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In the Book of Mormon, despised outcasts, such as the Lamanites or the poor, often have a special aptitude for spirituality, and the richer, civilized, and more overtly religious Nephites are often declining in righteousness. This phenomenon, with some characteristic specific themes, such as being excluded from a religious edifice, is found in ancient and contemporary cultures and religions. This theme points up the complexity of the Book of Mormon, which is not simple cowboys-and-Indians melodrama.
The Spirituality of the Outcast in the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: In the Book of Mormon, despised outcasts, such as the Lamanites or the poor, often have a special aptitude for spirituality, and the richer, "civilized," and more overtly religious Nephites are often declining in righteousness. This phenomenon, with some characteristic specific themes, such as being excluded from a religious edifice, is found in ancient and contemporary cultures and religions. This theme points up the complexity of the Book of Mormon, which is not simple cowboys-and-Indians melodrama.

Critics of the Book of Mormon have accused it of racism in portraying whites (Nephites) as the "good guys" and dark-skinned peoples (Lamanites) as the "bad guys," as in typical Westerns. For instance, the Catholic sociologist, Thomas F. O'Dea, writes,

In the Book of Mormon, as in popular opera of both "horse" and "soap" varieties, there are, in effect "good guys" and "bad guys." The good side always fights in defense of its liberties . . . . The good side sends out missionaries to bring the light to those in darkness. The bad side sends out armies of invasion.1

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1 Thomas O'Dea, The Mormons (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 33. As most of the wars in the Book of Mormon pit Nephite against Lamanite, O'Dea characterizes the Nephites as the "good guys" and the Lamanites as the "bad guys." Hugh Nibley skillfully demolished O'Dea's unfortunate sentence in "Good Guys and Bad Guys," in Since Cumorah, vol. 7 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 378-81. On an individual level, there are good and bad men in the Book of Mormon, but even here, as Nibley points out, many good men have faults and moral complexities.
This extremely oversimplified analysis of the Book of Mormon mars an otherwise interesting "environmental" treatment of that book.

Pace O'Dea and others like him, a careful reading, or even a reasonable cursory reading, of the Book of Mormon shows that the Nephites are often more wicked than the Lamanites, despite being more "civilized" than the Lamanites and having the "true church" in full development. The wilderness-dwelling Lamanites, lacking in education and civilization ("they delighted in wars and bloodshed," says Jacob; Jacob 7:24) and without correct religious traditions, often have a great aptitude for spirituality. This fits in with an important pattern found in the Book of Mormon in which the outcast is often more spiritually in tune than the more urban, overtly favored Nephites who usually have access to a well-developed church; much of the time they are on the downside of the pride cycle. The centralized (in the sense of city-dwelling), "civilized" religionist is often rich, and the outcast is often poor; the "civilized" religionist often overtly despises the outcast.

As early as the prophet Jacob, the Nephites looked on the Lamanites with contempt. Jacob, preaching to the wayward Nephites, refers to "the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins" (Jacob 3:5). We note the implicit rebuke in the words "your brethren," for the Nephites obviously were not treating the Lamanites as brethren, as members of the true church should. Thus, as early as this, the Nephites and Lamanites have moral complexity. Furthermore, Jacob tells the Nephites that the Lamanites live a higher level of sexual morality than do the Nephites (Jacob 3:5). Jacob commands the Nephites to stop reviling the Lamanites because of their skin color. "Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins" (Jacob 3:9). He makes the surprising statement that the wilderness-dwelling Lamanites are "more righteous" (Jacob 3:5) than the Nephites.

The long middle section of the Book of Mormon chronicles a series of wars between Nephites and Lamanites, and would offer a great deal of scope for "cowboys-and-Indians" stereotyping. Yet in these wars, when Lamanites attack the Nephites, it is often because ambitious Nephites have manipulated them into doing so. After the Nephites defeat Amlici and his army, he flees to the Lamanites and returns with a huge
Lamanite army added to the remnants of his own (Alma 2:24). The wicked priests of King Noah intermarry with Lamanite women (Mosiah 20), and their leader, Amulon, becomes a satellite “king” under a chief Lamanite king (Mosiah 23:39). These wicked priests become teachers among the Lamanites (Mosiah 24:1, 4). After the missionary successes of the sons of Mosiah, it is the Amulonites and the Amalekites (apparently other evil Nephites who lived among the Lamanites)\(^2\) who stir up the unconverted Lamanites to war against their converted brethren, and then against the Nephites (Alma 25:2). The Lamanites eventually see that they are being manipulated and hunt down the Amulonites and kill them (Alma 25:8–9).

