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## Alma, Korihor & Marx: Thematic Interdependence

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# ALMA, KORIHOR, & MARX:

## Thematic Interdependence in Alma 30-32

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Anecdotal or narrowly parsed episodic approaches to scriptural narrative are often misleading when it comes to understanding a text, just as is dogmatic but out-of-context proof-texting or a doctrinal/thematic analysis of a concept or principle based on a single word-concordance type approach, especially when a word is at best a translated approximation of the “original” with no exact equivalent existing in the “target” language at the time of translation. An eclectic variety of approaches must be tried before we close the doors on our understanding of a text (Consider Thomasson, 1988:14-37). Even varieties of stylistic analysis are often too narrow to accommodate the richness of a source. As an example of this, the following discussion of three particularly fertile and often commented-upon chapters in the *Book of Alma* (30, 31, & 32) is felt to be particularly appropriate. In haste to find "lessons" in the scriptures, some commentators on these texts have missed, I believe, an intentional linkage between the chapters that the original authors/editors intended us to see, as well as productive textual correlations to modern questions.

Traditionally, Alma 30 has been presented, effectively standing alone, as a lesson on what happens to an apostate or opponent of the truth. Alma 31 is frequently (though perhaps not often enough) cited in isolation as a warning against pride in wealth and hypocritical worship. Alma 32 usually is presented by itself to teach about "faith". These didactically created thematic divisions have divided the quite coherent *Book of Mormon* First Edition's chapter XVI of Alma (which ran from page 304 to 323, and included the modern chapters 30-35), and, I suggest, blinded us to an even greater thematic interdependence within this text. Moreover, by studying even just today's

chapters 30-32 as a unity, it will be seen that the divisions obscure a larger message. Alma in fact does not explicitly refute all of Korihor's arguments, and by implication for us today, their parallels in the thought of Karl Marx and other post-enlightenment figures, but rather gives a sophisticated qualification of their validity and application to specific cases. In the text that follows I will, for readers' convenience, use the modern divisions into chapters and verses.

## BACKGROUND

The crucial background and context for these chapters could easily include all the scriptures, but then writing about them would be impossible. For practical purposes it will suffice to mention that in Alma 28, the Lamanites, egged-on by apostate Nephites, pursue the pacifist people of Ammon into Nephite territory and a bloody war results. This war lasted through most of, but clearly not beyond the 15th-year of the reign of the judges. (Alma 28:7, 9)<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful that fighting continued until the very last day of the 15th-year and then ended instantly, and so it is consistent to conclude that warfare ended prior to the new year's beginning. In Alma 29 we find a classic example of a "thanksgiving hymn," albeit with more didactic content than Ammon's rather more pure hymn in Alma 26:12-37. This might be in keeping with Alma's greater ecclesiastical role, but at least Alma 29:9-17 is in a form that could have easily served liturgical purposes, celebrating the end of warfare, or, I would suggest, especially serving for use in the religious observances of the New Year (*Rosh Hashana*) to Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) period of the High Holy Days following the people's deliverance from destruction in that devastating war. In fact, no historical narrative exists between Alma 28 and Alma 30, and Alma 30:2-4 comes as close

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Alma 28:9 with Alma 30:4, which makes the crucial point that there was "no disturbance *in all* the sixteenth year ...".

to explicitly naming 1 to 10 *Tishri* as a text could without using the modern words.<sup>2</sup> Note the choice of words used:

[B]ut it came to pass *after* they had buried their dead,

*and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer,* (and it was *in* the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi)

there began to be continual peace throughout all the land ...

And thus the people did have *no disturbance in all the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges* (Alma 30:2,4, *italics* and **boldface** added).

