DIVINE BENEVOLENCE, EMBODIMENT, AND SALVATION
IN THE TEACHINGS OF JOSEPH SMITH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

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LATTER-DAY SAINT STANDARD WORKS

The Bible (Old and New Testaments)
The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ
The Doctrine and Covenants
The Pearl of Great Price

BOOKS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

I Nephi
II Nephi
Jacob
Enos
Jarom
Omni
Words of Mormon
Mosiah
Alma
Helaman
III Nephi
IV Nephi
Mormon
Ether
Moroni

BOOKS OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Moses
Abraham
Joseph Smith—History
Joseph Smith—Matthew
Articles of Faith

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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| *D&C* | *Doctrine and Covenants* |
| *EM* | *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* |
| *HC* | *History of the Church* |
| *JD* | *Journal of Discourses* |
| *JS-H* | *Joseph Smith-History* [in *PGP*] |
| *PGP* | *Pearl of Great Price* |
| *TPJS* | *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* |
| *WJS* | *Words of Joseph Smith* |

# BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

> Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.
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> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 324.[1]

## EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS[2]

The study of comparative religion does not typically involve itself with theological enquiry. However, when investigating any religious movement, and particularly one that lies outside of what is considered 'mainstream', the beliefs of its adherents serve as a window onto the ideological universe of the believer, an indicator of the motivations behind worship, church participation and social involvement. A basic understanding of the primary tenets of Mormonism will help to provide intellectual access to the LDS way of life and the Mormon perception of reality that determines the multi-faceted nature of the movement. This thesis is not, however, an attempt to catalog the doctrines of Mormonism, as many have done previously, but to examine those doctrines from the perspective of the insider. What are the epistemological bases of Latter-day Saint doctrine? Can current formulations of the LDS understanding of God, embodiment, and salvation maintain an internal consistency with Mormon perceptions of morality and human nature? If not, is there room within the accepted parameters of LDS discourse to suggest alternative interpretations of core doctrines? In this thesis we will investigate such questions with the hope of providing sufficient justification for an internal and ongoing re-examination of Mormon belief and practice. We will also propose a revised approach for interpreting and presenting both the meaning of Christ's work and the significance of the Latter-day Saint 'Plan of Salvation' based on Mormon scripture and the teachings of Mormonism's founding prophet, Joseph Smith, Jr.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized in April of 1830 in New York state, intellectually founded on the principles of an expanded canon of scripture and ongoing modern revelation. This emphasis on a prophetic epistemology has naturally led to a rejection of philosophy as a basis for establishing doctrine and a complete dismissal of the creedal pronouncements of the Church Fathers. For Mormons, all former discussions and

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[1]Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976) [hereafter referred to as *TPJS*].

[2]Members of the church refer to themselves as 'Mormons', as 'Latter-day Saints', as 'the saints', (speaking collectively), or—among themselves—simply as 'members'. Those outside are 'non-members' or less frequently 'gentiles'. In popular usage, the terms 'Mormon' and 'Latter-day Saint' are employed interchangeably and function either as nouns or adjectives. The abbreviation 'LDS' is almost exclusively used adjectivally. Thus one speaks of LDS doctrine, the LDS church and LDS scripture, but not the church of the LDS, etc. Similarly, one would not refer to a member of the church as 'an LDS'. We will follow these conventions herein.

conclusions about the nature of God and Christ were subject to revision following the personal appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820 when the Lord declared of the established denominations "that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight;...they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."[3] Given such an uncompromising statement, it is easy to understand why standard 'theology' has failed to hold a consistently valued place in Mormon thought. When a group accepts the ongoing reality of direct communication from the heavens, theological speculation becomes a purely academic pursuit and is divested of any authority to dictate or establish doctrine. Theology is often considered by Mormons a tacit denial of the possibility of revelation and it is therefore not uncommon to take a further step that rejects the field of theology altogether as nothing more than a corrupting influence on revealed religion.[4] However, while traditional theology may be disparagingly shrugged aside or ignored by Mormons, reason itself is in no way officially devalued and revelation is always expected to be comprehensible. As Bradford points out,

> "while revelation is considered the exclusive means of coming to know the things of God, reason is not correspondingly denigrated. Reason does play a role in the process. In revelation truth is conveyed to man, the ways of God are made known to man, and that which is revealed is understandable, is 'reasonable.'[5]

Despite a current trend in some Mormon circles[6] which would suggest that those who are willing to think are consequently forced out of the church, Sterling McMurrin made the previous point

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[3]*JS-H* 1:19

[4]The term 'theology' is often interpreted in this way by contemporary Latter-day Saints, who prefer to speak of their own investigation as 'studying the gospel,' or 'pondering the scriptures,' etc. Although it was a term in common use among many of the early members of the church, 'theology' today is primarily viewed as a pursuit for non-members. See for Example, Louis Midgley's article s.v. "Theology" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* [hereafter *EM*] vol. 4, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992): "Since scriptures and specific revelations supply Latter-day Saints with authoritative answers to many of the traditional concerns of faith, members of the Church tend to devote little energy to theoretical, speculative, or systematic theology...Latter-day Saints have little interest in theology in the sense of trying to discover divine things with the unaided resources of the human mind. Even when theology is seen as essentially descriptive or apologetic, it is not entirely at home in the LDS community." For a discussion of the specific role of the LDS theologian, see M. Gerald Bradford, "On Doing Theology," *BYU Studies* 14:3 345-58 and Sterling M. McMurrin, "On the Task of Mormon Theology," *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 110-13.

[5]Bradford, Ibid., 355.

[6]In the last decade there has been a growing distrust of 'intellectualism' in the church because of the outspoken and unconventional views of some who claim the title of 'Mormon intellectuals' and brand the church as anti-intellectual whenever it refuses to conform to their views. Others in the church have entered the foray from the other side, defending traditional views at the intellectual level, apparently in an attempt both to challenge the views of the 'opposition' and demonstrate the possibility of a 'faithful' scholarly approach to Mormonism. The first position has been published primarily under the auspices of Signature Books and the response has come mainly from those working in or with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.), especially in their *FARMS Review of Books* (formerly *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*). Perhaps the most conscious and comprehensive example of the latter view is to be found in the recent volume edited by Susan Easton Black, *Expressions of Faith: Testimonies of Latter-Day Saint Scholars* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, and Provo, Utah: F.A.R.M.S., 1996). If there is a degree of truth to the accusations that many Mormons have become complacent in the study of

even more strongly when he insisted on the premium that LDS thought places upon knowledge gained by study:

> There is among the Mormons a pronounced intellectualism in matters pertaining to religion and a strong commitment to the capacities of human reason. It is assumed that the world is intelligible and though there are limitations to human knowledge in relation to the objects of religion, those limitations do not justify the acceptance of paradox or an official doctrine of mysteries. In principle everything is knowable and the ways of God are reasonable.[7]

Reason has its necessary place in Mormon thought, but that place is circumscribed by the limits of its doctrinal applicability. Logic and reason lead to philosophical conclusions that may be of immense spiritual and religious value, but they can never arrive at "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come."[8] This relegation of theology to a subordinate position has helped to preserve the role of prophetic revelation as the primary source in establishing church doctrine. However, when that doctrine becomes the subject of discussion, such categories are more easily maintained in theory than in practice.

THE FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL

From Siddhartha and Plato to Aquinas and William James, and echoing powerfully down through the corridors of human thought, we find the frequent suggestion that two distinct realms of being exist. One we know through experience; the other we come to know by faith, meditation or self-denial. Reality as perceived in the present physical existence is temporary, ephemeral, to be replaced at length by a distinct mode of being that is logically prior to the physical cosmos and, in a fascinating sense, ontologically more real. Traditional religious truth is inherently inaccessible because in the final analysis it belongs to an order of reality that has no obvious connection to our own. The religious mind, especially the mystical variety, may seek to experience that transcendent reality but must do so by denying the senses, by finding altered states of consciousness, or by encountering intellectual and emotional promise in paradox.

If religious truth is by its nature an incomprehensible mystery—as many world religions assert—one can manage to accommodate it within any existing belief system since it poses no necessary conflict to the perceived order of reality. Although the two realms may have an influence upon one another, they are not in direct competition and in most cases are not even

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revealed knowledge, the fault lies not in the revelations but in the intellectual efforts of the members, and if that is the case, both scholarship and discipleship are found wanting.

[7]McMurrin, Ibid., 47. McMurrin makes clear that however Mormons themselves may respond to their doctrine, the 'theological foundations' of Mormonism not only allow for, but demand serious rational investigation. McMurrin's liberal and humanistic stance has placed him at odds with many Mormon scholars, but on this point I suspect most would agree with him at least in principle if not in method.

[8]This is the definition of 'truth' given in D&C 93:24.

thought to truly overlap. Our general religious perception imagines one universe of physical and temporal creation, and another 'religious' or 'spiritual' existence of a completely different order. Acceptance of the spiritual reality may logically demand a change of personal priorities or an alteration of behavior, but a believer need not attempt to reconcile one reality to the other. In fact it is possible and indeed increasingly common, given such a background, to focus entirely upon the events and meaning of existence in this world, addressing (as one example) the issue of how a Christian should respond to suffering, while accepting at the same time the possibility that there is another mode of existence beyond our knowing that is entirely foreign, and which, in an intriguing twist of priorities, is therefore not an immediate concern.

The Latter-day Saint understanding of the cosmos makes this a difficult undertaking. There is one absolute touchstone for truth in Mormonism that often brings it under ridicule by other religious systems while at the same time allying it with the methodology of modern science. That touchstone is not scripture nor revelation nor priesthood—however significant those are in establishing the faith. It is the fundamental reality of personal experience. The reason this is so lies in the LDS perception of the physical universe. In Mormon understanding, God is not the 'wholly-Other' creator of the spatio-temporal realm, but the loving and powerful Father of mankind who organized the pre-existing elements of the physical creation for his children's everlasting benefit. The reality in which we live is the same reality in which he exists, although for a variety of reasons his perception of it is obviously far more complete than our own. This idea creates a situation in which *all* experience has religious significance for Latter-day Saints, not only because it will affect one's reward or punishment in eternity, and not only because we can assign meaning to present life by reference to an accepted external standard, but because the reality we encounter now is coterminous with the reality in which God dwells. For Latter-day Saints, this universe is God's abode. Mankind's perception of it is limited, but the physical cosmos has ontological status and ultimate significance.[9] 'Testimony' in Mormon parlance is the witness of experience: "I know because I have seen (or heard or touched, or felt, etc.)." Given that particular knowledge, other epistemological sources can be established, but experience is always first and interpretation follows. Without personal experience, nothing else is binding. Even in such a system, however, it is clear that experience alone cannot determine perception. Whether one is conscious of the process or not, certain *types* of experience must be given priority over others if one seeks to create a systematic metaphysics. One's accepted world-view dictates how such priorities are set.[10] In LDS epistemology, personal revelation commonly takes precedence over traditional empiricism, but it does so by augmenting rather than denying the

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[9]This discussion of the reality of the physical and spiritual worlds will be amplified in chapter three.

[10]In other words, perception determines epistemology, which, in turn, directs the interpretation of perception. Teleological arguments for God notwithstanding, no assertions about the nature of reality can be philosophically demonstrated. While logical positivism therefore rejects metaphysics outright as having no substance, epistemologically the two are on a par, since both have assigned an unsubstantiable priority to a specific type of experience. All knowledge is ultimately based upon faith in the ontological validity of some form of experience, whether empiricism, rationalism, authoritarianism, revelation, etc.

data available to common sensory perception. It is certainly significant that revelation itself is largely regarded within the Mormon tradition as an empirical experience.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints profess to have the "fulness of the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ." To assert thus that the Gospel has been restored in its entirety is no more than to cite modern LDS scripture. To further suggest that Mormons as a community or even as individuals fully grasp it or fully live it would be a presumptuous overstatement. At least part of the cause for error has been an unwillingness to lay our personal interpretations of truth upon the altar of sacrifice. We have found through experience that it is often a simpler matter to adapt our behavior in an offering to God than to disavow ourselves of erroneous ways of thinking. Behavior may be a more pressing concern, but the way we choose to see the world will eventually deliver its effects into most aspects of personal life. Like believers of all sorts in any other time or place, LDS commitment is personal and intellectual comprehension limited. Sometimes those limitations are the obvious and acceptable result of an incomplete understanding, but too often we refuse the opportunity to expand our vision simply by clinging to the insistence that we already know everything that is out there to be seen. Let us be clear in pointing out that Mormons do not possess a unique or exceptional hesitance to accept new ideas—as the originality of many of their doctrines of God and man clearly demonstrates. But they do participate in the common human reluctance to make radical alterations to a personal world-view. Whether we are talking about the shape of the universe or the color of one's skin, interpretations that challenge our basic paradigms are not casually accepted. This is especially true when the new interpretations seem to contradict the very ideas that define reality for us. Joseph Smith recognized this in his day, both inside and outside the church. His comparisons make an unequivocal, and wonderfully idiomatic, statement.

> There has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle. Even the Saints are slow to understand.[11]

But how much of a problem was this for the early members of the LDS church who had in most cases left their homes and families and already suffered great hardships just to join the saints, motivated almost universally by the firm belief that God had spoken in contemporary times to a boy prophet and that further scripture both ancient and modern had been delivered to the world? Their willingness to entertain and accept novel possibilities was manifest and for these actions they were labeled as the most credulous of individuals by many of those outside, but they clearly had limits to what they would accept, even from their prophet leader.

> I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them,

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[11] *TPJS*, 331. In the practical matter of splitting the tough knots of hemlock, one supposes that both the mallet (beetle) and the wedge must be sturdy and solid. If the wood proves harder than the tools one will find it nearly impossible to break the knots apart.

> after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen.[12]

This appears to have been a frequent concern in the mind of the prophet Joseph Smith.[13] The saints had accepted the reality of the restoration of the Gospel upon the earth after more than a millennium and a half of general apostasy. They endorsed the divine origins of the Book of Mormon as additional ancient scripture. They believed in the mission of the LDS church to establish Zion in the last days. But they were still hesitant in allowing Joseph to introduce further revelations as he would have desired. In prefacing the most significant doctrinal address he ever gave to the church, at the general conference of April, 1844, he expressed his regret over the intolerance that the saints both felt and demonstrated towards modern revelation and the teachings of specifically LDS scripture:

> I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible. If I do, I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry "treason" and put me to death. So I will go to the old Bible and turn commentator today.[14]

Given the doctrinal significance of the speech that followed, one may rightly wonder what might have been said had the saints been willing to listen to their prophet.[15]

THE BOOK OF MORMON

More than one hundred and fifty years have passed since Joseph delivered the King Follett discourse, and with the passage of time the attitude of church members on many issues has clearly adapted and developed. One of the changes that promises to have an ongoing impact of great significance on the doctrines of the church and the lives of its members has been the increasing emphasis placed in this century upon study of the Book of Mormon, both at the personal and the group level. In more recent years, especially under the leadership of church president Ezra Taft Benson (1985-1993), the book has begun to take its place as (to use the

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[12]Ibid.

[13]See also Ibid., 194-95. Brigham Young told the Saints that while in Kirtland Joseph had said, "If I was to reveal to this people what the Lord revealed to me, there is not a man or woman who would stay with me" *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 9:294.

[14]Ibid., 348.

[15]It should be remembered that when this speech was given, the church had been established for fourteen years and was going through a period of intense persecution. The prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum would be murdered less than three months hence. The pressures on the membership of the church can account to a degree for the challenging questions that had arisen about Joseph's standing as a prophet.

famous quote from Joseph Smith) "the keystone of our religion."[16] The book's title has been officially expanded to "The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ" in order to clarify to casual readers the stated intention of the text.[17] This focus on the Book of Mormon as the primary text for personal study has been maintained since President Benson's lifetime.[18]

Since the Book of Mormon text constitutes the background for much of the research presented herein, it will be useful to give a brief synopsis of its contents and history. The book records the narrative of a people in the Americas who were descended from the Israelite tribes and who, throughout the majority of the record, were led by prophets whose visions and experiences provide the context through which the history is internally interpreted. These prophets taught and wrote that the Messiah would come into the world, taking upon himself the form of a man, in order to save his people from the effects of sin. The climax of the account narrates the appearance of the resurrected Christ to these 'other sheep' and the experiences of those who became his witnesses and disciples through their personal interaction with him. The records of the prophets and others were collected, edited and compiled by the prophet Mormon into a single record that was later completed and hidden away by his son, Moroni.[19] The book is of inestimable doctrinal value to those who view it as authentic ancient scripture since its writers speak frequently of the 'plan of salvation' and the 'doctrine of Christ', and testify of those things that they have learned through personal revelation as well as offering their own systematic or symbolic interpretations of these religious truths. In September of 1827 (seven and a half years after the 'First Vision' of the Father and the Son) Joseph received the ancient record from the angel Moroni. Due to a variety of difficulties Joseph was unable to begin the work of translation until April 7, 1829.[20] By August (not four months later), the translation was finished and the printing of the Book of Mormon was underway.

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[16]*TPJS*, 194. Recent research by Noel Reynolds and Allison D. Clark examined "general conference addresses, Sunday School manuals, missionary plans, publications on the Book of Mormon and the BYU and Institute curricula" and determined that all point to an "increased acceptance and study of the Book of Mormon in the last few decades…" See *Insights: An Ancient Window* the newsletter of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, October, 1996, 3. Publication of the findings is forthcoming.

[17]*Ensign* 16 [November, 1986]:4.

[18]This sense of priority is not Mormonism's attempt to displace the position of the Bible but to establish and amplify its witness of Christ. Mormonism's ninth article of faith states that "we believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."

[19]To avoid confusion, when two or more characters in the Book of Mormon share the same name, they are listed in the book's index with a superscript number (i.e., Alma[1], Alma[2], etc.). Since that is the format of footnote references in the present work, when necessary we will identify the Book of Mormon characters with a subscript number (i.e., $Alma_1$, $Alma_2$, etc.). In the cases of $Lehi_1$, $Nephi_1$, $Jacob_2$, $Samuel_2$, and $Mormon_2$, we will omit the number reference since the individual's identity is straightforward.

[20]These well-documented difficulties included for Joseph and his young wife, Emma, violent persecution, being driven from their home in New York to Pennsylvania, the tragic loss of the 116 pages of manuscript which were stolen from Martin Harris, near deathly illnesses and the death of their first child—among other things. This period was perhaps the most emotionally troublesome of Joseph's life. Yet it would appear in some ways to be a turning point for him as he emerged from it with far more courage, vision, peace and dignified calm in his prophetic responsibilities than he had known before this time. For primary sources about this period, see especially Lucy Mack Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, and *History of the Church* Vol. 1.

