

The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma

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In the midst of his accounts of military encounters described in the book of Alma, Mormon inserts an extended explanation of “the iniquity of the people” (Alma 31:1). Thirteen chapters (Alma 29-42) are devoted to reporting a contest of ideas and activities that affected both individuals and groups, describing problems and strategies to remedy these problems. Apparently the content of these chapters is significant to understanding Mormon’s interest in the military events (see Alma 30:1-6; 43:1-3).

Mormon begins his commentary in the aforementioned thirteen chapters with a description of Korihor the anti-Christ and an encounter he had with Alma. The text clearly points to six propositions Korihor used in an attempt to dissuade Alma and others from their beliefs. Korihor argued that (1) religious doctrines and prophecies are foolish and unenlightened ancestors create superstitious traditions (see Alma 30:13-14, 28), (2) only evidence that the physical senses can confirm is valid (see Alma 30:15), (3) religious convictions result from a frenzied and deranged mind (see Alma 30:16, 28), (4) God does not intervene in life – we survive only by our own efforts (see Alma 30:17), (5) there is no such thing as a crime (see Alma 30:17-18), and (6) churches are instruments of bondage, slavery, and oppression (see Alma 30:27). These were not new arguments then, nor are they unfamiliar to those who live today. They are fundamental to a popular modern worldview.

Many contemporary scholars are writing books analyzing historical and present cultural manifestations of the fundamental conflict between Korihor’s argument and its antithesis.¹ The underlying issue that makes the debate possible is the axial tension between what the Greeks perceived as the *mantic* versus the *sophic* view,² what has been identified in ancient Judaism as the *vertical* versus the *horizontal* tradition,³ and what has been termed in the modern era as the *supernatural* versus *natural* perspectives.⁴ In other words, does man look to God, to his authorized representatives, to a higher order, for light and truth to guide him in primary decisions; or does he look to himself, to his own unaided intellect, for solutions to his basic questions? Is the foundation of the human disposition to be vertical or horizontal, supernatural or natural?

Even in states of apostasy and under conditions of deception, as men by degrees fall away from the truth of God toward a reverence for their own power, the controversy remains clear. The reality Korihor doubted and the counterfeit he proposed remain as man’s dispositional anchor points. The so-called “middle ground” or “the areas of grey” are just so many variations on the primary theme. The Zoramites are a classic example of one such variation (see Alma 31:1-23). No one needs to doubt the source of knowledge and power on which they relied in their day- to-day lives. Their hearts were far removed from the religious terms emanating from their lips.

As Justin Martyr explained to the Greeks, “Neither by nature nor by any human skill is it possible for men to know such high and holy things; but only by a gift that descends from above upon holy men from time to time.” The only prerequisite is “to keep themselves pure to receive the power of the spirit of God, so that the divine plectrum can express itself through them.”⁵ This is the vertical look, the appeal to the supernatural. No training is necessary in analytical technique, speech, or skill in argument. The horizontalist, on the other hand, turns his disposition downward: it focuses on man and man’s relationship to man. H. C. Wright describes this choice of basic assumptions as “the central problem of intellectual history.”⁶ We are of the opinion that it is also central to the

analysis of the military policies Nephite and dissident Nephite leaders used while directing the armed conflicts reported in the book of Alma.

Within the framework of this age-old conflict, Mormon reports the particular cultural tensions that led to the armed conflicts described in the book of Alma. A clear understanding of this ideological battle gives both meaning and clarity to the armed conflicts and military actions Mormon describes. To study the military operations without recognizing the ideological foundation of the policies directed by Nephites on both sides of the conflict is to miss what could be Mormon's primary message.

Paradigm of a Divided Family

A paradigm often used in scriptural literature to convey the struggle between the vertical and horizontal life-style is the paradigm of the divided family. Beginning with the premortal conflict in heaven (see Moses 4:1-4; cf. Revelation 12:7-9), the book of Moses clearly describes this problem and follows its continuation in the account of Adam and Eve and their children.

The story of Cain and Abel illustrates the separation. Cain rejected the counsel of God, killed his brother Abel, and moved to the land of Nod where he and his descendants established a *horizontal* culture that rejected the relevance of God in one's personal life. This "displeased God, and he ministered not unto them, and their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men" (Moses 5:52). These people abandoned the *vertical* connection of seeking and heeding revelation from God. Another segment of the family, however, remained faithful to God. "God revealed himself unto Seth, and he rebelled not" (Moses 6:5). Seth and his son Enos began "to call upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord blessed them" (Moses 6:3-4).

Hugh Nibley has explained that the Sethites remained in high places and kept themselves holy. "They were preachers of righteousness" (Moses 6:23). The Cainites moved down onto the plains and established their own worldly society. They built walled cities, organized armies, invented money, established business based on greed, worked with metal, created musical instruments of brass, made covenants with Satan, and wore expensive clothing and jewelry.⁷

This separation continued until the days of Jared, who was the sixth generation from Adam. A delegation from the Cainites invited him to visit their city. Soon, many of the youth began to leave the high places and move to the cities below. Subsequently, Enoch was called by God to be a missionary to those who had gone astray. With power and authority he pleaded with them, saying, "Ye are my brethren, and why counsel ye yourselves, and deny the God of heaven?" (Moses 6:43). Some listened; most did not.