It might be that mourning for the war dead extended into the sixteenth year, and reading into the text a year of saying *Kaddish* would not be inconceivable today. But I would argue that today's verse 2 is not an example of parallel poetic style, and that the phrase "and *also* after" should be read as being distinct from what was written before. "Days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer" then constitute an almost perfect description of an expected Mosaic ritual life during the "Days of Awe" (1-10 *Tishri*), and it takes place, as noted, at the beginning of a year of continual peace.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Alma 30:3 most pointedly specifies that these peoples "were *strict in observing* the

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<sup>2</sup>Compare also Alma 44:24 through 45:2 (ignoring the non-textual chapter headers), for a year-transition marked by this ritual formula. I would here suggest that it is important to keep in mind that the "political" new year associated with divine kingship, while perhaps being temporally coincidental with the religious festivals, was not identical with them, and the latter would survive even with abandonment of king-centered celebrations following the beginning of the reign of the judges.

<sup>3</sup>At the F.A.R.M.S. 1984 Seminar on Israelite Festivals in the *Book of Mormon*, John W. Welch quickly recognized that continual peace throughout all the land (adding sixteen years of the reign of the judges together with thirty three years of the reign of Mosiah II), signals that this is a Jubilee year, falling 50 years after Benjamin and the priests had worked to establish peace in the land (Words of Mormon 17-18) and 49 years after Benjamin's feast and coronation of Mosiah II, which ends with Mosiah II commanding the people to go and plow their fields (Mosiah 6:7. This is a *non sequitur* among agricultural peoples, unless it is a Jubilee year when all agriculture is prohibited), which Mosiah II himself begins--the royal ritual first plowing known around the world. Moreover, Helaman 6:14 indicates that the sixty-fifth year of the Judges was also a year of peace, continuing the Israelite Jubilee pattern in accord with the Law of Moses.

*ordinances of God, according to the law of Moses*" (*italics added*). This is as firm a calendrical reference as we can find, I suspect, in the *Book of Mormon* (For a detailed discussion of Old Testament religious practices calendrical festivals in the *Book of Mormon* see Thomasson, 1988). Whatever the dating, the texts we are concerned with follow, disrupt, and in significant ways contradict this period of peace following the war, beginning "in the latter end of the seventeenth year" (Alma 30:6) .

### THEMES: POINT AND COUNTERPOINT

In my analysis, the beginning of the overall message of Alma 30-32 can be distilled down to two crucial points that are made by Korihor in his preaching. The first is an argument for a particular epistemology or theory of knowledge which Korihor presents in Alma 30:13ff. This is an essentially positivist/materialist position, and Alma effectively grants or concedes its validity within that context by not answering, or even attempting to answer Korihor here on his own ground.<sup>4</sup> Within the intentionally, and in some cases quite justifiably limited ground (the "sciences") which this framework provides for "knowing" and "proof," one can disagree with Korihor's position but not disprove it, and Alma does not attempt to do so.

The second point is what we can anachronistically call a "marxist" (perhaps better an Enlightenment) critique of religion. In fact, Korihor's remarks here are hardly unique in the *Book of Mormon*. Both those who labor under a "false consciousness" and many of the Lord's prophets effectively agree with the argument advanced in Alma (30:13-16<sup>5</sup>, 23-31, 43) which accuses religions and priests of being exploitative of believers. Contrary to most readings, this

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<sup>4</sup>This is a point that should give all would-be apologists, myself included, cause to ponder how we attempt to answer questions posed from another philosophical frame of reference or set of assumptions.

<sup>5</sup>Note the interesting critique, in 30:17, of an unregulated free-market capitalist type society.

position is *not* categorically rejected by Alma, but rather is qualified by him as **not** applying to specific cases (Alma 30:32-35), rather than being a universally valid generalization. In his response, Alma points out that the church to which **he** belongs does not permit *its* leaders to "glut [them-] selves upon the labors of this people" (Alma 30:32). And this is not the only time we find this moral perspective being articulated.

Beginning at least with Nephi's prophecy in 1 Ne 22:23, and his rather precise definition of "priestcrafts," (which can serve in the singular and plural, as a noun or a verb), we find the first of an almost continual stream of condemnations from both believers and unbelievers, throughout the *Book of Mormon*, against the kind of exploitation in the name of religion which Marx also condemned.<sup>6</sup>

[P]riestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion (2 Ne. 26: 29).