It was many years after its publication, in a meeting of the twelve apostles at the house of Brigham Young, that Joseph called the Book of Mormon "the keystone of our religion," saying that "a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."[21] This statement provides a fascinating insight into the LDS outlook on reality. If one accepts the Book of Mormon to be what it claims (which is often considered the first building block of a personal 'testimony' in Mormonism) one also implicitly accepts the miraculous claims of its discovery and translation.[22] A belief in the book presupposes a belief in angels, prophecy, spiritual gifts, and so forth. Thus, in conjunction with a literal acceptance of the miraculous explanations of its origin, the Book of Mormon is recognized by Latter-day Saints as holding a central position in defining a Mormon conception of the universe. For every case in which the Book of Mormon makes a claim about reality, that claim is viewed from within Mormonism as being incontrovertible.[23] Thus, Christ's post-resurrection ministry in the Americas is narrated, the ability to prophesy of the future in specific details is presented, the role of angels is discussed in depth, the necessity of spiritual gifts and the manifestations of God's power in his church are described, and the "Great Plan of the Eternal God" is made known, and in the LDS world view these must all hold ontological validity. The Book of Mormon builds each of these ideas and many others into the Mormon conception of the cosmos.

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[21]*TPJS*, 194. This has been the official position of the church from the beginning, but in many ways it took well over a century for the membership (collectively) to begin treating the book in this way. A similar shift of overall church perception has occurred more recently towards the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible. Following the exhaustive research of Robert J. Matthews and others and owing to the cooperation of the RLDS church historian's office, this material, which had long been considered somewhat suspect, has been documented as genuine and original and is now viewed as a much more reliable record than was previously the case. It was never completed nor canonized, but its contributions are recognized as doctrinally significant for the church.

[22]The classic LDS reasoning is that if the Book of Mormon is "true" as witnessed by the Spirit to the individual through prayer, then Joseph Smith must have translated it by the power of God as claimed. If he did so, then he must have been a true prophet. If he was a true prophet, then the church and its teachings must be instituted by God. As one prominent LDS general authority put it, "The Book of Mormon proves, sustains, and upholds all things connected with our whole system of revealed religion. It proves that the Bible is true, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that the gospel has been restored, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true, and so on and so on." Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 468. There is no easy way to 'demythologize' the Book of Mormon, interpreting it as a 'religious' text while denying the miraculous claims inherent to its contents and origins. To do so is to classify the book as a literary fantasy written by a man who was either an outrageous fraud or a lunatic. (Biblical demythologizing can at least credit the writers or redactors with sincere, if naïve, intent. No such option is available here.) It is possible to reject the book's assertions and still attribute to it great moral value, but under such conditions, it must be regarded exclusively as one literary text among millions of others.

[23]In saying this I do not intend to suggest, for example, that when the translation called for a word such as 'brass' or 'steel' we need to insist that such precise anachronistic alloys were in the possession of the Nephites. What I do suggest is that whenever the book itself gives an ontological explanation for an object or doctrine, we must begin our search for understanding with the interpretation provided internally. This includes such unfamiliar objects as the 'liahona', the 'interpreters', etc. as well as claims about the plan of salvation, the reality of charismatic gifts, prophetic revelation, angelic ministration, the moving of mountains, power over the elements, etc.

Since the Mormon religion bases its very existence upon the principle of revealed knowledge, there is both a desire and a tendency to think of the doctrines of the restoration as wholly independent of previous theological systems of thought, in much the same way that many conservative Christians have been wont to view every aspect of Christ's doctrine and teaching as original and unaffected by the cultural traditions of Judaism or Hellenism. The obvious fact is that in both cases, new, original, revealed understanding was added to the existing religious concepts, sometimes incorporating, sometimes improving, sometimes revising, and sometimes rejecting what had gone before.[24] There is an inherent difficulty, then, in separating what is revealed and hence "official" from the mass of concepts and models that preceded it and that often form the basis of its very discourse.

How can a Latter-day Saint speak of 'grace,' for example, or 'salvation' or 'atonement'— even in defining how the Book of Mormon uses the terms—without making reference to externally developed models, ideological relationships and language that will necessarily color the discussion in particular ways?[25] This is how language works and revelation uses language that is already associated with specific meanings and contexts in the mind of each individual who hears or reads it.[26] This is probably crucial for understanding, but at least two problematic results can occur. First, if a concept is previously associated in the mind of the Mormon reader with the discourse of those outside the LDS church, as in the case of ideas such as 'grace' or being 'born again,' this perception can lead (and at times has led) to the concept being disregarded or largely ignored despite the significance it holds in Mormon scripture. Second, ideas that are not germane to the revelation will be introduced—often imperceptibly—because of the background of the individual or group. Paradigms, assumptions, models and interpretations based on centuries or millennia of thought flow into and influence the significance of the revealed word. This means that it is difficult if not logically impossible to develop revealed doctrine in isolation.

But if Latter-day Saints seek to understand their doctrine on its own terms, it will be necessary from time to time to examine the origins of ideas and discern how—and whether— some of the background concepts fit within the Mormon system. Most LDS doctrinal interpretation assumes certain *a priori* principles such as the idea of God's sovereignty and the relationship between the natural and the spiritual realms that inherently lead exegesis along

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[24]This is "obvious" whether one accepts the possibility of propositional revelation or not. Either way, the teachings of Christ and of modern prophets are placed in and influenced by a pre-existing context.

[25]Despite the timely efforts of Bruce Hafen, Stephen Robinson and others who have attempted in recent years to reclaim the concept of 'grace' for a Mormon audience, most Latter-day Saints still associate the idea with televangelists and 'born agains' and would be quick to quote the Book of Mormon reference that "it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*," (2 Nephi 25:23 emphasis added). This means that almost every reference to grace automatically raises in Mormon minds the ongoing and poorly understood 'grace vs. works' debate, which we will discuss in chapter nine below. Most Mormons would be equally likely to associate the word 'grace' with Calvin, Luther, or Billy Graham as with Christ.

[26]D&C 1:24.

specific and predictable lines. The scope of interpretive possibilities for such concerns as the purpose of life, the nature of sin and repentance, and the significance of the atonement is largely determined by these *a priori* principles, and as a result of sharing such basic assumptions, LDS treatment of many of these issues is hardly distinguishable from standard evangelical interpretation. The present thesis seeks to point out that several of the given assumptions that have traditionally guided LDS doctrinal discussion are neither inherent nor necessary to Mormon theology. We will question the theological appropriateness of some of these common assumptions and suggest alternatives that would appear more consistent with Latter-day Saint scriptures and the doctrines of the restoration. Our intent will then be to explore the interpretive possibilities that are made available to LDS investigation into the meaning of salvation. The specific interpretive direction of this thesis is not intended as a prescriptive formula for subsequent LDS thought, but as a demonstration of the exegetical possibilities inherent in Latter-day Saint theology when unencumbered by the external perceptions that have unintentionally slipped into its discourse and determined much of its current arrangement.

Many of the paradoxes that exist in Mormon thought are the result of the introduction of these kinds of 'non-native' ideas into LDS doctrinal discussion and writing. As the church begins its task of researching the Book of Mormon with greater commitment, LDS scholars must recognize that many of the interpretations and models with which they have become familiar and very comfortable do not originate in the Book of Mormon or modern revelation, but in the writings and teachings of the broader Christian world. This is not a statement about the value of those teachings but merely of their provenance. As Joseph Smith made clear, Mormonism has no monopoly on truth, morality or understanding and "we should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true 'Mormons'."[27] But Latter-day Saints have the added responsibility of recognizing those ideas that do not properly have a place in the teachings of the restoration and locating them in their appropriate contexts. Much of the intent of this thesis will be to investigate anew the theological position of the Book of Mormon and other LDS scripture on matters such as sin, repentance, atonement and salvation by constructing models for interpretation based on fundamental LDS doctrines of the nature of God and man.

## EXEGETICAL ALTERNATIVES FOR MORMON THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The first topic that is of specific and central interest for this thesis is the character of God the Father in Mormon thought. How much of the LDS image of God is based on revelation (and the reason that makes it personally comprehensible), and how much on inherited cultural and religious traditions? The Latter-day Saint concept of the Godhead and man's relation to deity contains within it exegetical options that are unique in the religious world but that have

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[27] *TPJS*, 316.

never been consistently developed in Mormon writing. Starting with an investigation into the applicability of the concepts of 'omnipotence' and 'sovereignty' to Mormon doctrine, we will set out to explore the implications that might be reached if we begin from a revised set of assumptions about the character and attributes of the being who is the object of LDS worship—assumptions which, it is hoped, will open new avenues of inquiry for a Mormon interpretation of salvation.

While most LDS discussion and writing begins with the assumption of God's omnipotence (either explicitly or implicitly), chapter two of this thesis will propose the idea that the most basic attribute that defines the nature of God for LDS thought is not his power, but his benevolence, his righteousness, his love. This we present as an exegetical and logical possibility, a primary assumption upon which to construct the models of Mormon doctrine. Most of Western religious thought has presumed that omnipotence and benevolence can both be fully present within the being of God. But theodicy has consistently, if unintentionally, demonstrated that given the presence of suffering in the universe, one or the other of these attributes must be redefined. Liberal theologians have largely abandoned the notion of a metaphysical God of power in order to maintain the possibility of morality and ethics while more conservative theodicists have adamantly defended God's sovereignty and thereby transformed his benevolence into an incomprehensible mystery. In this thesis we will begin by offering an alternative and specifically Latter-day Saint response to the problem of evil, insisting on the reality of God's existence but placing our focus on divine benevolence at the expense of our usual definitions of omnipotence. This specific change in emphasis redefines the very framework for theological discussion and therefore has the potential to radically alter the LDS perception of reality. If we allow for the possibility of this assumption, we also introduce the opportunity to re-examine the Mormon understanding of the purpose of life and the meaning of salvation.

The second major assumption of this work will be introduced in chapter three and concerns the relationship between spirit and matter in Mormon thought and the resulting significance of embodiment. Much LDS discussion of this topic has been ambiguous and inconsistent, maintaining the traditional religious dichotomy between the spiritual and material realms while ostensibly accepting Joseph Smith's teachings about the material nature of the spirit world. Our examination of the ideas will review the nature of spirit and matter and the correlation that LDS doctrine holds to exist between the two, addressing issues that are of profound relevance in contemporary Mormon discourse. Can the Mormon understanding of the nature of the body be understood as consistent with the scriptural insistence upon agency on the one hand and with current scientific research on the other? This may at first seem a strange and ill-conceived question. However, based on the assertions about the physical world that will be developed in chapter three, it will become clear that the findings of empirical science are in some ways as relevant to LDS doctrinal discussion as is scriptural interpretation. It must be stressed that we are not attempting to back up the theological assertions of this paper with scientific data.

The two methodologies are, for our purposes at least, wholly incommensurable and such an attempt would prove a most unnatural fusion of method. The methodology of theology is exegetical and logic-driven and shares few fences with the empirical and experimental methodology of science. Although these distinct approaches to knowledge are perhaps equally relevant to LDS doctrinal discourse, this thesis will discuss them at the meta level and maintain the distinction between the two. Religion is often regarded as antithetical to science, and skirmishes between the two present perennial concerns. The inclusion of some fundamental scientific assertions and principles in this thesis is intended strictly for the purpose of demonstrating the *possibility of consistency* between the proposed interpretation of LDS doctrine and modern scientific research, and must not be interpreted as an effort to establish evidence or proof by which to validate the doctrinal schema presented herein.[28]

These two major assumptions about the nature of God and of the material world constitute the theoretical foundation for the present work and will proscribe the interpretive discussion of the remainder of the thesis. Therefore, from a methodological standpoint, chapters two and three present hypothetical possibilities that are tenable (but in no way final) for LDS thought, and the subsequent chapters examine some of the original avenues that LDS doctrinal discussion can explore if working from those basic assumptions. Our desire is not to present such an original interpretation of Latter-day Saint doctrine with the purpose of somehow proving its validity in opposition to prevailing views, but to re-explore the theological contributions of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in an effort to distance them even further from the philosophical assumptions of normative Christianity through which they are commonly viewed, and to evaluate some of the interpretive possibilities available to those working within the doctrinal framework of the 'restored Gospel'.

The remainder of the work, then, will constitute an exploration into the significance of embodiment and morality in LDS thought and the consequent meaning and 'sense' of salvation, especially as described in the Book of Mormon. Since that will be our primary text, we must make clear our position regarding the book. This thesis is not a work of apologetics and will make no attempt to substantiate the Book of Mormon claims. We will analyze the theological implications of key doctrinal issues as taught in the book, but beyond demonstrating a continuity with other teachings of the LDS restoration, we will not concern ourselves with whether or not these ideas are in any ontological sense "true". As a practical measure, we will base our interpretations as Mormons do upon the assumption that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be, a complex collection of writings by dozens of authors over a time period of more than a

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[28]Anyone who has studied the history of religious thought to any degree can readily see how the incorporation of current scientific theory has led to theological speculation which quickly loses its credence as science continues forward on its unflagging course. Our intention is not to promote any specific scientific interpretation of the relevant data, but to assert the view that LDS doctrine has room to incorporate the data into its own interpretations, rather than denying it or ignoring it as irrelevant.

thousand years,[29] but for the purposes of this thesis there is no need to corroborate that assumption. Our present concern involves the significance, the consistency and the implications of LDS doctrine, not whether such ideas are true or false.

The Book of Mormon writings are unified in their intent by the editing and compilation of Mormon and his son, Moroni, and while the later writings often refer to and build upon the language, imagery and metaphors of the former, it would be overly simplistic to speak of a discrete Book of Mormon view of such concepts as human nature, the meaning of atonement, or the character of God. Many authors have made such generalizations to their later embarrassment. The complexity of the Book of Mormon record resists facile assignment of its views to a category such as 'pessimistic', 'this-worldly', 'pragmatic', or 'thaumaturgical.'[30] At different times and to differing audiences, various Book of Mormon contributors teach their message and share their witness of the gospel of Christ in language and models appropriate to their particular situation.[31] This does not, however, imply a discontinuity or contradiction in the content, and the LDS writer is obliged (while recognizing distinctions in presentation) to assume an ideological context in which the various writings are complementary.[32] Insofar as such a context can be assumed from the record itself, it is clearly one of testimony and invitation, but for more specific interpretational usage such a context is not internally provided.

If a scholar wishes, for example, to compare how Nephi describes the atonement as contrasted with his brother Jacob, or Alma the Younger, or the Brother of Jared, the interpretive context is not provided and must be assumed. In other words, the context within which the scholar frames his questions is not the product of the text, but of its exegete and must be recognized as both modern and individual. One of the primary tasks of the present study is to provide such a framework for interpretation. The exegesis that we will undertake will be informed by that paradigm. It is by no means the only possible interpretive model and it may not ultimately prove to be the best one, but it marks an attempt to ground the understanding of

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[29]This increases to perhaps three millennia when one includes in the history Moroni's abridgment of the Jaredite record.

[30]The same can be said of LDS belief in general. Illustrative is Bryan R. Wilson's work, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study* (New York; Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1970) the purpose of which was to identify such ideal types. He calls Mormonism "the many-sided sect," saying that of modern religious movements, "none is more complex than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons".

[31]In an examination of doctrine such as we are presently pursuing, it is instructive to probe the variety of specific metaphors, language, and descriptive analogies which are used by different prophets in the book to bring together a more complete picture of Book of Mormon thought, and to see how certain speakers and speeches influenced the way in which later contributors combined their ideas. As one example, the explanation of Abinadi on the first and second resurrections seems to have had a significant impact on Alma the Younger after his conversion, but it is nowhere else employed by other speakers in the same way.

[32]Mormons have typically assumed this from the beginning, but have thereby often overlooked the individuality of the Book of Mormon testimonies. Most of the work which has sought to demonstrate the distinctness of language between the writers has involved word-print studies to determine authorship. Such work has been primarily apologetic, attempting to demonstrate the multiple authorship claims of the book and thereby give it credence and validity. While such studies have a role to play in LDS scholarship, they have not generally concerned themselves with exegesis.

Book of Mormon doctrines in both the world view of Joseph Smith and the personal ethical experience of Christian discipleship.[33]

Much of the material that we have extracted from the Book of Mormon comes from several major sermons dealing specifically with the topics we have chosen: Lehi's blessing to Jacob in II Nephi 2, Jacob's masterful discourse in II Nephi 9, significant speeches by King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma$_2$, Amulek, Samuel the Lamanite, and Mormon.[34] In these cases, the ideas are not only mentioned, but they frequently offer a specific interpretation of doctrine as held by each Book of Mormon prophet. These concepts and the images that are used to explain them are woven into the remainder of the text as well, but we will be drawing primarily from the more complete treatments of doctrine usually found in the longer passages.

We have taken a somewhat similar approach to our investigation of the teachings of Joseph Smith. Many of his sermons and doctrinal statements were recorded and offer a crucial source of information about his views, but again, it is often in the more lengthy sermons—particularly the King Follett discourse—that we find the most carefully formulated and expounded ideas. We will make frequent reference to these speeches as well as other sayings and revelations of the prophet.[35]

POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Several inherent difficulties attend the writing of a thesis such as this. The greatest frustration perhaps lies in the necessarily brief examination of various intriguing academic questions. The reader may well feel a desire for amplification of the ideas in any given chapter. Regrettably, due to considerations of space, this has not been possible and precedence has been given to the overall intent of the thesis, which is not any one of the topics we will explore, but the organization of them all, taken as a whole, into an original and consistent interpretation of Mormon theology. It is hoped that the notes and bibliography will provide a starting point for those wishing to probe some of these topics at greater depth. But other concerns remain.

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[33]As mentioned earlier, the primary epistemology of Mormonism is not revelation as is often suggested, but *personal experience* (which for Mormons assumes the reality and ongoing possibility of revelation). 'Testimony' as the term is used by Latter-day Saints suggests a recognized personal experience which convinces the individual of truth. Someone else's revelation has no binding epistemological significance for me unless I, through personal experience, recognize it as valid. If I have no personal experience of the fact that Christ is the Savior or that Joseph Smith was a modern prophet, such statements are no more meaningful to me than opinions on any other matter. If, on the other hand, personal experience has demonstrated such ideas to be true, I am intellectually bound to accept the immediate consequences of such ideas.

[34]It may seem strange at first, that the sermon at the temple in Bountiful by the resurrected Christ is not included in this list. While we do draw fairly extensively from that account, the messages of the Lord to the Nephites were not of a theological nature. They deal intimately with the themes of this thesis, but they are not based upon philosophical explanation as much as simple presentation and invitation.

[35]It would simply add too much material to attempt to incorporate into our study the entire corpus of the Doctrine and Covenants, but we will use it to clarify and expand upon the ideas which Joseph taught or which we find in the Book of Mormon.

