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## Excursus: Religion of the Nehors

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**Abstract:** The book of Alma begins with religious conflict and, by the end, escalates into military conflict. Mormon saw the later wars as the direct result of the early religious dissensions, which led not just to disagreement but to defection. The worst conflicts with “Lamanites” are not with those had always been Lamanites, but with apostate Nephites who became Lamanites. Mormon saw internal contention and religio-political fission as the cause of the Nephites’ virtual destruction before the Messiah came to Bountiful. Alma2 apparently saw the same problem and attempted to heal the social rifts by religious renewal.

## Excursus: Religion of the Nehors

The book of Alma begins with religious conflict and, by the end, escalates into military conflict. Mormon saw the later wars as the direct result of the early religious dissensions, which led not just to disagreement but to defection. The worst conflicts with “Lamanites” are not with those had always been Lamanites, but with apostate Nephites who became Lamanites. Mormon saw internal contention and religio-political fission as the cause of the Nephites’ virtual destruction before the Messiah came to Bountiful. Alma<sub>2</sub> apparently saw the same problem and attempted to heal the social rifts by religious renewal.

We have no information about how the book of Alma began on the large plates, but a predictable beginning would have been the official installation of the new judges and the commencement of the reign from which they thereafter measured their calendar. If it followed other ancient political documents, it may have stated the religio-political justification for the new dynasty.

Instead, Mormon elected to begin it with the story of a particular religious dissident, Nehor, brought before Alma<sub>2</sub> for judgment. Mormon selected Nehor’s story because it advanced his own narrative purposes. Only after discussing the reasons for bringing him before Alma<sub>2</sub> does Mormon inform us that his name was Nehor. In spite of what appears to be a very limited influence, Mormon seems to have named an entire religious movement for this man. Possibly Alma<sub>2</sub> applied “Nehor” to this religion; but I see Mormon’s selection of a murderer’s name for the religion as highly symbolic, even contrived, and therefore infer that the name is Mormon’s choice, not Alma<sub>2</sub>’s. This religion, which Mormon terms the “order of the Nehors,” existed long before Nehor himself; and other practitioners of the religion probably had a greater impact on Nephite society. I suggest that the designation reflects Mormon’s desire to place this religion in the worst possible light by associating it with a murderer.

Later in the book of Alma we learn that the order of the Nehors dominates the city of Ammonihah (Alma 16:11) and that the Amalekites (also known as the Amlicites) also profess the order of the Nehors (Alma 24:28). Most fascinating is that the Amulonites, descendants of Noah’s priests who defected to the Lamanites, were “Nehorites” before Nehor came along to lend his name to the movement.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John L. Sorenson, “Religious Groups and Movements among the Nephites, 200–1 B.C.,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, edited

Alma<sup>1</sup>, father of the man who judged Nehor, had once been an adherent of a Nehorite religion.

From at least the time of Noah's priests to the end of the Book of Mormon, this sect, the order of the Nehors, was the most threatening competing religion in Nephite cities. It became both politically and religiously divisive. Mormon formally introduces it as a great danger:

And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment-seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged, a man who was large, and was noted for his much strength.

And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people.

And he also testified unto the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life.

And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money.

And he began to be lifted up in the pride of his heart, and to wear very costly apparel, yea, and even began to establish a church after the manner of his preaching. (Alma 1:2–6).

These verses contain what Mormon believed were the essential elements of the order of the Nehors. In order of appearance, they are:

- Nehor believes he preaches “the word of God.”
- Nehor's religion was “bearing down against the church.”
- His emphasis on priests' role must be a contrast to priests in the Nephite religion. They should “become popular” and “ought to be supported by the people” rather than laboring to support themselves.
- All are saved and redeemed and will have eternal life (i.e., there is no need for an Atoning Messiah)
- A manifestation of Nehor's social position was the wearing of “very costly apparel.”

