

Thoughts on the Mormon Scriptures: An Outsider's View of the Inspiration of Joseph Smith

How is the Mormon Church viewed by those who are not members? One view is that Mormons are successful and prosperous, that they "take care of their own," that they live good lives, and that their beliefs emphasize a healthy family life. While Latter-day Saints might hope that this point of view prevails, it is essentially superficial in that it is almost always unsupported by a knowledge of the spiritual motivation for the observed qualities of the Mormons, and therefore fails as a basis for an intelligent understanding of Mormonism's unique contributions to religious thought and American culture.

A second view is based upon the singling out of certain negative and stereotyped issues such as polygamy, the Negro doctrine, or Mormon financial and political power. These are used as an "educated" objection to Mormonism as a whole, which deprives those who hold this view of any comprehension of the more significant and positive teachings of Joseph Smith.

A third view, akin to the second, is that of the Christian denominations, a supercilious tolerance for the good character of Mormons while holding Joseph Smith to be at least misguided if not a downright liar, and his writings, the Mormon scriptures, to be false.

Although many historians and students of religion do not subscribe to any of these viewpoints, the average American most generally voices one of the three. These views are all inadequate because they reflect a lack of understanding of the spiritual wellsprings of Mormon life and a confusion about "truth" in scripture.

The Latter-day Saints are of particular interest to me, as a member of the Bahá'í faith, not only because they have become a church numbering nearly five million souls, but also because of a number of significant Bahá'í references to the Mormons, Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon. The Bahá'í faith was founded in Iran in 1844 by the Báb (Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází, 1819–1850) and Bahá'u'lláh (Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí, 1817–1892), who are regarded by Bahá'ís as God's messengers for this age, equal in rank to Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Abraham. An international nine-member governing body, legislating on all matters not revealed in Bahá'í scripture, is the

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Universal House of Justice. In 1977, this body made an unequivocal statement about the indirect influence of the Bahá'í spirit on the development of Mormonism: "As for the status of Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon Faith, he is not considered by Bahá'ís to be a prophet, minor or otherwise. But of course he was a religious teacher sensitive to the spiritual currents flowing in the early 19th century directly from the appearance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and the Revelation of Their Messages of hope and divine Guidance."¹

Significantly, the Universal House of Justice does not detail the ways in which Joseph Smith was influenced or inspired by the impulse released by the two new Manifestations of God. In what manner was Joseph Smith sensitive to the advent of the Bahá'í era? Was it in finding metal plates on which was written an ancient record of a lost American civilization? Was it in the miraculous "translation" of this record? Was it in founding a new church? Or was it in certain of his teachings which show an astonishing similarity to Bahá'í tenets?

Revelation is a phenomenon which we can understand only "through a glass darkly" by the fragmentary descriptions given us by those who claim to be revelators. We must understand what is meant by "revelation" from a Mormon perspective and how this "revelation" is akin to or different from the revelations spoken of in other world religions. The following is an oversimplified statement of a complex topic, but it may provide a general outline for comparison.

In Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í faith, God reveals himself in a number of ways:

1) by directly appearing and speaking his word or law, as in his appearance to Moses on Sinai: "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses, is not so. . . . With him will I speak mouth to mouth . . . and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. 12:6-8);

2) by speaking through an intermediary, as in the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad through Gabriel: ". . . Gabriel — for he it is who by God's leave hath caused the Koran to descend on thy heart. . . ." (Qur'an 2:91). A Bahá'í example is that of the appearance of the Maid of Heaven, the personification of God in Bahá'í scriptures to Bahá'u'lláh: "While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My Face, I beheld a Maiden — the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord — suspended in the air before Me"²;

3) by imbuing the revelator with his spirit in such a way that the revelator's deeds and person become the revelation as in the case of Jesus Christ, and to some extent Bahá'u'lláh: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), and, "This is the beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you. . . . This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation. . . ." ³;

4) through vision, such as the appearance of knowledge before the face of Bahá'u'lláh in the form of a tablet, the English equivalent of the Arabic *lawh*

meaning a written document or letter from one of the central figures of the Bahá'í faith. The scripture describing the function of a tablet is: "Whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear . . . in the form of a Tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures. Thus do We set down in writing what the eye perceiveth."⁴

While these revelations may appear to an observer to be internal phenomena, they are expressed by the revelators in terms of objective experiences.