Since methodology will determine the nature of the conclusions and the parameters of the content, one needs to ask, "What approach can be taken that will fairly represent the distinctive subject of my research?" For example, if one follows the road of social anthropology in order to study religion, one will ideally conduct his or her research through fieldwork. One will immerse herself in the culture of the religious group and seek to understand the role religion plays in the life of the community. The questions of interest may address such issues as the influence of religion upon the relationship between the sexes or between people of varying ages. Or they may examine the functional results of ritual upon the individual or the group. Conceptions of 'time,' 'power,' or 'objects of limitation' may receive focus, and for those whose interest is social anthropology, these questions and others like them will define the significance of the religion, and such work will increase the body of knowledge available to the researcher. But it is not uncommon for such investigations to seem entirely insignificant or even incomprehensible to those who were the objects of the study, not because they are incapable of following the logical arguments, but because the logic does not readily apply to the reality they live in or care about.[36] If the scholar seeks a different outcome, an alternative approach might be through phenomenology or History of Religions, which seek to represent the religious position as it is understood by the believer.[37] Various methodologies are available for the scholar who desires to investigate religion as an academic observer and reporter, or who wishes to incorporate the function of religion into an existing scholarly field.

However, there is a fundamental paradox in the study of religion and for this thesis to accurately present the issues we wish to raise, we must address that paradox and actively search for a reconciliation. Scholarship, by its very nature, is a rational enterprise and in order to write academically about a given topic, one must place the object of study within a logic-driven framework. The problem is that religion may or may not be entirely rational, and in either case, *rationality is not its fundamental priority*. It is true that most religious persons seek for a rational understanding of their faith as far as rationalism can take them—and Mormons, with their emphasis on a comprehensible gospel, surely follow suit. But the essential purpose of the contemplation is not knowledge *per se*, at least not propositional knowledge, but the beneficial

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[36]For a discussion of some of the cognitive and linguistic reasons for this phenomenon and an attempt at an alternative approach, see Maurice Bloch, "What Goes Without Saying: The Conceptualization of Zafimaniry Society," in Adam Kuper, ed., *Conceptualizing Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), 127-146.

[37]One of the most interesting proponents of the discipline of History of Religions (or *religionswissenschaft*) as a scholarly description of the experience of belief is Wilfred Cantwell-Smith: "All religions are new religions, every morning. For religions do not exist up in the sky somewhere, elaborated, finished, and static; they exist in men's hearts. We are studying, then, something not directly observable. Let us be quite clear about this and bold. Personally, I believe this to be true finally of all work in the humanities, and believe that we should not be plaintive about it or try somehow to circumvent it. It is our glory that we study not things but qualities of personal living. This may make our work more difficult than that of the scientists, but it makes it also more important, and in a significant sense more true...A galaxy may be larger, but a value I hold to be not only more important but at least equally real and in some ways more real." "Comparative Religion: Whither—And Why?" in *The History of Religions*, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa eds., fifth edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 34-35. See also his *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

effects of that knowledge upon the personality, the individual in relation, the soul. If a scholar seeks to format a framework for understanding religious doctrines, great care must be taken to avoid the creation of a system that inherently detracts from the personal application of those very principles. Too often systematic theology demonstrates and promotes great intellectual vigor while ignoring the more fundamental Christian concern of living the Christ-like life. For a doctrinal framework to be useful for those within the religious community, it must function as a constant invitation to live (and not just understand) the faith. In Mormonism as elsewhere there are certain acceptable parameters within which reinterpretation can take place and every belief system continually struggles to define and maintain those boundaries. If a revised interpretation is too radical in its assertions it will not be recognized as belonging within the ideological structure of the group from which it originated. This thesis is a conscious attempt to ask some fundamental questions of LDS thought but to do so in such a way as to be recognized as belonging *within* the conversation of Mormonism.

The present work is therefore in part an attempt to provide a foundation of discourse for those who are researching Mormon beliefs and praxis from within and without, re-examining some of those doctrines and attitudes that characterize LDS life, with the hope of suggesting a way of fusing an intellectual understanding of the Gospel with a personal commitment to its teachings. Another difficulty in preparing this thesis, then, has been the necessity of writing for a dual audience: those from outside Mormonism whose interest is academic and who seek to understand how LDS doctrinal paradigms influence the Mormon way of life and worship, and those inside Mormonism who accept its central assertions as ontologically valid and who are interested in examining the relationship of its fundamental principles in ways that have not yet been fully explored. The approach we have taken is to look at the doctrinal implications of the Book of Mormon within the framework of the principles of the restoration taught by Joseph Smith[38] and to explore how those concepts relate to the way people think about and act towards one another. We will be exploring the meanings and implications of LDS doctrines from the point of view of the believer. But the text also purposely includes segments that might properly be labeled as confessional or even poetic in an attempt to respond to the aspiration of binding the intellectual discussion with the possibility of personal invitation and application.

Yet there remains one final danger. Scholarly discourse can be divisive. The expression of unconventional points of view and the reinterpretation of basic premises is often taken as an overt challenge by those whose opinions tend in divergent directions. It is all too common for

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[38]Some have attempted to draw a radical distinction between the Book of Mormon doctrines, sometimes naïvely labeled as 'Protestant,' and the later (post 1835) teachings of Joseph Smith. See, for example, Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (July-Aug. 1980), 24-33. On this point I would be prone to agree with Voros, Midgley and others who instead demonstrate that although they often address distinct questions or concerns there exists no discontinuity when viewed as part of a larger whole. See Frederick G. Voros, "Was the Book of Mormon Buried with King Follett?" *Sunstone* (March, 1987), 15-18 and Louis Midgley, "A Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy Challenges Cultural Mormon Neglect of the Book of Mormon: Some Reflections on the 'Impact of Modernity,'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* Number 2:283-334..

varying opinions to lead to factionalism, pulling Christian scholars diametrically away from one another and in this case from the basic Christian concern of 'at-one-ment.' We certainly need not agree on all points, but if we divide ourselves into camps from which to attack one another, we have betrayed the very essence of our message. In many instances, this thesis could have been strengthened by the inclusion of specific references to LDS authors whose ideas are here examined. This is standard academic procedure, yet we have chosen in most cases to omit citations to modern Latter-day Saint writers. The formulations of "common" or "popular" LDS beliefs presented herein are representative of widely held views within the Latter-day Saint community. They are easily documentable and we therefore have seen no reason to select and directly challenge writers who have promoted such views. Our hope is to open up a constructive conversation and not to make specific scholarly critiques that are frequently perceived as threats and provocations.

On the whole, this thesis is more concerned with reexamining some fundamental questions than with finding all of the answers. What responses are given are to be viewed as suggestions and possibilities, and certainly not as definitive conclusions. If these questions force us to re-examine our relationship to deity and to each other, perhaps together we will one day receive our answers from the source of truth.[39]

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[39]The majority of the revelations which Latter-day Saints recognize in modern times have come about as the direct result of prophetic inquiry. It is hoped that a new set of questions may reveal new doors to knowledge and prompt us to knock on them for the first time.

# GOD AND SUFFERING

*It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God
and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.*
*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 345.


SOVEREIGNTY

In this chapter we will consider the Latter-day saint perception of the nature of God and the motivations for worship. The essence of our hypothesis is that for LDS discourse the primary characteristic that defines God is not his power but his benevolence, the 'goodness of God' that the Book of Mormon frequently emphasizes. We will further suggest that for Mormon discussion, God's power is limited, in a recognizable manner, by His righteousness. Latter-day Saint doctrine holds that God's moral sense is not categorically distinct from that of his children. Indeed, if the Book of Mormon is viewed as correct in its assertion that humanity can truly distinguish between good and evil, such a conclusion is inevitable. In consequence of this proposal that God's benevolence is both constant and discernible, we will review traditional LDS assertions of omnipotence, proposing that conditions may exist in a fallen world that limit God's interaction in history. We are not primarily concerned here with an investigation of what those conditions are, or with speculation upon the factors necessary for divine intervention, but with examining the possibility within LDS doctrine of worshipping a God whose power is by nature finite.

Despite Mormonism's obvious departures from traditional Christian theology, the Latter-day Saint conversation of God's power and righteousness has clearly been shaped by broader Christian perceptions of deity. Powerful arguments have been put forward by western theologians to explain how God's goodness transcends and supersedes humanity's sense of right and wrong, and these ideas are profoundly rooted in humankind's understanding of who God is. However, these arguments have been challenged as morally suspect, and we hope to show that they are—for Mormons at least—unnecessary. The omnipotent God of Christianity is logically and culturally grounded in ancient Near Eastern ritual and neo-Platonic philosophy as these were adapted within Christian theology. We will seek to clarify the Mormon doctrine of God's nature by examining these historical roots of discussion and seeking out the points of departure for LDS discourse.

The most troubling paradox in Christian theology is arguably that posed by the effort to reconcile God's omnipotence with his omnibenevolence in a world where bad things happen.[1] If God is both all-powerful and all-loving, how does one explain the existence of suffering in the world? Theodicy is the well-developed branch of Christian apologetics that attempts to bring the

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[1]The categories of 'omniscience' and 'omnipresence' are derivative from the primary category of omnipotence, and thus are not discussed separately here.

two ideas into harmony. In order to understand the nature of the conflict we must first investigate the meaning and usage of the term 'omnipotence' and its corollary 'sovereignty.' As the terms are generally used and as we will employ them herein, 'omnipotence' refers to God's ability[2], while 'sovereignty' refers to his involvement. If 'omnipotence' could be summed up as "God can do anything," 'sovereignty' would be expressed as "God does everything." By way of contrast, the polytheistic concept of 'supremacy' holds that a god—or council of gods—is the *most* powerful of all beings in the cosmos while 'sovereignty' indicates teleological absoluteness: that God is the causal antecedent of every event. Monotheistic religions have always been concerned with the issue of sovereignty, which is why the idea of a devil has been such a perennial embarrassment to theology.

In the Old Testament, the Israelite understanding of God was based both on the teachings and declarations of their prophets and on the conceptions of people from surrounding cultures. It is immediately apparent in the record that one of the principal concerns of the prophets was the ongoing syncretism of foreign concepts about God and worship into Israelite belief and practice.[3] Over against Israelite monotheism, the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt had complex polytheistic systems in which the gods were identified by that which they controlled—fire, water, storms, death, etc. In other words, they defined their pantheon pre-eminently in terms of power and dominion. This idea was in no way peculiar to Near-Eastern religion—quite the contrary. Defining God or the gods principally in terms of power is a ubiquitous religious trend, so much so that it has traditionally been assumed (by those who study religion) to be the predominant—if not the only possible—motivation for worship.[4] Religion is almost universally characterized from the outside as a quest for power and control, whether in life or death. Whatever its limitations, this scholarly description of religion seems applicable to what we know at present of worship in the ancient Near East.[5]

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[2]The interpretation of God's omnipotence which Greek philosophical absolutism sometimes suggests (i.e. that the absolute has no limitations, that it can do *anything*) has no obvious place in theodicy. The idea of a God who is entirely boundless in his capacity leaves no room for morality. If he can do only that which is moral, then there exists an infinite number of possibilities which he clearly cannot accomplish. This is so unless morality in such a situation is whatever God arbitrarily decides, as some have proposed. This suggestion is intriguing, but it consciously rejects the possibility of theodicy. A similar limitation is required by the suggestion that God can only do that which is rational. Theodicy insists on the rationality of God, but omnipotence (as Calvin, Barth and others have shown) does not.

[3]See for example, Gen. 35:2; Ex. 16:2-3; Lev. 19:4; Deut. 7:5; 8:19; 12:2; 32:16; Josh. 24:2, 20, 23; Jud. 3:7; 10:14; I Sam. 7:3; 8-12; 25:8; I Kings 11:2; II Kings 16:3; 17:8; 21:2, 4, 7; Ezra 6:21; Ps. 106:36; Isa. 2:8; 57:8; Jer. 1:16; 2:13, 20; 5:19; 7:31; 8:2; 10:2; 11:13; 14:4, 13; Lam. 1:8-10; Ezek. 5:11; 6:13; 11:12; 20:32; 25:8; Hosea 2:1-13; 4:11-19.

[4]This is especially notable in the work of the early writers in the field of religious studies such as E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer, or later in Malinowski, Otto, Weber, etc., but it is an equally prevalent assumption in most modern sociological, anthropological and historical studies of religion. As a general rule, this assumption has likely been a valid one, but it cannot be applied universally as modern religious humanism or other ethical approaches to religion demonstrate. Power still likely plays a vital role, but it should no longer be considered the unique driving force behind the religious impulse.

[5]Our knowledge of ancient concepts of worship has increased dramatically in the last fifty years through the discovery of previously unknown texts and through improvements in our ability to translate the original languages. However, the problem which Henri Frankfort pointed out in 1948 still causes concern: "The most prolific writers…[have] assumed towards our subject a scientist's rather than a scholar's attitude: while ostensibly concerned

If power is the pre-eminent attribute of the gods, then worship can best be understood in terms of appeasement. One must "serve the gods" to gain their acceptance (and avoid their wrath), and if an offense is committed, strict penance and purification rites are necessary in order to regain their approval. The gods we are describing were often egocentric and capricious toward humankind, meting out vengeance when offended and providing abundance when pleased; such abundance, however, was without complete reliability or utter consistency. None of these gods was considered sovereign, although there was usually one high god who could call the others together in council in order to determine individual or cosmic destiny. But it was the council, rather than any specific god, which made such decisions and carried them out.[6] The existence of evil was explained in most cases by the belief that some of these gods (or demons) were either wholly indifferent to the plight of humanity or else actively seeking the misery of mankind.[7]

The extent to which these ideas influenced Israelite perceptions of prophetic teachings, or to take another step, the extent to which these ideas determined the language in which the prophets framed their messages—or even how they understood their own visions—is impossible to determine. However strong the case, it is certainly clear that Israelite religion likewise defined God in terms of his power, dominion and particularly his supremacy. Yahweh was *El-Shadday*, "the Almighty." The Creation established his power and dominion over the cosmos; the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan proved his supremacy over all the gods of the nations.[8]

With this emphasis on God's power, we are not surprised to find throughout the Old Testament a depiction of God as angry, retaliatory, punitive, horrifying and profoundly enigmatic. On the other hand, the Old Testament prophets make frequent reference to the love and mercy of God and his long-suffering. Nevertheless, the message as we have it in the record seems overshadowed by the demonstrations of his vengeance and wrath. The syncretism of external conceptions about deity and worship into the system of teachings revealed by the prophets was an ongoing fact in the history of Israel from its beginning and was a constant

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with religion, they were really absorbed in the task of bringing order to a confused mass of material. Men of this school…possess a splendid knowledge of the texts and have enriched our information greatly. But in reading their books you would never think that the gods they discuss once moved men to acts of worship," from the preface to *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), v-vi. Describing a more recent approach, one reviewer said that "throughout the book he admits the incompleteness of the data and that misunderstanding and even failure to comprehend altogether the available evidence are constant stumbling blocks." Burton MacDonald, review of *Treasures of Darkness*, by Thorkild Jacobsen, in *Biblical Archaeologist* (March 1978): 37. Such interpretive difficulties are inherent in the social sciences.

[6]This council was not considered 'sovereign' but 'supreme.' There were other beings and forces acting in the universe and not all that occurred or existed could be traced back to the council.

[7] For further reading, see J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1969), William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson. *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), Samuel Noah Kramer, *Mythologies of the Ancient World.* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961).

[8]The extent to which these views may have been influenced by later, and particularly post-exilic, redactors has been long debated. The P strand is generally credited with linking these notions of God to ritual worship as we will point out below.

threat to the integrity of the community. Much of the concept of God in the Old Testament, which appears at such odds with the Israelite prophetic teachings of God's love (and at such radical variance with the ethics of the New Testament), was the result of the adoption of a world-view in which God is defined in terms of his power. This view need not have been borrowed from neighboring religions; it can as easily be explained as the result of a general human tendency to seek for control or security. This tendency goes hand in hand with the concept of God (or the gods) as the one (or the many) who can provide such security in life or death and who can, under other conditions, remove it entirely. Our point (and it seems less applicable to ancient Judaism than to the Christianity that developed out of it) is that if power is the fundamental concern in defining deity, it is easy to imagine God in terms of how he can provide the believer with blessings and under what conditions he might take them away.[9]

In most religious systems this idea of the potency of God or the gods has led to the concept of propitiation and offerings, ideas the newly emancipated slaves of the Exodus could readily understand and follow. If the gods of Egypt and Canaan were often inscrutable, they were at least generally predictable. Certain acts or associations would incur their displeasure, while others, especially the ritualized formulae of prayers or gifts could, under the right conditions, invoke their power for blessings or protection.[10] Whatever the understanding of sacrifice may have been among the Israelites of the Exodus, the relation of sacrifice to propitiation and appeasement is clearly evident following the Exile.[11] The resulting religious mindset views the gods as watching one's every move and keeping a careful tally of individual or communal merit. The Old Testament frequently assumes this idea of a *quid pro quo* deity, setting the stage for the further development that judgment after death is based on the balance of one's good and bad acts.[12] Actions that displeased the gods (whether for moral, cultural or ritual reasons) were at times unavoidable but always required payment either in suffering or through purification rites and offerings in order to restore the balance and avoid ongoing punishment. This set of assumptions necessarily perceives God as a stern, demanding, judgmental, vengeful being.[13]

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[9]The perception of the people Israel as God's suffering servant has helped Judaism to avoid this quest for personal or corporate security and the self-seeking worship it can promote.

[10]These were the terms upon which the children of Israel cautiously, almost reluctantly, accepted Yahweh as their God at Sinai.

[11]Timothy Gorringe makes the good point that "we must not fall into the trap of believing that all sacrifice was always as the Priestly writers describe it. In von Rad's view such rites were not unknown in the pre-exilic cult, but they certainly did not then occupy the dominant place that they do in the Priestly redaction," in *God's Just Vengeance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37.

[12]While in early Mesopotamian religion the dead universally entered the underworld, in Egypt the concept of a final judgment was of central concern, the individual's heart being weighed in the balance against the ma'at feather of truth.

[13]As Frances Young and others have shown, however, this may not have been the predominant focus of sacrificial ritual, even in the sacrificial sin-offering. See Frances M. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas In Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Mass: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979). This idea of sacrifice will be taken up again in chapters seven and eight.

The New Testament provides a strikingly different perspective on the nature of God in the person of Jesus Christ. As we read the record we are suddenly confronted with a man who is wholly given over to the need to teach his followers about love. Where they had become accustomed to legalism, he counsels for compassion. In place of vengeance he demonstrates forgiveness. Instead of anger, he shows patience, humility and empathy. And where power and its accessibility had dominated most religious systems, he exalts the idea of charity. The language and models he used at times echoed the older Israelite views, as language must, but the message of his life was consistently one of personal concern. His religion focused not on orthodoxy, but orthopraxis, not so much on intellectual or ritual conformity, but integrity and care in the individual relationships between people. God had entered his creation and humankind would never have recognized him as such from the popular descriptions they had conceived.

