

shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land" (Alma 36:30)—which leads to "being lifted up in their hearts, because of their exceeding great riches" and thence to failure "to walk uprightly before God" (Alma 45:24). This cycle from virtue to prosperity, from prosperity to pride, from pride to a fall, and thence to repentance, which reinstates righteousness to start the cycle over again, gives many opportunities for prophets and preachers to arise and call the people to repentance. The central message of the book is repentance,⁷ and the work is full of slightly concealed revival meetings, as in Jacob's words to the people of Nephi (II Nephi, chaps. 6–10); Nephi's commentary upon Isaiah (II Nephi, chaps. 25–33); Benjamin's exhortation to his people and their conversion (Mosiah, chaps. 1–6); the preaching of Abinadi (Mosiah, chaps. 11–17); the preaching of the two Almas (Mosiah, chap. 18, and Alma), of Amulek (Alma, chaps. 9–14), and of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman, chaps. 13–15), to name the most obvious examples. Indeed, at one time "Alma did speak unto them, when they were assembled together in large bodies, and he went from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord" (Mosiah 25:15), a scene strongly reminiscent of the camp meeting. Yet the revivalism of the *Book of Mormon* is the more dignified revivalism of New England and is not marked by the "jerks," "barking," and other bodily exercises of the frontier variety. In only one instance does it approach excess, when three converts swoon (Alma 19:6, 13, 14).

The doctrine of the book is wholeheartedly and completely Arminian. It tells men that "because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon . . ." (II Nephi 2:26); and that they are "left to choose good or evil" (Alma 13:3).⁸ Men, says the *Book of Mormon*, will be judged by God according to their works—"Ye must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to be judged according to your works" (Mormon 6:21).⁹ This doctrine proclaims that "whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds" (Alma 42:27). While the salvation of men is through the merits of Christ, these

merits are available to all who repent. The Atonement was for all men, and grace and mercy are available to all.¹⁰

Much can be seen in the *Book of Mormon* of the implicit mentality of the popular Protestantism of the time. For example, the story of the first Alma (Mosiah, chaps. 23–24) is, in a very profound sense, the history of sectarian, left-wing Christianity, as seen by itself, projected into an ideal or mythological representation. The persecution of the prophet Abinadi, his burning by the king and the established church in a scene recalling the deaths of Ridley and Latimer under Mary Tudor (Mosiah 17:13–15), the secession of Alma and his founding of a church that bore all the marks of sectarian regeneration, and its final exodus into the wilderness, where (reminiscent of John Winthrop) the regenerate founded a free colony and where (anticipating what had come only much later in Massachusetts) they established republican government—all this must have sounded deep resonances in the minds of those whose forebears had left England in the reign of the Stuarts (Mosiah, chaps. 11–18).

The *Book of Mormon* is an ideal projection of left-wing Protestantism in another sense. All the Nephite prophets, from Lehi in 600 B.C., who was "a visionary man" (I Nephi 2:11), to Moroni, who tells us that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may know all things (Moroni 10:5), spoke, like Alma, "according to the Spirit which testifieth in me" (Alma 7:26), when indeed they did not converse with angels, with Christ, or with the Father himself.¹¹ Moreover, by this revelation and prophecy they spoke and taught "with power and authority from God" (Mosiah 18:26). Yet nowhere in the *Book of Mormon* does this abundance of inspiration and revelation and following of the Spirit "wheresoever it leadeth" get out of hand. Nowhere are the elect plunged by such criteria into controversy, with brother pitted against brother, each claiming divine sanction for his doctrine. Contention there is within the church of God, but good and evil are easily discernible at all times, and the Holy Spirit is never confused with impulses of human or demoniacal origin. Complete freedom of inspiration and interpretation combines easily with revealed authority, the inspirations of all showing remarkable unanimity. Moreover, this absolute freedom of revelation expresses itself in an authoritarian church structure whose rulers are priests who have been called by God and who are the revelators of his word. Hence there is

that ye will serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 18:10).

Yet, together with this Baptist doctrine, there is strong emphasis upon free will, upon the intention of the penitent to keep the Commandments. By the end of the book this blend of Baptist definition of the sacrament and Arminian understanding of the choice of the penitent takes on the appearance of a doctrine rather like that of the Catholics, Episcopalians, and others of the more central stream of the Christian tradition. The Book of Moroni, intended to be a manual for the new church, says: "Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins" (Moroni 8:11). A little later Moroni declares that, without repentance, baptism is useless and those who do not understand this are "putting trust in dead works" (Moroni 8:23). He stresses the importance of repentance and adds: "The first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins" (Moroni 8:25). The result of this teaching has been the doctrine held by the Mormon church that baptism is necessary both as a witness to the covenant and to church membership and for the remission of sins.

Infant baptism is condemned, and Moroni urges that "ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you" (Moroni 8:6). He attributes to Christ the following decisive statement: "... wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them" (Moroni 8:8). It is typical of the whole direction of Mormon theological development that infant baptism should be rejected not for the conventional reasons advanced by the Baptists but because of renewed emphasis upon the goodness of man. While this is attributed to the merits of Christ, it is nevertheless a part of the developing humanism of the period, which found such striking reflection in all Mormon doctrine.

We must also note that, with all its emphasis upon humility and giving to the needy, all its denunciation of pride and class distinction, the *Book of Mormon* does not advocate communitarian socialism. There are two references to apostolic community of ownership in the book (III Nephi 26:19 and IV Nephi 3). These are conventional repetitions of the New Testament.

The New Testament verses are as follows: