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The “Expanded” Book of Mormon?

Stephen E. Robinson

As a graduate student in biblical studies at Duke University I once had the privilege of escorting the great conservative scholar F. F. Bruce around the campus and town. At one point in our conversation I asked him how he could disagree with the logic of certain liberal scholars which seemed to lead inescapably to negative conclusions about the reliability of the biblical record. Professor Bruce responded by saying, “It isn’t their logic I disagree with. It’s just that before they ever start their logical processes they accept as given certain assumptions I would jolly well like to see proved.”

This was exactly my reaction to a recent article which maintains that the Book of Mormon is not actually the straightforward translation Joseph Smith said it was, but is rather a modern “expansion” of an ancient document (see Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of An Ancient Source”). The claim of the expansion theory is that not all of the present Book of Mormon is genuinely ancient, but that portions of it were created by Joseph Smith under the inspiration of God out of Joseph’s nineteenth-century environment: “It seems to me that the Book of Mormon makes most sense if it is

seen as both a revelation to Joseph Smith and as Joseph's expansions of the text" (Ostler 109). Thus, the theory claims, though all of the book is "inspired," not all of it genuinely reflects events and ideas among the ancient Nephites.

Like Professor Bruce, it is not that I disagree so much with the logic of the article as with certain assumptions it adopts without discussion and without warning before the logical processes even begin. I think that these hidden assumptions ought to be brought to light before the article as a whole can be properly understood and evaluated.

The Naturalistic Bias

One hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that there is no predictive prophecy, or at least that predictive prophecy cannot be invoked to explain the presence of "Christian" elements in the portions of the Book of Mormon that happened before Christ was born. According to the theory, prophecy is interpretive rather than predictive; therefore, prophets do not predict for future times; they merely interpret for their own time and in their own terms. It follows then, according to the theory, that the detailed predictions about Christ or his message in the Book of Mormon must be "expansions" added *after* the time of Christ, and this logic allows the expansionist to identify what came from Joseph and not from the plates. Such revisionism argues that Joseph must be the source of this or that passage because the Book of Mormon prophets who lived before Christ could not have known such things (see Ostler 80-82, 86-87, 101). It is stated this way, "The Christian motifs in the Book of Mormon require either that a Christian has been at work during some stage of the compilation or that it is Christian in origin" (Ostler 87). According to the theory this means that pre-Christian references to and about teachings of Christ must be post-Christian expansions and that these "expansions must

[have] come from Joseph Smith” (Ostler 87). There is no reason offered why the “Christian” involved could not have been Nephi or why, or how, if the Lord could tell Nephi how to build a ship, he could not have told him about the Messiah and his doctrine. The expansion theory merely takes it as given that such predictive revelation did not and could not happen. If it had, and if the so-called “expansions” could just as easily be considered instances of predictive prophecy, which is what the Book of Mormon claims in the first place, then the expansion theory is rendered totally unnecessary.

It should be noted that the rejection of predictive prophecy is characteristic of the *secular* approach to the scriptures, for the exclusion of any supernatural agency (including God) from human affairs is fundamental to the methodology of most biblical scholarship.¹ The naturalistic approach gives scholars from different religious backgrounds common controls and perspectives relative to the data and eliminates arguments over subjective beliefs not verifiable by the historical-critical method.² However, there is a cost to using the naturalistic approach, for one can never mention God, revelation, priesthood, prophecy, etc., as having objective existence or as being part of the evidence or as being possible causes of the observable effects.

It is commonly assumed that a critical biblical scholar by definition and on principle *cannot* conclude that any effect had a divine or supernatural cause, any more than a physicist can attribute nuclear forces to fairies or a medical researcher can

1 E.g. as stated recently in J. Hayes and C. Holladay 116: “Second, attempts are made to reconstruct the history without appeal either to special divine intervention in history or miraculous occurrences which might have altered the course of events. This represents a rather radical break with the outlook of the sources themselves which speak of divine involvement in historical events. The modern historian tends to consider this theological dimension in the texts to be a reflection of the faith and theology of the communities and the authors rather than a datum of history itself which can be studied and confirmed.”

