precede membership in the organization of the Church: “And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church” (Mosiah 18:17). Similarly, in New Testament times the fact that one could convert to Christianity helped to form it into an institution, not just a set of ritual practices, “an institution that we might name ‘the Church.’”<sup>60</sup> Thus, whereas in Jacob’s day a Nephite was identified simply as anyone “friendly to Nephi” (see Jacob 1:14), by this time expressions of true belief and prescribed outward ordinances were required for inclusion among the Nephites. The establishment of the church was in part a response to the redefinition of just what a “Nephite” was, which by this point had become more closely linked to an orthodox belief and practice that bound one to God. Pluralism of religious ideology had come sharply into contrast, which provided a further impetus for the establishment of an orthodoxy within an established organization.

The first mention of an organized “church” in the book of Mosiah is in 18:17: “And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward. And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church.” The church as such was evidently not seen as an essentially independent entity until Alma<sub>1</sub> “founded” it (see Mosiah 23:16).<sup>61</sup> Note also that in contrast to 1 and 2 Nephi, which make several atemporal references to various churches, no other churches are mentioned other than those of God at this time. The only competition as such came from incorrect teachings—similar to Cicero’s view of *religio* as orthodox and *superstitio* as everything else.

In the book of Mosiah, the term *church* has two distinct usages. Both usages of the term *church* appear in Mosiah 25:22: “And thus, notwithstanding there being many churches [i.e., local organized entities] they were all one church [i.e., the organized body of believers], yea, even the church of God; for there was nothing preached in all the churches except it were repentance and faith in God.” First, *church* refers to the organized body of believers.

The “church” mentioned in Mosiah 18:17 represents a local organized entity, something more akin to a “ward” today in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one for which local leaders, teachers, and priests are selected and individual locations are designated. A clear description of these local entities is found in Mosiah 25:21: “Therefore they did assemble themselves together *in different bodies, being called churches*; every church having their priests and their teachers, and every priest preaching the word according as it was delivered to him by the mouth of Alma” (emphasis added). The founding of the church and the organization of these various branches perhaps offered a fertile space for a formal reification of the orthodox teachings of Alma<sub>1</sub> as *religion*, though it is never overtly expressed in the text. Nevertheless, Alma<sub>1</sub>’s teachings and organizational drive helped to propel the church toward the first designation of *religion* in the Book of Mormon in the following century.

Circa AD 74, when Moroni<sub>1</sub> and his people were facing military action by Zerahemnah, the leader of the Zoramites, and his forces, we are told of the higher cause for the Nephite engagement. They were not fighting for “monarchy nor power,” but rather “for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church” (Alma 43:45). This verse is constructed upon poetic principles of synonymy: the paralleled usage of synonymous terms, here in couplet form. What is important for our discussion here is that “church” is synonymously paired with “rites of worship” in this verse. We see this again when Moroni<sub>1</sub> threatens Zerahemnah in an effort to convince him to enter into a covenant of peace. Moroni<sub>1</sub> uses highly poetic language in this formal, diplomatic discussion: “And now, Zerahemnah, I command you, in the name of that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you, by our faith, by our religion, and by our rites of worship, and by our church” (Alma 44:5). Moroni<sub>1</sub> employs two synonymous couplets in this verse: “by our faith, by our religion,” followed by “and by our rites of worship, and by our church.” Note that he uses “rites of worship” as a synonym of “church” by poetically aligning them in couplet fashion, providing excellent semantic control over the term *church* at this point in Nephite history as relating to “rites of worship.”

### The Emergence of *Religion* in the Book of Mormon

While various forms of religious practice are described in the Book of Mormon,<sup>62</sup> the immediate context of the first mention of *religion* in the Book

of Mormon is one of enflamed political rhetoric, secession, and the ominous threat of loss of freedom. Somewhat surprisingly, the term *religion* appears only in the book of Alma (see 43:37; 44:2, 3, 4, 5; 46:12, 20; 48:13, 47; 50:10; 51:6). The term bursts onto the scene with no fanfare or introduction, but is presented matter-of-factly as an understood concept. However, what Moroni<sub>1</sub> stresses in his definition of religion is highly telling and informative.

Soon after Alma<sub>1</sub> has been “taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord” in Alma 45, Helaman and his brethren set out to preach among the Lamanites, to establish a new the church in all the land, and to appoint priests and teachers for the people (see verses 21–22). There were some, however, who would not listen to Helaman and his brethren. Among this rebellious group, a leader named Amalickiah emerged, who, by means of flattery and promises of political power, managed to convince many people to support him in his effort to be named king (see verses 46:1–7). Notable among the dissentient band were numerous lower judges, in addition to many who had become prideful because of their “great riches” (45:24; 46:4). These new followers of Amalickiah abandoned the church, no longer walking “uprightly before God,” and began acting “wickedly.” Not content, however, just to distance themselves from the church, they actively went about “to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them” (46:10). Here the object of their destructive design was both the church and the foundation of God-given liberty.

In response to the threat posed by Amalickiah and those whom he had led away, and to the need for a physical symbol, or “totem,”<sup>63</sup> to serve as a rallying marker (i.e., a battle standard) for the Nephites, Moroni<sub>1</sub> tears a section of his garment. He writes on it the battle cry, “In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children,” which he then attaches to the top of a pole (46:12). The rhetorical impact of Moroni<sub>1</sub>’s terse composition was intensified through the careful and conscious use of poetic structuring. The arrangement of the possessive clauses in Moroni’s words can be parsed either into two triplets (*God–religion–freedom* and *peace–wives–children*) or into three successive couplets (*God–religion*, *freedom–peace*, and *wives–children*). Semantic couplets and triplets are a well-known convention in Near Eastern as well as Mesoamerican traditions<sup>64</sup> as a means of creating an emphatic or emotive aesthetic.<sup>65</sup> The Book of Mormon also has scores of specific couplets and triplets throughout the text.<sup>66</sup> Both couplets and triplets operate on the same principle of grouping terms that have a specific

relationship, be it synonymous, antithetical, grammatical, gendered, and so forth. If Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s words were originally composed in triplet form, "religion" is then being conceptually linked to both "God" as well as to "freedom." If the underlying structure is the couplet, then the association is most clearly between "religion" and "God." Indeed, poetic prowess will sometimes build *both* into a segment, where couplets operate at one level of discourse and the triplets at a secondary one, negating the necessity to choose only one author intent.

There are several indications from the text, however, that the message on the "title of liberty" is principally constructed as a set of three couplet constructions, which therefore entails a more intimate linkage between notions of "religion" and "freedom." Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s words versify then into three ornate couplet lines (Alma 46:12):

In memory of our God,  
     our religion,  
     and freedom,  
     and our peace,  
 our wives,  
     and our children

In perfect poetic structuring of ritual discourse in ancient and modern Mesoamerica, Moroni<sub>1</sub> creates three semantic couplets: God–religion, freedom–peace, wives–children. The words are presented in a ritual, covenant-making context, one that would normally require precisely this type of rhetorical, parallel structure among Mesoamerican indigenous groups. Moroni<sub>1</sub> displays mature rhetorical style in his use of *parallelismus membrorum* (parallelism of its members) in the precise moment his words needed to be the most persuasive.

After writing on the shred of garment, Moroni<sub>1</sub> bows down in full military armor and offers up a prayer to God, specifically asking that the "blessings of liberty" would rest upon the people who were called Christians, "those who did belong to the church" (46:13–14). Moroni<sub>1</sub> is here praying for not just their religion, but for the liberty to freely practice that religion. This is also made clear in verse 16, where Moroni<sub>1</sub> importunes for "the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored." Once again, religion is spoken of in the same breath as freedom.

### Expressing the Concept of Religion

Just as poetic pairing sheds light on the meaning of the term *church* above, so Moroni's elegant use of rhetorical devices in Alma 46:12 provides clear insights into his conceptual patterning regarding the term *religion*. His structural pairing of "God" with "religion" indicates, not surprisingly, a close semantic connection between them in his view. Furthermore, an examination of instances where *religion* appears in semantic couplets illuminates these culturally significant conceptions of what religion meant in Moroni<sub>1</sub>'s day: 1) "religion" / "faith in Christ" (Alma 44:3), 2) "religion" / "our faith" (Alma 44:5), 3) "religion" / "the cause of our God" (Alma 54:10), 4) "religion" / "God" (Alma 46:12), and 5) "religion" / "rights" (Alma 43:47; Alma 46:20; Alma 51:6). Religion in these verses is poetically linked to and thereby defined in part by "faith in Christ," "our faith," "rights," "the cause of our God," and "God." Four of the five relate to God or our faith in him, showing the closest association of *religion* with God. The pairing with "rights" is also highly instructive and will be discussed more below.

### Poetic Expressions and Religion

It is remarkable that out of the ten mentions of *religion* in the Book of Mormon, in only one case does the term *not* appear in poetically paired with another term in couplet form (see Alma 44:2). Religion, therefore, is consistently presented in complementary association with other terms, as the following examples demonstrate. Couplets:

1. "because of our religion  
     and our faith in Christ" (Alma 44:3)
2. "maintain their rights  
     and the privileges of their religion" (Alma 51:6)
3. "defend themselves,  
     and their families,  
     and their lands,  
     their country,  
     and their rights,  
     and their religion" (Alma 43:47)
4. "we will retain our cities  
     and our lands"  
     "we will maintain our religion  
     and the cause of our God" (Alma 54:10)

5. “defend his people,  
his rights,  
and his country,  
and his religion” (Alma 48:13)
6. “their rights,  
and their religion” (Alma 46:20)
7. “In memory of our God,  
our religion,  
and freedom,  
and our peace,  
our wives,  
and our children” (Alma 46:12)
8. “by our faith,  
by our religion” (Alma 44:5)
- Triplet:
1. “see that God will support,  
and keep,  
and preserve us,  
so long as we are faithful unto him,  
and unto our faith,  
and our religion” (Alma 44:4)

The patriotic fervor (that is, the highly emotive context) that attends these chapters in Alma may have been the impetus for poetic structuring when referring to that which they were willing to fight to defend. There could also be something inherent in the term *religion* at this time as a social construct or as a transcendent notion that lends itself to expression through poetic means. Regardless, in our day we gain considerable insight and understanding of the concept of religion over 2,000 years ago in the New World through the poetic devices employed by Book of Mormon prophets.

### Religion: A Right to Fight For

The interpretation of the concept of religion in Alma can only be properly understood when viewed through the lens of the major political and ecclesiastic changes taking place in Nephite society in this time period, including (1) the formation of “churches” in the land of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 25:19), (2) the division of power from the monarchy to a system of multiple, democratically elected judges and to Alma<sub>1</sub> as both high priest and chief judge (see Mosiah 29:42), and (3) the new emphasis by Mosiah<sub>2</sub> on popular equality, liberty, and

individual rights (see Mosiah 29:32). We would not be amiss in viewing (3) as an eventual byproduct of (1) and (2). The shift of centralized power onto the shoulders of numerous individuals created conditions where individual rights were brought more sharply into focus. Mosiah<sub>2</sub> stated his hope for a more egalitarian society in this way: “And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a *land of liberty*, and *every man* may enjoy *his rights and privileges* alike” (Mosiah 29:32; emphasis added). In fact, verse 29 contains the first use of the term *right* applied to the populace in the Book of Mormon—but it will not be the last. Moroni<sub>1</sub> appeals to this notion of “rights” to worship as one of the fundamental motivations to take up arms against the forces of Amalickiah.