In a new conflict, it is the Nephites, or the Amalekites, who begin to destroy the righteous Lamanites, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (Alma 27:2). This is a striking inversion of the supposed cowboys-and-Indians plot of the Book of Mormon.

Later, Amalickiah, the Nephite royalist conspirator, is thwarted among the Nephites (Alma 46) and flees to the Lamanites. There he incites the king of the Lamanites to declare war on the Nephites (Alma 47:1). He becomes general of the Lamanites, assassinates the Lamanite king (Alma 47:24), and becomes king of the Lamanites himself (Alma 47:35). He then uses a concerted propaganda campaign (Alma 48:3) to incite the Lamanites against the Nephites. When he is killed in battle, the next Lamanite king is another Nephite, Amalickiah’s brother (Alma 52:3). So the wars in the Book of Mormon are often not Nephite vs. Lamanite, cowboy vs. Indian, but “good” Nephite vs. “bad” Nephite, with the Lamanites sometimes being manipulated by “bad” Nephites. This is far from the simplistic Hollywood labeling of good and bad. A nation using a less civilized people to help fight a battle is historically quite believable—for example, in 771 B.C. China, the chief of the Chin nation, when a conflict brewed with the western Chou Empire, made an alliance with the Huns, the “Barbarian Dogs,” and these invaded the capital city of the western Chou, destroying that empire.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) We know very little about the Amalekites. But Amalek is a Nephite name (Omni 1:12, Mosiah 7:6), and the Amalekites are linked with the Nephite/Lamanite Amulonites (Alma 24:1). They live among the Lamanites, yet are distinguished from them (Alma 21:16). Probably, they were Nephites who intermarried with Lamanites.

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies are an example of converted Lamanites showing supreme righteousness (Alma 23–24, 27), laying down their weapons and refusing to fight because of their past murders. Later, their sons, the 2,000 stripling warriors of Helaman, are another example of extraordinary righteousness (Alma 53, 56, 58). Here we have righteous Lamanites fighting in a Nephite army against Lamanites led by a king who is a Nephite; the Lamanites follow the evil Nephite king because they have been manipulated by a skillful propaganda campaign.

In a time of particular Nephite decadence, a Lamanite, Samuel, calls the Nephites to repentance. After first being cast out from the Nephites (Helaman 13:2), he must stand on the wall of the Nephite city of Zarahemla (Helaman 13:4) to preach and is eventually forced to leave because of Nephite stones, arrows, and an attempt at apprehension (Helaman 16).

Finally, the “Lamanites” (it is unclear what the label means racially at this point; 4 Nephi 17) fall away from the gospel at the end of the Book of Mormon, but the “Nephites” fall lower, and the Lamanites are permitted to destroy them because of the Nephites’ complete decadence.4 Earlier in the Book of Mormon, we found a prefiguration of the same pattern when a Lamanite army overthrows a decadent Nephite regime as Lamanites invade the realm of King Noah (Mosiah 19).

In contrasting the occasional spirituality of the wilderness-dwelling (Enos 1:20) Lamanites with the highly civilized decadence of the Nephites (note King Noah’s elaborate building projects in a city which an archaeologist would immediately label as high civilization, with the development of a highly defined elite caste, Mosiah 11:11), the Book of Mormon, a complex, thought-provoking book, asks penetrating questions about what civilization really is. It is not the simple cowboys-and-Indians melodrama described by O’Dea.

The theme of the spirituality of the outcast, which we found in the story of Samuel the Lamanite above, is also found in the account of the poor Zoramites who have been cast out of the Zoramite synagogues (which they probably built, in large part, Alma 32:5) because of “the coarseness of their apparel,” “being esteemed as filthiness” (Alma 32:2–3). They are despised “of all men,” they say, and “especially by our priests” (Alma 32:5). “They have cast us out of our synagogues... because of

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4 See a convincing account of ritual torture and cannibalism, men killing women, in Moroni 9:10.
our exceeding poverty” (Alma 32:5). The poor Zoramites, like
the Lamanites, are considered “filthy.”

This worldly poorness makes it possible for them to be­
come “poor in heart” (Alma 32:3). Having no place to worship,
in their view, they turn to Alma the missionary for guidance, and
he preaches the gospel to them outside the city of Zoram, on the
hill Onidah. Here we have the important theme of preaching
outside of religious buildings, outside the city, in the country­
side. The outcast nature of the poor Zoramites has prepared them
to receive the gospel. “It is well that ye are cast out of your syn­
agogues,” says Alma to them, “that ye may be humble, and that
ye may learn wisdom. . . . It is because that ye are cast out, that
ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding
poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart” (Alma
32:12). Alma explains that though compulsory humility and
compulsory faith are useless without inner humility and faith,
yet poverty often leads to true humility. To be impoverished is
often the beginning of spiritual rebirth; and to be rich is often the
sign of imminent spiritual decadence. Alma continues in his
preaching and delivers his beautiful discourse on faith; then he
explains to the Zoramites that they can worship God in the fields
and wilderness, not only in synagogues. He quotes a prayer of
the prophet Zenos: “thou hast also heard me when I have been
cast out and have been despised by mine enemies” (Alma
33:10). Later, the Zoramite administration casts out the converts
from the land. When Alma shelters them, the Zoramites are en­
raged. They mix with the Lamanites, stir them up to battle, and,
finally, “become” Lamanites (Alma 43:4).