2 See, for example, the statement in Hauer and Young 42-44.

attribute illness to evil spirits.³ Such a conclusion would violate the methodological canons of the discipline: "To accept the supernatural would mean giving up the usual methods of establishing historical probability and leave no firm basis for historical investigation, since no grounds would exist for preferring one account of an event to another" (Marshall 129). But this methodology makes the examination of the whole picture impossible. Since the method itself assumes that whatever is being examined is the result of natural and human forces alone, it should not surprise us that such critics reject Joseph Smith's explanation of the Book of Mormon *before* the evidence is even consulted.

If one starts with the *a priori* that the claims of Joseph and the Book of Mormon to predictive prophecy are not to be accepted, then that *a priori* is bound to force a conclusion that where the Book contains predictive prophecy it is not authentic and must therefore be an "expansion." But clearly, this conclusion flows not from the evidence but from the *a priori* assumption. If one allows the possibility that God might have revealed future events and doctrines to Nephi, Abinadi or Samuel the Lamanite, then the so-called anachronisms disappear and this part of the argument for "expansion" collapses.

Naturalistic explanations are often useful in evaluating empirical data, but when the question asked involves non-empirical categories, such as "Is the Book of Mormon what it purports to be?", it begs the question to adopt a method whose first assumption is that the Book cannot be what it claims to be. This points out a crucial logical difficulty in using this method in either attacking or defending the Church. When those with a naturalistic bias apply their "scholarship" to LDS literature and history, we usually assume that it is to test the prophetic claims of the Church. In fact there is never a test at all. There cannot be, for the naturalistically based assumptions of the method have

³ Believing scholars are obligated to identify their faith assumptions or the faith community to which they are writing. Even so, their results are usually rejected by purists, among whom no sin is so great as letting one's theology influence one's results.

determined before we even begin that divine claims cannot be accepted, and the critical scholar will already be looking for naturalistic explanations for his data. Or in the words of W. Wink:

In this case the carrying over of methods from the natural sciences has led to a situation where we no longer ask what we would like to know . . . Rather, we attempt to deal only with those complexes of facts which are amenable to historical method. We ask only those questions which the method can answer (9).

It seems to me that few LDS scholars really understand this. While they think they are engaged in “pure” scholarship, many are really methodological half-breeds, using the naturalistic method when it suits them and drawing upon their theology when it suits them, without ever stating where and how they draw the line. Opponents and proponents alike can use the fruits of empirical research in a selective way to defend the faith, but the authority of the historical-critical method is lost in so doing, and the final product lacks any real force, being merely opinion (mingled with scripture). Pure critical scholarship on the other hand is agnostic by definition, and its rules are by design stacked against theistic conclusions. It would be incredibly naive to believe that biblical criticism brings us closer to the Christ of faith. After 200 years of refining its methods, biblical scholarship has despaired of knowing the real Jesus, except for a few crumbs, and has declared the Christ pictured in scripture to be a creation of the early Church (see the excellent summary in Perrin 207-48).

The Book of Mormon—An Ancient Text

A second implied assumption of the expansion theory, not totally unrelated to the first, is that our judgement of Nephite civilization and culture must be controlled and limited by our knowledge of pre-exilic Judah and Israel, and conversely that the Book of Mormon alone does not constitute reliable evidence

for what Nephites believed anciently. This *a priori* is clearly revealed by the practice of accepting Book of Mormon evidence for Nephite belief and practice only if a similar belief or practice can be found in pre-exilic Israelite sources. This method requires us to reject as modern "expansions" any doctrine in the Book of Mormon that is unsupported by what we know from other sources about pre-exilic Judaism. Thus, the Book of Mormon doctrine of the Fall is labelled an expansion because "The fall of Adam was never linked with the human condition in pre-exilic works, as it is in the Book of Mormon" (Ostler 82). The assumptions, of course, are that the Book of Mormon is not itself a pre-exilic work, that genuine Nephites were in all things clones of pre-exilic Israelites, and that we in the 20th century have a full and complete knowledge of pre-exilic Israelite beliefs. But since the former is the proposition being tested, we see the circularity of the argument and its assumed conclusions. The possibility that Nephite culture was to any degree idiosyncratic is totally ignored.

Expressed syllogistically, the expansionist argument goes something like this:

- A. The Book of Mormon links the fall of Adam with the human condition.
- B. But such an idea is not mentioned in other sources, and therefore must have been unknown in ancient Israel.
- C. Therefore, this teaching in the Book of Mormon cannot reflect ancient Israelite ideas and must be a modern expansion.