Joseph Smith had a distinctive form of revelatory experience which is outlined in a passage dealing with the "translation" of the Book of Mormon: "But behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me" (D&C 9:8-9).

And in a telling description of the process of "revelation" Smith said, "A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, *it may give you sudden strokes of ideas*. . . . Thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation."⁵

Smith relates this experience of revelation, in contrast to those described previously as a subjective phenomenon — one which must, by its very definition, arise within Joseph Smith's internal mental and emotional landscape, a process requiring the recipient's own initiative and discovery. While there is something of the subjective and personal in the experiences of Moses, Muhammad, Buhá'u'lláh, and Jesus, the fragmentary information we have indicates that the experiences of these revelators are external phenomena, in which God takes the initiative. Similarly, Joseph Smith's revelatory experience was not necessarily a totally subjective mental process, for the last phrase of verse nine and Joseph Smith's account of his first vision, an appearance of and communication from the Father and Jesus Christ, may imply the opposite.

In Bahá'í terminology, Manifestations of God (major prophets) are those who found a new religion and law and include Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. They are compared to the sun, which is itself luminous. Lesser prophets are compared to the moon which receives its light from the sun; examples are the prophets of Israel who reinforced the messages of the major prophets, receiving their light from the original revelations of Abraham and Moses. In 1950, the Shoghi Effendi (1896-1957), the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and the guardian of the faith from 1921 to 1957, considered the case of Joseph Smith. Shoghi Effendi has very clearly stated that Joseph Smith is neither a Manifestation of God (a major prophet) nor a lesser prophet:

We cannot possibly add the names of people we (or anyone else) think might be Lesser Prophets to those found in the Qur'án, the Bible and our own Scriptures. For

only these can we consider authentic Books. Therefore, Joseph Smith is not in our eyes a Prophet.

As there is nothing specific about Joseph Smith in the teachings, the Guardian has no statement to make on his position or about the accuracy of any statement in the Book of Mormon regarding American history or its peoples. This is a matter for historians to pass upon.⁶

Similarly, while Bahá'ís accept Zoroaster, Buddha, and Krishna as true Manifestations of God, the sacred texts associated with the Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Hindu religions are not regarded as authentic.⁷ Thus, Bahá'ís are like other non-Mormons — left to themselves to deal with the orthodox Mormon claims of the miraculous translation of the Book of Mormon from golden plates, and corollary claims of that book's historical accuracy as a narrative of an ancient American civilization founded by Israelites who fled from the Holy Land about 600 B.C. The Mormon believer often makes the error of supposing that the non-Mormon cannot appreciate the Book of Mormon without first accepting these claims.

There is not, however, a simple choice of becoming a total believer in or a total skeptic about the Book of Mormon and the gifts of Joseph Smith. This is the case particularly as we consider the Book of Mormon as a historical document. A number of RLDS scholars, who believe in the divine inspiration of the Book of Mormon, have questioned whether it can be viewed as a report of historical fact.⁸ They approach this problem from a number of directions: comparison of the questions addressed by the Book of Mormon with the questions of burning interest in early nineteenth-century New York; investigation of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon, such as the report of horses in the New World in 590 B.C., or the application of the term Jews at a time when we know it was not applied to the Israelites; and the comparison of Biblical texts quoted in the Book of Mormon, many of which were not written down in Jewish canon until centuries after the Book of Mormon emigrants supposedly left for the New World. They find indications that the Book of Mormon was not the annals of a lost pre-Columbian civilization but rather the product of a nineteenth-century New Yorker with a fervent religious imagination.

Secondly, the lack of independent evidence from the archeological record to confirm the events or places described in the Book of Mormon removes a logical source of support.

We would, however, be unwarranted in dismissing Joseph Smith as fraud or the Book of Mormon as falsehood simply because of these findings. Every Mormon surely knows Moroni 10:4: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost."

This verse is the key to a sympathetic approach to the Book of Mormon by an outside observer. The question is whether these things are true. When we use the word *truth* we are liable to equate it with historical fact. This is an unwarranted confusion of two very different ideas, a difference easily illustrated.