But this focus was a brief one. His disciples sought to continue his work and proclaim his message, but it would appear that love as a concept, instead of as a personal relationship, quickly fell prey to the ideology of power. Within a generation, Christ's concern for the individual was being replaced by Christian debate over metaphysics and the reconciliation of scriptural precepts with Greek philosophy. This was all but inevitable as Christianity sought social and intellectual legitimacy in a Hellenized culture. The rhetorical context of discussion itself forces the emphasis of religion in the direction of philosophy. This is not to suggest that Christians as a group or as individuals had abandoned the Christ-like life, only that the meaning of Christ's Gospel came to be formulated within the prevailing philosophical dialogue.

In the first century C.E. Philo of Alexandria was seeking to reconcile the dominant Hellenistic metaphysics of the day with the Hebrew scriptures.[14] Although a Jewish philosopher, he became one of the most influential figures in determining the direction for classical Christian theology. Several of the ante-Nicene Fathers disagreed with his conclusions (such as the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that Justin, Origen and others rejected), but they all took up the discourse he introduced, basing their conclusions on Plato and the Hebrew writings.[15] This became the accepted and recognized method for establishing Christian doctrine, and it permeates the councils and writings of Christianity for more than a millennium afterward.[16]

In the fourth century, another figure emerged who would do more than any other to direct the themes and define the conversation of Christian theology. Augustine was raised as a Christian due to the powerful influence of his mother, but finding it intellectually unsatisfying, he

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[14]Goodenough, Erwin R., *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2d ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963); Sandmel, Samuel, *Philo's Place in Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1971); Wolfson, Harry A., *Philo*, 2 vols., rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948); Holmes, Michael W., ed. *The Apostolic Fathers,* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), 159. See also Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1974), 19.

[15]Ibid., 20.

[16]Many have equated the general Christian councils with the council in Jerusalem which sought to determine the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, but by the time of the first general council three centuries later, the discourse was largely based in rhetoric and Aristotelianism, rather than in the practical application of newly revealed beliefs or the cultic (rather than theological) importance of ritual.

chose rather to be involved in the predominant philosophical discussions of the day. After his formal schooling he taught rhetoric in Carthage, Rome and Milan. For a time he was attracted by and affiliated with Manichaeism (considered a heresy by his contemporary Christians) which he thought offered room for his philosophical leanings. But in 386, having left the Manichees in disillusionment, he traveled to Rome where he became intensely interested in neo-Platonism, finding in it the possibility of logical articulation of his personal Christian beliefs. It is a matter of perspective to determine whether he reconciled his philosophy to Christianity, or whether he converted Christianity to philosophy,[17] but no one had a greater impact on the theology of Western Christendom down to the modern age.

Taking much the same route that Philo had for Judaism, Augustine standardized the Christian definition of God in the terms of neo-Platonic metaphysics.[18] The orthodox Christian God became Absolute, Necessary, the Prime Mover, and therefore Sovereign, which made Him *by definition* ultimately responsible for everything in the universe.[19] If sovereignty is once granted it is not far to the next logical step that all things must be according to God's will.[20] While this conclusion had at times been assumed even prior to the development of Greek philosophy[21], neo-Platonism provided it with a rational justification. Late in the 4th century, Christianity was united to that rationalism, and the wedding that Augustine performed between Christian scripture and Hellenistic philosophy has never been officially annulled.

## THE UNITY OF GOD IN LDS THOUGHT

In the early 1800's, Joseph Smith founded a new Christian church in the eastern United States that proclaimed a corpus of 'revealed doctrine' that departed radically from traditional Christian theology. One of the most fundamental doctrines of Mormonism is the belief that God

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[17]The most outspoken on the latter view is probably Hugh Nibley. See especially, *CWHN* Vol. 3: *The World and the Prophets* (Salt lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 80-88. Augustine was by no means the first to attempt such a reconciliation of Christianity with Hellenistic philosophy, but he was certainly the most influential.

[18]Clement of Alexandria had sought to synthesize Christianity with neo-Platonism two centuries earlier, but the church's position at the time had been far too diverse to standardize his view.

[19]The idea of sovereignty can be reached in at least two ways. For Judaism God's supremacy can be augmented to suggest that he *controls* all events. In philosophy the *ex nihilo* creation requires that God is ultimately responsible for everything. For Christianity, both have played a role, but the latter trend has held sway in theology. Given an *absolute* God, he not only made things as they are but must wish them to be so.

[20]However adamantly Christianity has claimed title to the concept of sovereignty, it has generally refused to accept its logical conclusions. Islamic philosophy has shown more consistency in its discussions of sovereignty and divine will. See, for example, E. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought : the Dispute over al-Ghazali's "best of all possible worlds"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). Of the Christian theologians, perhaps only Calvin has approached the Islamic philosophers on this score in his unwavering commitment to sovereignty.

[21]In most ancient religion, the concept of absolute control that we are referring to as 'sovereignty', was a nonexistent category. Every god of the pantheon—and every demon as well—exerted his or her influence upon the cosmos. In Israelite monotheism, these etiological forces were gathered in one, making Yahweh possibly the first deity to be considered sovereign. However, given the existence of evil, sovereignty thus defined is inherently difficult to rationally maintain, and it is frequently diminished in the Old Testament writings to 'supremacy', the idea of dominant (but not incontestable) power. This is continued in the New Testament with the Pauline inclusion of the pagan categories of 'principalities', 'powers', etc.

the Father and Christ the Son are separate individuals, each embodied in flesh and bones "as tangible as man's."[22] This literal and eternal distinction between the two, combined with the concept of their corporeal nature, underlies the entirety of the Mormon doctrine of deity. Christ is literally the son of God, both in mortality and in eternity. Since LDS doctrine also asserts that every individual is literally (prior to mortality) the spiritual offspring of God, Christ is acknowledged as the brother of man.[23] In the premortal world, God the Father gathered his children in council and proposed a plan whereby all would have the opportunity to be clothed in physical bodies with the purpose of thereby becoming more like him. This plan involved the redeeming work of Christ, who would provide the means by which those bodies could be perfected and purified.[24] In this council another spirit arose, proposing an alternative plan involving himself as the redeemer at the expense of individual agency, and demanding for himself the glory of God. This individual drew many after him and in their rebellion it was no longer possible for them to dwell in the presence of God. By the voice of the council, Christ (known as 'Jehovah' in the pre-earth life) was acknowledged and anointed to be the Savior of all mankind.

This very brief, and necessarily simplistic, summary lays the foundations for the doctrine that Mormons refer to commonly as the Plan of Salvation. That plan provides a context in which life can be viewed as meaningful, despite hardships and confusion, and it promises hope for a better world beyond this mortal sphere. It offers each individual the belief in a noble past and the hope for a glorious future.[25] Explicit in the plan is the opportunity (upon conditions of obedience) for humans to become Goddesses and Gods, offering the same blessings to one's

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[22]D&C 130:22

[23]In Mormon doctrine every individual existed in spirit form as a child of God prior to her or his entrance into mortality. In addition, each spirit is understood to be the (spiritual) embodiment of an eternal intelligence. Much has been written and speculated about the nature of intelligence or intelligences, but the church has not offered an official position. The majority of Latter-day Saints today tend to speak of individual and everlastingly separate 'intelligences' which were provided with spiritual bodies as the first step in their eternal progress, although some have preferred to speak of intelligence in the singular. If it sounds peculiar to speak of 'spiritual embodiment', it should be noted that in the LDS perception nothing is immaterial and the spiritual realm is composed of the same elements as the physical, though its organization is "more fine or pure." We will address this in chapter three.

[24]This discussion of a pre-mortal existence presupposes the idea of the fall of man, either because it was an essential part of the Father's plan, because it was foreseen by him as inevitable, or because it had already occurred or begun. Perhaps a combination of views is possible.

[25]Since LDS doctrine pays so much attention to events beyond both birth and death, there is a tendency at times (both among members and outside observers) to think of Mormonism as an 'other-worldly' religion. But while such emphasis occurs, it does so by insisting upon the significance of mortality. This life is neither illusion nor contemptible. Rather, it is a vital link in the eternal chain of time, and requires both moral decision and involvement in humanitarian service. There is an explicit continuity between the two realms, and categorizations which are frequently applied to religious sects become rather arbitrary in relation to Mormonism. 'Other-worldly', 'this-worldly', 'optimistic', 'pessimistic', 'prophetic', 'millennial', 'revolutionist', etc. are all characterizations that are evidenced in LDS scripture, doctrine and culture. To assign LDS thought to such categories—even noting changes over time—is a reductionist approach which has proven too simplistic to be of lasting value. See Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), 30.

own children into eternity. The idea is poetically contained in Lorenzo Snow's couplet, "As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be."[26] The prophet Joseph put it this way:

> God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. 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—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.[27]

So far, our description of the Mormon Godhead has concentrated on the idea that the Father and the Son are embodied, and therefore individual, personages. However, there is another aspect to be considered, for while Mormonism stresses the corporeal distinction between the two, it also insists upon their complete unity of purpose. This unity makes it perfectly appropriate to say of the Father and the Son that they are one, in the same sense in which that phrase is used in the intercessory prayer.[28] Thus Mormon scripture often refers to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost as "one eternal God"[29] or "one God, infinite and eternal,"[30] but this is never interpreted by the Latter-day Saints as a unity of substance.

Interestingly, then, Mormon doctrine focuses both on the separateness and on the unity of the Godhead and clearly defines the context of each. Both concepts are accepted and rigorously defended by members of the church, and an overt challenge to either idea would be doctrinally unacceptable. We should emphasize this point: for LDS thought, the two salient features of the Godhead that need to be reconciled are their separateness and their unity. Mormonism avoids a contradiction by placing the attributes in distinct contexts; the first describes their physical characteristics, the second their will. Thus, they are not mutually exclusive categories but complementary attributes of the Godhead.

But this dual focus proves somewhat difficult to maintain in practice and there exists an unrecognized tendency to overstate one of the sides. This is an interesting phenomenon and we

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[26]Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star* 54:404. See also Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City, 1884), 46 and *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 2. Although the idea of God's nature as an exalted man had been referred to by the prophet as early as 1831, it was first preached clearly in public by Joseph Smith at the April 7, 1844 church general conference, two months before the prophet's death. Since it was also the funeral service for brother King Follett, it has since become widely known as the 'King Follett discourse.' It was first published in the *Times and Seasons* on August 15, 1844. (See *TPJS*, 342-62 where the printed text of the discourse includes B. H. Roberts interesting explanatory footnotes.) The Mormon doctrine of man's potential deification was apparently not preached publicly until 16 June 1844, two weeks before Joseph's martyrdom (See *TPJS*, 370-71) even though "The Vision" given in February, 1832 and known now as Doctrine and Covenants section 76 made reference to the idea and it may be evidenced even earlier.

[27]*TPJS*, 345.

[28]John 17:21. Mormons are fond of pointing out that Christ equates his unity with the Father to the unity which his disciples can achieve, thus making a metaphysical interpretation problematic.

[29]Alma 11:44.

[30]D&C 20:28. See also 2 Nephi 31:21; Mosiah 15:2-5; 3 Nephi 11:27-28, 36; 28:10; Mormon 7:7

will see it again in our discussion of 'omnipotence' and 'benevolence' below. In this case, the two views are not in any sense contradictory, but they are focused in opposite directions, so context will determine which one is stressed. Three factors combine to create a context that dictates that of the two views, the physical distinction between Father and Son will receive the greater attention—and at times the idea of unity will be compromised in order to accommodate such an emphasis. Each of these factors is driven by the psychological desire for boundary maintenance, in this case the need for doctrinal distinction: "They believe that, but *we* believe *this*." Since Mormonism grew up in—and has never fully grown out of—an atmosphere of doctrinal debate, varying beliefs often pose an inherent challenge to the Mormon theological system. This is so whether those beliefs are used as a direct confrontation or in independent discussion. There is something here of the institutional persecution complex often associated with minority groups that preserve a corporate memory of victimization. The actual persecutions have all but ceased; the anxiety continues.[31]

The first factor driving Mormonism's stress on separateness in the Godhead is the well-developed and fully established concept of the Trinity in the Christian creeds, since this represents from the LDS perspective a clear challenge to Mormon interpretation of the corporeal nature of Father and Son. Many Mormons conceive of an overwhelming Christian Trinitarian consensus, which denies corporeality and asserts that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are but three aspects or representations of one being.[32] This thought predominates to such a degree that Latter-day Saints go to great lengths to explain away the threatening Trinitarian idea—even when explaining their own scriptures to one another.

The second factor involves the logical priority of LDS history and revelation to scripture. Joseph Smith's First Vision in the sacred grove is generally narrated (and its theological conclusions made clear) to LDS children before they begin reading scriptures for themselves. The result is that when they later come to encounter scriptures in the Book of Mormon or Doctrine and Covenants (or the New Testament) that emphasize the unity of God, a contradiction is often imagined. The scriptures must therefore be reconciled to the given LDS assertion that God and Christ are individual.[33]

The final factor is related to the first two, but in a passive way. While the idea of separate beings in the Godhead is perceived as constantly under threat, there is no motivation for

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[31]Joseph Smith offered a surprisingly liberal minded alternative to this position: "If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, *and in their own way too*, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way," (*TPJS*, 313 emphasis added).

[32]Many Mormons would likely be shocked to discover how prevalent the personal distinction between Father and Son is within popular Christianity.

[33]In a sense, this attitude is self-perpetuating. Members who feel threatened by Trinitarian ideas are compelled to defend their position in formal or informal church groups (Sunday School, seminary classes, family situations, etc.) to others who perhaps have not yet recognized the supposed Trinitarian challenge. These, in turn, eventually come across troubling references to the unity of God in the Book of Mormon. Upon consideration, they feel a sense of responsibility to explain away the troublesome verses to others and the imagined threat is thus perpetuated *within* the community, rather than from outside.

challenging the idea of a unity of purpose among the members of the Godhead, either at the personal or the institutional level. Who in the Christian tradition, regardless of their denominational background, would question the notion that Christ was at perfect unity of purpose with the God and Father of whom he spoke? [34] Such a proposition would be absurd. Yet, as will be shown below, the very fact that unity goes unquestioned creates a situation in which we can compromise the concept and never recognize we are doing so.

For Mormonism, then, the two attributes of God that at first appear contradictory and in need of logical reconciliation are 'distinctness' and 'unity'. While Mormonism places distinctness first and defines the unity of the Godhead in terms that are compatible with such a division, the opposite case has prevailed in traditional Christian theology. For those from the broader Christian tradition that has followed Nicaea, the doctrine of God's unity has always held primacy and distinctions between the Father and Son have been defined in terms compatible with that hierarchy of ideas. Mormonism and traditional theology begin with opposite assumptions on this issue and the logical effects on the conclusions of each are clear. But there is an even larger issue that divides Mormon from traditional Christian thought about the nature of God in much the same way. It has the potential for fundamentally redefining many of Mormonism's accepted interpretations of doctrine, yet few LDS writers have even ventured into these waters, much less probed their depths.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RITUAL CONFLICTS IN RELIGION

The cultural and historical movement we call 'Christianity' inherited from its Israelite extraction the concept of a stern, judgmental and punitive God.[35] Post-exilic ritual sacrifice and propitiation were replaced with a focus on moral conduct and personal integrity, but while the method of piety was distinct, its practical purpose was generally maintained—at least at the popular level: religious adherence provided the possibility of divine favor, either here or hereafter. In order to receive the blessings of God, scrupulous conformity to the prescribed techniques was necessary. If faithful and obedient, one could be assured of final (if not immediate) compensation. But a competing trait was also passed on to Christianity through the influence of the Church Fathers. Christianity's Greek philosophical ancestry, which had been

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[34]The distinction drawn between the God of the Old and the New Testament are rarely framed in terms of Father and Son, so this is not a threat to the Mormon position. Such a distinction may be confusing, but the questions it poses are distinct from those above.

[35]This is not to suggest that Judaism was the unique or even the most influential source for such a concept, only that it would seem to have had the most direct impact on the cultural perceptions of the *first* Christians. Tertullian, an ante-Nicene Carthaginian lawyer, was the first to systematically apply legalistic ideas to Christianity which incorporated the punitive God in a rigid philosophical system. His background was not Jewish ritual observance but Roman law. Rashdall suggests that "with Tertullian begins the legalism, the morose asceticism, the narrow other-worldliness, the furious zeal for orthodoxy, which Christian theology, and especially Western theology, never completely shook off," Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology being the Bampton Lectures for 1915* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 244-45.

fully developed by the late 4th century, endowed it with a coherent and logical description of God's sovereignty. Presented here as theoretical constructs, these two systems, *philosophical* and *ritual*, were passed on to Christianity like genetic traits, often diluting or in some cases even dominating the teachings of the Christ.[36]

This synthesis has proven awkward and at times even self-destructive. Neither *ritual* nor *philosophical* tendencies have blended seamlessly with the life and teachings of Christ. What we are calling *ritual* worship offers obedience and sacrifice with the intent of thereby procuring temporal or eternal blessings. This may be a nearly universal trend, but it places self-interest as the catalyst behind religious activity. The method is inherently mercenary and not easily harmonized either with Christ's example or with his teachings of selfless love. To offer obedience or obeisance as bargaining tools falls far short of loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength. The essence of Christ's gospel demands the choice of one or the other. Individuals may either seek their own interests and receive their reward, or else relinquish all concern for self (both in this world and the next) by offering what they are to God through love and service to others.[37] *Ritual* religion, which barters devotion for advantage, precludes the possibility of a selfless sacrifice.

In a different way, *Philosophical* worship, Christianity's second dominant inheritance, while not addressing (and thereby not directly contradicting) applied religion, runs into its own problems at the intellectual level. These concerns have provoked the most injurious of accusations against traditional Christian theology and have ultimately convinced many to reject (or at least ignore) the existence of God altogether. When the sovereign deity of philosophy is bonded with the loving God characterized by Christ, one need but glance around to recognize the obvious question. If God is all powerful *and* perfectly loving, how can evil and suffering exist in the world? Surely a being who cares for humanity as Christ did and who possesses the capacity to alleviate or eradicate human suffering—as Christ also did—would be morally bound to do so. The attempt to justify the ways of God to man in this situation, theoretically upholding both his omnipotence and his omnibenevolence is called 'theodicy'.[38] Since the reality of suffering will play a major role in this study, it will be useful to review the more significant ways in which the problem of evil has been addressed in the West. The concern antedates Christianity and is

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[36]We are discussing these two systems as though they were mutually exclusive although historically they clearly were not; Israelite religion incorporated rhetoric even as Greek culture included ritual. But the legacy which Christianity inherited from each followed the general pattern we are describing. Though it overstates the case, foreign idolatry largely dictated the popular religious understanding of ancient Israel and Hellenistic philosophy has done the same for Christianity. Both of these roads have merged along the way as the Old Testament history created a context for the emergence of the New Covenant and both continue to exert an influence on religious interpretation (especially Christian and Muslim) down to the present.

