

GOD AND MAN IN ETERNAL UNION

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Latter-day Saints are at times accused of reducing God to the stature of a finite being, where, as a man, he is still learning by making mistakes. While other Christians worship in spirit and in truth, it is charged that Mormons can believe in and worship only molecules—a God of flesh and bones. These accusations arise because the Saints hold tenaciously to scriptural testimony that God is a definite tangible personage, in form and stature like man.¹

The revelations of Joseph Smith support this view. "If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible," the Prophet said, "you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as man."² Again, he explained that both the Father and the Son possess bodies of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; "but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit."³ Spirit is pure and refined matter;⁴ and the Holy Ghost is a personage whose body is composed of this element.

In many other ways the Mormon view is separate and distinct from the position of traditional Christianity. As a tangible being, God is

considered to be in—not outside—of time and space. He is not an absolute Creator, for reality in its essential elements is said to be self-existent. By first attaining supreme intelligence, God organized self-existent realities for the mutual advantage of all concerned. The highest form of co-eternal life that God organized became man, whom he formed in His own image. By full development of his potential intelligence and by union with God, man may one day become a being of like intelligence as his divine Father.

Even though Mormon thought holds that there are certain existing relationships between God and man, God is not subject to finite limitations. In his First Vision, Joseph Smith stated that he "saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description." They were in a "pillar of light ... above the brightness of the sun."⁵ To describe this brilliant element associated with Deity, Joseph Smith used the scriptural term "glory." At other times he employed such descriptive synonyms as everlasting fire, everlasting burnings, light, heat, etc. Said he:

God Almighty Himself dwells in eternal fire; flesh and blood cannot go there, for all corruption is devoured by the fire. "Our God is a consuming fire." When our flesh is quickened by the Spirit, there will be no blood in this tabernacle. Some dwell in higher glory than others ... Immortality dwells in everlasting burnings ... All men who are immortal dwell in everlasting burnings.⁶

The most essential characteristic of glory is intelligence. In referring to this divine element, a revelation to Joseph Smith concluded, "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth."⁷ From this revelation we learn that while God is a personal being, there are pure principles and powers of intelligence centered in him to such a degree that the concentration thereof makes him a being of glory, above the light of the sun in his brilliance. The questions may thus be asked: Is a being of such concentrated intelligence a man? Can the finite mind comprehend him? What are the depths and intricacies of thought to which he is able to probe? Who can begin to fathom his powers of comprehension and retention? How exquisite and exalting is his joy?

The component attributes and the related characteristics of divine intelligence are spiritual by nature. A being of glory is a spiritual being, whose greatest attribute is love born of pure intelligence. Because "our God is a consuming fire,"⁸ it follows that "God is love."⁹ One who partakes in a measure of the glory of God is filled with that love "which passeth knowledge."¹⁰ Paul could thus write that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."¹¹ As these attributes are spiritual and bring man to a spiritual union with Christ, so God is spiritual. Nevertheless, his spirituality does not nullify his materiality.

The glory of God has been visibly manifested on certain occasions, the records of which contribute in some measure to an understanding of the spiritual nature of God. Through faith Moses was enveloped in this heavenly element and by its actions upon his body he could endure the presence of God. He later explained, "But now mine own eyes have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him."¹² Earlier Moses had beheld the burning bush as a manifestation of glory; and as the exodus got underway, God went before Israel in a cloud by day and was manifest as a pillar of fire that gave them light by night.¹³ "The Lord descended in a cloud" to speak with Moses upon a mountain, to reveal unto Israel their law. But though part of God's glory was doubtlessly shielded by the cloud, Moses absorbed so much of the heavenly element that his face shone so brightly that the Israelites later fled from before him. Their carnal natures could not endure the influence of such pure intelligence, and Moses was forced to veil his face while in their presence.¹⁴

As Solomon dedicated the Temple of Israel, "fire came down from heaven" so that "the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house."¹⁵ Because of his assurance of this divine power, Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to call down fire from heaven; and when they had failed he saturated his offering with water. "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."¹⁶ Later

there appeared a chariot of fire, with horses of fire, and Elijah was translated into a condition of glory.¹⁷

The *Book of Mormon* reports that while two Nephite missionaries—Nephi and Lehi—were laboring among the Lamanites they were cast into prison, but later delivered by a miraculous display of God's glory, that encircled them about and prevented their assailants from harming them. When their Lamanite captors responded to a heavenly command to repent, they, too, "were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire." By the influence of that pure intelligence, "they were filled with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory." Being "filled as if with fire, ... they could speak forth marvelous words."¹⁸ With like power were the Apostles at Jerusalem endowed, when on the day of Pentecost "there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." They, too, were given miraculous powers by which they were anointed with the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁹

By nature man in mortality is limited as to the glory he can endure. No natural man can "abide the presence of God." He must first put off the natural man and be regenerated by living faith in Christ. Then he must be enveloped in glory, by which, in some degree, he can endure the presence of God.²⁰ But even then there are limits to what a finite being can endure. Said the Lord to Moses, "Wherefore, no man can behold all my works, except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth."²¹

But though limited in ability to experience God, Moses was made to appreciate his infinite intelligence. While enveloped in glory and quickened by its powers, "Moses cast his eyes and beheld the earth, yea, even all of it; and there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God." By this heavenly medium he "beheld also the inhabitants thereof, and there was not a soul which he beheld not."²² Little wonder he exclaimed, "Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed."²³ To Moses, God was not a man limited by finite considerations.

Enoch, the brother of Jared, Nephi, Peter, James, John, and more recently, Joseph Smith, were also instructed by heavenly powers and drank in a measure from God's fountain of intelligence²⁴ It was commonly understood by the Prophet and his associates that "the Lord could teach a man more in five minutes than volumes could contain."²⁵ By his glory God is intuitively in union with the whole of his creations, so that not so much as a sparrow falls without the Father. His intelligence pervades all things and is the quickening and controlling power therein. In the words of a revelation,

He comprehendeth all things; and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things; and all things are by him, and of him, even God, forever and ever.²⁶

In the Mormon view, the Priesthood and its powers center in the light and truth that constitute God's glory. One properly ordained "is possessor of all things; for all things are subject unto him, both in heaven and on the earth, *the life and the light*, the Spirit and the power, sent forth by the will of the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son."²⁷ Commensurate with man's purity of life and his responsiveness to the directing intelligence that centers in God, he may utilize these powers to carry out the Lord's purposes on earth. In this light, Joseph Smith taught that the Priesthood "stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam."²⁸ Those who hold the keys of its power may rightly be called Gods, whether they are pre-mortal spirits, prophets in mortality, or resurrected beings. The Prophet explained:

The Scriptures are a mixture of very strange doctrines to the Christian world, who are blindly led by the blind. I will refer to another Scripture. "Now," says God, when He visited Moses in the bush, ... "Thou shalt be a God unto the children of Israel." God said, "Thou shalt be a God unto Aaron, and he shall be thy spokesman." *I believe those Gods that God reveals as Gods [Moses, etc.] to be sons of God...who exalt themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world...*²⁹

Before mortality man, as a self-existing entity, had been organized as a spirit being, in similar form and stature as his physical

body. Christ was the firstborn in the primeval world.³⁰ He and others attained to great intelligence and power in that sphere of existence, and were consequently called Gods. Among other things, they participated in the creation, as the Prophet pointed out when he said, "The head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it."³¹ In that heavenly convocation were such "great and noble" spirits as Abraham. "And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he [Christ] said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell." So it was that "the Gods organized and formed the heavens and the earth."³²

With the coming of mortality on earth, new responsibilities and powers were given to Christ, who, under the direction of the Father, had directed the work of creation. He now commenced to function as a Redeemer, a Mediator, and an Advocate for fallen man. Meanwhile, the Father of necessity withdrew himself from his estranged children. But first he centered in Christ the powers of his glory and gave the Redeemer a commission to act and speak as the Father. Through this investiture of glory and power, Christ became the light and the life of the world, ordained as both the Father and the Son. In real sense, Christ is "the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations"³³ in these dual capacities. In the words of Abinadi:

I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation, but suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people.³⁴

Christ's divine right as the Father was thus continued in mortality, for the Spirit was not given "by measure unto him" and "all things" were committed "into his hands."³⁵ Though he was the Son

because of the flesh, he subjected the will of the flesh to his powers as the Father—"The flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father."³⁶ And thus Christ manifests the Father to men on earth, as Jesus explained to Philip:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believeest thou not that I am the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.³⁷

To realize to the fullest his anointing as the Father it was necessary for Christ to partake of mortality. First, the fulness of the Father's glory cannot be centered in a personage of spirit. Only when spirit and matter are inseparably connected in resurrected form can one receive a fulness of joy, which joy is a product of a fulness of glory.³⁸ Second, the experiences of mortality, including death, are necessary to the attainment of full glory. It was necessary for Christ to descend "below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth."³⁹ Not until then did he receive "a fulness of the glory of the Father; and he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him." 40 Paul expressed the point, declaring: "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."⁴¹

Besides becoming the Son in the flesh, Christ also became the Son in glory, in that he was subordinate to his Father in acquiring that divine endowment. A revelation clarified that "he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; *and thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not the fulness at the first.*"⁴² Here is an important point in Mormon theology. By the endowment of glory Christ became the Father, but in the procedure of being thus endowed he was the Son.