Somewhat similar is the story of Alma (who is “cast out”
by Noah, Mosiah 17:3) and his group of followers. Alma
teaches the outlawed Christianity secretly, preaching in the
wilderness outside the city (Mosiah 18:4–7). Spirituality,
spiritual rebirth, takes place outside of the city. Noah accuses the
group of political sedition (Mosiah 18:33) and sends an army
against them, forcing them to flee.

5 One is reminded of the Greek ritual scapegoat, the pharmakós,
who was called a kátharma, “filthiness, offscouring, that which is thrown
away in cleansing.” See Scholion on Aristophanes, Plutus 454; Walter
Burkert, Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual (Berkeley:

6 The righteous can also be prosperous, of course; but in the pride
cycle, richness is always a sign of approaching decadence. Alma 4:6: they
“began to wax proud because of their exceeding riches.”
The story of Lehi and Nephi might also exemplify this theme. Nibley has repeatedly discussed this phenomenon as "the flight to the wilderness," the righteous prophet leaving the corrupt city, and has drawn the obvious Dead Sea Scroll parallels.7

Another interesting group of outcasts, the Gadianton robbers, shows that being an outcast does not automatically create spirituality. Some Gadiantons left civilization because they were criminals in hiding, or left voluntarily to live a more criminal life.

We have thus isolated a cohesive, important phenomenon in the Book of Mormon; those who are culturally deprived, who live in the wilderness, who are despised as inferior because of their race or poverty, are often more righteous than the inhabitants of cities, the possessors of supposed high civilization who have access to the church. In the city of the Zoramites, the poor are excluded from established worship and missionaries preach to them in the wilderness. Their outcast, impoverished state makes them especially prepared for spiritual conversion.

Modern and Ancient Parallels

Now I would like to examine a few parallels—some more or less contemporary to the publication date of the Book of Mormon, and some ancient. Book of Mormon studies have polarized into two camps, one seeking contemporary parallels to show that the book is not an ancient historical document, and the other seeking ancient parallels to show that the book is ancient. The natural tendency, for both sides, is to disallow the other side’s parallels as negligible.

One reason for this split is the natural academic weakness of specialization. The "historicists" (those who believe the Book of Mormon is an inspired translation of an ancient text) tend to work with antiquity and usually do not work with Mormon history, while the nonhistoricists tend to focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormon history and related topics.

However, I believe that every critic, in all fairness, should consider the others' parallels by the same standards one applies to one's own. Strong parallels, from whatever period, will enrich our understanding of the Book of Mormon. We should all have enough breadth to welcome work from other fields.

Historicists should welcome work on the setting that the Book of Mormon was first sent into, and nonhistoricists should develop an interest in the history of religions. Weak parallels, obviously, should be identified and set aside wherever possible.

Wesley and the Beginnings of Methodism

Thus, though I am in the "historicist" school, I will start out with a "contemporary" historical parallel, that of John Wesley and the beginnings of Methodism. Methodism was a movement that began in the Church of England, and John Wesley stayed a nominal member of the Church of England all his life. But Methodism was, to an extent, a critique of and a reformation of the Church of England. In its beginning stages, the leaders and members were literally cast out from the church buildings of the Church of England. It gained its strength from outcasts, from its popularity with the masses, often the poor, the downtrodden, and sometimes even from prisoners in jail.

Methodism started in religious societies that emphasized spiritual experience as opposed to mere perfunctory practice in the Church of England. Wesley experienced a moment of conversion at one point, after having been a minister of the Church of England for some years. He and his associate, George Whitefield, then began preaching with great intensity and religious enthusiasm. Whitefield, around 1738, became the most popular preacher in London, attracting packed houses wherever he went. But his popularity and "enthusiasm" soon offended many Church of England clerics, and they began to close their pulpits to him. By the end of January 1739, every London pulpit was barred to him. Thus he was forced to preach outside of London, outside of churches, in the open—"field preaching"—which he did with great success. He especially liked this because it allowed him to reach the lower classes, often coalworkers. Thus we have the phenomenon we have isolated in the Book of Mormon—exclusion from established religion, from the establishment churches; spiritual hunger and aptitude of the poor, the lower class, the masses; preaching outside the city, outside religious buildings, in the open air. Once Whitefield addressed 5,000 at Bristol on a bowling green. "Blessed be God," he said, "that the bowling green is turned into a preaching

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place.” He preached to 2,000 colliers at Coal-Pit Heath, and he preached to them at Kingswood Commons.