The same paradigm is reflected in the Book of Mormon account of the family of Lehi. Some of his children also rejected the teachings of their parents, whom angels had instructed to teach these things to their children, as had Adam and Eve. The family divided. Again it was brother against brother, disobedient against obedient. As in Adam's day, the conflicting ideologies eventually created two fundamentally different cultures. Dissidents from the one were drawn to the other. The righteous Nephites nurtured and sought to preserve the *vertical* position that seeks for and is driven by revelation from God. Dissident Nephites, and the Lamanites they sought to "employ" with varying degrees of opposition, inclined toward *horizontal* life-styles of one form or another. The presence and cultural dominance of these alternate traditions set the stage for the emergence of the ideological policies that underlie the conflicts described in the book of Alma.

War Is a Consequence of Cultural Conflict Involving Moral Issues

The general military accounts by the prophet-generalhistorian Mormon compiled in the book of Alma emphasize the primacy of a theistically based ideology in conflict with belief systems seeking its overthrow. In Alma, the issue at stake is whether people who held to the *vertical* tradition, those who acknowledged and were motivated by revelation from God, would be permitted to retain the freedom to believe and live according to that tradition. The armed conflicts Mormon reports can be understood more clearly if this spiritual context is taken into account. This is particularly true when it is remembered that the actual leaders of the conflicts were, in the main, Nephites and dissident Nephites rather than Nephites and Lamanites. The remainder of this paper will examine specific issues that arose during the first thirty-one years of the reign of the judges as reported in the book of Alma. Careful reflection indicates the ideological conflict in this material has relevance in our own day.

The fundamental ideological issue motivating the political and legal conflicts in the book of Alma is whether or not a cultural heritage premised on the existence of a divinely based higher law would be allowed to remain dominant in Nephite society. The record shows that cultural assumptions accepting or rejecting a theistic, higher law as valid and legally binding were expressed in educational, legal, political, military, and personal settings.

Background of Dominant Cultural Heritage during Armed Conflicts

There are two primary ideological components identified in the book of Alma. First, traditional Nephite political and military policies presupposed the existence of God, personal accountability, and divine intervention. This is in accord with the vertical tradition. Second, a relativistic, agnostic philosophy became dominant among much of the educated intelligentsia, the policy-making portion of Nephite society. This is in accord with the horizontal tradition. Nehor popularized a version of this philosophy and sought to enforce his priestcraft with the sword (see Alma 1:12). Horizontal curricula designed by dissident Nephites were also major influences in the Lamanite educational system (see Mosiah 24:4-7). The burning of believers and their religious texts at Ammonihah may also demonstrate the presence of a horizontal mindset in the Nephite culture (see Alma 14:8). The conflicting assumptions of these two distinct ideological positions often found expression in internal and external armed conflict in the Nephite nation.

Vertical Assumptions in Nephite Government and Military Procedures

Acceptance of vertical assumptions as valid and legally binding was the foundation of the freedom enjoyed by the Nephites (see Alma 46:10). The rationale used to justify the change in political government from kings to judges is evidence of the role of these assumptions. Similar assumptions are also dominant in Nephite war policies.

King Mosiah based his reason for favoring the change of Nephite government from a kingship to a judgeship on accepting God's existence and individual accountability to him. This is in accord with the vertical tradition:

Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just. Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people — I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you.... Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you. (Mosiah 29: 12-13, 16.)

A wicked king destroys the purposes of God and the righteousness of the people in specific ways. First, because he has “friends in iniquity, and he keepeth his guards about him” (Mosiah 29:22), one “cannot dethrone an iniquitous king save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood” (Mosiah 29:21). Second, “he tearth up the laws of those who have reigned in righteousness before him” (Mosiah 29:22). Third, “he trampleth under his feet the commandments of God” (Mosiah 29:22). Fourth, “he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people ... after the manner of his own wickedness” (Mosiah 29:23). Fifth, if he can, he will destroy those who will not “obey his laws” or those who “rebel” against them (Mosiah 29:23). Mosiah told his subjects that “it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you” (Mosiah 29:24).

The remedy for this potential abuse from wicked rulers was to choose judges by popular vote. King Mosiah assumed that the majority of the people would uphold the traditional Nephite laws given to righteous kings by God:

Choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord. Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore, this shall ye observe and make it your law – to do your business by the voice of the people. (Mosiah 29:25-26.)

The ultimate check on the popular voice of the people was the justice of God: “If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time that he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land” (Mosiah 29:27).

Widespread recognition of both the reality of divine punishment, as well as the ability to choose freely to avoid or accept the same, contributed to the people’s acceptance of King Mosiah’s proposal to create the office of elected judges.

They relinquished their desires for a king, and became exceedingly anxious that every man should have an equal chance throughout all the land; yea, and every man expressed a willingness to answer for his own sins. Therefore, it came to pass that they assembled themselves together in bodies throughout the land, to cast in their voices concerning who should be their judges, to judge them according to the law which had been given them; and they were exceedingly rejoiced because of the liberty which had been granted unto them. (Mosiah 29:38-39.)

The public commitment of the chief judge was consistent with the vertical values: “He was appointed chief judge and governor over the people, with an oath and sacred ordinance to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and to grant unto them their sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God, yea, to support and maintain the cause of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice according to their crime” (Alma 50:39). All of the foregoing illustrates that the rationale for having judges, the establishment of laws, and the ultimate political checks on the administration of these laws were based on vertical assumptions regarding the existence of God and individual accountability to him.

