



The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr., and the Dissociated Mind

William D., M.D. Morain

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"A whole life can be shaped by an old trauma, remembered or not." -- Lenore Terr, Child Psychiatrist What behavioral patterns could one expect from an adult whose brutal childhood traumas held themes of dismemberment, punishment, and worse? For Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism, a religious superstructure of narcissism may have evolved, with sexual and ritualistic features that flowed directly from traumatic events. Joseph suffered unspeakable pain as a seven-year-old child from a leg bone infection and its surgical treatments without anesthesia. He survived as the crippled middle child of an impoverished migrant family, retreating into a fantasy world of violence, persecution, and revenge from which he never completely emerged. As an adolescent, the sudden death of his beloved older brother contributed bizarre bereavement fantasies to an already traumatized psyche. The Sword of Laban examines the Mormon prophet's enigmatic life in light of current understanding of posttraumatic stress disorder and the dissociation that accompanies it. Dr. Morain traces the repetitive patterns of behavior and fantasies of Smith's adult life. He demonstrates how the horrifying real events of the surgeries combined with the developmental phase-specific fantasies of a seven-year-old boy resulted in permanent pathological distortion of Smith's entire early psychological growth and development -- with significant consequences for his subsequent adult psychological functioning. Dr. Morain's remarkable psychological study of Joseph Smith, Jr. will be of interest to a wide spectrum of readers -- as a social history, religious biography, an account of the dissociative elements in poetic and spiritual genius, or simply a gripping portrait of an ill-fated and tragic man. This text also has a special relevance for clinicians who are changing their theoretical and practical approaches to psychiatric illness.

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