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## Some Thoughts on the Social Message of the Book of Mormon

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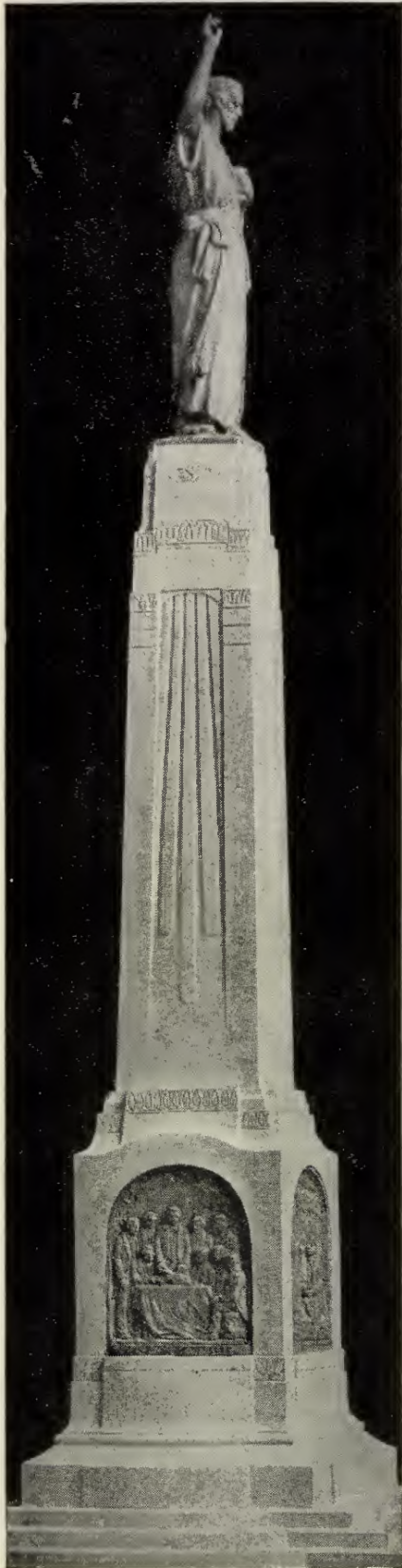
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**Abstract:** This article uses the discourses of Alma and Amulek to the Zoramites as a partial guide to determine what the Book of Mormon teaches about social action. The work teaches that violence is not a recommended “principle of social action” and “the solution of social difficulties must be sought on the spiritual plane.” It also discusses what the Book of Mormon teaches about government.

# SOME THOUGHTS *on the* BOOK OF



HILL CUMORAH MONUMENT

● “IT IS NOT COMMON THAT THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE DESIRETH ANYTHING CONTRARY TO THAT WHICH IS RIGHT; BUT IT IS COMMON FOR THE LESSER PART OF THE PEOPLE TO DESIRE THAT WHICH IS NOT RIGHT.” (BOOK OF MORMON, MOSIAH 29:26.)

WHEN Alma the younger began his missionary labors among the Zoramites, he found that they had not only perverted beyond recognition the religion of the Nephites, but that their hearts were set upon gold, silver, costly apparel, and the riches of the world. While they had built up an impressive material civilization, and while many enjoyed great prosperity, there was among them a numerous class of poor people who, because of their lowly station, were deprived of many prerogatives which the rich claimed exclusively for themselves. As is often the case in such communities, they were denied a share in the enjoyment of the very things which they had built with their own hands. This class distinction was accentuated by a spirit of disdain which the privileged displayed towards the more unfortunate members of their community.

This social inequality had caused a strong resentment among the poor. They were bewildered, unable to find a solution for the difficulties which, they imagined, had been placed in the path of their material and religious life. In their perplexity they were willing to listen to Alma and his missionary companions. Alma's answer to their question (Alma 32:8-33:23) is a panegyric on the spiritual advantages of poverty. Amulek's discourse, (Alma, Chapter 34) likewise, moves almost exclusively on a spiritual plane. Yet, in view of the natural bitterness of his listeners over their social position, Amulek deems it necessary to voice this admonition:

And now, my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye do not revile against those who do cast you out because of your exceeding poverty, lest ye become sinners like unto them. (Alma 34:40.)