However, the real logic of the argument (complete with hidden premises) runs more like the following:

- A. The Book of Mormon links the fall of Adam with the human condition.
- B. But the Book of Mormon is an unreliable witness

- except where supported by parallels in pre-exilic Israel.
- C. Because parts of it are modern interpretations of the ancient text: “The book cannot properly be used to prove the presence of this or that doctrine in ancient thought because the revelation inherently involved modern interpretation” (Ostler 114).
 - D. Since Nephite belief and practice must be identical to pre-exilic Israelite beliefs and practices, and
 - E. Since we have sufficient knowledge of all pre-exilic beliefs and practices,⁴ and
 - F. Since the pre-exilic literature known to us does not link the fall of Adam with the human condition,
 - G. Therefore, pre-exilic Israelites did not believe such things and the Book of Mormon passages to the contrary must be modern expansions.

It will be noted that premises B and C beg the question and that D and E fall into Professor Bruce’s category of “assumptions I would jolly well like to see proved.”

History and “Salvation History”

A third hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that many historical claims of the Book of Mormon are not historical at all.

Some may see the expansion theory as compromising the historicity of the Book of Mormon. *To a certain extent it does.* The book cannot properly be used to prove the presence of this or that doctrine in ancient thought because the revelation inherently involved modern interpretation. . . . Such a model does not necessarily abrogate either the book’s religious significance or its value *as salvation history* (Ostler 114; emphasis added).

⁴ Our present knowledge of pre-exilic Israelite beliefs is simply too fragmentary to make exclusions. All scholars can rightly say is that a certain idea is not found *in the surviving sources*, but this is a long way from proving that the idea was not found in ancient Israel.

In other words, this version of the expansion theory is willing to give up the Book of Mormon as “real” history but leaves it intact as “salvation history.” Here the theory has opened the door to a way of thinking about the historical claims of the Book of Mormon that simply is unacceptable on any terms. Although this author devotes relatively little attention to the concept of salvation history, it is such a dangerous notion that even the “camel’s nose” must be vigorously kept out. The term “salvation history” comes from biblical theory outside the Church where one function of the concept is to separate *history*, meaning what actually happened (German *Historie*) from *story*, meaning our beliefs and traditions *about* what happened (German *Geschichte*). When critics using naturalistic assumptions declared many biblical claims to be historically false, another kind of history was created wherein discredited beliefs could still be “true”—not true because they actually happened, but true because they are believed in the context of a religious community and are therefore a vehicle of religious “truth” for that community. The German word for this mythological history is *Heilsgeschichte* or “the story of salvation,” a term which hints at the unhistorical nature of beliefs by emphasizing that it is story rather than history. English-speaking scholars usually use the more misleading term “salvation history,” which camouflages the implied non-historicity.

First naturalistic scholarship drove a wedge between the text and history, then theology soothed the fears of the faithful by telling them that history did not really matter anyway. Consequently, history is what actually happened, but “salvation history” is what we *believe*, and it doesn’t matter whether it happened or not. “Salvation history” has nothing to do with the reality of the event at all, but only with the reality of the traditions, the beliefs, the myth spawned by the event. It is not history at all, but an interpretation of history. “Salvation history” can never be false since its claims, unlike those of “real” history, need not conform to the criteria of “things as they really are,” and since

a single historical event can be interpreted and believed in many different ways.

Thus the safety valve of “salvation history” allows the conversion of disputed historical claims (which should be objective and falsifiable) into theological claims (which cannot be). If I am sworn in court to tell the truth and am asked if the defendant struck the plaintiff, I know what constitutes telling the truth and what constitutes telling a lie. But the proponents of “salvation history” would have us believe that when Joseph Smith is put on the witness stand and sworn to tell the truth and asked “Did you see God,” or “Did you translate the Book of Mormon from ancient texts,” the rules of true and false somehow change. He can swear to a thing that did not really happen, and by labelling the lie “salvation history” somehow not be guilty of perjury. This same contrivance allows liberal theologians who do not believe in the resurrection to talk with tears in their eyes about the significance of the empty tomb—they don’t believe in the historicity of the gospel accounts for a second, but only that God is somehow involved in the myth. It is divine fiction. No doubt a similar rationale allows some in the Church to say they know the Church is true even though they do not believe its historical claims. In like manner the resurrection has become a divine fiction for liberal Christian theologians. Similarly, expansion theorists must adopt the device of “salvation history” to avoid making Joseph Smith look like a liar when they deny the historical truth of what he wrote.