[37]This does not mean that we should imagine Christianity without the thought of a future reward for righteousness; reward, while recognized as the outcome need not be the *motivation* for worship. One can hope for a better world without compromising the sincerity of his or her love, but this is much probably more difficult than we usually imagine. The introspective disciple might rightly ask, "Am I doing this in order to earn a blessing, or because I love this individual whom I am serving?"

[38]Some of the themes in this section were drawn from Kenneth Surin's insightful discussion s.v. "Evil, problem of," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

primarily philosophical by nature, or perhaps theological in the sense that Plato intended the word. Epicurus posed the question clearly in the 3rd century B.C.E., looking at all the possible combinations of God's ability and willingness to take away evils, concluding that "if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?"[39] These are the questions one naturally considers when directed to this topic, but the central issue can be stated in a different way.

THEODICY

One question has framed the entire discourse of Christian theodicy, and it is not the question we might imagine. Those offering responses have set out on a variety of paths but the starting point has been a constant: *For how much of the suffering in the world is the moral God of Christianity* not *responsible?* The inquiry has never been phrased quite this way, but this is the point of commencement from which almost every theoretical theodicy has proceeded. Sovereignty is the *a priori* assumption providing the perspective from which to view the theological landscape.[40] From this philosophical high ground the vista is one of strict determinism in which God has decreed through his inscrutable pleasure that all things will be just so. Standing at the crest of this headland, praising God and acknowledging his hand in *all* things, we find men like Spinoza, Leibniz, Calvin and Barth. If a tree falls, or a child is molested, or one nation gains dominance over another, it is all the work of God and it all somehow fits into his ultimate purposes. Though holding radically divergent concepts of omnipotence, they all agree on sovereignty. Of this group, only Leibniz thought it expedient to inquire rationally after the morality of God in creating such a world.[41] The others piously asked by what audacity humankind would presume to question the motives of deity.[42] Evil and suffering surely exist in the broad panorama, but the view from that peak is so sweeping and grand that all existence, whether positive or negative to

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[39]John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

[40]Although the term 'omnipotence' is widely used in the discussion, the idea of sovereignty is almost always intended. Few theodicists have spent much time elaborating what God can do or what might restrict his abilities. (This has generally been limited to the philosophical insistence that God cannot create a genuinely free being such that it will always choose good.) Most have concentrated on the theme of how much of the present situation is attributable to God.

[41]In 1710 Leibniz began this modern discussion with the publication of his *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*. Leibniz held that God was capable of creating any number of different types of world, but of all those possibilities, this one (when viewed as a whole) was the best option. Leibniz insisted on sovereignty to the point of rigid determinism, since every event constitutes a necessary piece in the positively directed puzzle, every evil finally working to produce good, but he allowed room for ultimate morality by holding that no other possible universe could engender more good in the long run. This for Leibniz is the best of all possible worlds. Although Voltaire and almost everyone since has lampooned Leibniz' view, he is one of the few who have formulated a logical explanation for evil's existence. Given the world we see around us we may not find Leibniz' view any more appealing than did Candide and Pangloss, but at least it is internally consistent.

[42]Calvin and Barth were both following the approach suggested but not elaborated by Paul in Romans 9. Paul, in turn drew his models from Isaiah 29.

our eyes, seems contained within it.[43] If it is incomprehensible to the mere human mind, that serves only to augment the glory of God.

But most theologians and virtually all theodicists have found it necessary to descend from that lofty summit, compromising God's sovereignty along the way in order to make room in his person for benevolence. Many have worked their way down by paths of their choosing, but almost all have eventually found themselves nestled on the same ledge, talking to one another and calling out to those above and below about the reality of human freedom: "Moral evil is *our* fault, not God's. He did not make us evil or depraved; he made us free. But freedom means that we can do what God would not. We have chosen evil, and many have suffered at our hands, but we are also free to choose God and love him. God made us free because he wants us to freely choose him." Origen,[44] Augustine,[45] Plantinga,[46] Swinburne and Hick have all situated themselves on this same outcrop. Having left absolute sovereignty behind, they spend their time considering what God intended when he created beings that are absolutely free. God has a design for us, but he is allowing mankind to decide its own individual and corporate destiny, and the evils we choose along the way are ours and not his. Few reaching such insights have been concerned to look further down and consider the meaning of the expanse of suffering that still remains below on the foothills of sovereignty. Not caring to venture further down the slope by limiting sovereignty any more than is absolutely necessary, all other suffering in the world is taken to be part of the mysterious work of God.

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[43]Spinoza offers an alternative view but it does not strictly fall within the realm of theodicy. In his *Ethics* he proposed that our experiences with evil and suffering are actually misperceptions. Suffering does not truly exist. What we perceive in the world is not real, but mere appearance created by the imagination. If something seems evil it is simply because the individual perceives it to be so; remove the perception and the evil vanishes. A somewhat similar sentiment underlies the notion of *maya* in Hinduism and the illusion of suffering in Christian Science.

[44]Among the early Church Fathers, none responded more carefully and consistently to this question than did Origen. In his view, there were two types of suffering. The first resulted from 'natural evils' (acts of nature, 'accidents', etc.) and was either penal or medicinal, either God's punishment for sin or the opportunity for human beings to grow and build character. Secondly, his position proposed what has since become the 'free-will' defense which insists that 'moral evils' exist because of the individual choices of agents. Since he was writing a century and a half prior to Augustine, omnipotence was not a theological necessity for him, though sovereignty clearly was. "We must say that the power of God is limited and not on the pretext of reverence deny the limitation of it....He has made then as many things as He could grasp and hold under His hand and keep under the control of His providence: as He has likewise created as much matter as He could adorn," (As quoted in Rashdall, 267-68.) Despite Origen's powerful influence upon the Christianity of his day, his ideas were deemed heretical at the fifth ecumenical council in 553. Not only did Origen originate the free-will defense, he also anticipated portions of the soul-making theodicy by suggesting that suffering could be medicinal.

[45]Augustine further developed the free-will concept to suggest that through the Fall, Adam had created a new modal possibility which had not existed in the creation. He insisted that man could freely choose evil, although he later saw the need to deny the possibility of freely choosing real good on the grounds that such a stand could lead to Pelagianism. Augustine established the free-will discourse for modern philosophy.

[46] Plantinga, the most formidable proponent of the free-will defense, asserts that if evil is the result of the actions of free, rational and fallible human beings, then the concept of an omnipotent and loving God is logically defensible. If God created beings who are truly free, those beings can choose evil and God will not be morally responsible. What Plantinga offers is not strictly a theodicy, but a 'defense', not seeking to justify God, merely defending the logical possibility of God's existence. But if free-will is to be regarded as the explanation of moral evil, one seems justified in asking why a sovereign and moral God created beings who were free and would choose evil. In addition, the free-will defense does not treat the problem of 'natural evils', those instances of human suffering that are caused by the very nature of the created world.

Still, if God is to be considered benevolent, he must have a purpose in creating such a catastrophic environment in which to place humanity. Those theodicists offering an explanation have uniformly invoked the Greater Good Principle by which it is taken as axiomatic that the end justifies the means. Richard Swinburne found his own spot on the free-will ledge but looking out from there was troubled also by the huge variety of natural evils still evident in God's creation. Surely a moral God would not have made the world itself a place of such suffering unless it were for our good. 'Perhaps,' he reasoned, looking around at his companions and considering their ideas, 'God has designed natural evils to make our freedom fully possible. How can we be free if we do not know good and evil? How can we distinguish between them unless we experience them and thus also learn our own will? How can we freely choose until we know what the choices are?' Natural evils, then, are to be recognized as a necessary component in the moral education of man.[47]

John Hick also cast his gaze upon the realm of natural evils. Recognizing the educative power of hardship and trial, Hick also contemplated the fact that most suffering he saw could not be so easily accounted for. Just who was benefiting from a child's sudden death? The loved ones, perhaps, as they allowed the experience to teach them—but what of the child? In order for natural evils to fit within God's benevolent power the benefits must extend beyond mortality, else what of the millions who die before their suffering has taught them anything beyond fear and sorrow? After contemplating the natural evils on the slope below, Hick concluded that God's ultimate purpose for humankind must require suffering as its vehicle. "The presence of evil can only be justified if it can be seen as the necessary condition for the evolution of moral personality."[48] But simple human freedom and dignity are not enough to constitute God's intention. Morality and the life of the soul in relationship with God constitute humanity's destiny, and in order to develop the kind of free will that is capable of producing real goodness each person must first pass through the crucible of suffering. Life on earth is a "vale of soul-making," and only through the suffering that God has created—and perhaps through that which we have imposed on one another as well—can we become what God intends for us.[49]

Since theodicy begins its journey with the supposition that all existence is the result of God's creative act, and then passes through the recognition of the reality of suffering in the

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[47]Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Swinburne holds that only through experiencing evil and suffering can we make a truly informed choice and only by the possibility of all evil occurring (moral and natural), can we be both free and responsible. What this boils down to is the suggestion that God has created natural evils in order to teach humankind the real distinction between good and evil. But this requires that the concepts of freedom and responsibility are more important than morality itself since God is doing what we (through observing and considering his actions) learn is evil.

[48]Hick, Ibid., 98-99.

[49]In times of difficulty, people often cling to the idea of sovereignty in an attempt to bring at least ideological order to the chaos of life: 'If God has allowed this to happen, then there must be a reason for it.' Suffering thus has meaning and one can derive a sense of belonging, of being part of a larger scheme of things through the expectation that God's will is being done. It is comforting to believe that there is always a distant purpose in our tragedies. But if God designed our sufferings, what kind of deliverance is it for him to undo them? And more importantly, if what we are suffering is God's will, then what sense can there be in turning to him for liberation at all?

world, theodicists have pressed forward from that point to reach the only possible destinations available from such a course. Either God *is* responsible for all things, including those things we perceive as evils, or he is not responsible for the suffering that mankind has created, though he is still the direct cause of everything else, including natural evils. In both cases, God *has* created a world of suffering and therefore must desire it to be so—either because of the inscrutable nature of his will and pleasure, or because of the purposes he has in mind for humanity.[50] This is the direction that theodicy has traditionally taken. The problem with both of these views is that benevolence ceases to have any obvious or straightforward meaning. Having established the priority of sovereignty in one way or another, theodicists have universally tried to explain where and how God's morality fits.

But what does benevolence actually become in such a system? The idea of God's moral nature suggests that he would not have done things this way unless he had a good enough reason. In the long run the ends will justify the means. In the final analysis this is not a discussion of love or morality but of pragmatism. One can descant upon the loving kindness of a God who provides man with the chance to learn through programmed difficulties and hardships, but such reasoning results in the need to praise the afflicters and the afflictions that beset humankind. Liars, rapists, child molesters, ruthless tyrants, viruses, cancers, and crack cocaine become the tools of God by which he shapes and bends our will to his. To suggest that "ethnic cleansing," rampant poverty, a terrorist bomb, or the abuse of a helpless child are all explained by the necessity of man's free choices may help to identify the roots of the problem, but what sort of 'benevolence' is it that convinces God *not* to intervene in the face of such atrocities? Many responses have been given to this question, but of necessity theodicists have employed a double-standard in their discussions of morality. In situations that morally demand human intervention, theodicy excuses God from the same requirement. The moral implications of the Greater Good Principle are monstrously offensive, implying that humanity is incapable of distinguishing between good and evil and that human suffering is God's will. To say that in the broad scope of things one's own suffering is unimportant can be a noble and courageous act; to say the same of someone else's misfortune is callous and contemptible insensitivity.

Furthermore, how does one explain suffering that has no basis in human choice? A cyclone hits the coast of Bangladesh claiming 200,000 lives, followed by another twenty-one years later that adds 125,000 more to the count; an earthquake in China buries 100,000 people in a rushing flow of silt, another in Peru kills 70,000—18,000 of them crushed as a mountain collapses; on the continent of Africa alone someone dies of malaria every thirty seconds;[51] somewhere in the world another child has just been born blind, another life has been devastated by a crippling disease, another person has experienced the reality of suffering. Any theodicy

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[50]The traditional sovereign God of Christian theology who created all things *ex nihilo* would almost seem to demand responsibility, but most theodicies attempt to absolve him of culpability for moral evil by insisting on human freedom, and then explain his participation in natural evil by an appeal to the Greater Good Principle.

[51]John Dwyer, *The Body at War: How Our Immune System Works* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 26.

promoting the view that these events are part of God's grand design, that they are insignificant in the larger perspective, or that he created each of these situations and more in order to try our faith or strengthen our resolve to follow him describes a god who employs evil means to bring about his ends. It is hard to imagine how such a being could deserve either worship or respect.

Given the universe in which we live, God can either be good, evil, or sovereign, but no combination of these traits is logically possible. Although we have become accustomed to thinking of divine benevolence as a primary concern in Christian theodicy, it has consistently been little more than an afterthought. The *a priori* assumption of sovereignty has allowed for no other possibility.

It is time to consider the question of where the mountain we have been standing upon originated. Did God shape it in his creation of the world, or have we, like Nimrod, piled the stones together and seen to its construction in order to contemplate heaven, and in the process reduced our conversation to babble and confusion? Although it is still frequently assumed at the popular level, the idea of sovereignty is losing favor and in the discussion of suffering, Christians are seeking apparently uncharted terrain to travel and explore. New points of departure have been discovered in the last two centuries and alternative pathways are still opening up. Finding the conclusions of theodicy personally alienating and far removed from the reality of suffering, many modern theologians have rejected the presupposition of sovereignty (or at least bracketed the issue), in an attempt to focus instead on the nature of ethics and the experience of love.

BENEVOLENCE

Down through the centuries that philosophical rhetoric has exercised its control upon religious discussion, many Christians have become increasingly aware of the gulf separating the other-worldliness of theology from the practical concerns of everyday Christian life and practice. What point could there be in theological speculation when the vast Christian congregations were untouched by such themes and discussions?[52] The traditional metaphysical concerns of the church doctors had little connection to the religious life of the individual in the pew and far less with her or his daily life at home or on the street. These notions resulted in a growing liberalism in the focus of Christian writing and preaching that has often been regarded by orthodoxy as a denial of the faith—and at times it has been—but the intention has usually involved the call to leave the realm of heady philosophy and participate in the ethical concerns of humanity. What use is talk of other-worldly redemption or salvation when people come to church hungry and return to their homes with nothing more to place on their tables? Why concern oneself with

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[52]In more recent years this dichotomy has often been expressed in terms of High Church/Low Church or official religion and folk religion. See, for example, Edmund Leach, ed. *Dialectic in Practical Religion* (London: published for the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology by Cambridge University Press, 1968), James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), and David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

angelology or doctrines of heaven and hell while people are being persecuted and killed in the name of Christianity? Brian Easlea has argued quite convincingly that the entire humanist movement was sired by the need for ethics in a day when religious beliefs were resulting in daily witch trials and burnings.[53] This humanist trend took many forms as the times and circumstances changed, but most of them, however destructive and heretical they often appeared to the church, were driven by the desire for a religious sense that focused its attention on the needs of the individual in the midst of a harsh and difficult world. Sometimes this road has led to a denial of all but the 'secular gospel'.[54] Other writers have expounded the message of Christ as the God who suffers with us and offers hope for the future.[55] Still others have attempted to demythologize the Christian message and distill its deeper meaning for the modern world.[56] Generally speaking, one approach of theologians has bracketed all discussion of God's nature while another has begun to ask what a God might be like if his benevolence is not shrouded in the paradox created by metaphysics.

In the context of human suffering, this debate between theoretical and practical religion has become especially poignant. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries liberal theologians were anticipating the day when technology and social involvement would establish a society that could endure indefinitely in peace and progress. It was hoped by many that humanity could usher in

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[53]Brian Easlea, *Witchhunting, Magic & the New Philosophy: An Introduction to the Debates of the Scientific Revolution, 1450-1750* (Exeter: A. Wheaton, 1980). According to Easlea's thesis the push for humanism was not originally directed against conceptions of God but of devils. However, if you utterly reject the possibility of the latter the basis for the former quickly crumbles as well.

[54]This move toward secularization was promoted strongly by Friedrich Gogarten in his book *Demythologizing and History* (1955). Harvey Cox initially followed this line of thinking in *The Secular City Debate* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), although he revised his ideas on secularism in *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984). Since metaphysics has been forced to abdicate its position, ethics has taken its place upon the throne of God. But the discussion of ethics is only convincing if based on specific assumptions about the nature of man or society. If other assumptions are made (for instance if ecology is paramount) it can be equally argued that human extinction—or anything else—is a worthwhile pursuit.

[55]The clearest proponent of this view is Jürgen Moltmann. His theology of the Cross implies that God's own response to the problem of evil is not to explain it but to enter into and experience it himself. Here we have a discussion which is fundamentally distinct from that of theodicy. Rather than asking *if* the God of Christianity can exist, or *why* evils occur, the intention here is to recognize God in the sufferings and death of Christ. Theodicy is replaced by Christology. When in the midst of suffering, the central concern is not the intelligibility of God's relationship to evil, but whether or not the God we worship offers deliverance and is able to provide it. Moltmann was strongly influenced by the poetry of Studdert Kennedy. See especially, "High and Lifted Up" in *The Unutterable Beauty* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1983). A similar line of thought is presented by Forsyth when he asserts that "the final theodicy is in no discovered system, no revealed plan, but in an effected redemption.…It is not in the grasp of ideas, nor in the adjustment of events, but in the destruction of guilt and the taking away of the sin of the world," in Peter Taylor Forsyth The *Justification of God* (London: Latimer House, 1948), quoted in Surin, "Evil," 196.

[56]Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958). See also Gogarten, Ibid., John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), and Michael Goulder, *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued* (London: SCM Press, 1979). Bultmann asks, "Shall we retain the ethical preaching of Jesus and abandon his eschatological preaching? Shall we reduce his preaching of the Kingdom of God to the so-called social gospel? Or is there a third possibility? We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain a still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain their deeper meaning," (p. 18). But on what basis does he retain (read "re-interpret") the deeper meaning? It would appear almost wholly arbitrary, governed only by his desire to place the New Testament into his already formulated model of existentialism, tossing away any anomalous remainder.

the 'kingdom of God' in the form of the ideal social state. But this optimistic hope for a brave new world was one of the casualties of two world wars and the ongoing political and social strife we have witnessed since.[57] These very wars have led the 20th century to its pronounced theological attentiveness to human suffering. As we have already noted, theoretical theodicy sought to offer metaphysical explanations for the evils of the world and thereby justify God's work to man.[58] This was perceived as a vain enterprise by many, either because it was considered to be based on a theological misunderstanding[59] or simply because it was asking all the wrong questions to rightfully call itself Christian.