The miners of Kingswood were regarded as depraved savages, yet Whitefield’s meetings drew them in ever larger numbers. Tears ran down their blackened faces, so moved were they not only by the message and the emotional eloquence of the young preacher, but also by the fact that anyone should concern himself with outcasts such as they.

He went on to attract crowds of up to 20,000. But soon he had to return to a mission in Georgia, and he asked John Wesley to preach in the open air to a crowd at Bristol. John and his brother Charles were wary of the invitation, partly because it was dangerous, as there was great official opposition to such preaching. Interestingly, they cast lots to make a final decision, a bit of Protestant sacred “magic.” Finally John went to Bristol, and his long career of field-preaching was started. In his first open-air sermon, on April 2, 1739, he took Isaiah 61:1 as his text: “the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble, to bind up the wounded of heart, to proclaim release to the captives, liberation to the imprisoned.” His preaching was a great success.

The Bishop of Bristol attacked Wesley. “Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing. . . . You have no business here.” Wesley went on preaching. Some of the opposition was political/economic. The Gentleman’s Magazine warned that Mr. Whitefield was keeping the colliers from their work and predicted that the price of coal would immediately rise because of his preaching.

Like Alma, Wesley organized “societies” and “bands” wherever he went, with lay preachers, often relatively uneducated, as leaders. This was another offense against the upper class, for in aristocratic England, it was felt that only the elite, only a gentleman, could be a cleric. Wesley returned to London, where he preached to larger open-air crowds, to as many as 80,000 people. Often there were ecstatic, convulsive, epileptic examples of religious enthusiasm in his audiences.

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 64.
11 Ibid., 64–71.
12 Ibid., 71.
Sometimes John Wesley’s followers were turned away from communion in the Church of England. So these “Methodists” were excluded both from the buildings and the central ritual of the standard church. Often the “Methodists” were persecuted. Mobs, protected by local judges and clergy, attacked their meetings, and their preachers were beaten up. Wesley was once attacked with stones.

The parallels with the Book of Mormon are numerous. The poor are excluded from religious buildings and rituals controlled by the establishment, the elite; preachers, themselves excluded from the buildings, speak with great spiritual power as they address great crowds in the open air. The lower-class crowds are very receptive and are even “enthusiastic” in the technical sense. And just as the Zoramites excluded the poor, then persecuted them, so the “Methodists” were persecuted. Joseph Smith undoubtedly could have been exposed to the story of Methodism, and Brigham Young was apparently familiar with John Wesley’s life, for he called him one of the best men who ever walked the earth.

Dionysiac Worship

We now turn to antiquity, the worship of Diónysos in archaic Greece. Diónysos is a god who was killed, torn apart, then resurrected. He offered his followers a religion of enthusiasm, being possessed by God; he was the god of wine, drunkenness, drama; his worship involved ecstatic dancing and characteristically took place outside of the city, in the mountains and forests.

According to the great classicist, E. R. Dodds, Dionysiac religion “probably made its original appeal mainly to people who had no citizen rights in the aristocratic ‘gentile state’ and were excluded from the older cults associated with the great fami-

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14 Pudney, John Wesley, 77.
15 See Richard Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 54, for Joseph Smith’s leanings toward Methodism.
lies."17 The tyrants, whose power derived from the lower classes, often encouraged Dionysiac religion.18 Dionysiac mysteries "are no longer bound to a fixed sanctuary with priesthoods linked to resident families; they make their appearance wherever adherents can be found. This presupposes a new social phenomenon of wandering priests."19 Characteristic adherents were women, a very oppressed group in Greece. When this religion appeared in Rome, it greatly offended the staid Roman conservatives, and it was subjected to famous persecutions.20 A number of passages testify to the democratic, levelling nature of Dionysiac religious practice. Plutarch writes, "The ancestral Dionysia anciently was a procession that took place democratically (demotikós) and merrily."21 A scholiast writes that at the Pithoigia, Jug-opening, part of the Dionysiac feast Anthesteria, "it was not lawful to bar a house-slave or a servant


19 Burkert, Greek Religion, 291; cf. Aristotle, Politics VI, 2, 11 (1319b)—In a democracy, "Fresh tribes and brotherhoods should be established; the private rites of families should be restricted and converted into public ones." "The measures which are taken by tyrants appear all of them to be democratic" (tr. Benjamin Jowett).