I might read a newspaper account of a man robbed while journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho. Such a story, while factual, would contain little or no truth which is relevant to my personal life. But the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), while not a recounting of historical fact (though it contains basically the same story as the newspaper account), has a far greater reservoir of relevant truth than the newspaper account. The newspaper story has facticity, a statement of the actual who, what, when. The second account, fictional rather than factual, contains not facticity but weighty truth, the statement of the spiritual and exemplary how and why.

Those outside the Mormon Church who recognize this distinction are able to consider another claim for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The believer will claim that facticity, historical actuality, is part of or even the most important part of the truth of the Book of Mormon. Mormons often quote the testimony of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon as proof of the existence of literal golden plates from which Joseph Smith translated the work known as the Book of Mormon. In the case of the Three Witnesses, they asked to be permitted the privilege of seeing the plates, and receiving in answer section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which promised that they would see the plates by faith. The historical record is quite clear that the witnesses prayed in the wood with Joseph Smith and were permitted a *vision* of the plates which were shown by an angel. In the case of the Eight Witnesses, Fawn Brodie argues that they never actually saw the physical plates but rather were allowed to heft a box in which the plates supposedly rested and were allowed to touch something under a cloth which was supposedly the plates.¹⁰ As a historical document, therefore, the Book of Mormon is unconfirmed by the evidence, whether internal or external. Russell compares such studies by Mormons with Biblical scholarship of the nineteenth century:

The Christian Churches faced a quite similar problem one century ago — when Biblical scholars concluded that biblical writings [which] claimed to be historical were actually fiction or myth. Some claimed that biblical scholarship would demolish the foundations of Christian faith. Apparently it did not, and it can be concluded that a much more vital and intelligible Christian faith emerged from the reinterpretation that scholarship required.

If we apply historical scholarship to the Book of Mormon, a similar reinterpretation for Latter-day Saints seems required. It is the judgment of this writer that Latter-day Saints must move forward with this reinterpretation, particularly if we want to both preserve our intellectual honesty as well as find value in an interesting book that a farm boy from New York published in 1830.¹¹

However, when I examine the Book of Mormon for truth rather than facticity, my reading reveals powerful, eternal, and relevant truths which are capable of changing and guiding men's lives. The Book of Mormon is a parable of the struggle between good and evil, between those who need the admonitions of their Creator and those who turn from his commands and sink to the level of the animal. But it is not an abstract statement. The Book of Mormon breathes with the excitement of the cosmic confrontation of light and darkness, and is peopled by characters who have names and personalities that are archetypal.

It is thus at the level of relevant truth that non-Mormons may be able to respond positively to the exhortation to “ask God . . . if these things are not true.” Even accepting the Book of Mormon as a repository of truth does not require the outside observer to immediately believe that the Book of Mormon was revealed or translated by the miraculous means reported. Klaus J. Hansen has noted that the Book of Mormon itself may well have been the product of Joseph Smith’s genius, “studied out” in his mind over a long period.¹² The account of gold plates and marvelous instruments, while a useful faith-promoting miracle story, does not convince the non-Mormon of the Book of Mormon’s truth, particularly considering that Mormons also discount miracles as reliable proofs.¹³

The clear statement in the Doctrine and Covenants on the revelatory process correlates with an application of modern psychological and physiological theories to Joseph Smith. Hansen has outlined some of the views on this subject, particularly those of Julian Jaynes on the bicameral mind. Studies done on subjects who have had the connection between the left and right hemispheres of the brain severed show that the two halves of the brain perform different functions. The left side is logical, analytical, and deductive. The right side is intuitive, synthetic, and inductive. Modern man is almost completely dominated by the left hemisphere of his brain. But some highly gifted individuals — artists, musicians, great thinkers — have a more highly developed right hemisphere. This half of the brain perceives patterns; it sees the whole; it synthesizes.¹⁴ Julian Jaynes’s theory attempts to explain *all* religious revelation as a product of the bicameral mind. While his theory may be useful in this respect, the objective nature of the revelatory process as spoken of by Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh does not provide such a straightforward connection with the internal working of the brain as does Smith’s description of a subjective mental and emotional process. It is possible that Joseph Smith used a fictional framework devised in the analytical side of his brain to express patterns of truth which were perceived and synthesized in the right hemisphere of his brain. Hansen’s use of Jaynes’s formulation is perfectly in accord with the statement, “you must study it out in your mind . . . and if it be right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you.” This theory does not diminish Joseph Smith’s stature or religious genius nor does it deprive the Book of Mormon of its reservoir of truth. I do not intend to raise Jaynes’s theory to an axiom dealing with Joseph Smith. It is one way of understanding the phenomenon of Joseph Smith while avoiding the extreme positions of true prophet vs. false prophet.