Amulek's warning to be patient and to abstain from abuse and calumny under the circumstances is

highly significant. According to his inspired view, violence in the social struggle is bound to lead to sin and to release passions and restraints which every true follower of Christ should avoid.

Of course, Amulek does not advocate non-resistance as a means for bringing about the instant amelioration of the condition of the poor. He deems their spiritual redemption to be of greater importance than their social liberation, and as to the latter his immediate outlook is pessimistic. Hence his exhortation that his listeners should bear their tribulation "in the firm hope that" they "shall one day rest from all" their "afflictions." (Alma 34:41.)

The rejection of violence as a principle of social action is, nevertheless, significant politically. History bears out the spirit of Amulek's view that social justice should not be enforced at the point of the sword. When the trial balance of the accomplishments of revolutions is struck, the result is likely to preponderate in favor of social progress through peaceful means.

The advice of Amulek embodies, however, a complete moral vindication of the cause of the oppressed. While the poor believer is admonished to abstain from force and abuse, the rich who entrench themselves in privilege created by their economically superior position and who consider "their brethren as dross," while their own hearts are set upon their riches, stand already condemned. Predatory practices such as those indulged in by the rich Zoramites, by which their fellows are reduced to underprivilege and abject poverty, make sinners of those who resort to them. Thus Amulek's warning to keep the social peace most assuredly provides no justification for a privileged position of the rich.

IN VIEW of these obvious deductions from Amulek's formula for social action the problem arises: What social and economic condition does the



# SOCIAL MESSAGE *of the* MORMON

By JEAN WUNDERLICH

"IF THE TIME COMES THAT THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE DOES CHOOSE INIQUITY THEN IS THE TIME THAT THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD WILL COME UPON YOU, YES, THEN IS THE TIME HE WILL VISIT YOU WITH GREAT DESTRUCTION." (BOOK OF MORMON, MOSIAH 29:27.) ●

JEAN WUNDERLICH, born in Germany, served the Church in the Swiss-German Mission from 1922 to 1926, principally as associate editor of *Der Stern* and as a district president. Coming to Utah at the conclusion of his mission he engaged variously in editorial work, and in the teaching of German and the study of law in the University of Utah, University of Chicago, and Hamilton College, Clinton, N. Y. He is now successfully engaged in the practice of law in Los Angeles, and, with his wife, the former Jane Burlingame of Denver, and one son, Walter Eugene, now resides in the Rosemead Ward of Pasadena Stake, where he is an active member of the Church.

Book of Mormon consider desirable?

No categorical answer to that question is possible. For nigh unto two hundred years after the appearance of Christ on the American continent a "united order" prevailed as an economic system among the Nephites. For lack of a better name, this system may be characterized as a pure form of collective ownership. The details of its organization have not been preserved, except, perhaps, in a modified form practiced by the Mayas and Incas. We only know that during that time,

every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things in common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free. (4 Nephi 2-3; see also 3 Nephi 26:19.)

This passage, incidentally, is proof that under proper conditions a community of worldly goods is a feasible economic system conducive to a condition of supreme human happiness.

Even when this ideal state did not prevail among the Nephites, the economic practices of the people claimed the earnest attention of the leaders of Book of Mormon times. Being observers of the law of Moses, their economic concepts were shaped largely by the ideals of distributive justice as revealed in the Old Testament. This influence of ancient scripture is clearly discernible, for

instance, in the Nephite idea of equality before the law (Mosiah 29:32), in their idea of the characteristics of the ideal ruler (Mosiah 2:11-16), and in the Nephite monetary system (Alma, Chapter 11). But one social thought recurs again and again in the teachings of the very man who headed the mission to the Zoramites: that is Alma's crusade against inequality.

Today, leadership in the field of economic justice is a responsibility shunned by many churches, yet it is a responsibility the assumption of which is expected more and more of organized religion. Leadership in that field is not new among God's people. The Book of Mormon clearly warrants the conclusion that the Church may properly promulgate ideals of distributive justice and take steps to shape the economic morality of its members.

At a time when Alma still occupied the political office of chief judge among the Nephites, "seeing all their inequality" he "began to be very sorrowful." This condition, more explicitly described in Alma 4:12, was to him "a great source of lamentation," sufficiently great to induce him to resign his secular office and devote himself exclusively to the ministry. From that time on we encounter in his reform work a constant indictment of inequality.