The military policy of the Nephites during this period was founded on the existence of God, communication with God, and protection of those who were faithful to that God. This concept is illustrated by the covenant made in conjunction with the title of liberty as well as by the summary principles of warfare Mormon articulated.

As reported in Alma 46, covenants associated with the title of liberty were premised on the existence of God, free agency in following God's commandments, and enjoyment of the divine blessings of liberty and freedom that would naturally follow. Explicitly, the title of liberty was "in memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives and our children" (Alma 46:12). Moroni covenanted with the Lord regarding the nature of the promised land. It was to be a land of liberty and freedom for those Christians and members of the house of Jacob who would possess the land and keep the commandments of God (Alma 46:13-18, 23-27). This was in accord with prior divine covenants and prophecies regarding the land (see 2 Nephi 1:7; 10:11; Mosiah 29:32; Ether 2:8-12). Those who voluntarily joined Moroni and his cause did so with a covenant to follow the commandments of God.

Moroni ... went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air, that all might see the writing which he had written upon the rent part, and crying with a loud voice, saying: Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them. And it came to pass that when Moroni had proclaimed these words, behold, the people came running together with their armor girded about their loins, rending their garments as a token, or as a covenant, that they would not forsake the Lord their God; or, in other words, if they should transgress the commandments of God, or fall into transgression, and be ashamed to take upon them the name of Christ, the Lord should rend them even as they had rent their garments.

Now this was the covenant which they made, and they cast their garments at the feet of Moroni, saying: We covenant with our God, that we shall be destroyed, even as our brethren in the land northward, if we shall fall into transgression; yea, he may cast us at the feet of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression. Moroni said unto them: Behold, we are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; yea, we are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, whose coat was rent by his brethren in many pieces; yea, and now behold, let us remember to keep the commandments of God, or our garments shall be rent by our brethren, and we be cast into prison, or be sold, or be slain. Yea, let us preserve our liberty as a remnant of Joseph (Alma 46:19-24).

The covenant of the Nephite people, then, was not allegiance to a man, such as Moroni, nor to a government position, such as the office of chief judge, held by Nephiah and Pahoran. Instead, the covenants and commitments were made directly to God, to whom the people believed they were personally accountable. Again, this allegiance reflected a deep-seated commitment to the vertical rather than a horizontal tradition based on individual or institutional allegiance.

On occasion the prophet Mormon offers insight through his Nephite history of vertically based principles that governed the people's welfare generally. These insights also presupposed the existence of a God who, in the fullest sense of the vertical tradition, was actively involved in the affairs of men.

Mormon's recounting of select Nephite military history includes observations that illustrate the vertical perspective on certain policies governing warfare. These include the following: (1) Destruction of liberty is contrary to the statutes, judgments, and commandments of God (see Alma 8:17). (2) "The foundation of the destruction of this people is beginning to be laid by the unrighteousness of your lawyers and your judges" (Alma 10:27). (3) Policies could properly govern acts but not belief (see Alma 30:11). (4) "Fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church," is a "better cause" than "fighting for monarchy [or] power" (Alma 43:45). (5) "Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" (see Alma

43:46). (6) “Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47). (7) Do not engage in offensive warfare (see Alma 48:14). (8) Allowing a massacre of one’s family by those who had rejected the theistic cultural tradition and joined one’s enemies is unacceptable (see Alma 48:24). (9) “We would subject ourselves to bondage if it were requisite with the justice of God, or if he should command us to do so” (Alma 61:12). (10) God “doth not command us that we shall subject ourselves to our enemies, but that we should put our trust in him, and he will deliver us” (Alma 61:13). (11) The purpose of armed conflict is to “retain our freedom, ... rejoice in the great privilege of our church, and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God” (Alma 61:14).

General principles that govern divine intervention in behalf of the faithful in times of peace and war and that accept a divine perspective as relevant include the following: (1) Prayers of the righteous save society from divine destruction (see Alma 10:22-23; 62:40). (2) God allows righteous people to be destroyed so that his judgments will be just (see Alma 14:11; 60:13). (3) Divine deliverance in battle occurs “because of our religion and our faith in Christ” (Alma 44:3). (4) “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion” (Alma 44:4). (5) “God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon ourselves the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, until we bring it upon us by our own transgressions” (Alma 46:18). (6) God will bless those who “come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion” (Alma 46:20; see 60:16). (7) God will prosper the faithful and “warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; ... [and] whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies” (Alma 48:15-16). (8) Quarrelings, dissensions, iniquities, intrigues, contentions, murderings, plunderings, idolatries, whoredoms, and abominations bring wars and destructions (see Alma 50:21; 51:16; 53:8-9). (9) Formulation and implementation of policies that negate a basic belief in God in the name of remedying perceived political wrongs are espoused with “a perfect knowledge of [their] fraud” (Alma 55:1; see 54:15-24). (10) Those who fulfill their oaths to God in time of warfare will not suffer more because of their faithfulness (see Alma 56:8). (11) If one does not doubt, God will deliver him in time of warfare (see Alma 56:47-48; 57:26). (12) Assurances from God of divine deliverance are manifested by his speaking “peace to our souls,” “grant[ing] unto us great faith,” and “caus[ing] us that we should hope for our deliverance in him” (Alma 58:11). (13) God can deliver the faithful, notwithstanding the weakness of their armies (see Alma 58:37). (14) Those who do not use resources available to defend liberty will be held guilty before God (see Alma 60:21-23). (15) Exceeding faith and patience in tribulation will provide the strength and blessing of God that “none other power can operate against them” (Alma 60:25-26). (16) The “spirit of freedom” is the “Spirit of God” (Alma 61:15). (17) God will “deliver ... all those who stand fast in that liberty wherewith God hath made them free” (Alma 61:21). (18) During the same armed conflict, some will become more hardened against God (see Alma 24:27-30; 62:41), while others will become more humble (see Alma 24:21-26; 62:41).