These aspects of the Nehorite religion appear in various manifestations throughout the Book of Mormon, including the preceding story of Noah's priests. Thus, even though this order is named after a later figure than Noah, it is best to see the Nehorite religion as a particular set of competing religious ideas that were already part of Nephite society and which continued to be the cause of what Mormon terms “contentions” throughout Nephite history. Each characteristic of Nehor's claims shows what Alma understood as the essential aspects of this most dangerous heresy.

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by Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 190–91, notes the similarity between the Nehorite beliefs and those of Noah's priests even though he calls Nehor the founder of the order of the Nehors.

## Nehorite Belief in God

The order of the Nehors was not a pagan religion but a syncretic one. It was a version of the Nephite faith but diverged from some of the principles taught by the faithful Nephite prophets. It was attractive to the Nephites precisely because it was not foreign. The Nehorites were not Israelites who have developed faith in a completely foreign deity but Israelites who believe in a version of the Israelite religion.

While it is not an accurate parallel, it may be helpful to imagine the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes of Jesus's day. In spite of their theological differences, they all considered themselves part of the same religion and community. Probably, those with political allegiance to the Nephites saw the order of the Nehors similarly.

Only the similarity between the religions accounts for Amulek's problem when Zeezrom confronts him in Ammonihah, offering him a bribe to deny Yahweh. Amulek recognizes this as a trick, and his response confirms that the Nehorites believe in Yahweh (although somewhat differently): "And now thou hast lied before God unto me. Thou saidst unto me—Behold these six onties, which are of great worth, I will give unto thee—when thou hadst it in thy heart to retain them from me; and it was only thy desire that I should deny the true and living God, that thou mightest have cause to destroy me. And now behold, for this great evil thou shalt have thy reward" (Alma 11:25).

Amulek here points out that, had he accepted the bribe and denied Yahweh, the Ammonihahites would have had "cause to destroy me." He would have been guilty of blasphemy, and one can blaspheme only a God in whom one believes. Thus, both Amulek and Zeezrom believe in the same God, but with a difference in interpretation—perhaps in the same way that Christians believe in the same God, yet interpret the godhead in different ways.

While it is not clear from Alma chapter 1's brief synopsis, one aspect of Nehorite religion was also a belief in the Mosaic law. During Alma<sub>2</sub>'s discourse to the Ammonihahites, he pointedly remarks: "The scriptures are before you" (Alma 13:20). Unless the Ammonihahites believe in those scriptures, Alma<sub>2</sub>'s admonition makes no sense. Further, the Ammonihahite demand to hear more than one person declare Alma<sub>2</sub>'s message may be related to the Deuteronomic law of witnesses. (See commentary accompanying Alma 9:6.) The most obvious instance of Nehorite believers accepting the law of Moses comes from Abinadi's testimony before Noah's priests, who declare: "We teach the law of Moses" (Mosiah 12:28).

The order of the Nehors shares much with the Nephite religion. They believe in the same God and follow the law of Moses, as do the Nephites. No doubt this common basis makes the order of the Nehors attractive to many Nephites. It is, however, the dissimilarities that are important and that shape the conflict in the Book of Mormon.

## Nehorism as a Religious Threat

The divisiveness of the order of the Nehors is much more than a difference in interpreting scripture. The Nehorite religion espouses a different form of social

organization, one that is diametrically opposed to a foundational Nephite tenet. A hallmark of the order of the Nehors was social differentiation. A hallmark of Nephite belief was social equality. These beliefs drive social interactions and institutions. Socio-political dominance by the order of the Nehors in any city would effectively exclude the Nephites from a significant role in that city.

Thus, when Alma<sub>2</sub> begins to see serious problems among the Nephites, he steps down as chief judge to begin a preaching tour, not a military campaign. One of those problems was the incipient social divisions: “Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted” (Alma 4:12). Even though the problem is social, Alma<sub>2</sub> sees reaffirming and reestablishing the Nephite religion as the solution.

### The Nehorite Priest

Alma chapter 1 focuses on Nehor as a priest. However, it is not just the religious function of the Nehorite priest, but its social implication that is dangerous. It is significant that a Nehorite priest does not work with his own hands. The ability to require someone else to provide one’s living is an important divider of social class.