The Pearl of Great Price is, in most respects, similar to the Book of Mormon, in that it purports to be a translation made by Joseph Smith, in this instance from Egyptian papyri. However, in this case the original documents from which the translation was made are available for comparison. Translations made by some Egyptologists¹⁵ show no relationship to the text of this Mormon standard work. Richard P. Howard suggests that “one real possibility . . . would be that the Book of Abraham is not a translation at all, in the sense of transferring ideas from the Egyptian to the English language.”¹⁶ Once

again there is the possibility that the right hemisphere of Smith's brain saw patterns which were triggered by the unusual and at the same time inexplicable illustrations on the Egyptian funerary papyri in his possession. We can follow the same argument as with the Book of Mormon — that the Pearl of Great Price communicates not historical fact or even literal translation but truth and powerful myth.

The Doctrine and Covenants falls into another category from the previously mentioned standard works of the Church, in that they are presented as revelations given to the Church through Joseph Smith rather than as translations. Except for noting some revelations given through the Urim and Thummin, Smith gives few indications about whether these revelations came by means of God speaking in his ear, through an angelic messenger, or in vision or dream. Hansen notes that while some of Smith's revelations perhaps came in these ways, they were often "issued after serious reflection on a problem, speaking by way of inspiration."¹⁷ Again, we are reminded of the words, "Study it out in your mind." It is not difficult for the sympathetic outsider to see the operation of both analytical and intuitive powers in Smith's psyche, diagnosing the particular needs of individual members and of the Church, then couching the necessary counsel in powerful revelatory language.

The Doctrine and Covenants is not so much universal spiritual truths directed to all men as it is specialized truths for the Church and its members: first, to give Mormons evidence of God's particular interest in their every deed and in the course of their history; and, second, to develop the internal functioning of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The non-Latter-day Saint should feel comfortable seeing the particularized truth of the Doctrine and Covenants as an agent for the internal strengthening of the Church and its members, while still maintaining an understanding of these revelations as the result of reflections and inspiration studied out in the mind of Joseph Smith.

Fundamental to the Bahá'í interpretation of history is a generally accepted belief that the advent of a new Manifestation of God (major prophet) has both direct and indirect influence on civilization. Bahá'ís have long held that the coming of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh exercised indirect influence on a number of nineteenth-century religious groups which predicted the near return of Jesus Christ, for example, the Millerites, followers of William Miller, who are predecessors of the Seventh Day Adventists, and the nineteenth-century German Templers who gathered in several colonies in the Holy Land to await Christ's second coming.

George Townshend (1876–1957) was in a position to comment knowledgeably on the movement. An Irishman, he served as an Episcopal minister in Utah, later as canon of Saint Patrick's Cathedral of Dublin and archdeacon of Clonfert, but ultimately, in the 1920s, became a Bahá'í and was appointed as a Hand of the Cause of God, one of a group assisting the Shoghi Effendi. He described the subtle spiritual influence of the new messengers:

There swept quietly into the minds of European men the impulsion of a new spiritual force, an impulsion the beginnings of which can hardly be traced but which gradually

brought into men's minds a new spirit of hope and enterprise and happiness and creative vigour and which by steady gradations . . . during the early years of the nineteenth century took the definite shape of the dawning on earth of a New Age, of the divinely aided appearance of a new and better world, and in Christian circles of the return of Christ and the descent of the Kingdom of God from heaven. . . . The generality of the people in town and in country, high and low, learned and unlearned, felt this new transcendent power stirring creation. The time was one of religious revival, of church building, of missionary expansion, the central motive being always the belief in the imminent coming of Christ. . . . Adventist sects were started, a few of which remain to the present day, such as the Latter Day Saints.¹⁸

In which of his teachings did Joseph Smith show himself to be in touch with the inspiration of the Bahá'í age? Despite wide divergences on important doctrines, a few important points are striking in their similarity.