An implicit condemnation is made of the priests of Noah (Mosiah 11:3-4), and explicit condemnations are made of Nehor (Alma 1:3-6), and Ammonihahite religion which was "after the order and faith of Nehor" (Alma 9-14, especially 14:16; Compare also the positions articulated in Helaman 16:21, and 4 Ne 26). The foregoing and many other prophetic passages all reflect, in

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<sup>6</sup>In looking at Marx's own attitude toward religion it should be remembered that he grew up in a Germany so racially and religiously prejudiced that it would have been impossible for him and his siblings to obtain an education had his parents not converted from Judaism to Christianity. His (self-?) hatred for Judaism is a predictable response to the inner conflicts his entire family must have felt in betraying their religious and cultural heritage for a socio-economically and politically more convenient Lutheran affiliation. Some, deceived by his literary skill, have assumed that Marx was truly converted to Christianity based on a text he wrote which seems to exult in the potential for "union with Christ." It should be noted that this was part of a **required** examination, graded not by a professor but by a Lutheran Pastor, which had to be passed in order for Marx to graduate from the *Gymnasium* and gain admittance to the university. There is little doubt that his parroting back this force-fed, required religious indoctrination had a significant impact on Marx's later attitudes toward religion in general (Marx, 1968, especially p. 601).

more or less parallel terms, Korihor's analysis and condemnation of religious exploitation, or its more or less accurately perceived potential for abuse.

Returning to the text of Alma 30-32, it is in one sense quite predictable that Korihor was killed by the Zoramites (Alma 30:59), in a manner appropriate for the execution of blasphemers. His message, despite his perhaps-belated and mute repentance/witness, was an all-too-accurate condemnation of precisely the religious *status quo* among the Zoramites. And Alma's mission to the Zoramites was probably motivated, not just by reports of Korihor's death, but by the clear pattern of linkage between pride, wealth, power, religious privilege, and exploitation that characterized bourgeois Zoramite worship, (Alma 31:9-29), and by class exploitation in society (Alma 32:1-5). Korihor's notorious critique of religion would have been more offensive to the Zoramite upper classes and priests than to any other group of which we know in the Zarahemla (Nephite) confederation, and we should in no way be surprised that the Zoramites (elites?) killed him by trampling in a ritual way reserved for the most extreme outcasts (those in *herem*—see **Appendix I**). Even as a broken man living in disgrace, Korihor was a vivid representation of the message Zoramite upper classes least wanted their oppressed subjects to hear. Alma ends his description of conditions among the Zoramites with a quotation from a spokesman representing the Zoramite "proletariat":

[T]hey are despised of all men because of their poverty, yea, *and more especially by our priests*; and they have cast us out of our synagogues which *we have labored abundantly to build with our own hands*; and they have cast us out because of our exceeding poverty, and we have no place to worship our God, and behold, what shall we do? (Alma 32:5, *italics added*).

With this almost perfect articulation of the alienation of the poor's surplus labor we find Alma giving us a text-based *de facto* endorsement or example of Korihor's precise critique of religious

exploitation.<sup>7</sup> (See **Appendix II, part I**). But Alma's description of Zoramite society (Alma 31), does more than illustrate and confirm Korihor's critique.

The question asked by the Zoramite spokesman, "we have no place to worship God, and behold, what shall we do?" leads Alma directly into a discussion about how people can gain religious knowledge. Alma's discussion of the "seed" in chapter 32 is an **alternative epistemology**, an effective answer to Korihor's question about religious knowledge: "How do ye know of their surety?" (Alma 30:15), without rejecting the other ways of knowing, in its place. Alma shows how a different framework could provide meaningful answers to the problems that neither an ancient nor a modern positivist/materialist type of epistemology could discover. Experimenting with the seed/word is a careful articulation of how one could in fact and in deed come to know just exactly those things from which Korihor's philosophical assumptions about the limitations of knowledge comfortably shielded him.