The lesson is evident. Glaring inequality among the people of God is not desirable under the divine plan. The prophets of old recognized more clearly than we are willing to admit today that liberty and equality are twins and that liberty cannot be fully realized without equality.

Alma's example contains, however, this other equally important lesson: the avenue to equality is through the Church. Here again the proper approach to the problem is spiritual. Otherwise it would be paradoxical for Alma to resign political power at the very moment he desires to bring about a social reform. But Alma, in the years of his political life, has learned that

the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God. (Alma 31:5.)

Therefore, he does not rely on reform by law, nor on an enforced equality, but through the spiritual message of the Gospel he hopes to

stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. (Alma 4:19.)

And thus we gather from the words and experience of Alma the inherent limitations of all law and of all government.

THAT the solution of social difficulties must be sought on the spiritual plane is evident from another problem on which the Book of Mormon touches—that of economic depressions. The Nephites were not immune to these recurring changes in their economic life, and this in spite of the fact that they appear to have had a commodity currency and free coinage of silver. (Alma 11:5-19.) Some of the causes assigned for depressions today were not available as explanations for the bad times of Book of Mormon history. There was, for instance, no problem of imports and exports, of tariffs, and of foreign exchange. There were, of course, such external causes as drought, poor crops, epidemics, and wars. Yet, throughout the Nephite record only one ultimate reason is given for changes in the business cycle, namely,

And it came to pass that they did repent and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper. (Heleman 4:15.)

Just as in the case of social progress, the factors underlying economic conditions are spiritual. Even the unbeliever will concede that every explanation offered for our present economic ills may be reduced ultimately to a spiritual cause. In the end it is always the moral character of man that determines his economic behavior.

The Nephites, therefore, knew and experienced again and again

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LESSON XIV

"OUT OF THE GROUND"

(First Part of Chapter 9)

- I. Life's Physical Cycle.
  1. "Dust thou art."
  2. Plants "eat" the soil; animals eat plants.
  3. How sunshine is necessary for plant growth.
  4. Man's bodily health connected through plants with soil composition.
- II. Composition of Human Body.
  1. Contains same elements as earth's crust.
  2. A comparison of the composition of the earth and the human body.
  3. The elements found in the human body.
- III. Importance of Soil Composition.
  1. Conditions plant's strength.
  2. Minerals must be available to plants for growth.
  3. Soils become exhausted by constant cropping.
  4. Proper soil fertilization necessary.
  5. Man's body is dependent upon elements in plant food.
  6. Health ultimately depends upon soil composition.
- IV. Necessary Minerals.

1. The "Basic thirteen."
2. Importance of each; one may not be substituted for another.
3. The work of Drs. Greaves & Greaves.
- V. Use of Minerals in Body Functions.
  1. Calcium the outstanding mineral: a biological necessity.
  2. The function of calcium in nutrition.
  3. Need of phosphorus, iron and copper.
  4. Importance of iodine and its relation to mentality.
  5. Other minerals needed in minute amounts.

QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, PROJECTS.

1. Explain the significance of the Biblical phrase "Dust thou art."
2. What is the modern interpretation of Genesis 2:7, 8, 9.
3. In what sense may one say that without the sun there could be no life on this planet?
4. Name the minerals that are indispensable for human life. Explain the functions of those best known.
5. How are the mineral essentials of food obtained.
6. Why is the fertilization of soil so important. How much was spent by farmers in your locality for fertilizers last year? Was it sufficient? Why?

## Thoughts on Social Message of Book of Mormon

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during their history that the way out of depression is a renewed interest in spiritual things.

The theme needs no elaboration. It is well summed up by one modern authority on business cycles:

But what causes these fluctuations in business and prices? Statistics show that crises are caused by spiritual causes, rather than financial, and prosperity is the result of righteousness rather than of material things. These spiritual forces are the true fundamentals of prosperity (Roger W. Babson, *Fundamentals of Prosperity*, p. 75.)

Instances might be multiplied where the Book of Mormon, upon thoughtful study, yields a definite social or political message. Let us, however, consider but one more problem which it is instructive to contemplate in view of much present agitation about it. That is, the question of the relative merits of the different forms of government.