Observations that explain the consequences of armed enforcement of specific policies include the following: (1) “Were priestcraft to be enforced by the sword among this people it would prove their entire destruction” (Alma 1:12). (2) Those whose political and military policies are in open rebellion against God bring upon themselves their own condemnation (see Alma 3:18-19). (3) Killing incapacitated soldiers will bring injustice upon one’s self and cause (see Alma 55:19). (4) “The Lord will not suffer that ye shall live and wax strong in your iniquities to destroy his righteous people” (Alma 60:31). All of the foregoing principles manifestly demonstrate a cultural heritage in which the people accept theistic assumptions as valid and legally, if not practically, binding.

Evidence of Rejection of Vertical Assumptions in Lamanite Culture and Various Components of Dissenters from Nephite Society

The Lamanite culture and Nephite dissidents rejected the theistic assumptions of the Nephite vertical tradition. Dissident Nephites also promoted agnostic or horizontal influences in the educational system of the Nephites. The gradations of religiosity among these dissidents and those who followed them seem similar to those personal dispositions described by Nephi respecting our own day (see 2 Nephi 28:5-11, 20-22).

The first chapter of Alma recounts the story of Nehor, who preached a personal version of the “word of God” against the established church. His doctrines included a paid ministry and universal salvation, redemption, and eternal life. Gideon, a leader among the believers, challenged Nehor’s preaching. Nehor responded by killing Gideon. Alma, the chief judge, condemned Nehor to death. Alma found that (1) this was the first time priestcraft had been introduced among the Nephites; (2) were priestcraft to be enforced among the Nephites, it would lead to their destruction; and (3) the Nephites would be accountable for the blood of a righteous person if Nehor was not slain. The law of Mosiah, acknowledged by the people and therefore binding on them, required Nehor to be put to death, which he was. Nevertheless, the prophet-historian Mormon observes that this did not put an end to the spread of priestcraft through the land — many loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor (see Alma 1:16). During the next sixteen years, evidently many of Nephite society chose to follow the “order and faith of Nehor” (Alma 14:16) rather than the “order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father” (Alma 13:9). Regardless of Nehor’s personal beliefs, certain practices of the order of Nehor seem to be cast in an agnostic or relativistic framework.

The reported practices and philosophies of the order of Nehor were contrary to the traditional, theistic practices in Nephite society. They advocated that (1) priests and teachers were to be popularly supported rather than self-sufficient (cf. Alma 1:3 with 1:26), (2) armed force was appropriately used to destroy rather than preserve either the church of God or its adherents (cf. Alma 2:4 with 46:10), and (3) holding or teaching a theistic perspective after “the order of the Son of God” was sufficient grounds for death or banishment (cf. Alma 4:2-19 with 35:3-11).

While those who followed the order of Nehor did not completely deny concepts of “God” and “Devil,” their perceptions of those beings differed significantly from the Nephite perspective. King Lamoni’s father indicated that the Amalekites had taught him there was a “God,” and he allowed them to build sanctuaries to worship him (see Alma 22:7). However, followers perceived the doctrines of the church, especially those relating to Christ, as “foolish traditions” (Alma 8:11; see 21:8). The hard-hearted and stiffnecked people in the land of Ammonihah attributed the righteous exercise of power to the devil (see Alma 15:15). Past and present prophesy of “things to come” was not believed (see Alma 9:4; 14:14; 21:8). Neither life after death in a resurrected, immortal state nor repentance of sins was accepted (see Alma 12:20-21; 15:15). God was to save all people (see Alma 21:6).

Mormon chose to record evidence of the armed conflict led by those who espoused the philosophy of Nehor. This conflict was present in both Nephite and Lamanite societies. In Nephite society, during the reign of the judges, the conflict with the Amlicites in the fifth year (see Alma 2) and the destruction of the righteous of Ammonihah in the eleventh year (see Alma 14:8-17) were representative of such conflict. In Lamanite society, during the same period, there occurred (1) the destruction of Anti-NephiLehies and other Lamanites who believed in Christ, under the direction of dissident Amalekites and Amulonites (see Alma 24-25); (2) the Lamanite destruction of Ammonihah (see Alma 16; 25:1-2); and (3) the burning of converted Lamanites by the remnant of the priests of Amulon (see Alma 25:3-6). The fact that these conflicts pervaded both Lamanite and Nephite society is evidence that the fundamental issue at stake was not national or political classification. Rather, it was the competing worldview—vertical or horizontal—that governed the Nephite and Lamanite societies. Both the philosophies and armed conflicts of the order of Nehor were contrary to the vertical tradition of the Nephites.

To better understand the educational traditions of the Lamanites during the first thirty-one years of the reign of the judges, one must first understand educational practices reported in the book of Mosiah. This book contains a description of King Noah, who openly apostatized from the ways of his overzealous, but vertically minded father, Zeniff (see Mosiah 11:1). Among other things, Noah “put down all the priests that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts” (Mosiah 11:5).