The message of many theologians and Christian writers of our time is that discipleship demands more than intellectual understanding and commitment. In a world where suffering is a constant reality, the man or woman who feels the call of Christ must become involved in the process of improving the situation by working against evils. While theodicy may offer intellectual understanding, it often does so at the price of additional pain. Instead of alleviating suffering, theoretical theodicy too often multiplies it. The truly Christian response to evils is not to create rational systems, but to seek ways by which suffering can be overcome. According to Tilley, theodicists follow the pattern of Job's friends, responding to his situation with explanations and accusations.[60] Systems of theodicy suggest that from the largest perspective, evil and suffering have a necessary place in God's work. But if that is the case, why should we seek to offer help at all?[61] Given such a situation, how could one possibly know which actions would be moral or immoral? If God created the situation or if he wills it thus or both, who are we to seek to change it? Explaining Tilley's view, Schuurman claims that,

> constructing such theodicies is tantamount to constructing a tranquilizing
> rationalization which not only inhibits moral protest but also prevents us from

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[57]It is possible that a return to such optimism may beckon on the horizon, wedded ideologically to the spread of capitalism and democracy, but it is difficult to forget the lesson that technological progress is a two-edged blade, both offering promise and threatening destruction. It is only with reluctance that one sets aside the picture of tyranny exemplified in history (not least the present century) to endorse the notion of hope for mankind based on his inherent morality. We have enough modern Herods and Caligulas to warn against such a view.

[58]Kenneth Surin has made this distinction between 'theoretical' and 'practical' theodicy, the first being primarily an intellectual exercise, the second an ethical response. (See Surin, Ibid.) It may be expedient to limit the usage of the term 'theodicy' to the former meaning, since the latter is a completely distinct endeavor. Both are responses to suffering, but they hold little else in common.

[59] This is the road taken by Process theology. Following the ideas of A. N. Whitehead, this approach focuses on the reality of God's *a priori* existence instead of the attributes we have customarily assigned to him. God is still considered infinite, absolute, unsurpassable, etc. (whatever those terms mean in this context), though he is also fundamentally personal, social and temporal. Divine experience is affected by God's interaction with mankind. Charles Hartshorne regarded the problems of theodicy as the result of the self-contradictory concept of God in classical theism. There can be no contradiction between the existence of evil and the existence of God simply because they both exist. If theodicists had an adequate doctrine of God they would see that there is no reason to seek to exonerate him from all responsibility for the existence of evil in his created realm. See "A New Look at the Problem of Evil," in *Current Philosophical Issues: Essays in Honor of C.J. Ducasse*, ed. F.D. Dommeyer. (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1966), quoted in Surin, Ibid.

[60]Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

[61]We are reminded of the Iranian folk wisdom quoted by Eugene England, "If you see a blind man, kick him; why should you be kinder than God?" in his essay, "How can God be both Good and Powerful?" *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Orion Books, 1984) [distributed through Signature Books, Midvale, Utah], 93.

identifying with sufferers who need to be supported and given a voice rather than silenced and suppressed. Modern theodicies efface the actual evils the world contains and make it difficult for people to confront them honestly and realistically. Indeed the phrase 'the problem of evil' is seductive in this regard because it tempts one to think there is a single general problem of evil which can be abstracted from the concrete conditions within which evil actually occurs and then 'solved' theoretically by deducing its occurrence from the divine nature and the structure of the universe.[62]

In the contemporary world it would seem that any adequate Christian response to suffering must involve not only a rational explanation of its source or purpose, but more importantly a justification for working against evil and a motivation to do so. The classical answers of theodicy require a definition of God's benevolence that has little if any correlation to human perceptions of morality. The Greater Good Principle means that all those things that we perceive as evil are, in the larger context, conducive to good. A view of God as sovereign, claiming that all things are as they are because he so wills it retreats from any recognizable description of love and benevolence towards pragmatism at best and coercion, extortion and heartless cruelty at worst. Evil in one way or another becomes mere illusion and misperception. The insistent chorus rising out of liberalism, humanism and so-called practical theodicy is that suffering must not be ignored or etherealized. The horror and desperation of the world cries out for healing in the present.[63]

## MORMONISM AND MORALITY

From the time of Joseph Smith to our own day, Latter-day Saints have rejected the traditional Christian metaphysics defined by the church fathers and established in the creeds and councils.[64] The God of Mormonism is not an ideal to be deduced philosophically, but a person—more specifically and in the most literal sense, a father. He exists within both space and

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[62]Henry Schuurman, s.v. "Theodicy," 818.

[63]The fully committed discipleship of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Joseph Smith stands as a constant moral invitation, even when—as Bonhoeffer preached and later discovered for himself—that call is to 'come and die.' On Bonhoeffer, see *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959) and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). Latter-day saints may find the parallels between Bonhoeffer and Joseph Smith intriguing.

[64]The Son's pronouncement in the sacred grove that "all their creeds were an abomination in his sight" surely set the stage for the LDS denial of Christian orthodox doctrine. Language, however, can be confusing as the issue of 'omnipotence' demonstrates. Because of the concept's association with neo-platonic metaphysics, Mormonism rejects the traditional definition of omnipotence. While the language is used even in LDS scripture, Mormon doctrine leaves no room for the metaphysical God of traditional orthodoxy. When Mormon scriptures use terms such as "omnipotence," "All-Powerful," etc. it would be inconsistent with Mormon doctrine to assign to those terms the meaning imposed by Greek neo-Platonist philosophy. (Interestingly, King Benjamin is the only person in the Book of Mormon to use the word "omnipotence.") It is a simple matter to find references to omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, etc. in LDS discourses and writing, but the Mormon concept of God is finite by definition. The clearest discussion of LDS doctrine vis á vis the Christian creeds is probably to be found in Sterling M. McMurrin's *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1974). While McMurrin has failed to adequately grasp the Mormon doctrines of the Fall and Salvation (by virtually ignoring the Book of Mormon in his analysis) he has done a worthwhile job of demonstrating the philosophical distinctions between Mormonism and Christian orthodoxy.

time and his work of creation is emphatically one of organization rather than *ex nihilo* invention. God the Father is personal, both interested in and moved by the experiences of his children. He does not stand aloof from his creation, unfeelingly observing the circumstances of history. He loves his children and actively works to secure their redemption. In Mormonism's revealed universe, God is not the sole and sovereign actor but neither is free will limited to humanity. The traditional sovereignty of monotheism insists that God either arranges or allows every occurrence. Whether by action or inaction he has chosen that the world will be exactly as it is in every particular. While human agency may be incorporated into the scheme, it exists by God's noninterference in the freedom of his creations. By contrast, Mormon perceptions of free will endorse this position but also move the discourse back a step by asserting that agency exists inherently within each individual personality. The Mormon God has not created new entities and then granted them freedom; he has reorganized the material structure of already existing free intelligence(s).[65] The free will of man is therefore co-eternal with that of God.

But agency does not terminate with the discussion of God and man. Like the popular perceptions of much of the religious world (Christian and otherwise), the "official" Mormon universe is inhabited by a multitude of beings who exercise their influence on the creation and upon one another. In LDS understanding these beings are also agents whose ability to think and act is not simply allowed by God, but inherent in their very existence. Many of these beings are actively seeking to subvert the will of God and manipulate the agency of man.[66] It is possible in the Mormon perception of the world to suggest that there are events in history and circumstances in life that are neither God's doing nor his will.[67] To state this view more clearly, we are proposing that the LDS universe allows for the possibility that God is *not* responsible for everything that happens—that in fact, Satan is directly responsible for many of the events that occur in this fallen world *and that God would have it otherwise*. While he has the power to turn evils to good ends, he need not be regarded as controlling all the particular details of existence.[68] When the conditions permit it, he will turn the worst curse into a blessing in our behalf, but that surely does not imply that he declared the curse. The teaching, the strengthening, the growth are

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[65]There is a long-standing though generally subdued debate among Mormon scholars around the question of whether there existed an infinite number of individual *intelligences* which became the human family through the organizational processes of creation, or whether there was one eternal *intelligence* from which all personality has developed. For our purposes, either interpretation is possible.

[66]Some Latter-day Saints would add to this scenario a framework of natural laws (such as gravity, conservation of energy or matter, entropy, etc.) within which God must work. Many Mormons would insist on the metaphysical existence of eternal moral laws as well, though this thesis does not regard them as having a necessary being independent of agents and their relationships to one another. This will be discussed in chapter eight.

[67]But let us not confuse this with Rabbi Kushner's forgiveness of God for not creating a perfect universe. God is not responsible for evil, but neither is He negligent. The more important distinction will be brought out in chapter four in the discussion of the fall: while God is not responsible for the suffering in the universe, LDS scripture insists on the reality of a being who is.

[68]Righteousness does not come from staring evil in the face and rejecting it, but from coming to know God and loving him. Satan is the author of sin, suffering and death. He delights in it and in this fallen world he rules with it. But Christ's disciples proclaim boldly that in God's kingdom things will be different. Satan will have no influence, and sin, suffering and death will be nonexistent. We learn in the Lord's prayer that in Heaven God's will *is* done, while on Earth God's will is something Christ's followers are to pray for and seek in faith.

at God's hand, but they come not as the result of trials, but as the deliverance from them. The concept of sovereignty, that God is either directly or ultimately responsible for every particular of existence, is not essential to Mormon doctrine.[69]

Nevertheless, both the language and the conclusions of sovereignty are often tenaciously argued and defended by Latter-day Saints.[70] While a few in Mormonism have recognized the snares and pitfalls of the traditional paths and have chosen to go their own ways (Eugene England, Blake Ostler and Mark Gustavson are some examples), this is ground that for a Mormon audience has gone largely unexplored. The great majority of Mormon writers continue to incorporate troubling conceptions of God into their work, and this is as true of those writing from within academia as without. Following the path of traditional theodicy, most Mormons have customarily reached the view that the eternal end justifies the temporal means. It is commonly perceived that God 'allows' evils in order to try man's faith or strengthen his commitment. Human suffering is either the result of sin or it is God's way of teaching and proving his children. In Mormon as in traditional Christian responses to suffering, the notion of God's morality is abstracted from experience to be re-drawn through the exaltation of mystery, either explicitly in the way that Otto depicted the character of deity, or implicitly as exemplified by the theoretical theodicists.[71] What kind of a being is it that would create disease, disaster and premature death to teach virtue to its creation, and how should we account for the frequency with which such lessons prove ineffectual?

> Enforced patience did not, in my case at least, become a habit that
> endured when the compulsion was removed. I have been no less impatient
> since than I used to be before my German adventure [in the first war]. Nor can
> I honestly credit my character with any improvement due to such sufferings as

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[69]Even if God's ultimate ends are not possible without the immediate circumstances which he may disfavor, we need not suggest that God 'allows' those circumstances in order to make his ends possible. The idea of allowance presupposes that God is free to do otherwise, and there is good evidence to suggest that the Mormon God has no such choice. See D&C 93:30-31 and Alma 42:13-25. Either God *could* destroy evil, but we (and he?) would cease to exist as agents or He cannot destroy evil. Either way, at this level, using the term 'allow' ceases to be meaningful since he can in reality do nothing else. Perhaps it would be helpful to the discussion to assert that God 'opposes' evil but cannot annihilate it without destroying his purpose of exalting his children (and perhaps without ceasing to be God) in the process. It is possible to assert that given the finite nature of the Mormon God, the only way he *can* help man to progress is through suffering. But even if that is true, we need not further claim that God creates or arranges the suffering.

[70]Because of Mormonism's lay leadership, popular understanding can easily become an institutional point of view—in fact, it would be surprising if such did *not* occur. Models and paradigms that prevail at the popular level can become incorporated into semi-official doctrines through public addresses and the publication of books or tapes which present an individual author's opinions. The effects should not be seen as entirely negative, since this also helps to maintain the practicality of everyday life in religious interpretation. Another result of a lay clergy is that Mormonism cannot be easily broken down in terms of "official religion" and "common religion" as some have tried to do. (See for example, Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984.) A "cultural Mormonism" surely exists, but this is a distinct type of category.

[71]Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923). While Otto praised the rational conceptions of God elaborated in Christianity, he insisted that God could not be comprehended by rational attributions. Otto's focus was on the *numinous* (non-rational) aspects of God and worship, which combined to create his *mysterium tremendum*.

I had to put up with. Even moderate pain makes me peevish and self-centred; intense pain (such as I never felt in Germany but only ten years later as the result of the same wounds) I found unbearable to the verge of despair, and was saved by heroin, not by fortitude. I shall never prescribe suffering for the good of any living soul and while it may be true that pain, in some of us, begets sympathy for the pain of others, I have found a depth of compassion in persons who have known neither pain nor griefs. Suffering can easily make a man self-regarding, whereas pity belongs to those who look about them; besides, it is a gift and a grace, not a lesson to be learnt from a beating. And when clergymen talk of God's use of suffering as a means of bringing us to him, I do not believe them.[72]

Although LDS scripture and doctrine allows for alternative possibilities, Latter-day Saints generally make the unwitting choice of implicating God in the evils and suffering of the world.[73] The distinction here is not a trivial one, and its implications are by no means limited to semantics.[74] It is a commonplace in the study of religion that the idea of sovereignty is incompatible with any common-sense notion of divine benevolence. The only way to support the belief that God creates or even 'allows' human suffering is to further suggest that from his perspective such suffering is ultimately inconsequential. One must assume that what God is doing is fundamentally good, even though from the human perspective life seems torn by inexplicable cruelties. A sovereign God must choose that it is best in the long run for certain people in certain circumstances to writhe in the most hideous kinds of agony possible because eventually it will turn out for the best. For the Christian there are two obvious concerns with such a position. First, it robs Christ's suffering of any reality or meaning (unless one holds that there is a certain *level* of suffering at which God's compassion is suddenly aroused—a level that is beyond ordinary human capacity), and second, it contradicts the daily responses of Christ to the physical suffering of those about him. Since the record of the Lord's earthly ministry involves compassionate healings at every opportunity, are we to assume that he had more empathy towards his associates than does the Father? Or should we suggest that in consistently giving sight to the blind or healing the lepers the mortal Christ lacked the divine perspective that would have placed human suffering within an ultimately beneficial purpose and therefore allowed it?

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[72]From L. E. Jones, *Georgian Afternoon* (Hart-Davis, 1958), pp. 49, 50. quoted in F. R. Barry *The Atonement* (Hodder and Stoughton, London: 1968), 205.

[73]LDS discussions of God's purposes in tragedy (in its various forms) assume the idea of sovereignty, that God has chosen the present situation, inadvertently placing the blame upon God for every sort of atrocity and outrage. When faced with human suffering, faithful Latter-day Saints have often sought to glorify God's ultimate power or contextualize and thereby lessen the impact of tragedy, as have their neighbors in other religions. The motivations behind this undertaking are certainly laudable, but that does not make the interpretation consistent.

[74]Although Mormons do not customarily employ the language of sovereignty, it is a concept so deeply rooted in the LDS understanding of God and so intimately connected with most of their other religious concepts that it is extremely difficult to honestly consider what alternatives there may be. Indeed, to even attempt to think in other terms may prove perplexing. However, it should be noted that as we are employing the words, the God of Mormonism is not sovereign, but 'supreme'. God is more powerful than all other beings in the cosmos, but his power is not absolute, nor does it determine every event. Since the problem of evil is about sovereignty while LDS theology requires supremacy, there is no necessary reason to assign any evil or suffering to God. It can all be explained in other ways.

On the contrary, Christ's own testimony was that he came to do the will of the Father in all things.

There is another concern at the ethical level that can be raised. It is true that experience is an effective teacher and parents may desire for their children to learn the reality of pain or the lessons that come from it. But no caring parent would stand idly by while a child reached up to touch the stove. And if the parent grabbed the child's hand to purposely place it on the element we would lock him or her away.[75] Either humankind is incapable of perceiving good and evil, or the sovereign God is doing evil things. The only defense of sovereignty is to affirm that God's morality is incomprehensible to mankind. Indeed this is the well-worn path of theodicy that has grown muddy and wide from centuries of overuse. In responding to suffering, many LDS writers have echoed the most common Christian theme advanced by theodicy: God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.[76] For the Christian who exalts mystery as one of the virtues, this is perhaps a defensible position, but it is an anomaly in Mormon thought; the escape hatch of mystery has been locked shut.

Condensing a universal theme of the Book of Mormon prophets into a few verses, Mormon in a masterful discourse to the church summarizes humanity's ability to discern between good and evil as follows:

> Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.
>
> But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.
>
> Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.
>
> For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.
>
> For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent

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[75]One may ask how we can assert that it would be inherently unethical to teach that way. Why is it wrong for a parent to use manipulation and extortion and betrayal in order to truly help her child in the long run, especially if it occasionally works? The response is that doing so is cruel and coercive and an insult to life itself. It is also common knowledge that we can teach those lessons in a better way. In fact, we know that the way of love and self-sacrifice is not only the kinder, but often the far more effective teacher.

[76]This response to the problem of evil is made in good faith and usually accepted as obvious by most practicing Mormons and their Christian friends. It helps to inspire people in their difficulties and trials and gives them courage and hope to endure to the end. These are righteous, acceptable and brave ways of living in a fallen world, but the Book of Mormon offers an alternative position, the impact of which is enormous in its implications. It is comforting in times of loss to hold to the hope that God is working a higher purpose through our tragedy. But it is ultimately far more comforting to believe that God loves us so much that He would never do such things and will eventually find a way to free us from them. Our greatest comfort lies in the hope of a God who mourns with those who mourn—not in one who plans and provides the very tragedies that bring us to tears.

forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.

Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.[77]

The Book of Mormon writers share a common insistence upon the notion that the moral and ethical perceptions of humankind are accurate and fundamentally real.[78] There exists no contradiction or discontinuity between the moral sense of humanity and that of God, and the reason for this situation is also explained. In the LDS understanding, the source of humanity's ability to recognize good and evil is the light of Christ, often equated with the conscience. This not only refers to the influence of Christ's example, but to a necessary element in the composition of personality. Part of what makes us both human and free is this Godly and God-given trait of recognizing good and evil.[79]

If there is no absolute standard of morality, no final way of distinguishing between that which is God's will and that which contradicts it, then God's righteousness becomes wholly arbitrary. Instead, the Book of Mormon asserts an absolute: God would cease to be God if he ceased from righteousness, and his righteousness must be recognizable as such. Consistent with the Book of Mormon message, God cannot teach his children one standard of morality and live a different one.[80] Given the continuity in Mormon doctrine between the natural and the eternal worlds, man's perception of morality and ethics (at least as governed and dictated by the light of

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[77]Moroni 7:12-19. For further references to the view of the Book of Mormon prophets on humanity's ability to discern between good and evil, see also II Nephi 2:5, 26; 15:20; Omni 1:25; Alma 5:40-41; 29:5; 32:35; 37:37; 41:7; Helaman 14:30-31; Ether 4:11-12.