21 Plutarch, On Love of Wealth (De Cupiditate Divitiarum) 8 (527d). Plutarch goes on to contrast the aristocratic nature of the festival in his day: "vessels of gold carried past, expensive clothing, carriages driven by..."
from enjoying the wine, but priests distributed the gift of Dionysos to all."\(^{22}\) There was, of course, a sacred, sacramental aspect to this wine drinking. Dionysos was referred to as Isodaïtêς, "he who distributes equally to all." Even in later ages, slaves were sometimes admitted to Dionysiac associations, ñíasoi.\(^{23}\)

A form of Dionysiac worship was a mystery religion that has been called Orphism, which emphasized the individual’s attainment of rewards in the next life through secret ritual in this life. This movement was once again encouraged by the populist tyrants, and George Thomson interestingly links it with miners.\(^{24}\) Greek miners were usually lower-class peasants and slaves,\(^{25}\) cut off from most city religion both by low status and geographical location, and they usually lived lives of unspeakable degradation and suffering. The parallel with Wesley’s miners is striking. Many of the abuses these ancient and modern workers were subjected to are similar: we have children working long hours in dark, poorly ventilated mines, for instance, in both ancient Greece and modern England.\(^{26}\)

Thus, we have many of our themes in the ancient world: exclusion from the centralized aristocratic cult in the city and popular enthusiastic religion arising among the lower classes,

\(^{22}\) Scholiast on Hesiod, *Works and Days* 368, from Plutarch.

\(^{23}\) CIL vol. 3, #704 and #7437 (slaves with freedmen are admitted to a *bakcheion*).


\(^{25}\) See Xenophon, *De Vectigalibus* IV, 14–15.

\(^{26}\) We have frightening passages from Diodorus Siculus (III, 11) that are probably applicable to all ancient mining: children, the sick and weak, are driven at hard labor by the lash until they die in their tracks, creating enormous profits for their masters. During the Peloponnesian War, 20,000 slaves, many of whom were likely miners, deserted from the Athenians to the Spartans (Thucydides VII, 27, cf. *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* XII, 4), a pathetic exercise in futility, for the Spartans did not treat their slaves with any great mercy. This is the dark side of the great Athenian democracy. See also Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, 149–51; Thomas More, *Utopia* Book 1.
slaves, and women, outside of the city, as a reaction against the centralized cult.

The Caste System of India

There are also some interesting parallels to this pattern in modern India. There we have socially and religiously institutionalized outcasts because of the caste system. In Indian culture, the untouchables, on a level below the lowest castes, are doomed to miserable lives; they are despised by the castes and are denied any kind of social or economic advancement. Thus it is not surprising that enormous numbers of them have left Hinduism and converted to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism.27

"Most of the Muslims in North India are from lower castes and untouchables."28

In India, as well, we find the outcast excluded from religious buildings and worship. "In Southern India, whole castes have been known to become Muslims because the Brahmans would not allow them to enter Hindu temples, and compelled them to worship outside."29 Exclusion from temples is commonplace for the untouchable:

[The depressed classes] are snubbed and repressed on all public occasions; are refused admission even to the temples of their gods. . . . Any attempts which they may make to educate themselves or their children are actively discouraged by the classes above them; caste-restrictions prevent them from quitting the toilsome, uncertain and undignified means of


subsistence to which custom has condemned them, and taking to a handicraft or a trade. . . . As a Hindu, you won’t touch him [an untouchable]; you would not let him sit on the same carpet with you, you would not offer him water in your cups. . . . You would not let him enter your temples.30

Thus the poor, the “filthy” in upper-class eyes, is excluded from the place of worship by religious figures of the highest caste. Outraged at this religious discrimination, the poor outcasts turn to a more accepting religion.

This kind of conversion in turn fuels more outrage among the Hindu majority, both for religious and economic reasons.

Hindus were agitated because the age-old slaves who provided cheap labour . . . had challenged the authority of their religion. . . . While remaining within the Hindu fold the Untouchables remained disunited, subservient and exploitable, [but] conversion would give them unity. While remaining Hindu, they had no friends. After conversion they would have friends and allies [within their new religion]. [Among the Hindus,] moneylender, trader, merchant, priest—all would suffer. So they all combined to make propaganda and to use all possible means to keep them [the depressed classes] within the Hindu fold.31

One remembers the Zoramite outrage at the defection of their poor, whom they had excluded as filth, to Alma’s people; and the callous Victorian complaint that coal production would decrease because of Wesley’s preaching. For the same reasons, Hindu persecution of converts to Islam has been a problem in India.32

According to Bhagwan Das, in another interesting example of the exclusion of untouchables from a temple, “the Untouchables had launched an agitation at Vaikom for the right to walk on the road some fifty yards away from the temple, which under the existing law and practice they were not allowed

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to use.” In this case, they do not even agitate to enter the temple; they merely desire to use a road that goes near the temple.