Advocates of the expansion theory must admit that the theory compromises the Book of Mormon as history, but they defend that move by claiming that its value as theology remains undiminished: “The Book of Mormon is not a history and was not meant to be; it is a revelation of the experiences of God and the salvation history of an ancient people” (Ostler 114). But that is trying to eat your cake and have it too. They say Joseph Smith’s claims are “true”; they just are not historically true. And while neither the term “salvation history” nor the concept can be found

in scripture or in the writings of the modern prophets, we are asked to borrow this sophistry from non-LDS theology to grease the wheels of the expansion theory.

"Worst-Case Scenario"

The full, logical implications of separating history from doctrine are unacceptable. A worst-case scenario would include the following results:

(1) We would cease to know. Since events and doctrines may or may not have happened or have been given as recorded, may or may not have been translated or transmitted correctly, and may or may not be interpreted appropriately—one can never be sure. I once asked a liberal protestant colleague of mine at Duke University what elements of Christianity, as he understood it, were non-negotiable, which propositions must be believed in order for one to be a Christian. His answer was that there were no such propositions. Everything was negotiable: the incarnation, the resurrection, the divinity or even the very existence of Jesus Christ—nothing was sure. Then what distinguishes Christianity from any other religion, say Judaism or Islam? Only that for Christians the myth that reveals God, creates a sense of community, and motivates correct values (our "salvation history") comes from the New Testament instead of the Old Testament or the Quran. This is one reason why liberal Christianity seems so socially oriented. Having lost faith in the actuality, the historicity, of the traditional claims of Christianity, they must focus their efforts on what they can see.

If we accept the concept of "salvation history," then when the scriptures or the prophets speak we can never know whether they are telling us what really happened or only what they want us to believe happened. Thus, whether a proposition is true or not no longer depends on whether it really happened, but merely

upon whether it is judged to be a good and useful thing to believe. This is why those who deny the historicity of the Church's claims always think Church doctrine is controlled by the Brethren. The General Authorities are not seen as witnesses of historical truths and of revealed doctrines, but rather as interpreters of a subjective and negotiable mythology.

If we accept the separation of doctrine from history, truth ceases to be a knowledge of "things as they are" (D&C 93:24), and becomes a mere collection of beliefs endorsed for their utility. The purpose of religious language is no longer to give knowledge but to give comfort. I have known scores of professionals in the field of religion who insist we cannot know whether there really is an afterlife, or even whether there is a God, but who endorse the practice of religion because it makes us feel better to think there is, and because thinking we are accountable to a God makes us live more ethical lives. And thus religion is reduced to a sophisticated form of whistling past the graveyard. In such a system one does not have faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world who actually suffered in Gethsemane, actually died on the cross and actually rose on the third day. One merely affirms that this is a comforting story whether it happened or not. But a mythological Christ can promise only a mythological salvation, and a mythological promise is no promise at all. Once the tie is severed between doctrine and "the real world," we are alone again in the universe, and doctrine or belief is merely a prop to comfort us or to motivate socially desirable behavior. Even then the types of behavior that are judged to be desirable are determined only by relative human standards.

In fact all of this is precisely what has happened in liberal Protestantism in the last two centuries or so. The "God is dead" movement of the 1960's and 70's was just the end of a long tradition of scholarly thought in which liberal scholars finally admitted that the idea of God was just a prop in their theology

and that human beings did not need the deception anymore and could just let the idea of God die.

The rejection of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, whether by expansion theorists or others, parallels the course previously taken by liberal Christianity in relation to the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. It should not surprise anyone that if we adopt the same assumptions relative to the Book of Mormon that liberal scholars have for the Bible, and if we employ the same methods they do, that we shall arrive at the same kinds of conclusions. This is precisely what the expansion theory urges upon us: "I suggest that we view the original, ancient text of the Book of Mormon much as scholars view the expansion of the words of the historical Jesus in the New Testament" (Ostler 107).

(2) Religion is relativized and subjectivized. Since "salvation history" is subjective belief and interpretation rather than objective fact, there can be no "true" church and no "false" ones. There remain only religions with different "salvation histories," and we are free to take our pick or make up our own. The results of such relativization are described in Doctrine and Covenants:

They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall (1:16).