The Book of Mormon does not hold an inflexible brief for any form of government. From its pages many thoughts of a political nature may be gleaned. One of these is that a democracy, even though initiated by a holy man of God, need not necessarily embody Montesquieu's doctrine of the separation of powers. Of that fact Mosiah's constitution for the Nephites and the entire book of Alma bear witness. Such lessons are gathered only in passing as we read the history of this dispersed branch of the House of Israel. A definite theory of government, however, is encountered in the glorious chapter 29 of the book of Mosiah. Apart from a skeleton constitution for the Nephites it embodies some general philosophy of government, commencing with this significant apology for democracy:

It is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right. (Mosiah 29:26.)

MOSIAH puts great trust in the people. From the verse just quoted it seems that according to him the people should decide upon measures and policies. They should not merely elect men who will make the choice for them. Knowing the issues and proposals, Mosiah is confident that the people, except in periods of great wickedness, will make the correct choice. But, as a man who is conversant with the realities of human life, he reckons with the possibility that even the majority may desire unrighteousness. Therefore

if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you, yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction. (Mosiah 29:27.)

Let us, however, not overlook the fact that Mosiah's democratic constitution is a compromise with the political corruption of man. According to his view the ideal rule is far from democratic. In spite of his tirade against kings (Mosiah, chapter 29) he finds a monarchy to be the most effective and desirable form of government. The difficulty with it is principally one of personnel. Mosiah proceeds from the proposition that "the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of men are not always just." (Mosiah 29:12.) If, therefore, there could always be just men who would be kings and who would establish the law of God,

if this could always be the case, then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you. (Mosiah 29:13.)

Under such a king, efficient leadership would not be thwarted by the inherent limitations of the democracy. (Concluded on page 236)

## The Protestors of Christendom

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FOR Cyprian, the baptism performed by heretics is no baptism because the Church alone may confer the Holy Ghost. Moreover how may one who has not the Holy Ghost confer it on others? And how may one be made a member of the Church who does not share the belief of the Church. A first council of Carthage (255) and a second council of Carthage (256) voted with Cyprian, but the only passage that has been preserved of a letter of Stephen, bishop of Rome, states, "If any one comes to you from a heretical sect, you must do nothing contrary to the tradition in force, you must be contented with the laying of hands on him for penitence."<sup>46</sup> The view that heretical baptism was no baptism was also shared by the Donatists. Most of the different groups claimed to be the catholic (universal) and only true church. They were stamped out by force.<sup>47</sup>

If Tertullian and Cyprian, the Donatists and others, were right and if baptism performed by unbelievers and non-members is no baptism; if baptism by sprinkling is no baptism; and if baptism of infants who can assume no responsibility for themselves and for whom no one else, neither godfather nor godmother, can assume any responsibility is no baptism; then revelation, public and private, would soon cease because, no one being validly baptized, no one would be in possession of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Revelation. Revelation and the gifts of the Spirit did soon cease altogether. Was it because the apostasy was complete?

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<sup>46</sup>Cited by Mourret, *Les Origines chretiennes*, p. 360.

<sup>47</sup>The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. VIII, article "Inquisition": "The ecclesiastical ideas of the first five centuries may be summarized as follows: (1) the church should for no cause shed blood; and (2) the majority held that the death penalty for heresy, when not civilly criminal, was irreconcilable with the spirit of Christianity."

"A law of 407 . . . asserts for the first time that these heretics (the Donatists) ought to be put on the same plane as transgressors against the sacred majesty of the emperor, a concept to which was reserved in later times a very momentous role."

Plus the VI claimed the right (1775-1799) "not merely to direct by counsel and persuasion, but further to command by laws, and to coerce and compel the delinquent and contumacious by external and salutary penalties."

<sup>48</sup>The Catholic point of view as formulated by Augustine and summarized by Battifol, *Le Catholicisme de Saint Augustin*, p. 159 is: "Without doubt the heretic and the sinner baptize illicitly, they have not the right to baptize, they usurp the formulas and the rites of Christ and of the Church. However the sacraments (*sacramenta*) are venerable and to be recognized none the less in their unworthy hands. For the sacrament to be (valid) it is enough that the formula be pronounced literally, it matters not what meaning the minister gives to the terms that compose it."



in two wards. The proceeds are to be used to finance the Security Plan project of the adult group. At least five acres are to be planted to sugar beets.

