

## REVIEWS

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### *Joseph Smith and Thomas Paine?*

*Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon.* By Robert N. Hullinger. St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, Inc., 1980. xiv + 201 pp., illus. \$14.95

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Thirteen years ago a heavily publicized and startling book called *The Passover Plot*, by Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield, daringly asserted that Jesus Christ planned his own arrest, crucifixion and resurrection; that he had beforehand arranged to be drugged on the cross, thereby simulating death so that he could later be removed safely to fulfill Messianic prophecies. Early in 1980 *Mormon Answer to Skepticism* has appeared, awaited eagerly by Mormons and non-Mormons alike ever since the author, Pastor Robert N. Hullinger of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Cincinnati, wrote "Joseph Smith, Defender of the Faith," in *Concordia Theological Monthly* in 1971. Unfortunately, the reader of the earlier article may be disappointed in the present book, for, like *The Passover Plot*, the logic used in *Mormon Answer to Skepticism* is akin to proving the veracity of the Ptolemaic system by using an elaborate system of epicycles.

Hullinger seems to have left no stone unturned in looking for the true history of Joseph Smith's intentions, and the author must be complimented for one of the most charitable and objective studies of Joseph Smith ever written by a non-Mormon. In the author's own words:

The argument of this study is that Joseph Smith tried to defend faith in the personal God of Christian belief in face of current denominational strife and popular skepticism. He staked out the principle of revelation as the ground for battle and regarded himself as the defender of God. He intended the Book

of Mormon to be an apologetic for Jesus Christ. (p. 2)

He insists that the reader let Joseph's expressed motives speak for themselves and draw conclusions from the evidence. But apparently this reviewer is perceiving another part of the elephant, or perhaps even a different animal, for his conclusions differ greatly from those predicted for the reader in Wesley P. Walters' forward [sic]: "the end result provides still further evidence that the Book of Mormon is a wholly modern production, not a translation of some ancient, long-buried record." (p. xii) Both Walters and Hullinger, like too many readers and pseudo-scholars, perceive only the skin and bones or trunk and tail of the Book of Mormon instead of its heart. They both seem to value their "scholarly ability" to explain Mormonism more than the Mormonism they are trying to explain. And why not, we could add? Western tradition insists upon rational explanation, so that theologians, by and large, are so concerned with examining the details that they cannot see the Big Picture. They too often miss the general message of salvation even though they are proficient in textual, historical and literary analysis.

Nevertheless, Hullinger is one of the best informed non-Mormons I know of. He must be considered in a kindly light because of his relative objectivity and fairness, compared to the Fawn Brodies and Walter Martins in "scholarship." His introduction shows a seeking spirit—to use his own words, "a seeker mentality" like my own mind: a mind which needs to prove all things. Before my conversion I tried in vain to disprove the Book of Mormon, but my knowledge of ancient languages and the theosophy, which issued forth from my own Lutheran theological training, were no match for the spirituality, humility, honest naivete and testimony which came forth from the mouths of babes (read: missionaries). Shortly thereafter my mind could not un-

derstand what my heart felt, knew and accepted, and I denounced the new vehicle for my faith and ripped my baptismal certificate to shreds—only to denounce my intolerant logical mind by leaping ahead ten feet in faith after the one leap of doubt backwards. I discern that Pastor Hullinger feels duty-bound to prove Mormonism wrong, just as I feel bound to prove *him* wrong, but at least he has not gone about it like the Anglican Bishop Solomon Spalding of 1912, whose avowed (and aggressive) purpose was to save America's youth from the "immoral, untruthful, unspiritual, and illogical system of Joseph Smith." Rather, Hullinger should be compared to a Saul of Tarsus, so clearly does his sincerity and need-to-help-us-understand-his-message come across. Like all Lutherans, he is tradition-bound to the inerrancy of scripture, and it behooves him from his theological training to de-eschatologize the Book of Mormon. Sadly, however, Hullinger's hermeneutical training has led him to eisegesis instead of exegesis—a fault in much of Mormon scholarship as well!

The chapter on masonry and Mormonism was particularly interesting, especially in light of Dr. Reed C. Durham's Mormon History Association lecture of 1974, "Is There No Help for the Widow's Son?" from which Hullinger quotes. Hullinger echoes these words in Durham's lecture:

Mormon historians need to respond to the myriad questions like those relative to Masonry instead of burying their heads in ostrich-like fashion in the traditional sand.

It is not mere coincidence, I feel, that I was reading Hugh Nibley's *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, when *Mormon Answer to Skepticism* was sent to me for review, for my perspective in the Masonry question was widened beyond Hullinger's nineteenth century America. Others would probably agree if I said that there is nothing at all wrong with Joseph Smith's use of Masonic ritual and symbolism if such came from eternal sources, for it is obvious that both Masons and Mormons de-

rived material from Egyptian Memphite theology, which may have existed long before Judaism and the Mosaic laws. Nibley includes lengthy quotes from newly discovered apocryphal works which show many parallels to the Mormon temple endowment. In addition, a graduate student at Brigham Young University, Michael Lyon, has graphically pointed out Masonic symbolism in Chinese art which dated before the time of Christ. If Mormonism is an international church—then Mormon scholars should no longer avoid studying facets of truth in other religious and cultures—from the chakra points in Kundalini yoga to Chaldaic numerology or Hebrew gematria symbolism in the Thirteen Articles of Faith.

Hullinger makes it clear that he has used the Book of Mormon as primary source material to show how Joseph Smith meant to defend the divinity of Jesus Christ against the deism of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. (This in itself is far-fetched since Paine's book appeared in 1794 and 1796, only thirty years before the Book of Mormon was written and published. *The Age of Reason* could hardly have been a burning issue in the "burned-over district.") Indeed, the lengthy index of references shows that Hullinger might be more familiar with Mormon scriptures than most Mormons—unless he made extensive use of Reynolds' *Concordance*. Unfortunately for all of us, the passages he used were lifted out of context in order to prove a point, a practice I thought was beneath Lutheran textual criticism. In addition, Hullinger uses the worn-out example of Book of Mormon contradictions (Alma 7:9-10): that Jesus was born in Jerusalem, not Bethlehem! (How many university students have told me they are from Los Angeles, when they are really from North Hollywood or Orange.) If Joseph Smith truly owned and read the scholarly four volume Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, before translating the Book of Mormon, he surely would not have made such a serious "mistake," if such a cultural idiom *were* a mistake!

"No matter," I hear the typical Nibley reader respond, "for the Book of Mormon's authenticity can be 'proved'