(3) If the claims of the Church are to be understood as story rather than history, then authority in the Church will eventually pass from the Brethren to the scholars, just as it happened in ancient Israel and in the early Christian Church. For if the scholars know the "objective truth" about the Book of Mormon through their research while the "benighted Brethren" are still struggling under a false perspective and with archaic interpretations, then modern revelation and authority are just part of the myth, part of our "salvation history," and we, like the ancient

Church, will ultimately abandon the idea of living prophets and turn to scholars for the “truth.” God help us if it comes to that.

The claims of the Church are now and always have been historical. The doctrines have power only because they testify of what really happened. As Jacob put it: “. . . for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not. Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be . . .” (Jacob 4:13). Also, in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord says, “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (93:24-25).

When the link between doctrine and the real world is severed, religion becomes a sugar-coated lie. Adopting the concept of “salvation history” might indeed make it easier for those who cannot sustain a belief in certain historical claims to remain in the fold, but it does so by telling them that what they found so hard to believe was not really true after all.

Thus, before we even begin to analyze the arguments for the expansion theory, we see that at least three *a priori* assumptions are at work:

1. There is no predictive prophecy (for if there is, the expansion theory is unnecessary).
2. The Book of Mormon is not a reliable witness to Nephite history and culture unless supported by other pre-exilic sources.
3. At least some of the historical claims of the Book of Mormon are false.

On the surface the expansion theory presents itself as a “friendly amendment” to the position of the Church; yet it actually requires us to accept up front, as givens, three propositions that contradict the clear teaching of the Brethren throughout this dispensation. This can hardly be viewed

realistically as a "friendly amendment" to the teachings of the Church.

But even if we were to accept its *a priori* assumptions, the expansion theory still faces some problems with the interpretation of the data itself; at several points the arguments are simply too weak to support the theory. Let me offer just three examples: (1) the use of form criticism, (2) the claim that the Book of Mormon was influenced by Arminianism, and (3) the claim that the Book of Mormon doctrine of atonement is dependent upon Anselm of Canterbury.

Form Criticism

The possibility of doing form criticism in the usual sense on the Book of Mormon would be dismissed by most scholars. Since form criticism is the analysis of the pre-literary forms of written material, application of the form critical method presupposes such a pre-literary history for the material it examines. In the case of the Book of Mormon, however, acceptance of a pre-literary stage of tradition requires the prior acceptance of the Book of Mormon as a record pre-dating Joseph Smith and of Joseph's translating it "by the gift and power of God" (Book of Mormon title page). Since naturalistic scholarship rejects supernatural explanations, scholars must explain the book in terms that do not involve a pre-literary history, and without a pre-literary tradition of an actual people there can be no form criticism. There can be no form criticism of any literature that goes from an author's head to paper. On the other hand, a believer could attempt a form-critical analysis of the Book of Mormon, but it would entail accepting on faith the claims for the book's origins, thus going "beyond conclusions justified by the evidence or allowed by logic" (Ostler 67). But once one accepts the origins of the book on faith, it is hard to argue against accepting

the entire book on the same grounds, including the so-called “expansions.”

But even if we were to ignore this problem and proceed with a form-critical analysis of the Book of Mormon, other problems arise. Form criticism deals with the forms, the genres, in which pre-literary traditions must have circulated within a community, and then relates those forms to the life setting of the community, or what the Germans called *Sitz im Lieben*. According to both Dibelius and Bultmann, the two giants of the form-critical method, form criticism is the attempt “to rediscover the origin and the history of the particular units and thereby to throw some light on the history of the tradition before it took literary form” (Dibelius cited in Bultmann 4). So knowing about the form of the text tells us about the community, and knowing about the community in turn helps us to further interpret the texts. But even Bultmann admits that the method is circular (5). It follows then, that without a period of oral transmission or free circulation within a community, there can be no form criticism, for the forms must have been shaped and preserved by a community in order to give any valid information about that community. Yet for most of the Book of Mormon, we are given to understand that the record keeping was contemporary with the events, and that the traditions never circulated in the public domain to be shaped by the community before being recorded.⁵ The amount of material in the Book of Mormon which could constitute an oral tradition is negligible, although exceptions might include traditions of the Lamanites or of the Gadianton robbers, which were eventually recorded by the Nephites. And if the sources were not oral but written and not freely shaped by public circulation—for example, if Mormon used records