Religious exclusion induces conversion in another way. Sometimes Hindus of upper or middle castes suffer great sickness and distress; they are given treatment by Muslims, and accept food and water from them, which transgresses Hindu caste law. As a result, their caste excommunicates them. Thrown into the horrible no-man’s-land of caste excommunication in India, they turn to Islam.

These details from our own century remind one uncannily of the Pharisees in Christ’s day with their obsessive concern for ritual and racial purity. The doctoring Muslims remind one of the Good Samaritan.

**Early Christianity**

We may now turn to early Christianity. There the theme of the spiritual outcast is present, though it is not as overt as in the Book of Mormon. First of all, in the gospels, we have the exclusive, centralized city cult tended by the Sadduceans, who were in charge of the priesthood linked to the Jerusalem temple. Then we have the Pharisees, who prized ritual purity at all costs. Thus, “the supreme religious duty for contemporary Judaism was to keep away from sinners.” “A Pharisee does not dwell with them [the ignorant, the sinner] as a guest, nor does he entertain one of them at home in his garments.” “But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed” (John 7:49; New Revised Standard Version).

Thus Jesus’ teaching “was a slap in the face to all the religious feelings of the time.” His disciples included publicans (generally extortionate and dishonest toll or tax collectors), sinners, prostitutes, and the uneducated (Mark 2:16; Matthew 21:32; Matthew 11:25). Publicans especially were outcasts: “if they had belonged to a Pharisaic community before they entered office [i.e., became a publican], they were expelled.”

Jesus’ followers were also characterized as poor: in Luke’s version of the first beatitude, we read, “Blessed are the poor

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 111 n. 2.
[πτόκχοί], for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). The corresponding woe is, “But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation” (Luke 6:24). Interestingly, the Dead Sea Scroll people referred to themselves as “the poor.”38 After a potential convert avows that he has kept the commandments since youth, Christ instructs him to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow him. This rich man “went away sorrowful.” Christ then remarked to the apostles that it was difficult for the rich to be saved.39 Christ, after describing his healings to John, summarizes his entire teaching thus: “the poor have good news preached to them [πτόκχοί ευαγγελίζονται]” (Luke 7:22). The phrase that follows this has great meaning: “And blessed is he who takes no offense at me” (Luke 7:23). As Jeremias points out, Christ’s ministry to the poor, the uneducated, the religious outcasts, such as publicans and prostitutes (Matthew 21:31), caused great offense among the Sadducees and Pharisees.

It is only in this context that we see what a “slap in the face” the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) is. The Samaritan was racially impure—half Gentile, half Israelite; he worshipped at a different temple, a rival of the Jerusalem temple. His religion was half pagan, half Jewish, a blasphemous mongrel religion to the ultraorthodox Pharisees. So Jews despised such people. Yet when the traveller is wounded, perhaps close to death, a priest and a Levite pass him by—afraid of sustaining possible ritual impurity upon contact if the man were dead,40 in addition, perhaps, to simply being in a hurry—and the racially, religiously impure Samaritan cares for his wounds. It is the outcast who shows “mercy,” who is the “neighbor,” who is in

38 Commentary on Habukkuk (1QpHab) 12:3, 6, 10; Commentary on Psalms (4QPs37) 2:10; The War Scroll (1QM) 11:9, cf. William S. LaSor, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 60–62; Frank Moore Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 84–85; see n. 49 and Appendix A.


fact spiritually righteous. One can imagine how offensive this story was to the priests and Levites of Jesus' day. Translating such a parable into our culture, it is as if a stake president or a bishop passed by such a victim because he was late for a session at the temple or a ward planning meeting, and an excommunicant Mormon cared for him.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) explicitly contrasts the miserable outcast state of the poor and the heedless rich and shows the stark spiritual contrast between the two men. A sumptuously dressed rich man feasts every day, and "At his gate, covered with sores, lay a poor man named Lazarus, who would have been glad to satisfy his hunger with the scraps from the rich man's table. Even the dogs used to come and lick his sores." The beggar dies and ends up in the "bosom of Abraham"; the rich man dies and "looks up in torment," "in agony in this fire." T. W. Manson associates this parable with a section in Luke that he calls "The Gospel of the Outcast."41

According to Jeremias, one of Jesus' greatest offenses was table fellowship with religious outcasts. "Jesus invited them [sinners and tax collectors] into his house (Luke 15:2 prosdékhetai) and reclined at table with them (Mark 2:15f. par.) in festive meals."42 "In the east, even today, to invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness."43 But table fellowship also means "fellowship before God."

