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The Bibliographic Description of the Book of Mormon and the Bible

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Introduction:

Classification is a notoriously messy business that requires compromises and rarely has clear-cut answers, but nowhere is this more evident than in the field of religious texts. Sacred religious texts such as the Bible have been through more iterations than can be counted. They are used by different communities in different ways. What some communities view as mythology, others view as historical fact. Placing such complex, living texts into stagnant, neat boxes can be almost impossible. The field of religion is also historically burdened by bias, and the DDC in particular has a notoriously unbalanced representation of religion, with Christianity occupying a disproportionately massive dominance of the 200s section of the classification scheme.

However, by examining the ways in which such texts are classified, one can learn much about how classification works. This paper will examine the bibliographic descriptions of two sacred texts belonging to Christianity: the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The two texts are similar in that they are both sacred texts of Christianity, but they are different in that one has seen enormously wide usage, while the other is embraced only by a relatively small sect of Christianity. The similarities and differences in how these two texts are classified and described by systems such as the DDC, the LCC, and MARC can be revealing of how these texts are understood by cataloguers.

Both texts have many iterations and versions, particularly the Bible. This paper will examine the bibliographic records for one specific version of each of these documents. The version of the Bible that will be examined is the King James Version, specifically the version published by Zondervan in 1984. For the reader's reference, the ISBN number of this specific version is 031090322X. I selected the King James Version for this paper for several reasons. It is a widely used version of the Bible that is not specific to any particular sect of Christianity. The King James Version is also the Bible of choice of the Christian sects that utilize the Book of Mormon—the churches that originated from the Latter-day Saint movement. The Zondervan edition was selected because it is a generic, non-sectarian iteration of the King James Version.

The version of the Book of Mormon that will be used is the 1981 version, the “blue book” version. This version was chosen because it is the most recognizable and most widely used version of the Book of Mormon. The ISBN number of this specific version is 1592975011.

Placement in the DDC

The Zondervan King James Bible is placed under 220.52032 in the DDC. The breakdown of the DDC number follows. 200: Religion. 220-290: Bible and specific religions. 220: The Bible. 220: Bible. 220.1-220.9: Generalities. 220.4-220.5: Texts, versions, translations. 220.5: Modern versions and translations: 220.52: Versions in English and Anglo-Saxon. 220.5201-220.5209: English. 220.5203: Authorized version (King James version). 220.52032: Bible--English--King James--standard editions.

The 1981 Book of Mormon is placed under 289.322. The breakdown of this number follows. 200: Religion. 220-290: Bible and specific religions. 230-280: Christianity. 280:

Christian denominations. 281-289: Specific denomination or sect. 283-289: Protestant and other denominations. 289: Other denominations and sects. 289.3: Churches of Latter Day Saint movement origin. 289.32: Sources (Sacred books). 289.322: Book of Mormon.

The first thing that I feel is worth noting is the distance between the shelf placement of these two texts. The two are separated by nearly 70 points in the DDC system. For members of the sects who embrace the Book of Mormon as a canonical religious text, the Book of Mormon and the Bible are fundamentally inseparable. Both are considered canon works that build off each other and testify of one another. They are often printed together as one volume by Latter-day Saint churches. A classification scheme designed by and for members of the Latter-day Saint churches would almost certainly place the Book of Mormon and the Bible right next to each other on the shelf. Of course, most Christian sects would not necessarily think of the Bible and the Book of Mormon as being part of the same sentence, as members of Latter-day Saint churches might. The distance between the Book of Mormon and the Bible in shelf order is a decision to prioritize the majority view over the minority view.

It is interesting that this version of the Bible has a longer DDC number than the Book of Mormon, in spite of the enormous representation that the Bible has in the DDC system. The Book of Mormon is a relatively fringe topic compared to the Bible. The longer DDC number for the Bible is because the DDC specifically delineates between different translations and languages of the Bible, while all languages and editions of the Book of Mormon are classified under the same number.

The specific placement of the Book of Mormon is also very interesting. The group of religions originating from the Latter-day Saint movement are categorized underneath the 283-289 section, as “Protestant or other.” They are then placed under 289 as “other,” before finally

being given a specific category to their own at 289.3. The Latter-day Saint movement is not a small movement by any means, with its largest denomination currently claiming to have over 17 million members (“2022 Statistical Report”). Considering the enormous representation that Christianity has in the DDC, it is interesting to me that the Latter-day Saint movement has to go through so many “other” designations before it is given its own category. This could be a result of the fact that the Latter-day Saint movements are difficult to lump together with other denominations of Christianity.

The 289.32 category, “Sources (Sacred books),” is another category that is worth examining. This category purportedly contains the sacred books of the Latter-day Saint churches. The sacred texts listed under this category are: the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants. The Bible is nowhere to be found in this category, in spite of the fact that it is a sacred text to the Latter-day Saint churches. This means that even Bibles that are specific to the Latter-day Saint denominations (such as Bibles that have commentaries and notes written by Latter-day Saint scholars or the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible) would not be categorized as Latter-day Saint sacred texts in most libraries.

Placement in the LCC

Zondervan’s King James Bible is classified in the LCC as BS185. The breakdown of its placement follows. The Bible—General—Texts and versions—Modern texts and versions—English—English versions—King James, Authorized version (1611)—Texts. By date.

The Book of Mormon is categorized in the LCC as BX8623. The breakdown of its placement follows. Christian denominations—Other Protestant denominations—Mormons.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints—Sources of Mormonism. The Sacred Books (Teachings of Joseph Smith)—Book of Mormon—Texts (English). By date.

