



Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon

Robert D. Anderson

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A troubled childhood. A difficult adolescence. How might these have affected the adult character of church founder Joseph Smith? Psychiatrist Robert D. Anderson explores the impact on young Joseph of his family's ten moves in sixteen years, their dire poverty, especially after his father's Chinese export venture failed, and his father's drinking. It is equally significant, writes Anderson, that Joseph's mother suffered bouts of depression. For instance, "for months" she "did not feel as though life was worth seeking" after two sisters died of tuberculosis and later when she buried two sons, Ephraim and Alvin. A typhoid epidemic nearly claimed her daughter Sophronia, and the same affliction left Joseph with a crippled leg, after which he was sent to live on the coast with an uncle. Such factors and others produced emotional wounds that emerged later in the prophet's life and writings, in particular, according to Anderson, in the Book of Mormon. Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith, writes W. W. Meissner (Professor of Psychoanalysis, Boston College; author, Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint): "is a superb study, approached with the dual advantage of an insider and an experienced psychiatrist. Anderson presents a convincing psychobiographic analysis of a great religious figure, unveiling for us a profound and perplexing question surrounding religious movements how such important figures can translate psychic disturbances into messages of conviction and inspiration. The story itself is powerful, and the questions it raises are thought provoking." Brigham D. Madsen (professor emeritus of history, former vice president, University of Utah; editor, Studies of the Book of Mormon by B. H. Roberts) agrees that "Anderson has an excellent grasp of early Mormon history and writes with dispassion and good balance, impressive scholarship, and readable prose. His naturalistic explanation provides a unique and penetrating analysis of factors which motivated and fashioned Joseph Smith's dictation of the Book of Mormon. We have been waiting a long time for this book."

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