It is a basic tenet of Islam theology that God has left no nation without guidance: "Indeed, We sent forth among every nation a Messenger, saying: 'Serve you God, and eschew idols'" (Qur'ān 16:38). The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh hold that God has revealed himself successively in a series of Manifestations of God who lift mankind to ever wider spiritual and social horizons; and that these manifestations will continue to be sent by God into the future.

In every age and dispensation the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones have appeared among men. . . . Can one of sane mind ever seriously imagine that . . . the portals of God's infinite guidance can ever be closed in the face of men? Can he ever conceive for these Divine Luminaries, these resplendent Lights either a beginning or an end? . . . There can be no doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be withheld from the world, it would completely perish. For this reason, from the beginning that hath no beginning the portals of Divine Mercy have been flung open to the face of all created things. . . .

I testify before God that each of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book. . . .¹⁹

A fundamental tenet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that revelation has not ended, and that the word of God has been given to other nations and peoples. In verses reminiscent of the words of Bahá'u'lláh and strikingly akin to the Qur'ān, the Book of Mormon testifies that the portals of God's grace have been open to all nations in many revealed books:

Woe be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. . . .

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea even up on all the nations of the earth? . . . Wherefore I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. . . . And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; for my work is not finished. . . . For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is

written. . . . And I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it. . . . And it shall come to pass that my people, which are of the house of Israel, shall be gathered unto the lands of their possessions; and my word also shall be gathered in one. (2 Ne. 28:29-30; 29:7-14)

A cornerstone of Bahá'í belief is that Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of all the revealed religions' prophecies concerning a messenger who would return in the last days to establish justice and the reign of righteousness. Bahá'ís accept him as Christ returned in the glory of the Father. "Followers of the Gospel," Bahá'u'lláh addresses the whole of Christendom, "behold the gates of heaven are flung open. He that had ascended unto it is now come. Give ear to His voice calling aloud over land and sea, announcing to all mankind the advent of this Revelation — a Revelation through the agency of which the Tongue of Grandeur is now proclaiming: 'Lo, the sacred pledge hath been fulfilled, for He, the Promised one is come.'" ²⁰

At the same time that Bahá'u'lláh was preparing for the revelation of his mission, Joseph Smith was organizing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in preparation for that second advent of Jesus Christ which was "near, even at the door" (D&C 110:16), a time when "he shall manifest himself unto the nations" (1 Ne. 13:42), and when "I will reveal myself from heaven with power and great glory . . . and dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand years" (D&C 29:11) for "I am in your midst and ye cannot see me" (D&C 38:7).

The revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has given a tremendous amount of independence and spiritual responsibility to men and women. Bahá'u'lláh prohibited priestcraft and enjoined upon everyone the duty to investigate reality. He considers that "first and foremost" of the "favours, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding," the purpose of which is to enable men "to know and recognize the one true God."²¹ His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), whom he appointed to interpret the Bahá'í scriptures and be the "perfect exemplar" of Bahá'í life, defines this "greatest gift" to include "intellect, . . . the power by which man acquires his knowledge of the several kingdoms of creation, and of various stages of existence, as well as much which is invisible."²² This power is "the eye of investigation" by which man "may see and recognize the truth," for "each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God," so that he may "become completely purified from the dross of ignorance."²³ This independent investigation of truth and its concomitant responsibilities is based in part upon the Bahá'í belief that men are responsible for their own sins, since the concept of original sin is "unreasonable and evidently wrong, for it means that all men . . . without committing any sin or fault, but simply because they are the posterity of Adam, have become without reason guilty sinners," which is "far from the justice of God."²⁴

Joseph Smith, in keeping with the spirit of a new age and the development of very American ideas of liberty and individual responsibility, records the command "that there be no priestcrafts" (2 Ne. 26:29) and writes of "intelligence, or the light of truth" which "is independent in that sphere in

which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also” and which is the basis for “the agency of man” (D&C 93:29–31). This power of intelligence, this light of truth, is to be used to know God’s commands, to “seek . . . out of the best books, words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118) for “if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (Articles of Faith 13). Man must be a free agent, able to investigate truth, for “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 2).

