

THOUGHTS FROM READING

Behind the Mask of Mormonism, From Its Early Schemes to Its Modern Deceptions

John Ankenberg and John Weldon, (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1992)

With a Postscript based on: *The Life Beyond*, by Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1986).

After reading *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, by Grant Palmer, I was given this book to read by a co-worker and asked my opinion of it. I found it quite similar to Grant Palmer's book where it attempted to cover similar material. But did I find it devastating like I did Palmer's book? No, these authors are not 'insiders' by any stretch of the facts or imagination.

I have read many exposes of Mormonism, this one is quite up to date, quite comprehensive, well reasoned, and well written. Its historical citations are correct. However, its combative style and claims to know absolute truth from the Bible really grated on me after a while.

Why? Just one example right at the start: they are sure there is no revelation outside the Bible (page 41):

Are Mormon Revelations from God? . . . We can determine whether or not these revelations were from God by comparing them with what God has already said in His Word, the Bible. If these revelations deny His Word, then they cannot logically originate in God.

The rest of Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to this topic and underscore the confusions and contradictions that have been spoken and written under claimed states of inspiration. Are the facts wrong? No, but just like Palmer they miss the point that it is this jumble of revelation and this striving for revelation at all times that is both the glue that holds the organization together and the tether that holds believing people close to it. It is a very empowering thing to believe that one can and will receive inspiration when one asks.

I was particularly interested in the book's chapter on the occult and its connection with Mormonism, and in the chapter on the "Fruits" of Mormonism, focusing on its distortions of everything from history through salvation through human relationships. Of course the book cites the Bible as authority for being very critical of Mormonism and its historical roots in the occult. By assuming a broad definition of the term necromancy, and a narrow definition (Bible-based of course) of the nature of angels, the authors show that the meeting between an angel and a prophet is really a meeting with a spirit of a dead person, hence necromancy.

The authors rely quite a bit on a book by D. Michael Quinn on *Mormonism and the Magical World View* which we will look at next. Quinn shows quite definitively that the charges regarding early Mormon occultism are true, but puts this into a perspective missing from the "Mask" book: the occult and religion were historically quite intermeshed, and this was not automatically or universally thought to be a bad or evil thing.

The book calls Mormon polygamy and racism evil, and with that I cannot disagree. However, when it comes to racism there is no clean slate in general Christendom, and there is racism in the Bible. And where polygamy is concerned, it is very Biblical.

So if I am not going to say much about the book, why include it here? Just to show that in my opinion, these types of "anti-Mormon" writings do not cause me to want to be a Christian.

What a bare spiritual life it would be to take in all religious knowledge through the eyes and brain while reading just one spiritually authoritative book! It is much more appealing to see the Bible for what it is: the result of individual inspirations spread over many places and times, varying in world-view and content, setting an example of what would and should be continually produced among spiritually alive persons even today.

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POSTSCRIPT BASED ON: *The Life Beyond*, by Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1986).

If one read only Ankerberg and Weldon’s account of the Mormon view of communications between worlds one would get the distinct impression that Mormons sit around seeking communications with the dead, as in seances perhaps. A good antidote to this notion may be found in the very Mormon book called *The Life Beyond*, by Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie (Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1986).

So, who do these Mormon authors say that Mormons communicate with? In their chapter entitled “Angels: Our Companions” they explain. On page 73 they start their explanation with an enigmatic scriptural citation from the Doctrine & Covenants, section 130, verse 5: . . . “there are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.” This, it is explained, means the angels are spirits who have either already lived here on earth or who are yet to come here and live on earth, a very holistic view I think. Three types of such beings are described on page 75: “resurrected beings,” or the spirits of “just men made perfect” meaning they still await resurrection. The third category is “translated beings,” those resurrected without ever passing through death. Satan also has angels, all spirits, and they can be fooled into shaking your hand and you will feel nothing. This is apparently an obligation laid on them to allow the believer to discern between them and the “just men made perfect” spirits who will refuse to attempt to shake hands. Resurrected beings will be glad to shake hands and you will feel their hands.

Page 75 also mentions departed family members and church leaders whose presence can be felt at special occasions. This is addressed in more detail on pages 85 and 86:

When a righteous man or a righteous woman die, they do not cease to love their family in the flesh, they do not cease to pray for them, they do not cease to labor on their behalf. As their family was their primary concern in this life, so it will continue to be their primary concern on the other side of the veil. We would demean the nature of their labors in the spirit world to suppose that they had nothing more to do than to conduct a daily watch over those they left behind; yet the love and interest is still there, and on special occasions their presence will be felt and in some instances, as appropriate, they may be granted the privilege to more fully manifest themselves, though these treasures of heaven will not be common.

Thus, there is no real occult weirdness at work when examining the Mormon idea of the activities of the dead. The handshake idea is a bit strange, but hearing members occasionally describe an experience of or with a spirit of a deceased relative just gives one the idea that one is among true believers who are convinced there is no great gulf between the living and the (righteous) dead. It seems quite compatible with general Christian notions except that the nature of angels in normative Christianity makes them into an inferior creation of servants. Either like an inferior race destined for eternal service, or like robots that do the bidding of God unquestioningly like the monsters of the Book of Revelation. Calling the much more humane Mormon view occult and that other set of notions not occult stretches credulity way beyond the breaking point. Though I believe neither view to be correct in any sense, at least the Mormon view literally puts a human face on angels as well as on God. But that is another subject that is a sore point for ‘normative’ Christians, but it

certainly makes the universe a less scary, less unpredictable place to believe in this more humane, more holistic way.