The prophet Abinadi described the attitudes and perspectives of these teacher-priests when he spoke in the court of King Noah. They professed to teach the law of Moses (see Mosiah 12:28), but without the “spirit of prophesying” (Mosiah 12:25). The priest’s “hearts,” or dispositions, had not been “applied ... to understanding” (Mosiah 12:27). Instead, they had “studied and taught iniquity the most part of [their] lives” (Mosiah 13:11). Their conduct was not wise (see Mosiah 12:27); they knew that Abinadi spoke the truth (see Mosiah 12:30).

Considering their perspective, it is not surprising that the priests encouraged the burning of Abinadi (see Mosiah 17:6, 12). Alma, the only priest who responded positively to Abinadi’s message, was driven from King Noah’s court under threat of death (see Mosiah 17:3-4).

Eventually, in fulfillment of the prophecies of Abinadi, the Lamanites overran the transplanted Nephite colony in the land of Nephi. At the time of attack, the priests followed the command of King Noah and fled into the wilderness, leaving behind their own wives and children. The men who retreated with the royal court eventually mutinied, and then they burned King Noah. Their efforts to slay the priests of the court in a similar manner were frustrated by the priests’ escape further into the wilderness (see Mosiah 19:9-26). Subsequent to these events, those who remained in the land of Nephi returned to their families and, after repentance, ultimately escaped from the bondage imposed by the Lamanites and returned to the land of Zarahemla (see Mosiah 20-22).

The priests of King Noah, however, never returned to the land of Nephi or the main Nephite body in Zarahemla. Mormon records that they were “ashamed” and “fear[ed] that the people would slay them” (Mosiah 20:3). They did not, therefore, return to their wives and children. Instead, they laid in wait and captured twenty-four Lamanite daughters and carried them into the wilderness (see Mosiah 20:4-6). After the main body of Nephites escaped from the land of Nephi, Lamanite troops seeking their daughters discovered the priests of King Noah at a place called Amulon, named after their leader (see Mosiah 23:30-32). Amulon and the kidnapped Lamanite daughters successfully pled for the lives of the priests, and the group joined the Lamanite forces (see Mosiah 23:33-35).

In time, Amulon obtained the Lamanite king’s favor. He was made a ruler over the land of Helam (see Mosiah 23:39). This was the land to which Alma, the repentant priest of King Noah, and his followers had fled (see Mosiah 23:38). Amulon and his associates were appointed teachers over the people and established an educational program in the lands of Shemlon, Shilom, and Amulon (see Mosiah 24:1). The Lamanite king eventually “appointed teachers of the brethren of Amulon in every land which was possessed by his people” (Mosiah 24:4).

Mormon observes that the educational doctrines Amulon and his associates taught in this instructional system were agnostic insofar as they pertained to Jesus Christ. The educational system did not include the vertical heritage of Nephite culture, which was manifested by theistic assumptions, morally based law, and the revealed words of the past and present prophets.

The language of Nephi began to be taught among all the people of the Lamanites. And they were a friendly people one with another; nevertheless they knew not God; neither did the brethren of Amulon teach them anything concerning the Lord their God, neither the law of Moses; nor did they teach them the words of Abinadi; but they taught them they should keep their record, and that they might write one to

another. And thus the Lamanites began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning and a wise people, ... delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren. (Mosiah 24:4-7.)

In the land of Helam, Amulon followed the practice of others affiliated with the order of Nehor in that “whosoever should be found calling upon God should be put to death” (Mosiah 24:11). Thus began the development of an agnostic or horizontal perspective among the Lamanite educational system. Indeed, “although Mormon does not *detail* the relationship between Amulon’s school and the rise of the order of Nehor in the Nephite society he does make the connection (Alma 21:4; 24:28-29).”⁸

While the early accounts of the order of Nehor are either agnostic, or at least apostate from the Nephite version of God, clearly some, such as Korihor, are atheistic in nature (see Alma 30:28, 37-38). While Korihor could also be classified as agnostic (see Alma 30:48), it is not clear that those dissident Nephites involved in opposition to the title of liberty adopted the philosophical extremes of Korihor. Amalickiah cursed God when he learned of his army’s defeat at Ammonihah and Noah (see Alma 49:27). Ammoron, his successor, maintained that belief in God, the devil and hell “matter[ed] not” (Alma 54:21-22). In light of this possible confusion as to the presence of agnostic or atheistic perspectives, the ideological frameworks during the title of liberty conflicts will be classified simply as being vertical and horizontal in nature.

Policies Affecting Armed Conflict Reflect Practical Ramifications of the Vertical and Horizontal Traditions

Most of the armed conflicts the book of Alma reports can be classified as extensions of policies driven by two conflicting ideologies – vertical and horizontal.⁹ First, there were conflicts led by educational, legal, and military leaders seeking to impose by force a horizontal philosophy on a people and culture that accepted a vertical tradition as valid and legally binding. The affiliation of the order of Nehor with these conflicts has been reviewed previously. Second, there were conflicts led by those seeking power, the elimination of the Church, and destruction of the “foundation of liberty which ... God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous’ sake” (Alma 46:10). Inasmuch as the lower judges of the land favored these objectives (see Alma 46:4), those associated with the order of Nehor may have at least influenced, if not corrupted, the legal society of the Nephites at large. We do know that an angel from God told Alma that those who followed the order of Nehor in Ammonihah were actively studying to “destroy the liberty of the [Nephite] people” (Alma 8:17). The second kind of conflict arose during the time of Moroni and his title of liberty. Together, these two general groups of conflicts offer insight as to the effect and impact of the radical shift in assumptions of cultural and philosophical heritage and the war policies that the prophet-historian Mormon reports in the book of Alma.