In review, then, chapter 30 presents one epistemology and one critique of religion. Chapter 31 to 32:5 presents an acknowledgment and elaboration of that critique of religion in a specific case (rather than as a general rule). Chapter 32 then presents an alternative (or supplementary?) epistemology which, rather than invalidating the first, shows that it too, like the critique of religion, has a limited validity but should not be overgeneralized because there is another way of knowledge that can overcome the limitations of the first. Just as Alma and his priests' self-support (Alma 30:32 ff.) is part of a solution to the problem of class exploitation, so too experimenting with the seed/word provides an alternative means of knowing God. With this we see that Alma 30-32 constitutes part of a necessarily interdependent thematic unity, which

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<sup>7</sup>We could hypothesize that Korihor's apostasy might have begun as a rejection of Zoramite evils, and that he even could have been a victim of that system. Was he returning home, hoping for a better life than he was getting by begging when he was killed. The text does not give us any details one way or another. The question is unanswerable, but worth considering.

ends with chapter 35 and the destruction of the “craft” of the Zoramite elites. To grasp the full meaning of the First Edition’s XVI, it should, among other things, be studied as such a unity.

## APPENDIX I

### To Be Cursed

Finally, humanity's and especially America’s choice is clear. As the one land which effectively has assimilated peoples from every land, country, and people, we cannot fight a war that is not, in some literal sense fratricidal, even before we factor in all being children of our mutual Father in Heaven. If our hearts cannot turn to the peoples of every other land, and to their children, abhorring any violence against them, then the conditional prophecy found in Malachi will surely come to pass:

Look, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will reconcile fathers to sons and sons to fathers, *lest I come and put the land under a ban to destroy it* (Hebrew: *Herem* , from New English Bible, Mal. 4:5-6, *italics added*).

This "ban to destroy" the land, the biblical concept of *herem*, is a cursing to total destruction, in which every man, woman and child, every domesticated animal, and every type of material good is destroyed by warfare as a divine judgement. Nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction make the fulfillment of this prophetic threat of *herem* a technological reality that must not be ignored. It is ironic that some who pay lip-service to the positive potential of this prophecy are actively supporting the expanded creation of weapons and an atmosphere of vengeful-sacrificial violence that can lead to the opposite end. Like the ancient temple-sacrifice echoing ***Doctrine and Covenants***’ “all flesh be consumed before me” (98:17), the ***New English Bible*** translation here is far more accurate a rendering of the Hebrew than the King James', for modern English

speakers, relatively toothless: "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." "Smite" in 1828 American English had the meanings of "1. To strike", "2. To kill", "3. To blast; to destroy life" (Webster, 1828). This meaning of this word, *herem*, is lost to modern peoples for whom a curse may be "I hope your nylons run." But the very last word in most Christian editions of the Hebrew scriptures means infinitely more than that, having spiritual as well as temporal implications, and for individuals it is no less severe. This scripture is one of a very few to be cited in all four of the LDS Standard Works, and as such it must be taken quite seriously

Compare Mal. 4:6 and 3 Nephi 25:6 ("smite the earth ..."); *D&C* 2:3 ("utterly wasted"); 27:9 ("smitten with a curse"); 98:17 ("smite ... curse, and all flesh be consumed before me", which is coupled with the command for the Church to "renounce war"); 110:15 ("smitten with a curse"); 128:17-18, ("smite ... curse", note here that the prophet "might have rendered a plainer translation", as we find in 2:3, 98:17, 138:48, and JS History 1:39); 138:48 ("smitten ... curse and utterly wasted at his coming"); and Joseph Smith--History 1:39 ("If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."). "Waste" here means more than leaving the electric lights burning an hour more than necessary. Its contemporary meanings in Joseph Smith's time include "1. ... [as when] disease wastes a patient", "2. ... Thus cattle waste their fodder", "3. To expend without necessity or use", "4. To destroy in enmity; to desolate; as to waste an enemy's country.", "5. To suffer to be lost unnecessarily ... to waste the blood and treasure of a nation", "6. To destroy by violence." (Webster: 1828). The two main families of meaning that seem to fit the latter revelations are: to have been totally expended but not serving any useful purpose, and to have been laid waste or totally destroyed. The Book of Mormon captures the concept of *herem* perfectly in the destruction of the people and land of Ammonihah.