[78]If possible, a distinction must be made between the idea of inherent conscience and inherited culture. Cultural tradition may define as honorable or worthwhile that which would otherwise cause the conscience to recoil. Further, the cultural inheritance may prove strong enough to fully override the moral sense. It is assumed that this is true in all societies whether we speak of unethical business practices or more literal types of headhunting.

[79]This is distinct from the enlightenment views of Hobbes and Voltaire or the developmentalist ideas of Tylor, Frazer and Piaget. Morality is not only a function of *reason* but of relationship—even intuition. In this sense, the LDS concept perhaps shares more common ground with Levy-Bruhl's romanticist version of cognitive anthropology. See Richard A Shweder, "Anthropology's Romantic Rebellion Against the Enlightenment": Or There's More to Thinking than Reason and Evidence," in Shweder and Robert A. LeVine, eds. *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[80]Isaiah's message in Chapter 55 that the Lord's thoughts are not man's thoughts, nor are his ways man's ways (vss. 8-9) is sometimes used in Christian and Jewish writing to support the idea that man's perception is wholly distinct from God's. However, when placed in the context of the previous verses (6-7), this message is not made to humanity generally, but to the wicked and is thus an invitation to repent and change the situation—presumably by making God's thoughts and ways one's own.

Christ) is applicable to God as well. He does not live outside of that law which we have received. If it is wrong for us to use immoral means (cruelty, extortion, mercilessness, vindictiveness, or exploitation) to achieve *our* ends, then it is impossible for God to do so.

Peter Appleby has pointed out the problems inherent in making a distinction between the morality of man and God:

> On the surface, this reasoning has a certain plausibility, since the concerns and responsibilities of Christianity's high God must far exceed those of any human agency and since honest reflexion requires us to admit that our mortal wisdom is severely limited at best. But this plausibility is available only at a price which the faithful cannot consistently pay, that of total agnosticism with regard to the values of their God. In other contexts (in prayer and preaching, for example), Christians espouse quite definite beliefs about the divine character...If these practices are to make sense to them or anyone else, they must, as John Stuart Mill and others have shown, attribute to their deity exactly the same values that they accept themselves. For if the deity's goodness is radically different from human goodness, there is little reason for calling it goodness at all, and still less for praising and glorifying it, as faith is wont to do.[81]

Beginning with the very first verse, the Book of Mormon places more emphasis on the 'goodness of God' than any other work of LDS scripture including the Bible. It is a goodness that is both intelligible and overwhelming. Consonant with such an emphasis is the insistence upon the loving nature of God. Nephi admits that God's fatherly care of his children is the one attribute of deity he is sure of.

> And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me...Knowest thou the condescension of God? And I said unto him: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.[82]

The God described in the Book of Mormon is a being whose morality is greater than man's precisely because it is also commensurate. They are the same in type, though not in intensity.

The fact remains that few Latter-day Saint writers have examined the implications of divine benevolence. Since the idea of sovereignty is so fundamental to traditional LDS definitions of God, it is worth asking whether sovereignty is what defines deity for Latter-day Saint doctrine. Is it because God is all-powerful that he can command our obeisance?[83] Let us

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[81]Peter C. Appleby, "Finitist Theology and the Problem of Evil," in *Sunstone* (November/December, 1981, Vol. 6), 52-53. Appleby suggests that in order to believe in a moral God we must reject all claim to his intervention in the world, fully emasculating deity until it can be no more than a happy thought. That extreme, while a logical possibility, is unnecessary if we recognize that there are conditions within which God can work and others that prevent his intervention. What those conditions are remain to be discovered. (See 3 Nephi 19:35).

[82]1 Nephi 11:14-17.

[83]Many have rejected the idea of a finite moral God on the grounds that few would want to worship him. (See Mark S. Gustavson, "Is the Free Will Defense Available for Mormons?" in *Sunstone* November, 1987, p. 35; Blake T. Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17:2 [Summer, 1984] 84; McMurrin (Ibid., 28). But what else would we expect? Humanity seems determined to prove that we are similarly opposed to

approach that question by imagining that we live in a universe quite different from our own. This hypothetical universe is governed by Satan. We will imagine that he, in his wickedness and cruelty, dictates the circumstances of life. After we die, he will determine our final destiny. But, in this universe there exists another being who is God. He loves us and seeks to help us, but the only way to receive his influence will also incur Satan's wrath. If that happens, there is no telling what tortures he might put us through and those tortures threaten us into eternity. Given such a universe, which being would LDS doctrine point to as the rightful object of worship? Even if Satan were sovereign, he does not—indeed, cannot—deserve our devotion. We can even imagine that there would be some in our hypothetical universe who would be strong enough to reject the evil and choose God as their guide simply because he is the embodiment of love and morality, even at the cost of their eternal lives.

To drive the point home, let us consider what the motivations would be pushing those who in such a universe would choose to worship Satan. The possibilities are rather limited. It is conceivable that the individual may genuinely love darkness more than light (although experience suggests that such individuals are extremely rare). The other obvious possibilities would be worship motivated either by fear or greed (or perhaps a combination of the two). "If I don't worship him, who knows what he'll do? And if I do worship him, maybe there'll be something in it for me." This, in an extreme example, is what we have referred to earlier as *ritual* worship.

The scenario is nightmarish, but directly applicable to our situation. Whether the being is Satan or God, evil or good, if we worship primarily on account of the power he holds, our worship is actually turned inward. We are either afraid of what he will do *to* us, or we are counting on what he will do *for* us. We also recognize quite naturally, however, that there are other possible reasons for worship and our conscience drives us to the conclusion that we would be right to take the side of God even if he were doomed and we along with him.[84] Those who worship power, despite the other characteristics their object of worship may have, cannot truly offer themselves in worship because 'self' is their primary interest. It is not power that demands our moral allegiance; it is love. A wide variety of characteristics may evoke or encourage our worship, but if God is not perfectly righteous there exists no moral demand for that worship. We can imagine and seek after something or someone more worthy of our adoration.

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the God who was manifest in Christ. If what we seek is a god who can help us out of a bind now and again, a shoulder to cry on when we are weary, a hand to hold when all alone, then perhaps a projection of our wishes for an ideal friend and comforter is enough. Such a god appeals to our emotions. But a real being who promises salvation and who loves without reservation while inviting us to become as he is demands our discipleship at the ethical level as well. If Godhood is the result of a popularity contest, it seems certain that Christ will have to step down once the votes have been tallied. But if Christ is God and lives today, then although we may reject him for failing to meet the criteria of the god we have chosen to walk after, the projected image of our own imagination, his love will continue. And long after our own god has waxed old and perished, Christ's invitation to us will endure: Come unto me.

[84]In the hypothetical universe we have described God may not have all the prizes (which prompts worship through greed) and he may not have power to punish us for disobedience (prompting worship through fear), but we still find in him something worthy of our devotion, in fact something far more compelling in many ways.

Of course, ours is not that universe and the emphasis on God's love does not require that we abandon the belief in a God of power, but that power does need to be redefined. At this point we must ask ourselves the opposite question: Can God be God if he is impotent? Can a wholly good but completely powerless being conceivably be God? Of course not. Such a being may engender admiration, may impress by such stalwart commitment to principle, may inspire us through a sense of tragic nobility, but would finally deserve pity not adoration. God—in order to be God—must have power of some sort. In other words, the challenge that is being made here is not against God's power, but against his 'sovereignty', the absolute power of the traditional God of the creeds. What power, then, does the God of Mormonism require in order to merit worship? The suggestion of this chapter is that God is God because his love is perfect, and because he has all the power necessary to save His children.[85] Any exploration of the nature of God that is to be worthy of the LDS doctrinal and ethical context must both rationally incorporate the ontological universe of revealed LDS thought and beckon the disciple to increased involvement in the Christian life.[86]

THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF GOD

The missing element in many traditional Christian discussions of divine benevolence is Christ. He is our example of how God feels towards suffering. Not only can we remember his death and feel intimate solidarity with a suffering God as Moltmann has shown, but we can look to his life and witness the compassion of one who truly cares.[87] If there is one thing Mormons can profitably borrow from modern liberal Christianity, it is its insistence on Christ as the revelation of God. If Mormons wish to learn what God is like, their own scriptures witness that they can do no better than to come to know Christ.[88] If Christ is the full expression of the Father, then the most reliable information available about the character of the Father is in the person of Christ. The testimony of his character and life should take precedence over all other witnesses. Language about God, no matter the source, is colored by culture and cannot tell us the truth of his nature as accurately as can the life of his son: the way he treated those with whom he lived and the emotions he felt while with them. What Ward has said of Christianity generally holds true for Mormonism: "It is in fact extraordinary that Christian theologians have

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[85]LDS scriptures also emphasize and elaborate upon his power to create [read: organize] and to exalt, though our understanding of the latter will require further definition in the following chapters. There is an interesting hint about the nature of God in the concept of the *power* of *Godliness* (JS-H 1:19) This could be suggesting that there is power inherent in the way God lives—power which is the product, rather than the basis, of love.

[86]Mosiah 18:9.

[87]As Rashdall argues, this tendency to define God without considering the life of Christ has confused our discussions of sin, forgiveness and atonement as well.

[88]In LDS theology this is certainly true until Christ brings us into the presence of the Father.

been so mesmerized by Greek concepts of perfection that they have been unable to develop a more truly Christian idea of God whose revealed nature is love."[89]

In his Seventy's Course in Theology (Year Three), B. H. Roberts went to great lengths to make the attributes of Christ an emphatic part of his doctrine of deity.

> When the veil falls from the revelation that God gives of Himself, what form is that which steps forth from the background of the world's ignorance and mystery? A man, as God lives! Jesus of Nazareth—the great Peasant Teacher of Judea. He is God revealed henceforth to the world. They who thought God impersonal, without form, must know Him henceforth as a person in the form of man. They who have held Him to be without quality, must henceforth know Him as possessed of the qualities of Jesus of Nazareth. They who have regarded him as infinitely terrible, must henceforth know Him as infinitely gentle. Those who would hold Him at a distance, will now permit Him to draw near. This is the world's mystery revealed. This is God manifested in the flesh. This is the Son of God, who comes to reveal the Father, for He is the express image and likeness of that Father's person, and the likeness of that Father's mind. Henceforth when men shall say, Show us the Father, He shall point to Himself as the complete revelation of the Father, and say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father also." Henceforth, when men shall dispute about the "being" and "nature" of God, it shall be a perfect answer to uphold Jesus Christ as the complete, perfect revelation and manifestation of God, and through all the ages it shall be so; there shall be no excuse for men saying they know not God, for all may know Him, from the least to the greatest, so tangible, so real a revelation has God given of Himself in the person and character of Jesus Christ.[90]

The burden of Roberts' next chapter is to demonstrate the character of God by describing the character of the son. The strongest portion of the chapter, both in form and content is the three-part section, "The Compassion and Impartiality of God." Therein Roberts recounts episodes from the life and ministry of Christ. The following example demonstrates the power of such an approach to understanding the nature of God:

> You see him one day with some of His disciples approaching the little village of Nain, "His raiment dusty and His sandals worn." As they draw near, the gate is opened and a funeral procession marches out. The mother of the young man whose body is being borne by his neighbors to the final resting place, walks feebly and weeping beside the bier, desolate in her loneliness. As Jesus saw that poor woman in the midst of her sorrow, His heart—I pray you think of it, for we are speaking of God when we speak of Jesus Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth—the heart of God is moved with compassion towards this woman. He stops the bier, takes the dead by the hand, and says, "Young man, I say unto you, Arise." And he arose. Jesus Christ gave this

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[89]Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 85, quoted in Ostler, Ibid., 91.
[90]Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology Third Year: The Doctrine of Deity* (Salt Lake City: Caxton Press, 1910), 171-72.

woman back her son. It was an act of beautiful compassion, one of many,
which illustrates how tender and sympathetic is the heart of our God![91]

Such events in the life of Christ stand as a constant challenge to traditional concepts of deity. We cannot afford to dismiss the abundant evidence that while Christ trod the dusty paths of Palestine he experienced deep personal concern for the pains and sorrows of the individuals around him. Wherever Christ encountered suffering he sought to heal it, and he turned none away. There were circumstances in which he could not exercise his power as he desired,[92] but he never refused those who came to him, nor did he suggest that their trials were the will of God.[93] Crippling handicaps and emotional or physical impairments were consistently assigned to the work of devils[94] and wherever the conditions made it possible Christ offered deliverance. If the Son is the manifestation of the Father then we have here more than a description of the love and compassion of Christ that we ought to emulate. We have a description of God. If our common perceptions of the Father are inconsistent with our understanding of the Son, perhaps we are guilty of choosing our theological heritage over a relationship with our Lord and Savior.

In addition to the New Testament witness, Mormonism has a corpus of history about Christ that has been unavailable to others. The book of Third Nephi in the Book of Mormon contains seventeen chapters recording the postmortal visit of Christ to the Americas. If Mormons desire to investigate the character of Christ and thereby come to better understand the character of the Father, there is in Third Nephi additional primary material that must not be

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[91]Ibid., 183.

[92]Mark 6:5-6, Matt. 23:37, 3 Nephi 19:35, etc. These ideas have clear implications for the concept of miraculous intervention in our daily lives, especially in the realm of physical healing, but it remains outside the scope of this paper to explore the conditions upon which miracles may occur. Possible directions of inquiry are apparent. Certainly our understanding of faith could benefit from further investigation both at the personal and the communal level. More attention could be paid to the meaning of 'belief' in the Book of Mormon and its relationship with and distinctions from 'faith'. Discussions which revolve wholly around the lack of faith—either personal or communal—fall short and often end up creating feelings of guilt and inadequacy. While faith is clearly central, other factors must play a role in the process as well. See D&C 46:19-20. LDS thought can beneficially explore the conditions upon which God's miraculous intervention is made possible, but perhaps the answers will only come through experience and a more genuine discipleship. As another possible avenue of investigation we may do well to carefully consider Joseph's statement to the priesthood holders during the malaria epidemic in Nauvoo as recorded by Parley P. Pratt: "Brother Joseph, while in the Spirit, rebuked the Elders who would continue to lay hands on the sick from day to day without the power to heal them. Said he: 'It is time that such things ended. *Let the Elders either obtain the power of God to heal the sick or let them cease to minister the forms without the power.*'" [Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, Classics in Mormon Literature series (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 254. (Italics in original)]. We have rightly emphasized the many healings which took place in Nauvoo, Montrose and the vicinity on 22 July, 1839, [recorded in chapter 19 of Wilford Woodruff's *Leaves from My Journal*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 63-65] but in light of Joseph's remarks we might also ask ourselves why such healings are not more common among us.

[93]The episode in the ninth chapter of John does not say that God made the man blind in order to show forth his power. If we suggest that the people Christ healed were originally made ill by God's design (whether to test them, teach them, or manifest the power of God) we effectively deny the goodness of Christ's healing work since he created the problem (or at least willed it) in the first place. What John 9 says is that the man's blindness was not his nor his parents doing, but his infirmity now provides an opportunity to demonstrate "the works of God". The works of God are not found in the binding and maiming of his children, but in their healing and deliverance.

[94]In the touching narrative found in Luke 13:11-17 we find an interesting example of Christ making reference to Satan as the cause of infirmity rather than the more common idea of evil spirits.

overlooked. The following excerpts from the account exemplify the love that the risen Lord demonstrated to his New World disciples:

> And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.
>
> And he said unto them: Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you.
>
> Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy.
>
> For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you.
>
> And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him.
>
> And they did all, both they who had been healed and they who were whole, bow down at his feet, and did worship him; and as many as could come for the multitude did kiss his feet, insomuch that they did bathe his feet with their tears.…
>
> And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of praying unto the Father, he arose; but so great was the joy of the multitude that they were overcome.
>
> And it came to pass that Jesus spake unto them, and bade them arise.
>
> And they arose from the earth, and he said unto them: Blessed are ye because of your faith. And now behold, my joy is full.
>
> And when he had said these words, he wept, and the multitude bare record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.
>
> And when he had done this he wept again;
>
> And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.
>
> And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did minister unto them.
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> And the multitude did see and hear and bear record; and they know that their record is true for they all of them did see and hear, every man for himself; and they were in number about two thousand and five hundred souls; and they did consist of men, women, and children.[95]

When we turn to the narrative of Christ's personal ministration to the people of the Book of Mormon, the testimony of his love is augmented and magnified as we witness Him

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[95]III Nephi 17:5-9, 18-25.

healing *all* of the sick and afflicted, teaching them, praying with them, crying with them, and remaining with them because of their longing for His continued presence.

Still, there is another element in the life of the Savior that we have not yet discussed and that must be recognized. In describing the attributes of Christ, love, mercy, and compassion are not the only aspects to be considered. Many in Mormonism and in Christendom generally have made reference to Christ's expulsion of the money changers from the temple, his vituperative accusations against the scribes and Pharisees, or his accusing command to Peter, "Get thou behind me, Satan," as a demonstration of the wrath of God. The logic presented is that Christ exhibited anger and retaliation and we ought to be warned, therefore, of the fierceness of God's wrath. But this is circular reasoning: assuming traditional conceptions of God's justice and anger (concepts inherited from the Old Testament tradition), such scholars have sought to demonstrate these attributes in the life of Christ. The interpretation of these events in the life of the Savior is all too frequently colored by a prior concept of God, and the examples given are weak and only distantly analogous to the subject. If a writer assumes that God must possess a certain trait and, based on that assumption, garners evidence of such an attribute in the life of the Savior, it is meaningless to then try to suggest that the Father must *therefore* embody that trait—and its pre-determined definition—as well.

When one begins from the record of the Savior, rather than from a philosophical or cultural construct about the nature of God, what does he or she find? Harsh words to the wicked, to be sure, and forceful action against those who would corrupt and defile, but not violence or abuse. Never does he strike back in anger. Not once does he seek vengeance. He is uncompromising but never vindictive, never coercive, and never personally offended by those who attack and accuse him.[96] The God revealed in Jesus Christ is demonstrably a God of love, forgiveness and compassion. He heals, he forgives, he cares, he loves. Such a God is truly worthy of worship.