There are at least eleven armed conflicts associated with the promulgation and defense of the title of liberty. These battles include the following: (1) in the nineteenth year, the internal conflict with the Amalickiahites and Captain Moroni’s title of liberty (see Alma 46); (2) in the nineteenth year, the Lamanite attack on Ammonihah and Noah (see Alma 49); (3) in the twenty-fifth year, the king-men conflict (see Alma 51:1-21); (4) in the twenty-fifth year, the Lamanite invasion in the northeast quadrant led by Amalickiah and the subsequent capture of the cities of Lehi, Morianton, Omner, Gid, and Mulek along the seashore (see Alma 51:22-37); (5) in the twenty-fifth year, in the southwest quadrant, the Lamanite capture of Manti, Zeezrom, Cumeni, and Antiparah (see Alma 53:8-9; 56:9-15); (6) in the twenty-seventh year, the Lamanite defeat near Antiparah (see Alma 56:29-54); (7) in the twenty-eighth year, Helaman’s recapture of Antiparah and Moroni’s of Mulek (see Alma 57:1-4; 52:19-26); (8) in the twenty-ninth year, the Nephite recapture of Gid, Cumeni, and Manti (see Alma 55:3-24; 57:6-36; 58:1-28); (9) in the thirtieth year, Moroni’s recruiting and restoration of Pahoran’s rule by defeating the Nephite forces of Pachus

at Zarahemla (see Alma 62:1-11); (10) in the thirty-first year, various battles and Pahoran and Moroni's recapture of Nephiah (see Alma 62:12-29); and (11) in the thirty-first year, a final effort by Moroni, Lehi, and Teancum that defeats the Lamanite forces by driving them to the land of Moroni (see Alma 62:30-39).

Various aspects of these eleven conflicts illustrate at least two challenges associated with administering armed conflicts in a nontotalitarian society. These fundamental challenges deal with the recruitment and retention of armed forces.¹⁰ Retention of armed forces includes not only maintaining a fighting force but also insuring that military forces follow the decisions of civilian leadership. Mormon's recounting of historical events associated with the title of liberty offers unparalleled examples of differences between vertical and horizontal perspectives in the recruitment and retention of military forces in order to implement political policy.

Recruitment of Armed Forces

The actions and policies Moroni and Amalickiah used in recruiting vary distinctly according to their vertical or horizontal perspectives. As noted previously, Moroni recruited by calling for those who would "come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord God may bless them" (Alma 46:20). Those coming forward not only made a covenant to keep the peace (see Alma 46:31), but also covenanted with God regarding their involvement in the war (see Alma 46:21-22). Those of the rising generation whom Helaman recruited and led "covenanted that they would never give up their liberty, but they would fight in all cases to protect the Nephites and themselves from bondage" (Alma 53:17). They did "think more upon the liberty of their fathers than they did upon their own lives" (Alma 56:47). They went forth, assured by their mothers that "our God is with us, and he will not suffer that we should fall" (Alma 56:46). They did "not doubt [their] mothers knew it" (Alma 56:48).

Amalickiah, on the other hand, followed recruiting patterns that did not include any of the vertical assumptions dominant in the Nephite perspective. When he was among the Nephites, he flattered many "that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people" (Alma 46:5). In Lamanite society, Amalickiah "did stir up the Lamanites to anger against the people of Nephi, insomuch that the king of the Lamanites" issued a call for war against the Nephites (Alma 47:1). He then resorted to tactics of deception and murder to gain initial control of the Lamanite troops and the favor of the Lamanite queen (see Alma 47). Thereafter, he again relied on massive propaganda to win the hearts and minds of the people.

As soon as Amalickiah had obtained the kingdom he began to inspire the hearts of the Lamanites against the people of Nephi; yea, he did appoint men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites.... Therefore he had accomplished his design, for he had hardened the hearts of the Lamanites and blinded their minds, and stirred them up to anger, insomuch that he had gathered a numerous host to go to battle against the Nephites. (Alma 48:1-3.)

This type of recruiting was not based on vertical assumptions. It motivated action by generating hate rather than covenanting with God.

Simply stated, the recruiting issues in the title of liberty conflicts were based on perspectives regarding political freedom. From a vertical or theistic perspective, the purpose of the conflict was to preserve freedom of choice in maintaining a personal relationship with God through religious expression. Recruitment was merely public expression of a private covenant with God. From a horizontal or nontheistic perspective, the purpose of the conflict was to insure freedom from a designated enemy for whom hatred is built through public propaganda. By

whatever means the armed forces were recruited, retention of reliable troops was necessary to achieve their armies' objectives in warfare.

Commitment of Armed Forces in Time of Conflict

Like recruiting, retention of forces (or the continued adherence to the cause for which one has taken up arms) differed markedly between the Lamanite and Nephite societies because of their differing perspectives. The practical results of the two perspectives are demonstrable in the conduct of the armed forces in two different ways: (1) commitment during times of conflict and (2) adherence to political policy directing the conflict. Comparing the performance of the fighting forces of Amalickiah and Moroni illustrates these variances.