The Nehorite priest is not the equivalent of a modern professional clergyperson. Modern society is full of wage earners. A modern priest’s ability to exchange services for money is not qualitatively different than for any other person who similarly exchanges expertise for wages. Where all participate in a wage-earning economy, the fact of earning wages does not, in itself, imply social differentiation, although social differentiation certainly occurs based on the amount of wages received.

The social difference that concerns Alma<sub>2</sub> is that the Nehorite priest does not work with his own hands. In a society where there were no wage earners, a non-laborer necessarily lived directly on what other people produced. Such a priest was also in direct contradiction to one of Mosiah<sub>2</sub>’s laws: “And he also commanded them that the priests whom he had ordained should labor with their own hands for their support” (Mosiah 18:24).

Nehor’s description does not include another marker of Nehorite religion that Mormon underscores in the case of Amlici, also a Nehorite, but one who causes even greater unrest:

And it came to pass in the commencement of the fifth year of their reign there began to be a contention among the people; for a certain man, being called Amlici, he being a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law—

Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; even so much that they began to be very powerful; and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people.

Now this was alarming to the people of the church, and also to all those who had not been drawn away after the persuasions of Amlici; for they knew that according to their law that such things must be established by the voice of the people.

Therefore, if it were possible that Amlici should gain the voice of the people, he, being a wicked man, would deprive them of their rights and privileges of the church; for it was his intent to destroy the church of God. (Alma 2:1–4)

Mormon spells out that Amlici is “after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword” (Alma 1:9–10, 15) in such detail that it is impossible to overlook his affiliation with the order of the Nehors. The critical point is that Amlici has persuaded his supporters that he should be a king—not just a king like Mosiah<sup>2</sup> but a king presumably like Noah. Benjamin could say that he worked with his own hands for his support (Mosiah 2:14), but if a Nehorite priest believed that he should be supported by the people, we may be absolutely certain that a Nehorite king would expect no less—and certainly more.

During the reign of the kings the fracture line lay between Nephite egalitarianism and competing pressure for social hierarchies. After the reign of the judges, however, the pressures for social hierarchies focused on the reinstatement of the monarchy. This movement was not just agitating for a different form of government, however. In it, the king represented a social revolution that instituted significant social segregation.

## Nehorite Denial of the Atoning Messiah

The most dangerous religious belief of the Nehors was that there was no need for an Atoning Messiah. This teaching struck a blow to the heart of Nephite teaching. The Atoning Messiah was unquestionably Nephi’s dominant message, and the belief in the Atoning Messiah was the continuing theme of Nephite prophets. Indeed, testifying of the Messiah is Mormon’s entire purpose in abridging Nephite records.<sup>2</sup>

Yet those who denied the Atoning Messiah were not necessarily denying Yahweh. As noted in “Excursus: The Nephite Understanding of God” (following 1 Nephi 11), the Nephites understood the Messiah as Yahweh. The Nehors believed in God, or Yahweh. What they did not believe in was Yahweh’s atoning mission. They may even have believed in what I have termed the Triumphant Messiah, or the Messiah of the end of times who would conquer all enemies of God; but they did not believe that Yahweh would come down and become the sacrifice that atoned for sin. (Nephi called this sacrificial mission “the condescension of God.” See commentary accompanying 1 Nephi 11:18 and 27.)

For this reason, Zeezrom attempts to catch Amulek in a contradiction by asking whether Amulek believes in one God:

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<sup>2</sup>The Book of Mormon’s Title Page states its purpose: “And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” Remembering that the title “Christ” is the English version of the Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah” (as rendered in English), the book’s declared purpose is to “convince . . . Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Messiah, the Eternal God.”

Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God?

And he answered, No.

Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things?

And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me.

And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?

And he said unto him, Yea.

And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word.