Thus Jesus' meals with the publicans and sinners, too, are not only events on a social level, not only an expression of his unusual humanity and social generosity and his sympathy with those who were despised, but had an even deeper significance. They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus (Mark 2:17), eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end-time (Matt. 8:11 par.), in which the community of the saints is already being represented (Mark 2:19). The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellow-

43 Ibid.
ship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.44

Jesus once lodged openly with the chief publican in Jericho (Luke 19:2–5) and included publicans in his twelve apostles (Levi—possibly the same person as Matthew). As the Luke 19 passage shows, however, Christ did not encourage the sinner in his sins, but associated with him to bring him to repentance. In many parables, the repentant sinner, who still feels that he is a sinner, is more righteous than the devoted religionist who feels he has never sinned (Luke 18:9–14; 15:11–32).

Jesus often preached to crowds in the open air, in the tradition of Alma and Wesley—thus the “sermon on the mount,” the “sermon on the plain” (Matthew 5:1; Luke 6:17). Of course, he also taught in synagogues (Matthew 9:35); on at least one occasion he was forcibly cast out of a synagogue by an enraged congregation (Luke 4:29). The incident of Paul’s arrest for profaning the temple also comes to mind (“they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple”; Acts 21:30).

In the early church after Christ’s death, Gentiles were welcomed into the Christian community, an event that was difficult for many Jewish Christians to accept (Galatians 2:12). The Lord’s Supper, communion, became an important ritual act that required social, racial oneness, because it required Jew to eat with Gentile. Early Christian table fellowship was the antithesis of the ritual exclusivity of the Pharisee.45

The poor continued to be a major component of the early Christian church. However, recent scholarship has shown that the church also attracted a cross-section of society, middle and upper middle class and some rich.46 But unlike competing religious groups, the cross-section of society functioned together.47

44 Ibid.
47 Roman society has been characterized as a steep pyramid with the rich on top, Ramsay MacMullen, Roman Social Relations (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 88–120.
Rich and poor, aristocrat and slave, sat down at the table of the Lord’s supper together. In Hellenistic religious associations, typically, the upper classes would exclude the lower, and the lower classes had their own separate religious associations. In an apparent exception, a Dionysiac association, we do find senators rubbing shoulders with freedmen and slaves; but the freedmen and slaves are the senators’ specific clients.48

E. R. Dodds, in his analysis of the reasons for the success of Christianity, writes,

Christianity was open to all . . . . It accepted the manual worker, the slave, the outcast, the ex-criminal; and though in the course of our period it developed a strong hierarchic structure, its hierarchy offered an open career to talent . . . . In the second century, the Christian Church was still largely (though with many exceptions) an army of the disinherited.49

In later centuries, of course, Christianity became the state religion, and thus attracted a whole aristocratic structure into it. Such a transformation—bringing with it fine buildings, fine


49 Eric R. Dodds, Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 134. See Justin, Apology II, 10, 8; Athenagoras, Legatio pro Christianis XI, 3; Tatian, Oratio XXXII, 1; Minucius Felix, Octavius VIII, 4; XII, 7; Origen, Contra Celsum I, 27. See also A. H. M. Jones, “Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity,” in Arnaldo Momigliano, The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 37. For miners in early Christianity, see Adolf von Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972, orig. 1902), 164–65. In Apostolic Constitutions 5:1, we read, “If any Christian is condemned for Christ’s sake . . . . to the mines [eis . . . . métallon] by the ungodly, do not overlook him, but from the proceeds of your toil and sweat send him something to support himself and to reward the soldiers.” A church was organized in the mines at Phaeno; Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica VIII, 13, 5. For early Christian charity in general, see Harnack, Mission and Expansion, 147–98.
clothes, political power, etc.—would change the nature of the church unalterably, of course.  

**Implications**

I will now look at some of the implications of this pattern for Latter-day Saints today. First, a follower of Christ votes, chooses candidates, issues, or parties; concern for the poor and oppressed of this and all nations should be a major factor in his decisions. The only Christian Republican or Democrat is obviously the one who is sincerely concerned with helping the poor, the minorities, the disadvantaged.

