Book Review

WALTER R. MARTIN. *The Maze of Mormonism.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962. 186 pp., $2.95.

Review is called for mainly on the strength of Martin's reputation as a specialist on the "cults," with a record of lectures, books, and even editorship of something of a journal devoted to them. The preface claims for the book a reliance on source material: "the first attempt in over twenty-five years to present a thoroughly documented, historical, theological, and apologetic survey of the Mormon religion." Although recognizing the outdated and unreliable nature of much literature on Mormonism, the book does not substantially alter the situation. For one thing, the author has not mastered his "vast and complex subject" (p. 34), since he redundantly insists that Mormon scholars have not treated issues that have actually been discussed many times. Failure to respond is taken regularly as supporting evidence, so a reviewer must protect himself against appearing to validate what is not discussed (for want of space) by paraphrasing the epilogue of John's Gospel: "There are many other errors in this book, the which if they were stated every one, the whole journal would not contain them."

The initial chapters concern the "verdict of history." Of all people, the star witness against Joseph Smith is his mother. By mentioning that Josiah Stoal had heard of Joseph Smith's powers of spiritual discernment, Lucy Smith (in Martin's view) confirms the Palmyra affidavits on "money digging." But her narrative places Stoal's appearance *after* the visitation of the angel, and there is no reason to suppose that he heard anything different from a garbled version of the visions, which (according to Joseph Smith's story) were perverted in the bitter tirades against him. As for the affidavits, they merely prove the same thing—that stories were circulated about Joseph Smith. Martin seems to be unaware that many family members and close associates also left recollections of this

period quite at variance with the gossiping residents of Palmyra.[1]

The next historical judgment exposes "the many difficulties" which the Book of Mormon "introduces in the light of already established facts" (p. 39). Professor Anthon's 1834 version of what he told Harris is given in order to impeach Harris, with no mention that Anthon's contradictions in an 1841 letter throw considerable doubt on the accuracy of his 1834 story.[2] Concerning the "reformed Egyptian" of the Book of Mormon, "no one has ever been able to find the slightest trace of the language" (p. 44). Such a statement betrays a great deal of ignorance of both Egyptian and language in general, which is always being "reformed." Demotic Egyptian, of origin not long before Lehi's exodus, is certainly a "reformed Egyptian," as are other well-known and less-known variations. Given the facts of a millennium's isolated existence and social degeneration, any linguist would expect precisely what Moroni describes (Mormon 9:32-4). Without knowing it, Martin raises a similar problem by arguing that American Indians are racially Mongoloid, with neither physical nor blood-type affinities to the Near East. But the one thing that emerges clearly from a cursory look at racial blood types is the uniqueness of the American Indian, who is at the opposite pole in A and B groups from supposed Asiatic relatives. The data pose the greatest problem for the theory of Oriental origin. And blood types may shift, somewhat as language, through the isolation of small groups. William C. Boyd, who is cited but not quoted in support of Martin's thesis, suggests that the best explanation of present knowledge is the migration from "central Asia" of "small groups" in the fashion of Lehi's departure.[3]

Finally, the Book of Mormon "betrays a great lack of information and background on the subject of world history and the history of the Jewish people" (p. 53). Judged by the

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[1]The affidavits are treated, together with contrary evidence, in Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America,* I (3d ed.; Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University, 1960), and Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961). In a similar problem of exaggerating history, Martin mentions "the order" (p. 33) of Brigham Young to kill immigrants, which the most thorough investigator, Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), has failed to find.

[2]Both letters are reprinted in Kirkham, *op. cit.,* 414-422.

[3]William C. Boyd and Isaac Asimov, *Races and People* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1955), 152-3.

examples given, it is Martin's lack of background that is showing, for not once (in common with O'Dea and Whalen) does he betray the slightest knowledge of Hugh Nibley's evidence that its knowledge of world and Jewish history is at present the strongest proof in favor of the Book of Mormon.[4] Such consistent and perverse failure to perceive the state of the question before contributing is unknown in any scholarly field. Essential "anachronisms" in support of Martin's contention follow:

> Anyone thoroughly conversant with Jewish law would know that the Jews were forbidden to eat or to keep swine; yet Nephi, allegedly a very orthodox Jew, kept swine; according to the Mormons. And not only this, but the Jaredites enjoyed "glass" windows in the miraculous barges in which they crossed the ocean; and "steel" and a "compass" were known to Nephi despite the fact that neither had been invented, demonstrating once again that Joseph Smith was a poor student of history and of Hebrew customs (p. 53).

The initial objection listed merely mistates the facts. "Swine" appear in the Book of Mormon among the Jaredites of the pre-Mosaic era and once in the Book of Mormon version of the Sermon on the Mount, where the derogatory Jewish attitude is retained. The technique of checking one's references will similarly solve the problem of glass by determining that it existed in many forms in the Near East at the approximate time required by the Book of Mormon.[5] It is standard ritual in non-L.D.S. treatments of the Book of Mormon (in which Martin, O'Dea, and Whalen join) to assert knowingly that steel in the age of the Book of Mormon is impossible. But the fact is that iron was less useful than the copper alloys of the Bronze Age until heating and tempering imparted some amount of carbon to the metal. In this sense ancient technology produced steel squarely within the period of the Book of Mormon, as a check of the studies of R. J. Forbes and others will show: " . . . we are sure that *steel* was produced in antiquity."[6]

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[4]See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert* and the *World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), and *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (2d ed.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964).