Now Zeezrom said unto the people: See that ye remember these things; for he said there is but one God; yet he saith that the Son of God shall come, but he shall not save his people—as though he had authority to command God. (Alma 11:28–35)

Zeezrom attempts to catch Amulek on two points. The first is the possible contradiction in one God, yet a “Son of God,” which implies a “Father God” and therefore two Gods, not one. (See commentary accompanying these verses for a discussion of this point.) The next important fact is not just Yahweh’s uniqueness but denying the Son’s atoning role. The issue is salvation, and Zeezrom words his question hoping to trap Amulek, who, he knows full well, believes in the Messiah’s salvific mission. The Nehorites do not believe in repentance from sin, since (for them) salvation is universal (Alma 15:15).

It is this heresy that denies the redeeming mission of the Messiah. Thus, it underlies Alma<sub>2</sub>’s question to the Nephite congregation in Zarahemla: “Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you?” (Alma 5:15). This is no rhetorical question. Alma<sub>2</sub> is bearing down on what he understood as part of the great religious division among his people. It is analogous to a temple recommend question asking if they supported apostate groups.

## Nehors and Costly Apparel

Costly apparel does not have religious significance per se; rather it socially marks the division between the two religions. Costly apparel in the Book of Mormon is a sign, not only of encroaching materialism but also, and more importantly, divisive social hierarchies. It is a threat that began so early in Nephite society that it obviously predates the Nehorite religion. We first meet the sin of costly apparel in Jacob: “And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they” (Jacob 2:13).

In this first mention of costly apparel, it is already accompanied by social divisiveness. Those with access to costly apparel assumed a higher social rank. They saw themselves as better than ordinary people, in a privileged position. The term “costly apparel” is Book of Mormon shorthand for this type of social divisiveness. When Mormon described the return to sinfulness after the Messiah’s appearance at

Bountiful, one of the first evidences of moral decline was wearing costly apparel (4 Ne. 1:24). It is so closely attached to other aspects of the Nehorite religion that it forms one of the oblique references that Samuel uses to suggest that the Nephites are quick to accept the order of the Nehors:

But behold, if a man shall come among you and shall say: Do this, and there is no iniquity; do that and ye shall not suffer; yea, he will say: Walk after the pride of your own hearts; yea, walk after the pride of your eyes, and do whatsoever your heart desireth—and if a man shall come among you and say this, ye will receive him, and say that he is a prophet.

Yea, ye will lift him up, and ye will give unto him of your substance; ye will give unto him of your gold, and of your silver, and ye will clothe him with costly apparel; and because he speaketh flattering words unto you, and he saith that all is well, then ye will not find fault with him.

O ye wicked and ye perverse generation; ye hardened and ye stiffnecked people, how long will ye suppose that the Lord will suffer you? Yea, how long will ye suffer yourselves to be led by foolish and blind guides? Yea, how long will ye choose darkness rather than light? (Hel. 13:27–29)

Samuel the Lamanite does not name the order of the Nehors, but the traits are plain: denial of the atonement, social segregation, and costly apparel.

In spite of costly apparel's connection with the order of the Nehors, I emphasize that it is a greater problem than its specific association with the Nehors. It is an invasive trait in Nephite society that causes problems even in the absence of the Nehorite religion. The case of Jacob tells us that social stratification, as manifest through wearing costly apparel, is a threat to Nephite society by itself. It even threatens Nephite religion from the inside. When Alma<sub>2</sub> addresses believers in Zarahemla, he says:

And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of costly apparel and setting your hearts upon the vain things of the world, upon your riches?

Yea, will ye persist in supposing that ye are better one than another; yea, will ye persist in the persecution of your brethren, who humble themselves and do walk after the holy order of God, wherewith they have been brought into this church, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and they do bring forth works which are meet for repentance. (Alma 5:53–54)

Even among those who profess to follow the Nephite religion, this pressure to form social divisions was strong. It is, therefore, not exclusive to the Nehorites, although they accept it rather than fighting against it like the Nephite prophets.