9 And thus ended the eleventh year of the judges, the Lamanites having been driven out of the land, and the people of Ammonihah were destroyed; yea, every living soul of the Ammonihahites was destroyed, and also their great city, which they said God could not destroy, because of its greatness.

10 But behold, in one day it was left desolate; and the carcasses were mangled by dogs and wild beasts of the wilderness.

11 Nevertheless, after many days their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth, and they were covered with a shallow covering. And now so great was the scent thereof that the people did not go in to possess the land of Ammonihah for many years. And it was called Desolation of Nehors; for they were of the profession of Nehor, who were slain; and their lands remained desolate. (Alma 16:9-11)

The Land of Desolation remains a symbol of Malachi's message, as much as that of every Book of Mormon prophet, for those who do not obey God's laws that govern the Land of Promise. It also captures Mormon's explanation of most of human suffering: "But, behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children unto bloodshed." (Mormon 4:5)

## APPENDIX II

### FIVE MORE-THAN-EPILOGUES

#### I

The following narrative re-description of the Zoramite persecution of their poor, rather than being a flippant use of Marxist or leftist categories, is intended to provide a significant confirmation of the validity of the categories that Marx employs in his **diagnosis** of the dialectical nature of class struggle, in the same sense that Alma and other *Book of Mormon* witnesses give

evidence that Korihor's descriptions of religious exploitation of the poor are not without basis in reality. Alma 35 goes on to note how the Gospel taught by Alma, which emphasizes economic equality, destroyed the "craft" (this could mean either techniques of manipulation and exploitation, or the ideology that justified and/or rationalized economic oppression)<sup>8</sup> of the Zoramite ruling classes (v. 3). In response the latter sent out *agent provocateurs* secretly and "found out privily the minds of all the people" (v. 5). As a result, all those who shared in the new class-consciousness based on the teachings of Alma and his brethren "were cast out of the land" (v. 6, note that ethnic cleansing of a religious or economic group is one type of genocide). These exiles were not only accepted and welcomed into the land of Jershon by Alma and his brethren and the people of Ammon (v. 6 ff.), but were granted "lands for their inheritance" (v. 9). This effective "enriching" of the Zoramite refugees set such a dangerous precedent for further undermining Zoramite class-structure that their leader "breathed out many threatenings" (Alma 35:9), demanding that those who had been cast out from their lands also be expelled from the land of Jershon, returning them to their previous impoverished and subordinate class status (vs. 8-9). When this demand was refused, the Zoramite ruling classes entered into an alliance with the Lamanites and began what by any other definition can best be called "class warfare" (vs. 8-14).

In a discussion of I Samuel 11 from Qumran, which Frank Moore Cross and others say should be **restored** to the Bible, we find an elaboration and contextualization of the implications of the Zoramites' having breathed out threatenings against those who had received the Zoramite refugees. Cross shows, among other things, that the Qumran I Samuel correctly gives the royal title of Nahash (in later biblical texts he is the only king whose royal title is omitted from the historical passages), and explains that Nahash had conquered Reuben and Gad, on the other side

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<sup>8</sup>"2.Cunning, art or skill, in a bad sense, or applied to bad purposes; artifice; guile; skill or dexterity employed to effect purposes by deceit". (Webster, 1828)

of the Jordan, and some 6,000 survivors had fled as refugees to Jabesh-Gilead.<sup>9</sup> Cross shows that Nahash's demand to execute those who fled was standard Near Eastern practice, as was the penalty he threatened to exact (loss of an eye) from those who sheltered the refugees (I Sam. 11:2). Thus, based on internal and external evidence, Cross shows that the Qumran Samuel is more complete than today's Bible, and should be restored to the text (Cross, 1985a; 1985b). This conforms to W. F. Albright's

long-standing position that in the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets (Joshua-Kings) "losses" far outweigh "glosses". (Albright, 1968:34-36, 266 n. (d); and compare also Albright, 1959:341; and Albright and Freedman, 31.2 (1963):112.)