The armed forces affiliated with the Lamanites, with their horizontal perspective, revealed a lack of commitment in following political directives and engaging in conflict. Amalickiah was faced with unreliable forces in both Nephite and Lamanite contexts. First, Amalickiah's Nephite forces were unreliable when confronted with the forces of Moroni. Amalickiah saw that not only were Moroni's forces greater, but that "his people were doubtful concerning the justice of the cause in which they had undertaken" (Alma 46:29). Second, when he first sought to incite the Lamanite army to battle, the majority of the Lamanite forces mutinied and refused to obey a royal command to go to battle against the Nephites. Notwithstanding the Lamanite soldiers' fear of displeasing their king, "they also feared to go to battle against the Nephites lest they should lose their lives. And it came to pass that they would not, or the more part of them would not, obey the commandments of the king" (Alma 47:2). Amalickiah himself assumed command of all the rebellious forces. Thereafter, he used Zoramites as chief captains because of their superior geographical knowledge of Nephite territory (see Alma 48:5). One can only wonder whether the previous instability of a majority of the Lamanite officer corps contributed to the significant replacement of Lamanite officers with Zoramites.

The marked difference between Amalickiah's preparation of armed forces and that of Moroni seems to have been obvious to Mormon. He observed that

while Amalickiah had thus been obtaining power by fraud and deceit, Moroni, on the other hand, had been preparing the minds of the people to be faithful unto the Lord their God. Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites, and erecting small forts, or places of resort; throwing up banks of earth round about to enclose his armies, and also building walls of stone to encircle them about, round about their cities and the borders of their lands; yea, all round about the land. And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men; and thus he did fortify and strengthen the land which was possessed by the Nephites. And thus he was preparing to support their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children, and their peace, and that they might live unto the Lord their God, and that they might maintain that which was called by their enemies the cause of Christians (Alma 48:7-10).

The Nephite forces under Moroni's command had a different motivation than simple obedience to governmental edicts. The loyalty of the forces rose beyond defense of liberty and families. In the final analysis, it was premised on their faith in the fulfillment of divine promises. "Nevertheless, they could not suffer to lay down their lives, that their wives and their children should be massacred by the barbarous cruelty of those who were once their brethren, yea, and had dissented from their church, and had left them and had gone to destroy them by joining the Lamanites. Yea, they could not bear that their brethren should rejoice over the blood of the Nephites, so long as there were any who should keep the commandments of God, for the promise of the Lord was, if they should keep his commandments, they should prosper in the land" (Alma 48:24-25).

Actions of the 2,060 sons of Helaman in later battles demonstrate that the Nephite forces who were most reliable in battlefield performance were those who were the most consistent in basing their personal perspective and lifestyle on vertical, religious principles centered on Jesus Christ (see Alma 56-58). This apparent consistency in Nephite forces contrasts sharply with the unreliability in future performance of those king-men forced to swear allegiance to the title of liberty on pain of death (see Alma 46:35). Their failure to perform contributed to significant victories of the Amalickiahites and Lamanites (see Alma 51:5-7, 13-27). Thus, even with the cultural heritage that offered a vertical rationale for consistency in commitment, apparently forced allegiance will, ultimately, produce unreliable performance.

Adherence to Political Policy in Time of Conflict

Implementation of political policy by armed forces may lead to two major challenges. First, the actual motives behind the policy may not be clearly understood. Second, failure to understand the policy may lead to actions that, while in accord with the stated policy, may actually defeat the objectives it was designed to achieve. Conversely, understanding the motivating force of the policy as well as the actual policy can lead to an effective use of military force. Mormon's account of the Lamanite and Nephite military forces illustrates these principles.

Those charged with implementing the military policy of Amalickiah were faced with unusual challenges. First, the principles behind the policies of Amalickiah were not clearly expressed. Those who fought under Amalickiah initially did not understand his motivating force to obtain power over the Lamanites and Nephites. He intentionally disobeyed the commands of the Lamanite king who sent him forth to regain troops disloyal to the king (see Alma 47:16). He and his brother Ammoron advanced a political theory that the war was being fought to "avenge [Lamanite] wrongs, and to maintain and to obtain their rights to the government" (Alma 54:24) rather than to reveal Amalickiah's true intent of bringing the Nephites into bondage (see Alma 48:4), destroying the church of God (see Alma 46:10), and ruling over all of the land (see Alma 48:2).

Not only was the policy unclear, but the failure to understand that policy undercut the effective use of Lamanite forces in the field when not under Amalickiah's direct command. During the initial forays, the Zoramite chief captains retreated from the fortified city of Ammonihah and marched to Noah to attack. The "chief captains came forward and took an oath that they would destroy the people of that city" (Alma 49:13). Unknown to the captains, the city of Noah was extremely well fortified and was commanded by Lehi, whom they "feared ... exceedingly" (Alma 49:17). (He had previously defeated the Lamanites near the river Sidon; see Alma 43:35-40.) When the captains arrived at Noah, they began an attack only because "they had sworn with an oath to attack the city" (Alma 49:17). The outcome of the conflict was that fifty Nephites were wounded, more than a thousand Lamanites were killed, and all of their Zoramite chief captains were slain (see Alma 49:23-24). Had the actual war policies of Amalickiah been what he publicly proclaimed them to be, there would have been no need for unquestioned adherence to military objectives that undermined the Lamanite government's ability to achieve its actual policies.