⁵ “Some individual texts and passages might well be first-time productions and thus do not lend themselves to all of the aspects of form-critical analysis. Such a text, like passages in a letter of Paul, may be “typical” in that they reflect customary forms of statements or argumentation but they have no prior history *per se*. That is, they have no previous “life setting.” Their setting is that of the document itself and the author-audience situation which gave it birth” (Hayes and Holladay 81-82). So it is with most of the Book of Mormon.

written by Nephi or Alma, then one must be satisfied with source rather than form criticism. This is still true even if an eyewitness describes events long after they occur, since he is still writing personal testimony and not preserving a common tradition shaped by community use, which is essential for form criticism. To the degree that material has not been created or shaped by a community, it is barren ground for form-critical analysis.

Were it not for these concerns, it might be possible to examine the genres of the prophetic lawsuit or the prophetic commission, although one must guard against confusing the how with the what, the descriptive genre with the event being described. The event being described, for example, a covenant renewal festival, cannot at the same time be the literary genre used to describe it. Since the same event, the covenant renewal festival, could be reported in a narrative, or poetry, or drama, or expository prose, it cannot itself be a form. If one confuses form with life setting, the method degenerates into farming for parallels. While the point here is complex and subtle, it is nevertheless significant methodologically because more than one writer has confused analysis of content parallels with form criticism.

Arminian Dependence?

A popular theory among those who believe Joseph Smith wrote all or part of the Book of Mormon on his own is that the text reveals Arminian influences. The adjective "Arminian" has both a descriptive and a derivative sense. In the descriptive sense "Arminian" simply means any part of a "theological reaction against the deterministic logic of Calvinism" (Cross 90). In this sense of the term many things are called Arminian which are not dependent upon the writings of the Dutchman Jakob

Harmenzoon, whose name is latinized as Jacobus Arminius.⁶ It is in this sense that Thomas F. O’Dea referred to the Book of Mormon as Arminian, since it (1) denies the doctrine of predestination and (2) teaches that Christ died for all men and not just for those predestined to be saved. However, other specialists reject the term “Arminianism” as being inappropriate to describe what was happening theologically in the northeastern United States in the early nineteenth century (Smith et al., 1:374ff). The Book of Mormon can be called Arminian only in the sense that its teachings on these two points agree with those of Arminius and his Remonstrant followers. The full Arminian doctrine as stated in the Remonstrance adds three more points: (3) man cannot exercise saving faith without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, (4) man can fall from grace, (5) the grace of the Holy Spirit is sufficient for continued victory over sin. But any similarity or agreement between the teaching of Arminius and that of the Book of Mormon does not necessarily prove influence or dependence, since many parties and individuals had held similar beliefs even before the 17th century, from Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians down to Erasmus and Carlstadt, who lived a century before Arminius himself. In fact, the provincial Council of Carthage was convened in 418 AD for the sole purpose of dealing with these same issues. Thus any argument that the Book of Mormon is dependent upon Arminianism must also prove that the doctrine in question was exclusively Arminian. Similarity is not necessarily dependence. One certainly didn’t need to be a student of Arminius to believe in free agency and a universal atonement. In fact, after the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, the hard-liners known as Jansenists even accused the Jesuits of teaching unrestrained free will and a universal salvation.

And yet, Arminius did not believe in either moral agency or in a universal atonement in the same way that the Book of

⁶ In fact, Frederic Platt can use the adjective in this way to say “Arminius himself was less Arminian than his followers” (1:808).

Mormon teaches them. Arminius believed in original sin, and that only Christians would be delivered from original sin by the Atonement of Christ. All others would suffer for the sin of Adam. For Arminius the atonement was potentially universal, but actually limited to believers. "As for the universal removal of the guilt of original sin, Arminius says that there could be such but there is not. Participation in Christ's benefits is by faith alone, hence only believers are delivered from the guilt" (Bangs 339). This is a far cry from the LDS belief that all men benefit from the Atonement through which no one will suffer for Adam's sin. Arminius' view of free will can hardly be compared to the Book of Mormon view, since he says:

In this state the free will of man toward the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatsoever except such as are excited by divine grace (Bangs 341).