In a similar manner those who are born again through the powers of the Gospel become "the Sons of God." They are born "not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,"⁴³ and

become spiritually the sons and daughters of Christ, to be glorified in him as he has been glorified in the Father. Christ then becomes their Father in this divine relationship. Through his atonement and by the extension of his glory unto them, they are begotten unto him.⁴⁴ Thus he prayed to his Father, concerning his disciples, stating: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them to me." Continuing, he said:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

*And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one...*⁴⁵

Here is revealed man's ultimate union with Deity, by means of indwelling glory. Since man's goal is to be glorified in Christ, as Christ has been glorified in the Father, an understanding of this divine relationship is vital to true worship. A revelation on the subject explained:

I give unto you these sayings *that you may understand and know how to worship, and what you worship*, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father.⁴⁶

In a sense, Christ is the One God to whom men in mortality are directly responsible. While men, with Christ are to come unto the Father and be glorified in him, the glory men receive is given through the Son. Hence, men are commanded to pray unto the Father in the name of the Son, for he is their redeemer, their mediator, and their advocate with the Father. In him they have life, even immortal glory. By that divine intelligence men may become one with God. In that eternal relationship the Father dwells in the Son, endowing the latter with his intelligence and power, so that the Son does nothing without the Father. Through the indwelling of the Father's glory in the Son, it is not Christ but the Father that worketh all in all. As Jesus explained, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father

that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."⁴⁷ In a similar way Christ must dwell in men, until they are glorified in him as he is in the Father. Here is the way of salvation.

Footnotes

1. See Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-3; Exodus 33:11, 20-23; Numbers 12:7-8; Isaiah 6:1-11; John 12:44-45; Colossians 1:12-15; Hebrews 1:1-3; etc.
2. *History of the Church*, VI, p. 305.
3. *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22
4. Ibid. 131:7-8; *History of the Church*, IV, p. 575; John Taylor, *The Government of God* (London, 1852), p. 32.
5. Smith 2:16-17.
6. *History of the Church*, VI, p. 366; see also p. 476.
7. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:36
8. Hebrews 12:29.
9. I John 4:8.
10. Ephesians 3:16-19.
11. Galatians 5:22-23.
12. *Moses* 1:1-11.
13. Exodus 13:21-22; 40:34-38.
14. Exodus 34:5, 29-35; II Corinthians 3:7-18.
15. II Chronicles 5:13-14; 7:1-3.
16. I Kings 18:38.
17. II Kings 2:11. Such beings are made "as flaming fire" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 7:6), in that they are endowed with glory. But, as the Prophet explained, they are not "taken immediately into the presence of God, and into an eternal fulness" of glory. Instead, they receive a sufficient endowment to enable them to reside in a terrestrial order. *History of the Church*, IV, p. 210.
18. Helaman 5:20-45.
19. 2 Acts 2.
20. Moses 1:2, 11, 31; *Doctrine and Covenants* 67:10-13.
21. Moses 1:5. The works that God here refers to are those that have been glorified. To behold them all one would have to behold all their glory.
22. Moses 1:27-28.

23. Moses 1:10.
24. Moses 7:2-3; Ether 3:25-26; I Nephi 11-14; II Nephi 4:25; *Doctrine and Covenants* 63:21; Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith, the Man and the seer* (Salt Lake City, 1960), Chapters 4 and 5.
25. *Messenger and Advocate*, III (June, 1837), pp. 513-514. See *ibid.*, I (April, 1835), p. 112.
26. *Doctrine and Covenants* 88:41.
27. *Ibid.* 50:27; 121:36 (italics by author).
28. *History of the Church*, V, pp. 554-556.
29. *History of the Church*, VI, p. 478 (italics by author).
30. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:22; Revelation 3:14; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6.
31. *History of the Church*, *op. cit.*
32. Abraham 3:22-24; 4:1-31.
33. Title page of the *Book of Mormon*. See also II Nephi 26:12-13. The writer is indebted in some measure to his colleague, Professor F. Kent Nielsen, for being made fully aware of the emphasis the *Book of Mormon* places on this point.
34. Mosiah 15:1-5.
35. John 3:34-35.
36. Mosiah 15:7-8.
37. John 14:8-10.
38. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:33-34.
39. *Ibid.* 88:6.
40. *Ibid.* 93:16-17.
41. Colossians 2:9.
42. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:13-14. (Italics by the writer.)
43. John 1:12-13. See also *Doctrine and Covenants* 11:30; 25:1; 34:3; 35:2; 39:4; 42:52; 45:8; 50:41; 76:24; 58; 121:7.
44. An atonement was not necessary for Christ to be endowed with glory, as in the case of others, for he, by the Spirit and through strict obedience, lived above the power of the Fall.
45. John 17:6, 20-23. (Italics by the author.) See also Ephesians 3:16-21; Hebrews 2:9-13, III Nephi 19 elaborates upon this point, giving many important insights. See particularly verses 23 and 29.
46. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:19-20. (Italics by the author.)
47. John 14:10.