In contrast, the Nephite forces defending the title of liberty appear to have understood both the true nature and announced position of their government's political policies. Moroni expressed his policies with clarity, and all who chose to align themselves voluntarily with the title of liberty understood them. As a result, Nephite commanders and forces could modify their military actions so as to defend more effectively the underlying objectives of their nation's political policies. Two examples illustrate this point.

While the forces under Moroni were sworn to keep the peace (see Alma 46:31), they were not averse to employing force in resolving internal conflicts to compel the allegiance of the king-men (see Alma 51:5-7, 13-27),

to prevent the departure of the dissenting Nephites of Morianton (see Alma 50:25-35), or to “cleanse the inner vessel” after the betrayal of Pachus and other king-men (Alma 61-62). Moroni’s perceptions of the true nature of warfare and divine intervention allowed him to maintain proper priorities, even though he, too, was bound by an oath regarding military conflict. “He had sworn with an oath to defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion” (Alma 48:13). Second, while the Ammonites had taken a covenant not to bear arms in war (see Alma 24), they did not impose it on their children. Eventually their children relied on the faith of their parents and their own obedience to God to help preserve the Nephites (see Alma 56-58). Their children’s contribution to the Nephite cause fulfilled Helaman’s belief that “God would strengthen us, insomuch that we should not suffer more because of the [parents’] fulfilling the oath which they had taken” (Alma 56:8).

Conclusion

An examination of the accounts of warfare Mormon selected for inclusion in the book of Alma reveals shifting assumptions in the cultural and political policies directing warfare during the first thirty-one years of the reign of the judges. Policies that were ideologically motivated characterized conflicts in both Lamanite and Nephite society during the first eighteen years of the reign of the judges. Armed conflict arose between those who professed allegiance to the agnostic, nontheistic order of Nehor and those who believed, taught, or lived in accord with the theistic perspectives of the Nephites. This perspective was based on the gospel of Jesus Christ and manifested itself in their law, military policy, and religion. The nontheistic order of Nehor, championed by apostate or dissident Nephites, was a mainstay of the Lamanite educational system. Further, influences of the order of Nehor fostered in the Nephite setting may have led to the corruption of Nephite law. The angel’s instructions to Alma regarding Ammonihah and the attitudes of lower Nephite judges evidences this.

This ideological corruption contributed to the internal and external armed conflict in Nephite society over the title of liberty. The conflict arose from internal dissension created by those who sought to impose a rule of kings and destroy the church of God, as well as from external Lamanite attacks under the command of Amalickiah and Ammoron. Recruiting policies, retention of troops, and adherence to military policies during the time period illustrate the practical consequences of the basic theistic and non-theistic assumptions underlying political policies for the use of military force.

These matters have practical significance for us today. Modern Gentiles have inherited the promises made to the inhabitants of the Americas following the appearance of Christ (see Mormon 5:19). Their promised land remains under the curses and blessings God pronounced upon the Nephites (see Alma 45:11-20). In recent times, many thinkers and leaders in education, law, and the military have adopted agnostic ideas reminiscent of Korihor and the order of Nehor. Some of the intellectual and social implications of these agnostic ideas are contrary to divine principles. Those who are committed to the divine principles illustrated in the Book of Mormon thus face an important challenge in defending those principles in modern society.

Notes

1. A sample bibliography treating this theme in various disciplines during the past half century could include J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1923); Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); John C. Ranson, *God without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1965); Daniel Kulp II, *Educational Sociology* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1932); C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: G. Bles, 1962); W. W. Wager, *World Views: A Study in Comparative History* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1977); David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mary Lystad, *From Dr. Mather to Dr. Seuss* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980); Malcolm Muggeridge, *The End of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980); Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (Westminster, Maryland: Random House, 1981); Marvin Harris, *Why*

America Changed (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); Peter D. Hall, *The Organization of American Culture 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982); A. J. Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985); G. Roche, *A World without Heroes: The Modern Tragedy* (Hillsdale, Michigan: Hillsdale College Press, 1987).

2. See "Flavius Josephus against Apion," *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, tr. William Winston (Chicago: John C. Winston, 1936), 1:26; Dio Chrysostom, *Oration on the Knowledge of God* XII, 15; Hugh Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic" (unpublished paper, retyped mss., Brigham Young University, 1987).

3. Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 1:8-22.

4. James L. Thrower, *The Alternative Tradition: Religion and the Rejection of Religion in the Ancient World* (The Hague: Mouton, 1980); J. H. Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1926); F. L. Baumer, *Religion and the Rise of Skepticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960); James Turner, *Without God, without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

5. As quoted in Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, vol. 4 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 3.

6. H. Curtis Wright, "The Central Problem of Intellectual History," *Scholar and Educator* 12/1 (Fall 1988): 52.

7. Hugh Nibley, "The Pearl of Great Price" (unpublished mss. belonging to Brigham Young University, Department of Continuing Education, 1987), Lecture 21; see also Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 100-103.

8. Neil Flinders, "Teach the Children: An Agency Approach to Education" (unpublished manuscript, 1989), 9.

9. There are two armed conflicts reported in Alma that do not offer sufficient information to be clearly classified in either category. The first is the conflict between Teancum and Morianton in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of judges near the land of Desolation (see Alma 50:25-36). The second is an abbreviated account of a major conflict between the Lamanite forces motivated by Nephite dissenters and the forces of Moronihah in the thirty-ninth year of the reign of judges (see Alma 63:14-15).

10. We are indebted to Dr. Philip Flammer for the identification of these two concepts.