An effective and well-ordered plan for interesting all adult members of the Aaronic Priesthood is now under way in Long Beach stake. Under the direction of Verne S. Handy a systematic campaign is being carried on in each of the wards in a very intensive manner. Wards are being divided into districts with special committeemen assigned to each. The slogan "Every Adult Can and Must Be Reached" is being put into practical effect.

East Jordan stake publishes a monthly bulletin patterned after that issued by the Presiding Bishopric. The percent of attendance in each activity is shown with the rating of each ward.

Frequent bulletins, special reports, and survey forms and close supervision on the part of the stake committee are responsible for splendid activity among the Aaronic Priesthood of Grant stake. Both the regular quorum groups and adults are making good progress.

**CORRELATION ACTIVITY SCHEDULES BEING ADOPTED**

REPORTS from several stakes indicate that the suggested correlation committee activity schedule, sample of which was published in the minutes of the last Aaronic Priesthood convention, is being adopted and put into effect. This schedule includes all activities of young men 12 to 20 and is to be prepared well in advance, preferably once a year, by the Priesthood, M. I. A., and Sunday School officers. Its use by all wards and stakes is urged as a means of providing a balanced and coordinated program.

**PIONEER FOURTH WARD PRIESTHOOD ACTIVE**

NOTEWORTHY activity in Aaronic Priesthood activity is reported from the Fourth Ward of Pioneer stake. The program recommended by the Presiding Bishopric is being followed and a large percent of the available boys of the ward are active. Outstanding among the accomplishments of the Deacons has been the service during the past year in assisting the ward to reach the goal of \$1.00 per capita in Fast Offerings.

**MESA THIRD WARD DEACONS HAVE NOVEL PROJECT**

DEACONS of the Mesa Third Ward in Maricopa Stake adopted a novel project in the program followed to earn the Standard Quorum Award. The boys picked up rocks and rubbish for several miles along the streets of Mesa within the ward boundaries. The Deacons were given the Presiding Bishop's award for the second consecutive year.



ABOVE: AARONIC PRIESTHOOD OF FOURTH WARD, PIONEER STAKE, WHO HAVE AN OUTSTANDING RECORD IN FAST OFFERING COLLECTIONS.

RIGHT: DEACONS OF MESA THIRD WARD, MARICOPA STAKE, IN WORKING CLOTHES ENGAGED IN A QUORUM PROJECT.



**THE WORD OF WISDOM REVIEW**

*A Monthly Presentation of Pertinent Information Regarding the Lord's Law of Health*

QUORUM Supervisors are urged to make opportunity to discuss with members at frequent intervals, at least monthly, some phase of the Word of Wisdom. Matter printed in this department is intended for that purpose.

During the drive for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment it was urged that repeal would bring prosperity and end the depression. No such thing has happened. To the contrary many people are convinced that the excessive use of liquor has been an important factor in bringing about present business conditions. President Grant has urged frequently, that if the money spent for liquor and tobacco could be given to the poor there would be no relief problem and business generally would be helped.

Members of the Women's Christian

Temperance Union and the American Business Men's Research Bureau have termed the present recession a "whiskey depression," calling attention to the fact that the liquor traffic has cost the public \$20,000,000 since 1933. These groups are asking Congress to provide \$50,000,000 to carry on a campaign against the use of alcohol as a beverage.

The Keeley Institute of Chicago, a liquor-cure institution, announces that the number of persons now taking the liquor cure is the highest in 30 years. The number of women taking the cure increased 33% last year over the year before.

Several recent murders in Utah and surrounding states have been traced to liquor causes. Crime, criminals, and liquor frequently are associated.

**Thoughts on Social Message of Book of Mormon**

*(Concluded from page 234)*

cratic process. Neither murder nor plundering nor stealing nor adultery nor any manner of wickedness would be tolerated, for the king himself would be the spiritual teacher of his people. He would be at once a king and a High Priest. His people would be free, for he would not "suffer" that "they should be confined in dungeons" nor that they "should make slaves one of another."

(Mosiah 2:13.) Such a king would work with his own hands to ease the tax burden of the citizens. And at the end of his days he would consider the hours spent in the service of his people as spent in the service of his God. (Mosiah 2:16.)

This is a glimpse of the social philosophy of the Book of Mormon. To the believer in the divinity of the book, it must speak with a voice of authority on many bewildering social problems of the day. But even to the skeptic it should be a significant, though hitherto neglected, contribution to American social thought.