The Bahá’í, it seems safe to say, may posit that Joseph Smith, along with William Miller and many other religious prodigies, enunciated a number of ideas which had formed in the collective unconscious of mankind over a long period of incubation, finally to see the light of day in the early nineteenth century. That the expression of these ideas should occur at the appearance of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh is a monumental coincidence. Joseph Smith, in founding a church which now has nearly five million members, and in tapping and channelling the spiritual currents of a new age in a unique scriptural canon, showed himself to be a religious genius of a most profound kind. An outside observer can, therefore, accept Joseph Smith as a seer — a man with considerable powers of insight. This conception of Joseph Smith arises from an understanding of Joseph Smith’s revelatory experience as possibly different in kind from those described by such revelators as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh. The Mormon scriptures can be seen as repositories of truth (either in the universal sense of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, or in the particularized sense of the Doctrine and Covenants) though not necessarily as documents recording historical fact or arising through supernatural means. The distinction between truth and historicity makes this understanding possible. While admittedly, such an approach is inadequate and partial from the standpoint of the orthodox Mormon, it does allow the non-Mormon to approach with sympathy and appreciation the beliefs of those who do call Joseph Smith a prophet and who consider the standard works as the word of God.

NOTES

1. Universal House of Justice to Bahá’í individual, 7 Feb. 1977, quoted in Helen Hornby, comp., *Reference File* (Quito: Helen Hornby, approved by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Ecuador, 1981), p. 320. Correspondence in the Bahá’í World Centre Archives, Haifa, Israel, may not be cited by the name of the recipient, many of whom are still alive.

2. Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 101–2.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Center, 1978), p. 149.

5. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), p. 151.

6. Shoghi Effendi to Bahá’í individual, 13 March 1950 as quoted in William P. Collins, “The Bahá’í Faith and Mormonism: A Preliminary Survey,” *World Order* 15 (Fall 1980/

Winter 1981) p. 44; Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavours: Messages to Alaska*, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Alaska (n.p.: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Alaska, 1976), p. 71.

7. Shoghi Effendi, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1957* (Sydney: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1970), p. 41; Shoghi Effendi to Bahá'í individual, 25 Nov. 1950, quoted in Hornby, *Reference File*, p. 321.

8. See Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1 (Sept. 1970): 15-22; Leland W. Negaard, "The Problem of Second Isaiah in the Book of Mormon" (B.D. thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1961); Susan Curtis, "Palmyra Revisited: A Look at Early Nineteenth Century American Thought and the Book of Mormon," paper presented to the John Whitmer Historical Association, Graceland College, 10 May 1977; non-Mormon Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1980); William D. Russell, "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon: The Thought of Pre-exilic Israel and the First and Second Nephi Compared," unpublished paper, 1982.

9. Michael Coe, "Mormonism and Archeology: An Outside View," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 8 (Summer 1973): 40-48; Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 12.

10. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 75-80. It seems to me that Mormons have not yet answered the discussion of this subject by Brodie.

11. Russell, "Historicity of the Book of Mormon," pp. 14-15.

12. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, pp. 16-17.

13. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), pp. 230-32.

14. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, pp. 13-21. He outlines Julian Jaynes's theory from Jaynes's *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1977). Another especially valuable review of psychological theories applied to Joseph Smith is T. L. Brink, "Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 73-83. Brink argues that Smith's work can be seen as the product of a sound mind and as the result of authentic religious experience.

15. "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations," *DIALOGUE* 3 (Summer 1968): 67-105; Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Prmit of Hor: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *DIALOGUE* 3 (Autumn 1969): 109-134. The first set of articles includes Hugh Nibley's explanation of the orthodox Mormon view which is repeated and amplified in Benjamin Urrutia, "The Joseph Smith Papyri," *DIALOGUE* 4 (Summer 1969): 129-34. Mormons query whether it is really possible to state that the papyri were not a codified scripture which could be read in more than one way, or that Joseph Smith's power to translate did not transcend the mere mechanical act of rendering a word-for-word equivalent of the Egyptian in English.

16. Richard P. Howard, "A Tentative Approach to the Book of Abraham," *DIALOGUE* 3 (Summer 1968): 92.

17. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, p. 33.

18. George Townshend, *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), pp. 59, 62.

19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 68, 74.

20. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 104.

21. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 194.

22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 11th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 41.

23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Chicago: Executive Board of Bahá'í Temple Unity, 1922), p. 287.

24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 120.