Like the DDC, the LCC places a considerable amount of distance between the King James Bible and the Book of Mormon in terms of shelf order, which is once again a decision to prioritize the majority view over the minor view. Unlike the DDC, however, the LCC does make room for the Bible to be considered a Latter-day Saint sacred text, with Latter-day Saint Bibles being classified under BX8630. This isn't a perfect solution either, though, as it counterintuitively places certain Bibles (Latter-day Saint specific Bibles) outside of the designated "Bible" category, where most Bibles (including Zondervan's King James) are classified. Whether the DDC's solution or the LCC's solution is more desirable is not my place to say.

The breakdown of the placement of the Book of Mormon in the LCC's classification scheme is perhaps more troubled than the DDC's placement. The Latter-day Saint movements are classified under "Other Protestant dominations;" a curious placement, considering that the Latter-day Saint movements are not Protestant. Additionally, the LCC makes no acknowledgement of the fact that there are multiple Latter-day Saint churches that originated from the same movement. Rather, the LCC categorizes the whole movement underneath the largest domination: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saints who are not members of that specific church may find it troubling that the LCC considers them to be members of that church, just as members of that church may find it troubling that the LCC considers them to be Protestants.

It is also interesting that while the DDC does not use the word "Mormon" or "Mormonism" to refer to the Latter-day Saint movement, the LCC does. This term historically

has been somewhat controversial, with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bouncing back and forth between embracing the term and avoiding it since it was originally conceived as a pejorative term. Although the church has embraced the term in the past, the most recent instruction from the church to its members in 2018 was to avoid using the term (“The Correct Name of the Church”). The LCC’s decision to use this term to describe the movement is a choice that not all would sympathize with.

MARC Records

The MARC records for the Book of Mormon and the Bible are interesting to say the least. There are countless iterations of the Bible. Although the Book of Mormon doesn’t boast quite as many iterations, the Book of Mormon has many different editions and printings in many different languages. There is a considerable amount of variety between what is recorded and what is not recorded in the MARC records of different iterations of both books. For simplicity’s sake, however, I will only examine the MARC records for the iterations that have been specified. I will specifically examine the 6XX sections of the MARC records for each book.

The following table is the 6XX entries for the Zondervan Bible:

650		2	Religion \$0 (DNLM)D012067
650		6	Religion. \$0 (CaQQLa)201-0028702
650		7	religion (discipline) \$2 aat \$0 (CStmoGRI)aat300054300
630	0	7	Bible. \$p New Testament. \$2 fast \$0 (OCOLC)fst01808090
630	0	7	Bible. \$p Old Testament. \$2 fast \$0 (OCOLC)fst01808092
650		7	Religion. \$2 fast \$0 (OCOLC)fst01093763

The following table is the 6XX entries for the 1981 Book of Mormon:

630	0	4	Book of Mormon.
610	2	6	Église mormone \$x Livres sacrés.
610	2	7	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. \$2 fast \$0 (OCoLC)fst00549691
650		7	Theology, Doctrinal. \$2 fast \$0 (OCoLC)fst01149617
650	1	7	Mormonen. \$2 gtt
650		7	Mormonism. \$2 aat \$0 (CStmoGRI)aat300196541
655		7	Sacred works. \$2 fast \$0 (OCoLC)fst01923249
655		7	Livres sacrés. \$2 rvmgf \$0 (CaQQLa)RVMGF-000001349

Even a casual glance indicates some very strange discrepancies between these two tables. The Book of Mormon is specified as being under the 655 category (genre and form) as being a “sacred work,” while the Bible is not. I cannot say for sure why this would be the case. My only guess is that the Bible is so well-known that it would seem redundant and unnecessary to specify that the Bible is a “sacred work.” The Book of Mormon is classified under the 650 field (topical term) as being “theology, doctrinal,” while the Bible is not. Again, I can only guess why this may be, but perhaps it is because the Bible is interpreted in so many different ways by so many different sects, making it impossible to describe the Bible as “theology, doctrinal.” Perhaps the most perplexing difference is the fact that the Bible is described as being in the 650 category of “religion” by four different classification schemes, while the Book of Mormon is not designated as having “religion” as a topical term. This discrepancy seems almost impossible to explain. My best guess is that the people who created that bibliographic record for the Book of Mormon did

not feel the need to specify it as being in the “religion” topic because it was already described as “sacred works” and “theology, doctrinal,” which would make the “religion” tag redundant.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, the differences and similarities between the ways that the MARC records, the DDC, and the LCC describe the Book of Mormon and the Bible can only be explained through guesswork. However, examining the ways these different systems handle these religious texts leaves some very interesting guesswork to be done. The way the works are described and classified informs us of the mentality and world view of the people who classified them.

Generally, there seems to be more different than there is in common in the ways that the Book of Mormon and the Bible are classified. For these particular iterations of the texts, there was no common ground in the 650 section of the MARC records, and the two texts were placed far apart from each other in both the LCC and the DDC. This is telling because, once again, if these bibliographic description systems had been made for and by members of the Latter-day Saint movement, the two books would almost certainly be positioned much closer to each other.

It is no secret that “Mormons” have historically been regarded with contempt by their Christian cousins. The religion was born in persecution and bloodshed, and harmful myths and stereotypes about “Mormons” exist to this day. One of the reasons the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has divorced itself from the term “Mormon” is to dispel the false notion that Mormons aren’t Christians (“The Correct Name of the Church”). The distance placed between the Book of Mormon and the Bible in bibliographic description may be a reflection of the wider-held belief by many Christians that the Latter-day Saint movement is a separate, fringe group of Christianity that shouldn’t be boxed in with the rest of Christian sects. I am not necessarily

suggesting that the Book of Mormon and the Bible *should* be placed right next to each other on the shelf in every library across the world. I am merely suggesting that cataloguers need to be careful about what messages they reinforce through their decisions. After all, classification matters, as the adage goes.

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