To the annual meeting of Quakers in September of 1789 George Washington declared, “The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping Almighty God agreeably to their conscience, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights.” The Book of Mormon likewise teaches in no uncertain terms that one’s religion and the right to practice it are God-given, and something to defend. Of the ten specific references to *religion* in the Book of Mormon, remarkably *six* are in a military context, defending the right to practice that religion. Just as decisively, the Book of Mormon also proclaims that religion is a *right*. Of the ten occurrences of *religion* in the Book of Mormon, four are expressly associated with the term *rights*: (1) “they will maintain their *rights*, and their *religion*, that the Lord God may bless them” (Alma 46:20), (2) “to defend his people, his *rights*, and his country, and his *religion*, even to the loss of his blood” (Alma 48:13), (3) “to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their *rights*, and their *religion*” (Alma 43:47), and (4) “to maintain their *rights* and the privileges of their *religion* by a free government” (Alma 51:6).<sup>67</sup> It is significant then that when Moroni<sub>1</sub> carried the title of liberty to various Nephite cities, he invited the people to enter a two-tiered covenant: to “maintain their rights, and their religion” (Alma 46:20). When those who heard Moroni<sub>1</sub>’s stirring words rushed out and assembled themselves, they, like Moroni<sub>1</sub>, had their “armor girded about their loins” (Alma 46:21). Their armor signified their willingness to fight and defend their right to religion, peace for their families, and freedom.

What Alma 46:21 makes perfectly clear, however, is that the Nephites understood the tenuous state of freedom granted by the Lord: it could be taken away through disobedience to the commandments. Thus, the act of donning military garb prior to entering the covenant carried both a literal

and symbolic meaning: they would defend their rights to religious and civic liberty with all of their military might, and they would ensure the protection of those same rights through obedience to God.

## Conclusion

As the preceding has shown, religion as a concept has a supple quality that can at times defy strict definition. The semantic evolution of the Greek *thrēkeia* reveals a term that could comfortably be applied to both Christian and non-Christian forms of worship in the first century AD. Early Christian ideals and practices refocused the use of the term into the second century to represent more Christian forms of worship, though still not exclusively so. It is important to remember that even by the fifth century Augustine did not fully accept *thrēkeia* as a viable translation for *religio*, primarily because of the unique semantics *religio* had developed by that time.

Debates over the true etymological origin of *religio* have embroiled religious-minded scholars in debate for centuries. However, what is clear from a historical analysis is that *religio* was polyvalent and susceptible to change. After the death of the last apostle and the onset of the apostasy in the second century AD, defining religion became progressively more problematic as false teachings and practices spread. By Augustine's day, correctly locking down the meaning of *religio* among the competing ideas was essential, so much so, in fact, that Augustine devoted a whole book to the subject in the late fourth century, *De Vera Religione*.

Thus, with both *thrēkeia* and *religio*, we see evolution and adaptation in their application to Christian notions of religion—at least as it was being defined at a given point in history.

In the Book of Mormon *religion* was not mentioned in the text until around 74 BC. As I have discussed above, the establishment of a church and churches was evidently key, organizationally speaking, as was Mosiah's edict that Nephite society have more equality and rights for every individual (Mosiah 29:32). For the Nephites, defining and distinguishing themselves in terms of their belief system and practices also became more relevant due to pending Lamanite aggression and the existence of other competing ideologies. Organized branches of the church as well the establishment of an overarching entity (also known as the "church") facilitated the application of the term *religion* to their system of worship. Furthermore, when the freedom to practice their form of worship was severely threatened (not unlike

situations in the world today<sup>68</sup>) *religion* surged to the narrative forefront as one the reasons to enter a covenant to protect such liberties.

Thus, the appearance of the word *religion* in the Book of Mormon coincided with political strife and immediate threats of loss of liberty to worship God. Nephite conceptions of *religion* in Alma were not only instrumental in reacting to these conditions, they were ultimately informed by them. The notion of *religion* as such blossomed under the rays of additional liberties and rights granted to the people. **RE**