The social divisiveness of costly apparel was also prominent in another Nephite heretical religion, that of the Zoramites. Alma<sub>2</sub> presents the Zoramites as a unique religion. The Zoramite Rameumptom is not mentioned in connection with any other people. (Possibly Mormon recorded the Rameumptom of the Zoramites because it fits with their history, simply neglecting to mention it for other Nehorites.) With the exception of the Rameumptom, however, the Zoramite religion shares a number of traits with the order of the Nehors—traits Alma<sub>2</sub> decries in these terms:

Behold, O God, they cry unto thee, and yet their hearts are swallowed up in their pride. Behold, O God, they cry unto thee with their mouths, while they are puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world.

Behold, O my God, their costly apparel, and their ringlets, and their bracelets, and their ornaments of gold, and all their precious things which they are ornamented with; and behold, their hearts are set upon them, and yet they cry unto thee and say—We thank thee, O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish.

Yea, and they say that thou hast made it known unto them that there shall be no Christ. (Alma 31:27–29).

These characteristics are fundamental aspects of the Nehorite religion. They believe in social segregation manifest through the wearing of costly apparel, and they deny the Atoning Messiah.

## Conclusions and Speculations

I hypothesize that the order of the Nehors is Mormon's name for the major religious heresy among the Nephites after their arrival in Zarahemla. It would be unlikely that Nehorite believers labeled it in that way, as Nehor's death was "ignominious" (Alma 1:15). It is more likely that they did not name it at all, but simply assumed that it was the only "right" way. That understanding matches better the profile of ancient religions and may help us understand that, even among the Nephites, the order of the Nehors may not have been seen as a separate and competing religion.

The most fascinating question is where Nehorism came from. While it is always possible that it was a religion that split off from the Nephite religion since that is where we see it, its theology does not support a Nephite origin. In what way would any splinter religion establish itself by specifically denying the most important aspect of its parent religion? The denial of the Atoning Messiah makes little sense unless it was a reaction to a religion that preached the Atoning Messiah. This heresy was tantamount to reconceiving God, a rare phenomenon in splinter groups.

Obviously, my suggestions are speculative, given the lack of information. I note that part of the order of the Nehors is clearly formed from what modern readers would call social pressures rather than religious ones. Wearing costly apparel is an indication that the social divisions seen in surrounding cultures are influencing Nephite perceptions of what their society should look like. Perhaps a modern analogy might be Amish communities living among peoples who accept materialism in ways that the Amish reject. They certainly see and understand the surrounding culture, and doubtless some Amish are tempted by it. Nevertheless, fundamental to Amish religious belief is resistance to the influence of that outside culture. It would not be surprising to see some Amish who desire adaptations that would make their religion more welcoming to materialism; and, equally unsurprisingly, the traditional part of the community would resist such modernizing efforts. In the modern world, some of the modern Amish, encountering such recalcitrance and unable to accept traditional forms, would leave their community. In the Nephite world there was rarely anywhere else to go, and the social pressures continued to boil inside the community.

Among the Nephites, accepting elements of the larger society might carry with it accepting certain aspects of the larger culture that might also be seen as religious. After the destruction of Ammonihah, Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek continued to preach among other political Nephites against what appeared to be the order of the Nehors among them:

And thus did Alma and Amulek go forth, and also many more who had been chosen for the work, to preach the word throughout all the land. And the establishment of the church became general throughout the land, in all the region round about, among all the people of the Nephites.

And there was no inequality among them; the Lord did pour out his Spirit on all the face of the land to prepare the minds of the children of men, or to prepare their hearts to receive the word which should be taught among them at the time of his coming—

That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the true vine, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

Now those priests who did go forth among the people did preach against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be—

Holding forth things which must shortly come; yea, holding forth the coming of the Son of God, his sufferings and death, and also the resurrection of the dead.

And many of the people did inquire concerning the place where the Son of God should come; and they were taught that he would appear unto them after his resurrection; and this the people did hear with great joy and gladness. (Alma 16:15–20)

Of particular interest is the additional information of the traits against which Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek must preach. According to verse 18, they preached “against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness.” These traits are, in other parts of the Book of Mormon, ascribed to Lamanites. For example, when Ammon and his brothers begin their missionary journey, they size up the dangers of their mission: “They had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in *murdering* the Nephites, and *robbing* and *plundering* them; and their *hearts were set upon riches*, or upon gold and silver, and precious stones; yet they sought to obtain these things by murdering and plundering, *that they might not labor for them with their own hands*” (Alma 17:13–14; emphasis mine).

