

Chapter 2

The Search for Cultural Origins of Mormon Doctrines

David L. Paulsen

For those interested in Mormonism's singular belief system, the question of origins has always posed a particular challenge. Historians, believers, and critics have turned to a variety of sources—natural and preternatural—in an effort to explain from whence this uncommon theology came. For many of the faithful, an appeal to divine revelation, or maybe even providence, has sufficed. Revelation has also satisfied a number of critics, though they disagree with believers as to the identity of the preternatural source. Others have concentrated on seeking natural sources of Mormon doctrines.

The first of these explanatory theories explains Mormon doctrine in terms of the psyche of the founding prophet Joseph Smith. They include Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (1945; 2d ed. rev., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), esp. the “Supplement” to the 1971 edition, 405-21; T. L. Brink, “Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology,” *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 73-83; C. Jess Groesbeck, “The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions,” *Sunstone*, March 1988, 22-29; Lawrence Foster, “The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 1-22; William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998); Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999); and Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004). The comment of Newell G. Bringhurst, *Pacific Quarterly Review* 70, no. 2 (May 2001): 319-21, though reviewing Anderson, may be said to apply to the others as well—a point Bringhurst himself makes about Brodie: “It presents a secular portrait of a religious man, making it a fundamentally flawed work” (321).

The second approach sees Mormon doctrine as a functional solution to the social stresses of the new republic and/or the issues of the Age of Jackson. Among significant works in this category are Mario S. De Pillis, “The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 68-88; Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61, no. 4 (October 1980): 359-86; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (1981; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989). For treatments of early Mormonism and its doctrines as functional solutions on