In addition, our pattern shows that if we are affluent, well-educated, part of the racial majority, urban, and have easy access to the true church, we are in particular danger. The Book of Mormon shows us that the pride cycle is always at work on church members. It is an inevitable process, though individuals may resist it. Certainly, the rich and educated are not automatically wicked, just as they are not automatically righteous. In the Book of Mormon’s pride cycle, the righteous tend to become rich because they are industrious, honest, living in harmony with God’s laws, peaceable. But then they tend to become caught up in their possessions: pride, expensive buildings and clothes, stark social divisions, spiritual and governmental disintegration follow (capitalism, carried out in an inhumane way, can be a factor in the spiral of the pride cycle outlined there. It can also be administered in a constructive, humane way also, obviously.) Though richness is a characteristic of both up and

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50 Cf. Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Athenaeum, 1976), 76–79. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History* XXVII, 3, the bishops of Rome “are free from money worries, . . . riding in carriages, dressing splendidly, feasting luxuriantly,” quoted in Johnson, *History of Christianity*, 77. For the transition from religion of poverty and equality to religion of wealth and class division, cf. n. 21 above (Dionysiac); n. 27 above (Buddhism). The monastic groups devoted to the idea of poverty who become extremely wealthy and politically powerful orders in a few generations are fascinating case histories; cf. Johnson, *History of Christianity*, 144–50. See an unpublished paper by Rand Johnson on this subject—he shows a series of primitivistic reformations by a few who have the ideal of poverty. These develop institutionalization, eventually creating wealth and power in the monastic group, which requires another reformation to primitive Christian poverty. The pride cycle in the Book of Mormon shows that every culture and civilization, especially the righteous, are subject to this danger.
down sides of the pride cycle, the rich are in motion toward spiritual danger. The tendency for the well-to-do to fill church positions—natural because the wealthy are often good managers and have some education—nevertheless has some ambiguity in it.

An obvious implication of the pattern I’ve discussed is that we should be careful not to exclude the poor, the apparent sinner, the racial minority from our communities or our buildings of worship. A subtle way of excluding the poor, the sinner, the racial minority, is by simply ignoring them. One of the great Christian acts of the Book of Mormon is the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites. Ironically, not too many years after that event, a Lamanite prophet would stand on the walls of a Nephite city and call the Nephites to repentance.

51 See n. 6 above.
52 These are complex issues, a full discussion of which is outside of the compass of this short paper.
Appendix A

I will look briefly at the Dead Sea Scrolls community, who may perhaps be identified with the Essenes. The founder-prophet of the sect, the Teacher of Righteousness, a priest, was persecuted by a “Wicked Priest”; this evil man persecuted the Teacher’s followers, too. So perhaps they were forced from the city and into the wilderness.

As has been mentioned previously, the Dead Sea Scroll people sometimes referred to themselves as “the poor.” Evidently, they practiced a form of communitarianism, as did the early Christians.

But the Essenes are problematic for our pattern since they themselves willingly left the city, with its corrupt priesthood tending the temple, to join a community in the wilderness. Thus they are not despised outcasts in this sense, but they themselves are rejecting and despising the centralized worship. However, it appears that they were indeed “poor,” and that they were sometimes excluded from the temple cult. Josephus writes, “They do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account, they are excluded from the common court of the temple.” It is interesting that John the Baptist may have had Dead Sea/Essene ties, and that he came

53 Commentary on the Psalms (4QpPs37) 2:15–16; LaSor, Dead Sea Scrolls, 120.
54 Qumran Commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab) 11:4–8; LaSor, Dead Sea Scrolls, 107; persecution of the sect Qumran Commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab) 11:5; 12:6.
55 Qumran Commentary on Habakkuk (1QpHab) 12:3, 6, 10; Commentary on the Psalms (4QpPs37) 2:10; The War Scroll (1QM) 11:9, cf. LaSor, The Dead Sea Scrolls 60–62; Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran, 84–85.
56 The Community Rule (1QS) 6:17–22; 1:11–13; 6:2–3; Josephus, Antiquities XVIII, 1, 5; Wars II, 8, 3: “These men are despisers of riches . . . nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another,” tr. Whiston; Philo, Every Good Man 26; Acts 4:32; Robert Grant, Early Christianity and Society (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 100; LaSor, Dead Sea Scrolls, 53, 60, 133; cf. 4 Nephi 3; Moses 7:18; D&C 49:20.
57 Josephus, Antiquities XVIII, 1, 5.
58 Luke 1:80, he was raised in the wilderness; he later preached in the wilderness, Matthew 3:1. See Cross, Ancient Library, 204n; LaSor, Dead Sea Scrolls, 142–53.
from a priestly lineage on both sides of his family. Was he barred from practicing as priest?

In some ways, the Essenes seem the opposite of our pattern, for they were ritually very exclusive, legalistic and judgmental.59 Sometimes they appear to have more in common with the Pharisees than with Jesus, who continually taught the spirit of the law over pure legalism.