The implications of this position are clear. Once losses have been acknowledged then restoration becomes necessary, as Albright and his colleagues did not hesitate to advocate. Taking Frank Moore Cross's earlier work on Samuel as a case in point, they said,

Future translations will have to expand the text substantially--including many passages which dropped out of all previously known recensions and translations, some of great importance for their content (Albright and Freedman, 111).

Albright's aggressive pursuit of such lost biblical texts may well be the catalyst that has accelerated recent interest in the field of canonical criticism.

Another example of "class warfare" comes in Helaman 6, where the richer classes not only combine to persecute the poor (He 6:17,38-39), but enter into secret combinations that are only to murder those not of their group (He 6:22), which is to say to murder the poor. The only conceivable motive for killing those being exploited is if at least some of them begin to rebel or to see through the exploitation, and thus undermine the control of the ruling classes. From this point

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<sup>9</sup>There is a curious symmetry in Jabesh Gilead having to call upon the rest of Israel for defense against Nahash (I Sam. 11). It was the people of this same city that refused to come to the assistance of Israel in its punitive expedition against Benjamin (Judges 21:8 ff.). For another discussion of the symmetry of biblical justice see the latter half of Thomasson (1984).

of view, right-wing "death squads" are not new to Central America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

While Marx's **diagnosis** of history may in fact fit the *Book of Mormon* record, his **prescriptions** for dealing with the problems of history do not. In this regard, Alma's decision to renounce politics/government epitomizes the *Book of Mormon's* quite different solutions to the class conflict and violence Marx assumes is inherent in and essential to the dialectic.

## II

“ Finally, and this is the name that convinced me to pursue this entire subject, we come to Benjamin Urrutia's correlation of *ezrom* and the name Zeezrom. In Alma 11 we find a seeming digression from the topic of the text--the complex discussion of Nephite weights and measures (not “coinage” as it is termed in the anachronistic 20<sup>th</sup>-century headnote to chapter 11) with their grains' and precious metals' equivalents. Conspicuous, now, among the names of the units of value given is that of an *ezrom*. It is a quantity of silver. Immediately following the discussion of money we find the person of Zeezrom. This appears to be a compound of the word Ze, which we might translate as "This is an" and the word "*ezrom*." Zeezrom is distinguished by having offered 10.5 *ezrom* of silver to Alma and Amulek if they would deny their testimonies. Zeezrom is a lawyer of dubious repute--today we might call him a bag-man, or a "fixer,"--one who offers bribes, and his name entirely fits his life before he repents. His name would translate "this is a unit of silver." Besides linking him with his actions, the name ties into a complex with those who would sell their signs and tokens for money, and to Judas' selling/betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver. If this is not metonymic naming I am anxious to learn what it might be. Lest the likelihood of Zeezrom being a metonym be underrated, I subsequently noted that the largest Nephite monetary unit, the *antion* of gold, appears in subsequent chapters of the text of Alma,

first in referring to a chief priest in Ammonihah--one Antionah (a self-deluded as being a big man in status and self-esteem)--and later to the big-money town or pride-in-wealth city of Antionum, home of the *nouveau riche* bourgeois Zoramites--note they take upon themselves the name of an ex-servant, Zoram.<sup>10</sup> ”

“ With the name of Zeezrom and the probable use of the word *antion* in other related contexts I believe that we have a *prima facie* case for pursuing the concept of metonymic naming as a mechanism for exploring the scriptures both for a deeper understanding of their meaning and as a possible key to some of the linguistic features of Nephite language. (Thomasson, 1994, 1991) ”

### III

In chapter 33:2-3 Alma further questions the supposition voiced in Alma 32:5 that an institutional church was necessary for the poor Zoramites to pray and/or worship God. He tells them that they

[G]reatly err, and ye ought to search the scriptures; if ye suppose that they have taught you this (Alma 33:2).