For Arminius human beings, though "free," have no power to choose the good in any degree whatsoever without first receiving divine grace. Without grace man is not free to choose the good, or indeed, to choose at all. This is hardly the Book of Mormon doctrine of free agency:

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself (2 Nephi 2:27).

In fact, Arminianism did not really constitute an identifiable theology separate from the Reformed Church at all. As Frederic Platt has observed: "Apart from these and kindred questions involved in the problem of predestination, Arminianism has no definite theological distinctness. It attempts no fresh statement of the doctrines of God and man" (1:808). Therefore, to say that the Book of Mormon is Arminian

is nothing more than to say that it teaches moral agency and a universal atonement, although in a fashion and with a logic totally distinct from that of Arminius himself.

But the expansion theory does not claim mere similarities or parallel beliefs; it claims actual dependence of the Book of Mormon upon the writings of the Arminians (Ostler 81-82). Such a claim must be based on more than a few parallels, since "Arminian" parallels also exist for movements and individuals who preceded Arminius and who could not therefore be dependent. Mere similarities between documents or ideas do not prove that the latter are dependent upon the former.

If the expansion theory argues that the Book of Mormon is dependent on the writings of Jacob Arminius, then its advocates are obligated to prove (a) that Book of Mormon parallels involve exclusively Arminian doctrines, and (b) that specific verses in the Book of Mormon show literary dependence (not mere parallelism) upon specific passages in the writings of the Arminians. But the expansionists have not so far attempted to do either. If dependence is the claim, then a formal demonstration of that dependence is required. Certainly, it needs more than just a dogmatic assertion of such dependence. The Book of Mormon can rightly be described as Arminian only in the sense that, in common with many before Arminius, it rejects predestination and teaches that Christ died for all men.

Dependence On Anselm

Lastly, proponents of the expansion theory have claimed that the Book of Mormon is also dependent upon the satisfaction theory of atonement expounded by Anselm of Canterbury in his treatise *Cur Deus Homo* written in 1098 AD (see Ostler 82, 97). But here again, the concept of satisfaction predates Anselm, being found in early Christianity and in pre-Christian Judaism, though Anselm may have been the first Christian writer since the

Apostasy to discuss the Atonement in terms of divine justice and mercy. He also taught that the Atonement had to be infinite, and that it therefore required a God-man to perform it.

While the parallels to the Book of Mormon are here more striking at first glance, claims that the Book of Mormon is dependent on Anselm make the same logical error as the claims for Arminian dependence—that similarity plus posteriority automatically equals dependence. In this case, the parallels are not really as striking as they at first seem. For example, in Anselm, satisfaction means more than paying the debt and satisfying the demands of justice. Anselm holds, as the Book of Mormon does not, that the satisfaction must be greater than the act of disobedience (*Cur Deus Homo* 1:21-24; see also McGrath 59). Since sin is an affront to God, satisfaction must be made not only for the sin, but for the affront to the dignity of God as well. It is this recompense beyond the “cost” of the sin itself, which satisfies the affronted dignity of God, that man is unable to pay (*Cur Deus Homo* 1:22-23). For Anselm, the sin, though finite, affronts an infinite God who is therefore entitled to an infinite satisfaction for the sake of his ruffled infinite dignity. This idea is based on feudal concepts of justice in which an injured nobleman was entitled to recompense for his actual damages plus satisfaction for his offended dignity as well. It is actually the keystone of Anselm’s theory of satisfaction, and it is not found in the Book of Mormon.

Second, since God is an infinite being, according to Anselm’s theory, an affront to him is an infinite affront, and can be satisfied only by an infinite atonement. But this is not at all what the Book of Mormon means by the phrase “an infinite atonement.” Jacob teaches that the Atonement must be infinite to overcome death, that is to communicate immortality (infinity) to those it claims (2 Nephi 9:7-12). Amulek adds that the Atonement must also be infinite—that is divine rather than human (Alma 34:10)—so that the sacrifice can supercede the Law of

Moses, which will not allow one mortal to be sacrificed in place of another (vv. 11-13). Neither Jacob nor Amulek alludes to making infinite satisfaction for an offended infinite majesty.