## Notes

1. James Wiggins, "What on Earth Is Religion?," in *What Is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations*, ed. Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian Courtney Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 153.
2. Western culture has influenced the development of the term, but *religio*, the Latin term from which the English "religion" derived, has also had a profound effect on Western culture. Volpi (2001) explains that "*le mot romain religio articule et infléchi la racine indo-européenne leg- dans une signification tout à fait particulière, qui dévoile et exprime une expérience devenue fondamentale pour la culture occidentale*" ('the Roman word *religio* articulates and influences the Indo-European root *leg-* in a very special meaning, which reveals and expresses an experience that has become fundamental to Western culture'). Franco Volpi, "Heidegger et la romanité philosophique," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, no. 3 (2001): 5–18.
3. Martin Luther famously taught *simul iustus et peccator*, "simultaneously justified and sinful." John Calvin and Martin Luther argued that works cannot produce a righteous individual, rather a sinner is justified through faith in Christ.
4. Benson Saler, "Religio and the Definition of Religion," *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (1987): 395–99.
5. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 30.
6. See Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 67.
7. A *sine qua non* definition of religion would be a *monothetic* portrayal, where as those that take into account the relative nature of any definition of religion rather than focusing such absolutes are *polythetic*. Polythetic definitions, according to Wiggins, specifically look to identify "sets of characteristics, only some of which a system must have in order to be counted as a religion" (Wiggins, "What on Earth is Religion?" 158).
8. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. J. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1965 [1912]), 62.
9. Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981–82).
10. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Q–Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdsman, 1995), 78.
11. Dan G. McCartney, *James (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 127.

12. Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des Institutions Indo-Européennes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 265.
13. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Coded with Strong's Concordance Numbers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).
14. W. E. Vine, *Vines Concise Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 308.
15. Dallas R. Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, vol. 1 (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 389.
16. Gilbrant similarly views *thrēskeia* as originating in the “reverence of the gods or worship of the gods” but that such devotion leads to acts of ritual. Thoralf Gilbrant, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Zeta-Kappa, 2176-2947* (Springfield, MO: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 13:121; cf. Sophie Laws, “Religion,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael David (Coogan: Oxford University Press, 2001), 435.
17. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.13.1, in *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1960).
18. Paul Azous, *In the Plains of the Wilderness* (Jacksonville, FL: Mazo, 2006), 224n34; Margaret H. Williams, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 161–2.
19. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Q–Z*, 337.
20. It is worth noting that Fred O. Francis has suggested a different translation that alters the theological arguments against angel worship in this verse. Francis treats *θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων* not as an objective genitive (“the worship given to angels”) but as a subjective genitive (“the worship offered by the angels”). Fred O. Francis, “Humility and Angel Worship in Col. 2:18,” reprinted in Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeke, *Conflict at Colossae* (Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1975), 163–95.
21. This can also be seen in Herodotus (2:37) where he used *thrēskeia* to describe the religious observances of Egyptian priests. Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887).
22. Due to certain probably Christian-era interpolations (7:19; 8:17; 16:25) the date of production, which has been the object of considerable scholarly debate, is likely somewhere around the mid-first century AD. See James D. G. Dunn and John William Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 888.
23. The terms appearing as “religion” or “religious” in the KJV are often translated differently in other versions of the New Testament. For instance, many translations give the term Ἰουδαϊσμός (*Ioudaïsmós*) (“the Jews’ religion” in the KJV) as “way of life in Judaism” (NIV), “manner of life in Judaism” (NASB), or “life in Judaism” (RSV). In Acts 13:43 the Greek *σέβω* (*sebō*) is commonly translated as “devout” in many other versions (e.g., NLT, NIV, RSV, ASV). Additionally, *σέβω* (*sebō*) appears as “religion” in 1 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 3:5. Furthermore, in 1 Timothy 2:10 the RSV translates a compound form of *σέβω*, *θεοσέβεια* (*theosébeia*, lit. ‘god-reverence’), as “religion.”
24. See Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Q–Z*.
25. McCartney, *James (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 229.
26. Indeed, scholars today generally view the etymology of *thrēskeia* as linked to *therap-* (‘to serve’). See Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 337.