Each of the italicized phrases also describes the Nehors. Mormon may simply see these traits as inevitable among those opposed to the true order of Yahweh, for he uses similar descriptions when he calls the Gentiles (whoever he conceived them to be) to repentance: “Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doings, of your *lyings* and *deceivings*, and of your *whoredoms*, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your *murders*, and your *priestcrafts*, and your *envyings*, and your *strifes*, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive

a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel” (3 Nephi 30:2; emphasis mine). When Mormon categorizes the Gentiles as needing repentance, he casts them as sharing the same sins as Nehorites or Lamanites.

It would seem, then, that the Nehorite religion has two elements: (1) a syncretization with at least the social structures of Mesoamerican religions, and (2) an acceptance of the Mosaic law and Yahweh, with the crucial difference that the Nephites emphasize the Atoning Messiah while the Nehorites deny the need for repentance and therefore the need for an Atoning Messiah.

It seems unlikely that this pattern, which is precisely the picture I have suggested for Laman and Lemuel (1 Nephi, Part 1: Context, Chapter 7, “The Historical Setting of 1 Nephi”), is coincidental. I have argued that Laman and Lemuel believed in the form of Judaism represented by the Josian reforms that excised belief in the Atoning Messiah. This stance placed the two brothers at odds with Lehi and Nephi, who both emphasized the Atoning Messiah, and perhaps other elements of pre-reform Judaism.

Denying the Atoning Messiah makes the Nehorites a fascinating historical problem. While pagan religions would not believe in the Messiah, neither would they devote significant energy to denying something they don’t believe in. Christians do not believe in the Aztec tribal god Huitzilopochtli, but they make no effort to actively deny that god or any teaching related to him. Denying the Messiah makes sense only if the Nehorites might have believed but chose not to. Selecting that particular issue to disbelieve is, in my opinion, too coincidentally linked to issues traceable to the original fission of Lehi’s children.

I suggest, therefore, that in spite of the official animosity toward the Lamanites in the earliest stages of the Nephite religion, there was still some communication with them and Laman and Lemuel’s religious ideas had their adherents, just as Nephi’s did. Somewhere among the people described as Lamanites were those who were literally Lamanites and who had preserved an alternate form of their ancestral Old World religion. Furthermore, it seems likely that they did not subscribe to the Nephite egalitarian ideal and embraced social stratification. When influences from the larger culture began to intrigue Nephites, the most impressive would be a religious form combining the Old World tradition with what they saw and liked of the New World; wealth, power, and status were part of those New World values.

I have also suggested that Mosiah<sub>1</sub>, in leading his people away from the city of Nephi, represented a minority religion, while the majority had accepted some other form of religion and society. (See commentary accompanying Omni 1:12.) Possibly, even so early, the basic elements of what would become the order of the Nehors were so popular that Mosiah<sub>1</sub> and his people fled from them. I consider it too coincidental that these traits emerge clearly in the record among Noah’s priests, a people who left Nephite-dominated Zarahemla and returned to the now Lamanite-dominated land of Nephi. The pressures which forced Mosiah<sub>1</sub> out of the city of Nephi were more internal than external. In Jacob’s conflict with Sherem, we see a

contest between forms of the Old World religion. It is therefore logical that the earliest clear manifestation of Nehorism should appear in the land of Nephi.

I see the order of the Nehors as a version of the Old World religion transmitted to the New World by Laman and Lemuel, which differed in some crucial respects from the religion Lehi and Nephi espoused. The similarities are due to the shared source. The differences preserve the very divisions that resulted in Lehi's dream-driven exodus from Jerusalem to the New World, a physical change that Laman and Lemuel never fully accepted and perhaps a religious change that they rejected as well.