Third, the parallel involving the competing demands of justice and mercy is particularly deceptive, for while the words are the same, the substance of the arguments is exactly opposed. In the Book of Mormon the competing demands of justice and mercy are resolved, according to Amulek, when mercy “overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy justice and encircles them in the arms of safety . . .” (Alma 34:15-16). Later Alma says that Christ atones “to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice . . .” (Alma 42:15). In the Book of Mormon justice is appeased by mercy so that mercy (the Atonement) may claim its own.

However, in *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm dismisses mercy as a form of injustice (1:12, 24-25). He then defines atonement strictly in terms of *iustitia dei*, the justice of God. Anselm’s theory does not deal with the idea of opposing principles. The mercy of God simply is not allowed to operate, and it is not mentioned again until the end of the treatise where it is noticed as a happy by-product of the divine justice (2:20). But there is never for Anselm a law of mercy which operates on its own or which can make claims of its own in opposition or in contrast to the law of justice.

Finally, the Book of Mormon emphasizes that Christ is a volunteer redeemer (see 1 Nephi 11:16, 26; 2 Nephi 4:26; 9:53; Jacob 4:7). But in Anselm’s theory God must act as he does, since he is acting out of justice and not out of mercy. For Anselm, Christ does not volunteer out of love to do what he was not otherwise obligated to do. A. McGrath, commenting on *Cur Deus Homo* 2:1-5, 17-18, puts it this way: “God, as *summa iustitia* [total justice] is therefore obliged . . . to restore the rectitude of the created order by redeeming fallen man—as an act of justice” (58; emphasis in the original).

While on the one hand it is true that formal parallels exist between the Book of Mormon and Anselm involving the vocabulary justice, mercy and infinite atonement, they are not parallels which would indicate dependence or borrowing, since the meanings of the words and the substance of the arguments expressed in the two documents are significantly different.

Conclusion

A final criticism I have of the expansion theory is that it fails to use the tools or methods of biblical scholarship with consistency. A fundamental principle of biblical scholarship is that no proposition will be accepted on faith; it must be founded in evidence and logic. Hence all divine agents are dismissed from the academic study of religion. Accepting this methodology, the expansion theorists hold that Joseph Smith must have written the pre-Christ "Christian" passages in the Book of Mormon; otherwise, it would involve an acceptance of predictive prophecy. Yet proponents of the theory are willing to believe that Joseph Smith got genuinely ancient gold plates from a real angel and that he translated them by the inspiration of God and with the aid of seer stones and the Urim and Thummim (Ostler 102-3). But once one accepts divine agency to explain any part of the Book of Mormon, one can't very well object on naturalistic grounds to the traditional divine explanations for the rest. One expansion theorist is perfectly willing to believe that God or an angel might have taught Joseph Smith about Christianity, but then he objects that God could have revealed the same things to Nephi because scholars maintain the "idea of a Messiah who dies for the sins of others, then rises from the dead, was unknown in ancient Israel . . ." (Ostler 83 [citing Klausner]). Such an approach, while claiming to be based on scholarship, really only argues for one set of faith propositions, those of the expansion theory, instead of another, those of the traditional Church.

The bottom line is this: the proposition that Joseph Smith expanded on a genuinely ancient document which he received from an angel, that the Book of Mormon is part ancient and part modern, presents no fewer obstacles to the unbiased mind and requires no less an exercise of faith, than the proposition that the Book is entirely of ancient authorship. In trying to ride two horses at once the expansion theory falls between them both. It will not ultimately satisfy naturalistic scholars, those who refuse "to go beyond conclusions justified by the evidence or allowed by logic," because it allows certain of the faith propositions of the Church. Yet it abandons or alters other foundational propositions of the Church and of its members who walk by faith.

In summary, then, let me say that the expansion theory asks us, without discussion, proof or justification, to accept as givens three *a priori* assumptions which are inimical to the teachings of the Church and which are, I believe, merely camouflaged capitulation to the arguments of the Church's opponents. Second, the theory is inconsistent in its treatment of parallels. It first states very properly that the mere existence of parallels proves nothing in terms of relationship and dependence (Ostler 67), then it turns around and without demonstration invokes just such parallels as evidence for dependence and hence for expansion. Finally, the theory is inconsistent in its use of the critical empirical method, rejecting this or that claim of the Book of Mormon because it involves divine agency, and then proposing alternative views which themselves rely upon divine agency. There is nothing to be gained by trading the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon for the expansion theory.

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