27. The Greek *eusebaeia* (‘piety’) is another term that can be translated as “religion” in general, but not in the sense of acts of worship per se (Laws, “Religion,” 435). In Greek, *sebō* means “to worship” or “to revere.” The form *σεβομένων* (*seboménōn*) is translated as “religious” in Acts 13:43 in the KJV. As Price has argued, while *thrēskeia* precedes *eusebaeia* in the Roman period, the concept of *eusebaeia* also had a far-reaching influence that “helped to define the religious domain of the Greeks, remaining important down to the end of antiquity.” S. R. F. Price, “Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 104 (November 1984): 79–95.
28. Saler found Émile Benveniste’s arguments persuasive that *religio* derives from *legere*, ‘to collect’, noting Benveniste’s observation that ‘re-collect’ would thus signify “to take up again for a new choice, to reconsider a previous step.” Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 65.
29. “*Qui omnia, quae ad cultum deorum pertinerent, diligenter retractarent et tamquam relegerent, sunt dicti religiosi ex relegendo, ut elegantes ex eligendo, ex diligendo diligentes, ex intelligendo intelligentes; his enim in verbis omnibus inest vis legendi eadem in religioso.*” Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 28, 72.
30. Hoyt contrasts the bounded notion of *relegere* to correct ritual observation *neglegere* (i.e., *neglegere*), which refers to not observing or attending to duties. Sarah F. Hoyt, “The Etymology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 32, no. 2 (1912): 128.
31. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 72.
32. The verb *religare* also means “restrain,” and in this light some have linked it more closely to the rules of ritual and services that are an outward expression of devotion. See Sarah F. Hoyt, “The Etymology of Religion,” 128.
33. St. Thomas diverted from Lactantius’s meaning slightly, interpreting it as deriving from *se ligo*, “to bind oneself [to God]”. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* (Parisiorum: Lethielleux, 1967, III), 119; cf. Balázs M. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 30.
34. Nigel Ajay Kumar, *What is Religion? A Theological Answer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 52; see also Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 106.
35. Schott, *Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 106.
36. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 28.
37. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 29.
38. Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), X/1, 392.
39. Jerome used *religio* “in the sense of a rite . . . [i.e.,] ‘religious observances,’ ‘ritual practice,’ ‘way of worshipping,’ and in the Old Testament various terms for ordinance and ritual prescriptions.” Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 28.
40. See Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 28.
41. Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 67.
42. Mezei, *Religion and Revelation after Auschwitz*, 30.
43. “The fact that *religio* could and sometimes did mean different—and differently valued—things,” writes Saler, “testifies to its semantic suppleness.” Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 67. See also Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 25.
44. The Greek *thrēskeia* followed a similar semantic development as the Latin *religio*. Boyarin writes: “Greek, we might say, also rises to the occasion of this semantic and social shift, with the once very rare word *θρησκεία* stepping into the new semantic slot now occupied by *religio* in its post-Christian sense in Latin. This semantic development is paralleled