Then he recalls for them the writings of the prophet Zenos, **which he clearly expects them to have read!** The writings of Zenos were most probably on the Brass Plates. In any case they were in wide circulation and had great currency among the Nephites.<sup>11</sup> I would suggest that Alma

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<sup>10</sup>I hypothesize that Zoram was a Levite refugee from the Northern Kingdom, attached to Laban's household through generations of unbonded service to his tribe, thus accounting for his responsibility (and ritual purity?) for keeping the plates, as well as the appearance of what are probably Levitical ordinances in Lehi's camp and colony prior to their joining with the Mulekites. This heritage could also account for the liturgical innovation found among the Zoramites, if that is not based in contact with some of the many non-Book of Mormon peoples in MesoAmerica.

<sup>11</sup>Elsewhere my research shows the number of textual sources and traditions which are related to the Book of Mosiah (Thomasson, 1993, 1983, note 2). Further work is needed which will explore the nature and broad extent of popular literacy in the *Book of Mormon*.

had more reason to cite Zenos than just that his writings could teach them about worship and prayer. What better way was there for Alma to reinforce his comparison of the word to a seed than to refer the people to the writings of a prophet who delivered the most complex horticultural imagery in scripture, the parable of the olive orchard (Jacob 5). If his audience had any familiarity with their scriptures at all, the mention of Zenos' name should have conjured up in them a whole host of "footnotes" to Alma's sermon.

#### IV

Textual dependence is a curious problem. Alma's discourse on the seed/word, for example, is clearly distinct from the New Testament parables of the sower and of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:3 ff., Mark 4:3 ff., Luke 8:5 ff.). There is no evidence of one being derived from the other. In Christ's imagery the independent variable in the Parable of the Sower is the quality of the ground into which the seed is sown--but the quality of the seed is taken for granted. In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares there are two sowers with different kinds of seeds, good and bad. The quality of the ground is irrelevant to the message, and while the evil sower and the seed are condemned the soil is not. In Alma's sermon what is germane are the "genetic" characteristics of the seed itself, with little or no "ecological" concern about where it is planted--the quality of the site (one's heart) is taken for granted. Moreover, one takes seeds in and experiments with them, rather than their being planted by an evil sower. In Zenos' parable the quality of the land, the genetics of the seed (trees), **and** the quality of the care given to both the former are all critical. The imagery here combines the perspectives, as it were, of a plant breeder, soil scientist, and pomologist. While the metaphors are all agricultural in content, the specifics are so different as to preclude any serious argument of interdependency or clearcut "borrowing"

among Christ's, Alma's, and Zenos' texts. Only in ignorance of agronomy can the texts be described as equivalent.

A classic example of textual parallels and possible dependency, on the other hand, probably in this case with both texts drawing upon a third, earlier common source, is to be found in a comparison between Alma 32 and the Apocryphon of James (part of the so-called Gnostic, Coptic Nag Hammadi corpus). In the latter document, which was unavailable to Joseph Smith in 1830, or to anyone else, for that matter, prior to the discovery in 1947 of the Nag Hammadi library, we read:

Become earnest about the word! For as to the word, its first part is faith, the second, love, the third, works;<sup>12</sup> for from these comes life. For the word is like a grain of wheat: when someone had sown it, he had faith in it; and when it had sprouted, he loved it because he had seen many grains in place of one. And when he had worked, he was saved because he had prepared it for food, (and) again he left (some) to sow. So also can you yourselves receive the kingdom of heaven; unless you receive this through knowledge, you will not be able to find it. (Apoc. James I:2:8:10-27, Robinson, 1977:32-33.)

