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Book Reviews of D. Michael Quinn's Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Introduction to Reviews

Paul H. Peterson

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Book Reviews

Editor's Introduction

Paul H. Peterson

Probably no Mormon history book in recent years has stirred as much controversy and elicited as many varied responses as has D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. Quinn's book stirred much interest among Mormon historians even before its publication. Other scholars had uncovered documents that they claimed necessitated some reassessment of our early history, and Quinn seemed a logical choice to make such a reassessment. Author of a number of polished essays on the Mormon past, he was superbly qualified to write a cutting-edge study that would broaden and illuminate our historical horizons and possibly point to new directions to be taken.

When the book appeared, reaction was both loud and mixed. There was virtual unanimity among scholars that Quinn's research was prodigious, and most commentators agree that at least some of his implications and conclusions are significant. But while some scholars confidently pronounce Quinn's study to be a scholarly tour de force and basically accept his thesis that early Mormonism was centered around a magical world view, others have expressed alarm at Quinn's methodology. More particularly, they object to unwarranted conclusions based on what they consider to be highly tentative evidence. The debate continues.

BYU Studies is committed to bringing to the attention of its readers important published works that deal with the Mormon experience. Because of the controversy surrounding Quinn's book, we invited three reviewers to comment on the work. Each of them approaches it from a somewhat different perspective and discipline. Stephen Robinson is a New Testament scholar; William A. Wilson is a prominent folklorist; and Benson Whittle is an artist with a background in comparative literature. In addition to the perspectives provided by these reviewers, readers may wish to consult reviews by Jon Butler, Stephen Ricks, and Daniel C. Peterson (with a reply by Quinn) in *Sunstone* 12 (January 1988): 36–40; by Peter Wiley in *Utah Holiday* 17 (January 1988): 26, 27; by Mark S. Joy in *Journal of the West* 27 (April 1988): 106; by Alan Taylor in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21 (Summer 1988): 157–59; and by Sterling M. McMurrin in *Utah Historical Quarterly* 56 (Spring 1988): 199–200.

Paul H. Peterson is an assistant professor of Church History at Brigham Young University and the book review editor for *BYU Studies*.