- in Hebrew *dat*, which in biblical and early rabbinic usage means something like *religio* in the old Latin sense and comes to mean ‘religion’ only in the Middle ages.” Daniel Boyarin, “The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal of Religion,” *Representations*, no. 85 (Winter 2004): 34.
45. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 25.
46. Schott, *Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, 105.
47. Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des Institutions Indo-Européennes*, vol. 2, 273.
48. Boyarin, “The Christian Invention of Judaism,” 32.
49. Schott, *Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 105.
50. Boyarin, “The Christian Invention of Judaism,” 32.
51. Maurice Sachot, “Comment le Christianisme est-il devenu *religio*,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 59 (1985): 97.
52. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 2: *A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
53. Augustine, “The Greatness of the Soul,” in *Saint Augustine: The Greatness of the Soul: The Teacher*, Ancient Christian Writers, ed. Joseph M. Colleran (New York: Newman Press, 1978), 9:110.
54. The Latin term *catholica* derives from the Greek *καθολικῆ*, meaning “universal.” However, that meaning was added to in the century following Christ. Srawley writes: “this primitive sense of ‘universal’ the word has never lost, although in the latter part of the second century it began to receive the secondary sense of ‘orthodox’ as opposed to ‘heretical.’” J. H. Srawley, *The Epistles of St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch*, vol. 2 (London, 1919) 41–42.
55. Naoki Kamimura, “The Evolving View of the ‘religion’ in Augustine’s Early Works,” paper presented at the North American Patristic Society 20th Annual Meeting, Chicago, May 28, 2010.
56. Holly Haynes, *The History of Make-Believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 122.
57. See Laws, “Religion,” 435.
58. John Saxbee, *No Faith in Religion: Some Variations on a Theme* (New Alresford, UK: John Hunt, 2009), 39.
59. Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 17.
60. Boyarin, “The Christian Invention of Judaism,” 33.
61. Daniel Peterson has argued that a pivotal moment in the development of an independent “church” was secession from Noah’s community and rule: “Alma founded the Church among the Nephites (Mosiah 23:16) in the sense of a separately existing organization within the larger society. It is easy to see why he did so. King Noah had rejected his part in the hierarchical social system of the Nephites, and Alma had taken his place as the spiritual leader and the earthly source of priesthood authority for those who dissented from Noah’s leadership. Alma’s colony thus became a secessionist group. Birth as a Nephite was no longer enough to make a man or woman one of God’s people. . . . Instead, a conscious and personal decision was required of anyone who wished to be numbered among the people of God.” Daniel C. Peterson, “Priesthood in Mosiah,” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1991), 187–210.
62. In this regard, Welch notes: “The diversity of religious experience in the Book of Mormon is further seen in the great number of religious communities it mentions in varying situations. Outside of orthodox Nephite circles (whose own success varied from time to

- time), there were an extravagant royal cult of King Noah and his temple priests (Mosiah 11); a false, rivaling church in Zarahemla formed by Nehor (Alma 1); centers of worship among the Lamanites (Alma 23:2); the wicked and agnostic Korihor (Alma 30); an astounding aristocratic and apostate prayerstand (an elevated platform for a single worshipper) of the Zoramites (Alma 31:13–14); and secret combinations or societies with staunch oath-swearing adherents intent on murder and gain (3 Ne. 3:9).” John W. Welch, “Religious Teachings and Practices in the Book of Mormon,” in *To All the World: The Book of Mormon Articles from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, S. Kent Brown, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2000).
63. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 219.
64. In the hieroglyphic script of the ancient Maya, a considerable number of triplets appear in lamentations and other highly emotive contexts. See Kerry M. Hull, “Verbal Art and Performance in Ch’orti’ and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2003), 502–3.
65. Hull, “Ch’orti’ and Maya Hieroglyphic Writing,” 462–63.
66. In the Book of Mormon, triplet constructions are similarly used to punctuate teachings and to provide emotive highlighting. James T. Duke notes 10 triplets that appear in the Book of Mormon but not the Old Testament: “yesterday, today, and forever,” “hunger, thirst, and fatigue,” “carnal, sensual, and devilish,” “death, hell, and an endless torment,” “might, mind, and strength,” “the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God,” “your diligence and your faith and your patience,” “envyings and strifes and malice,” and “weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth” (162). The tripartite repetition within each phrase obviously adds emphasis, even beyond that of a couplet, but more important is the increased emotional effect of the three combined descriptive terms. For example, among Nephi’s final recorded words is the joyous refrain stated in triplet form: “I glory in plainness, I glory in truth, I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell” (2 Nephi 22:6). For more examples of poetics in the Book of Mormon, see James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003).
67. Emphasis added.
68. According to a new study produced by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life in 2012, restrictions on religious practices or beliefs increased by 37 percent between 2006 and 2010. The study found that Christians had the highest number of harassment cases worldwide out of all major religious groups (Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, “Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion,” September 2012). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has made its position on religious liberty abundantly clear, stating: “Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that protects the conscience of all people. It allows us to think, express and act upon what we deeply believe. But around the world, and in the United States, this freedom is eroding. Churches, religious organizations and individuals face increasing restrictions as they participate in the public square, express their beliefs or serve in society. But there is much good that Church members and people of goodwill can do to preserve and strengthen religious freedom.” Mormon Newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/religious-freedom>.