Whether one goes by the specific words chosen by Alma's and Apoc. James' by now various translators, by the themes, or by the principles taught, and we have not yet begun to fully mine the richness of such texts, the correlations between the two texts are highly significant.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>In this, philosophically speaking, predictably non-Greek text, which reflects a Jewish/oriental Gnosticism rather than neo-Platonism and Aristotelian logic, faith, love and works are parts of the same whole, rather than being pitted against each other in an exclusionary way by either/or logic, as in Luther's rejection of works as against faith/grace. All are necessary, but no one of the three is sufficient to the exclusion of the others. Contrast on this point Nephi's insistence on the necessity, though not the sufficiency of grace, until "after all we can *do*" (2 Ne 25:23, *italics* added; cf. 10:24; 31:19-21). Also noteworthy is the point made in *Pirke Aboth* 1:2 that the world survives, or is supported upon three pillars, and by implication that if any one were removed it would fall, namely *Torah* (and its study--the recognition of the world's dependence upon learning is a continuing motivation for study and education in Judaism even after secularization), *Work* (here a preferred reading might be divine service in the temple), and *Deeds of Loving Kindness* or Charity (*gemilut hasidim*).

<sup>13</sup>While some who call themselves historians will automatically ignore this because, like Korihor, they will not allow anything positive about the *Book of Mormon* to be drawn from the ancient world that was unavailable to Joseph Smith, that is their loss. For anyone who is honest enough

## V

Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain the culture of the Zoramites in the city of Antionum. These include the very plausible suggestion that they might represent contact with one of the many non-*Book of Mormon* peoples of the Americas. Their “professional clergy” and in their “bow [-ing] down to dumb idols” (Alma 31:1), their clearly wealth and occupation/class/caste-based divisions of society (Alma 32:2-5), and their peculiar Rameumptom style of prayer (Alma 31:21, see also F.A.R.M.S., 1987 II:718-719, n. 670), represent a radical form of culture change, as reflected in Alma’s astonishment at the practices and moving the “big guns” of his missionary effort to Zoramite lands (Alma 31:32). An interesting recent confirmation of the possibility of such a perversion of Israelite religion is reported in a study of an apparently second temple-destruction diaspora community (70 A.D.) of Jews in India (Katz and Goldberg, 1993).

The authors then ... show how the group has absorbed Hindu symbols of purity [compare the discussion of Israelite laws of ritual purity in Thomasson, 1993] and nobility into their culture, holding such "borrowings" to the standards of Halakah (Jewish law).

Those Halakic standards broke down in a particularly sad way when, centuries ago, the community divided itself into Hindu-style, non-intermarrying subcastes, some of which were denied certain privileges in the synagogue. Resentment of the subcastes even gave rise to a "Jewish Gandhi," Abraham Barak Salem (1882-1967), who emulated the Mahatma in his use of civil disobedience to challenge the divisions. (Ayoub, 1993:A10)

The apparent parallels with the story of the Zoramite proletariat are startling. The question I would pose is whether there is an almost self-destruct mechanism in the religion of Israel, based among other things in its concept of monotheism and laws of purity (Thomasson, 1993), which

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to allow that intelligent discussions about the *Book of Mormon* need not be limited to the 19<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (as some would have it), there is much to be gained from a comparison of the two texts. Moreover, just as the hypothetically reconstructed "neutral" description of Christ which many supposed Josephus must have written--recognizing the problems inherent in accepting the unbelievably positive "testimony" in the text that came through Christian sources as extremely inconsistent with the rest of what Josephus wrote--was validated by the recent discovery of an early arabic manuscript that very closely matches the reconstructed text, so too a common source for Alma and Apoc. James may someday be discovered.

distort as a result of syncretistic processes mixing in non-Gospel practices and distorting the truth, along perhaps predictable fault lines.

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<sup>14</sup>Graciously noted by Elder Neal A. Maxwell in *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1983):6, n. 1; & cited at length in “The Book of Mormon clearly is not a daily journal or chronology” in *The Church News* (Book of Mormon/Gospel Doctrine supplement), 2 April 1988:14.

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