[5]See D. B. Harden, "Glass and Glazes," Charles Singer *et al.* (eds), *A History of Technology,* II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 311-46. Martin is accurate in mentioning glass (Ether 3:1) but inaccurate in his version of windows (Ether 2:23).

[6]R. J. Forbes, *Metallurgy in Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950), 409. Cp. p. 414: "For only steel is definitely better than bronze for tools and weapons and only the invention of steel could herald the Iron Age."

As a matter of fact, the Book of Mormon references to steel intimately reflect its ancient use in that it is always listed as semi-precious and utilized mainly in the manufacture of weapons. The "compass" criticism (levelled by both Martin and Whalen) disregards the basic difference between the medieval magnetic compass and the Book of Mormon "Liahona." Both authors have been tricked by their inflexible approach to the translation English of Joseph Smith. The Liahona was an instrument similar to the Urim and Thummim in that it worked by the principles of metaphysics, not physics; it has ancient cultural affinities, not modern.[7]

The balance of *The Maze*. . . is essentially theology. Of these chapters, that devoted to arguing the cause of "sole grace" against Mormonism is the most accurate, and (given their commitment to Christ) Mormons should not take issue with Martin's characterization "that they cannot conceive of a God who could save apart from human effort. . . ." (p. 115) The chapter on Priesthood is strangely legalistic. Instead of treating descriptions in the Acts or Pastoral Letters concerning the bestowal of apostolic authority on others, Martin prefers to base his case on a dubious translation of Hebrews 7:24, maintaining that Christ's priesthood is "untransferable." But his vintage 1889 citation from Thayer's lexicon for this use is squarely contradicted by the best authorities in the field. The lexicon of Arndt-Gingrich (in agreement with Moulton-Milligan) gives more than a dozen secular uses of the period to show that the term in question (*aparabatos*) "rather has the sense *permanent, unchangeable.*"[8] The point of the passage is not that Christ's priesthood cannot be transferred, but that it permanently remains superior, as does he, to all other authority.

The chapters on the "Doctrine of God" and the "Virgin Birth" caricature L.D.S. doctrine. Venturesome and intelligent Latter-day Saints have boldly speculated on the ultimate nature of theological reality. But whether from Orson Whitney, Parley P. Pratt, or Brigham Young, opinions are subject to formal proposal and acceptance by common consent before becoming official theology. The result is that Martin has perverted instead of explained what Mormonism teaches about Adam (al-

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[7]See Hugh Nibley, "The Liahona's Cousins," *Improvement Era,* LXIV (1961), 87-89, 104-111.

[8]William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 80.

ways subordinate to Christ in L.D.S. scripture), the Virgin Birth (accepted fully but not defined as to method), and the Holy Ghost (a person, not a substance). Martin repeatedly contends that any statement of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young is doctrinally binding upon all Latter-day Saints (e.g., pp. 90, 102, 140). The technique is not as ridiculous as citing anti-Mormon writing (Kidder) for the supposed concept that the lost tribes are in polar "deep freeze" (p. 118), but it is equally misleading and disqualifies Martin as giving any serious analysis of true L.D.S. beliefs.

This brings up the central difficulty of the book's approach: something akin to the "conspiracy theory" that opens every promoter of a better world to the charge of secret Communism. In the author's view, the real problem of Mormon exposition is "*that they do not use language which might* reveal the true nature of their theological deviations" (p. 123). One good reason may well be that Mormonism does not really teach such deviations, but that is not considered. The supposed answer is that Mormon propaganda is a "masquerade" characterized by "shifty language" (p. 127). In fact, "it is extremely difficult to write kindly of Mormon theology when they are so obviously deceptive in their presentation of data . . . " (p. 85). In other words, Mr. Martin never has solved the problem of why his image of Mormonism does not correspond to what Mormons say. He attacks an imaginary system instead of the real thing. The only substantial example of such deception in a whole chapter devoted to this subject is Richard L. Evans' statement in *Look* affirming that Latter-day Saints believe in the Trinity. The Mormon leader proceeded immediately to qualify L.D.S. belief as Tritheism and obviously faced serious risks of misconception by denying belief in the Trinity. *Yet this example is really all that supports the* sweeping conclusion that "scholastic dishonesty and twisted semantics are standard Mormon practices" (p. 129). But what is actually twisted is the class of non-L.D.S. literature that continues to use such discreditable methods. Who can study a religion based on doctrinal premises of continued revelation and eternal progress by pouring its theology into an outdated mould? Such inconsistency needs to be underlined at this time when literature on Mormonism is being overhauled. More generations will be misinformed on the true nature of L.D.S. beliefs unless men of perception recognize the "fabrications

and myths which characterize many anti-Mormon tracts."[9] Although Martin's preface promises an up-to-date and scholarly treatment of Mormonism, the result is neither. Because it portrays a creative, dynamic religious movement through atypical, archaic documentation, *The Maze of Mormonism* is itself an anachronism.

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[9]William J. Whalen, *The Latter-day Saints in the Modern Day World* (New York: The John Day Company, 1964), 5.