So let us try to imagine for the purposes of doctrinal discussion that what Christ said is true and that the Son perfectly resembles the attributes of the Father. Would the Christ we read about in the New Testament or the Book of Mormon make a man blind in order to teach him patience or some other virtue? Would Christ give a woman cerebral palsy just to see how she would respond to it? Would Christ plant an evil tendency in someone's character to tempt him or her away from righteousness? And since we will be seeking in this thesis to understand the meaning of Christ's atonement, other questions are pertinent as well: If an individual offended Christ, would he hold a grudge? If a woman were taken in sin, would he accuse her? If someone

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[96]What can Mormons make of 'anger', 'wrath', and 'chastening' language in the scriptures—especially the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants? What can be understood by those terms or the concepts of justice and punishment? LDS discussion cannot dismiss them with facile disregard even when they fail to square with the Latter-day Saint sense of morality,—what Mormons usually refer to as the light of Christ. Mormons must make an honest effort to understand why such language is used and how far it is to be understood literally. How much of that language is culturally inherited? How much is included because humankind fails to understand the terms of love? The Book of Mormon teachings about God's justice, punishment and anger will be addressed in later chapters.

transgressed the law or simply made an honest mistake would Christ's righteousness force that individual—or someone else—to pay him a price in suffering? If someone, *anyone*, sought Christ's healing power, would he turn them down saying, "No, go your way and be comforted. Your ailment is for your own good and you can inspire others with your endurance"? If God is fully revealed in the person of Christ, he would never do the things so often attributed to him because he abhors human suffering as thoroughly as we do. If we can imagine ourselves being more forgiving, more compassionate or more empathetic than our God in any given situation, we have not yet learned the simple lessons taught through Christ's life of love.

We began this chapter with a discussion of the concepts of unity and separateness in the Godhead. Since Mormon doctrine begins from the perspective of the Father and the Son's physical distinctness, it has been difficult to maintain the equally important concern for their unity of will and purpose, especially when the notion of sovereignty has been introduced into the discussion. As we have briefly examined the characteristics of Christ the disparity between our descriptions of God the Father and Christ the Son have become manifest. The LDS concept of unity in the Godhead has been severely compromised because attention has consistently been drawn elsewhere. By following in the ideological footsteps of Christian metaphysics, popular Latter-day Saint doctrine has fallen into the same pitfalls as traditional theology. We will do well to commence a thorough re-examination of LDS scripture beginning from the basis that Christ is the perfect manifestation of the Father and that our God is therefore a God of perfect love.

## OF STONES AND SERPENTS

What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?
Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?[97]

We have attempted in this chapter to point out the influence that our categories of *ritual* and *philosophical* approaches to religion have exercised on popular LDS formulations of the doctrine of God. We have been primarily concerned with how the notion of sovereignty that is assumed by traditional Christian theodicy has also predominated in Mormon discussions of the problem of evil. But such discussions have been challenged on the basis of their weak descriptions of God's benevolence and the distinctions implied between the will of the Father and the Son. Although Mormon discussion has almost universally accepted the assumptions of traditional theodicy, absolute sovereignty is incompatible with LDS doctrine and we have

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[97]Matt. 7:9-11.

suggested that the Latter-day Saint treatment of God might usefully assert benevolence—rather than power—as the most fundamental and definitive characteristic of deity. From such a basis it is possible to conceive of a system in which God has the power necessary to save mankind, but that there are conditions in a fallen world that prevent his constant intervention.

These ideas have widespread repercussions, affecting not only our response to evil and suffering, but our understanding of the purpose of life, the significance of salvation and atonement, and the meaning of sin and repentance. In this thesis we will try to open doors for further investigation in each of these areas. Although the effects of God's goodness may be apparent in many ways upon each individual, for the purpose of this thesis we will focus primarily on those effects that are physical (both in mortality and eternity). The reasons for such a focus are based in the LDS concept of embodiment, which will be the general theme of chapters 3 to 6. In the remainder of the thesis we will embark on a series of short exploratory journeys into the implications of divine benevolence on LDS doctrine. According to Joseph Smith, "it is necessary for us to have an understanding of God himself in the beginning. If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it be a hard matter to get right."[98]

Throughout the history of the world men and women from all cultures and all time periods have sought to identify what or who God is. Humanity has worshipped the force of storms, the magic of fire, the powers of planting and harvesting. We have made offerings to the sun and moon. We have watched the stars for auspicious or cataclysmic signs. We have entreated the potency of the elements and bowed ourselves before images of men and beasts. In the formally 'religious' context as well as in the secular, we humans have been seeking through the centuries to discover meaning and purpose in the cosmos. So when we stumble across an idea that makes sense to us we *sacralize* it. We believe it to be holy. We worship it. But when we get down to the heart of things, what is it that we are worshipping? From the perspective of the worshipper, what is it that makes God *God*?

The resounding answer to that question that has come down almost universally through the ages is 'Power'. This world is unpredictable and bad things seem to happen far too often for us to be comfortable for very long. Therefore we look for something or someone to protect us or to make things turn out all right. To have any assurance at all that we are being looked after, we must believe that our God is powerful enough to take care of things. Hence, the central attribute of God—the defining characteristic and the reason for our worship throughout the ages—has been power.

But what do we find in Bethlehem? An infant. A crying, precarious, needy newborn. A babe, sent to save the world. Here is no warrior—no martial hero gripping a sword and ending oppression. No, power is not central in Bethlehem, and yet there, in a small cave befitting the shelter of animals, is God. Stripped of glory, incapable even of caring for himself or maintaining

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[98]*TPJS*, 343.

his own mortal life, but somehow *even so*, worthy of our adoration. As if to teach us a new reason for worship, God became man and offered through his life a 'more excellent way' to live.

Bethlehem, Nazareth, Gethsemane, Calvary. Yes, there is power in all of them, but it is derivative. Behind the power and at a much more basic level we discover love. He can relinquish power and remain God, but if he abandons his love he ceases to be. Is it possible that we have been worshipping God for all this time for all the wrong reasons? We have entreated Him with the hope of getting a bounty from his glory. But this is not devotion; it is aspiration. We have prayed at other times with the hope of pacifying his wrath. But this is not reverence; it is fear. At the end of the day, the one characteristic that makes God the deserving object of our religious adoration is his righteousness. All else could be removed and he would remain worthy of our worship. The central attributes of God are manifest more in the birth of a child than in the subduing or overthrowing of kingdoms. Christ has entered the world offering peace, forgiveness, healing, wholeness, love. As we learn to love in return, we will begin to worship God in truth.

# MATERIALITY AND THE SPIRIT

> The spirit of man is not a created being; it existed from eternity, and will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be eternal; and earth, water, etc., had their existence in an elementary state, from eternity.
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> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 158.

## METAPHYSICS

One of the most obvious points of interaction between theology and philosophy has traditionally concerned the nature and structure of reality known as metaphysics. Is this world real? What is the universe made of? Is there only one or is there more than one fundamental substance? Is there a world of existence beyond the material, and if so, does mankind somehow participate in it?[1] In the present day with our ever-increasing knowledge of the physical world from subatomic interactions to the motions and makeup of the cosmos, this kind of metaphysical speculation appears esoteric, archaic and decidedly unscientific. Philosophy and academic theology have tended to abandon the field of metaphysics arm in arm, leaving it to those who have failed to recognize the fruitlessness of the questions. With no reliable means of demonstration or verification, why bother with the discussion at all?

This methodological merger has created a modern academic Christianity in which all that is left of metaphysics is the nebulous haunting specter of what *might* exist out there somewhere, and the questions posed by the faint apparition are routinely and superciliously dismissed by the majority of modern theological schools. Theology has come of age and put away such childish things. But remove the hope of establishing some context for worship within a common understanding of reality and what is left of religion? Robbed of that which is characteristically a faith's enlivening essence, it is reduced to the empty shell that much modern research into religion expects it to be. It becomes but one more in an interesting series of social and psychological phenomena. Theology as an academic discipline can turn away from metaphysical inquiry and assumption, but in so doing it severs many of its ties to the religious community that engendered it.

Metaphysics is not a term aptly suited to Mormon conversation, but the questions raised by this branch of philosophy and the answers Mormonism posits to them are fundamental. To many, these issues may seem parochial or naïve, but they constitute the breath of life for religious thought and they will necessarily form the background for our investigation into the LDS doctrines of embodiment and salvation.

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[1] It is frequently suggested that the pre-Socratics were the first to formally pursue the inquiry of metaphysics. In one sense this can be considered accurate, but it is also misleading. A significant percentage of ancient mythology is centrally concerned with the questions of cosmology, ontology and meaning which define traditional metaphysics. The *Enuma Elish*, the early Egyptian creation myth preserved on the Shabako stone, and the myth of *Atrahasis* are three obvious Near Eastern examples pre-dating Greek speculation. The search for ultimate answers, even when discussed within the context of philosophy, has ever been a religious pursuit.

RELIGION AND THE MATERIAL WORLD

Varying conceptions of the physical universe have played a central role in defining the direction of worldwide religious belief and practice. The opinion one holds of the world is conditioned by that individual's notion of the nature of ultimate being. Does reality consist of those objects and events we see around us, or is there a deeper, more profound reality 'out there' beyond the physical realm? If such a reality exists, how are we related to it (if at all) and what are its implications for our present condition and situation? Would such a 'spiritual' dimension be ultimately preferable to the physical reality we experience from day to day? And if so, in what way would a believer demonstrate that preference? The reasoning of *homo religiosus* universally insists upon a transcendent reality.[2] Indeed, the impetus behind much religious endeavor has been the attempt to gain freedom from the moral and/or intellectual bondage of corporeality. This body and indeed the entire world that we encounter in common experience are often regarded by the religious mind as either illusory or inherently evil. Many Eastern faiths accept the former by denying that essential reality rests in the physical world with its pains and injustices, while Western religious traditions with their doctrines of the fall generally lean—to varying degrees—toward the latter view.[3] Pushing the occidental line of reasoning to its limits, some forms of Gnosticism combined aspects of Zoroastrian moral dualism with Plato's philosophical world of pure forms to elaborate a system in which the physical world, although real, was intrinsically evil—the product of a demiurge who had captured and corrupted a portion of the spiritual universe by encasing it in the baneful prison of matter.

Although traditional Christian doctrine has avoided and even anathematized such extreme positions and most academic theology has entirely bracketed the ideas from discussion[4], popular Christianity has regularly incorporated the neo-Platonic reverence for the realm of pure spirit and has generally maintained the noble aspiration to eventually set aside the physical world in favor of something better. That which is of supreme religious significance lies beyond the bounds of mortality in that sphere of existence associated with the spirit. This has not come about by the denial of reality to material being, but simply by the denial of permanence. The physical world of experience is temporary and while its characteristic moral effects upon the soul will persist beyond death, in itself the world is transient and therefore ultimately inconsequential. Again, it was largely through the introduction of neo-Platonism into Christian doctrine that the

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[2]Even Confucianism which maintains no official metaphysics, popularly admits the existence of supernatural beings. For this and some other faiths, the spirits of the deceased are often assigned the role which the gods characteristically take in more overtly metaphysical religions.

[3]Christian Science allies itself at this point with the predominantly oriental tradition. The Hindu concept of materiality as *maya* (illusion) is also demonstrated in the first principle of knowledge which Krishna explains to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* through the recognition that "I am not this body." An interesting parallel to this type of thought can be found in the Australian concept of Dreamtime as well as other mythical histories ancient and modern which are held by their narrators to be constitutive of a more fundamental reality than personal experience.

[4]Beliefs concerning the spiritual realm are still studied and researched as subjects belonging to anthropology, sociology and psychology of religion, but are seldom addressed in strictly theological discourse.

radical dichotomy between the two realms was established for the West. God, a being of pure spirit (consciously associated with the Platonic sphere of Ideas or Forms) had called the universe into existence. Through the work of Christ humankind can now participate in the life of pure spirit throughout eternity.[5]

At the popular level, religious seeking is widely concerned with the transcendent, the eternal, the spiritual, flowing out of the notion that the world of spirit is more real, more significant, more fundamental than the material creation. One of the uniting factors for much religious thought is the concept of moral or ontological superiority attributed to the spiritual realm. The broad scope of traditional religious belief has either implied or declared a radical distinction between spirit and matter, disparaging the physical world to some extent and aspiring ultimately to its dissolution in favor of the pure and noble realm of spirit.[6]

Those describing religious thought as observers rather than participants are at times ideologically and socially inclined to similarly divide the universe of the religious believer into two opposing realms but with the tendency to transpose the superiority of the two, validating that which is observable, demonstrable, repeatable (scientific) and treating any surplus claimed by the adherent as a curious psychological or social phenomenon. Something is either natural or supernatural, fact or fantasy, normal or paranormal, science or myth, rational or irrational. For the modern researcher, each of these dichotomies implies in its way the distinction between reality and imagination.

Another scholarly categorization that has explicitly sought to understand how the duality is perceived by the believer is the contrast between the sacred and the profane.[7] The profane dimension includes all those events or objects around us that are not in some way directly associated by the believer with the realm of the sacred. Any object in the physical universe can take on religious significance if one assumes that it represents a point of contact with the divine. A temple, a mountain, a tree, a shrine, a house, a storm, an animal, a person, or events such as a war, a death, a birth, or even sensations and emotions like anger, love, or inner peace can all be viewed as irruptions of the sacred into the profane world. Wherever the transcendent cosmos is perceived as having an impact on our own, there the mundane becomes holy. According to Eliade and others of this school, that hierophany is what defines the holy in religious man's existence.[8] But notice that in this common usage there is no necessary moral value placed on the

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[5]The influential contributions of Aquinas, Maimonides and others helped sway Christianity away from this Augustinian dualism between the physical and spiritual realities, but even in the largely Thomistic domain of modern Roman Catholic doctrine, the life of the spirit is paramount.

[6]Most Protestant theologians in this century have,taken the opposite approach by neglecting the discussion of the world of spirit and focusing instead on the reality of experience. It seems that for the religious mind the spiritual and physical realms have been largely irreconcilable. One has been constrained to choose which realm is real and significant to religious thought and living.

[7]On this topic, see for example Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1977) and Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

[8]Ibid., See also, Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Garland, 1985).

sacred as a category.[9] It may be good, evil, or neutral as long as it belongs to the realm of the otherworldly and influences or is influenced by something we can recognize in our own universe. In this way of thinking the heavenly and the diabolical both belong to the numinous world of spirit.

This suggestion that the sacred (the spiritual world) imbues the profane (the material world) with religious significance raises a metaphysical concern. How can two competing realities intersect at all? In what sense can the divine and spiritual manifest itself in the mundane and physical? How can someone existing within the physical universe ever come into contact with the spiritual plane in the first place? The usual answer is that there is a spirit in man that is (or can be) attuned to that external reality and which recognizes it naturally. But this merely shifts the question slightly into the context of the mind-body problem. Descartes speculated that the mind (the immaterial conscious self residing within the body) creates tiny oscillations in the obscure pineal gland of the brain that in turn affect the body in various ways. But if the mind— or the spirit—is essentially distinct from the body, it matters not how minuscule the contact; such interaction remains unresolved.[10]

In this chapter we begin our discussion of embodiment that will continue through chapter six and form the basis for the subsequent discussion of salvation. We will begin by exploring some of the metaphysical assumptions of Latter-day Saint belief regarding the nature of matter and spirit and the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms. The intent of this discussion is two-fold. First, we will investigate the usefulness of categories that divide religious reality from physical experience demonstrating that the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon suggest that there is an essential continuity between spirit and matter. Because of Joseph's teachings on the subjects of spirit and matter, time and eternity, etc., each of these dichotomies has become suspect as an appropriate way of viewing human existence in LDS thought. On the whole, Latter-day Saints have not paid enough doctrinal attention to the issue of embodiment and materiality. This has practical implications for the significance of mortality in Mormonism and these implications have yet to be fully explored. Since matter is essential to God and resurrection is emphatically corporeal, this has profound implications for

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[9]In theory one could add a third category such as the diabolical in order to subdivide the realm of the sacred along moral lines, but this goes beyond the intent of most writers. The fundamental distinction being made by most scholars is between that which is real and that which is imagined to be real. For those doing the imagining, the categories may seem absurd.

[10]This question is more philosophical than religious in nature, but one reasonable response from the perspective of the believer is to say, "*I don't know how the two realms meet, but they obviously do. The lack of an explanation does not invalidate the data. [Such and such miracle] happened and to dismiss that evidence solely on the basis of ignorance of* how *it happened is ridiculous.*" This is methodologically sound, but unless the 'evidence' is verifiable it will offer nothing convincing for the skeptic. Those who have made the suggestion that, as an artefact that can be studied, researched, and tested, the Book of Mormon should stand as exhibit A for any investigation into the validity of the restoration, have found that this argument is not always convincing even *given* significant and palpable data. Again one's concept of reality will determine the parameters of acceptable evidence: if "books don't come from angels" then it *cannot* be treated seriously. It is interesting to note that this works from both sides. Regardless of whether one leans toward religious faith or scientific pragmatism, conclusions are often based more on the presuppositions of what is possible than upon the data.

the LDS sense of identity.

Second, we will derive from the Book of Mormon a model by which to understand the relationship between experience and its effects upon the soul in the Mormon world view. We will suggest that from the perspective of the doctrines of the restoration, all experience has religious significance in addition to and independent of the issue of individual guilt or worthiness. This will establish the basis for our subsequent investigation into the LDS interpretive possibilities for the topics of agency, sin, repentance, atonement and salvation.

MORMONISM AND THE CONCEPT OF MATTER

Most Mormons are familiar with the statements made by Joseph Smith that we will discuss in this chapter. His contributions offer the possibility of a completely revised view of metaphysics and the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds. But in common parlance and even in more formal settings, the implications of those teachings are easily overlooked when addressing other doctrinal topics. As we saw in chapter two, doctrinal discussion at the popular level does not always reflect the idiosyncratic peculiarities of a speaker's religious heritage, and this is particularly true in Mormonism due to the combination of a statistically large convert membership and a lay clergy intentionally lacking in theological credentials. Ideas that are not entirely compatible with the teachings of modern revelation are innocently introduced through the benign assumption of interpretive models, theological vocabulary and even inspirational hymns, stories, or phrases. Joseph insisted that "we should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true 'Mormons',"[11] and he proclaimed that "one of the grand fundamental principles of 'Mormonism' is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may."[12] Such openness to ideas is liberating, but it also imposes upon the Latter-day Saints the responsibility to learn how to recognize that which adds to the body of "truth" and that which contradicts it. This is obviously not an easy task, especially given the importance of individual experience already discussed. All truth is not of equal value in Mormonism, and those suggestions that introduce unnecessary paradox into LDS understanding should be analyzed for their strengths and weaknesses and placed in their appropriate contexts.

It is commonplace in Mormon conversation to adopt and follow the popular religious inclination to suggest a fundamental distinction between the spiritual and physical worlds, yearning after the spiritual realm of purity and innocence and seeking freedom from the injustice, cruelty and temptations of corporeality. Mortal experience is consequential insofar as it influences the eternal spirit, so the meaning of life in the Latter-day Saint understanding lies primarily in the moral impact that experience has upon the spirit. If a child tells a deliberate lie,

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[11] *TPJS*, 316.
[12] Ibid., 313.

the moral character of that child's soul is weakened. If the same child selflessly shares toys with another, his or her moral character is strengthened. The incremental effects of choices and experiences throughout life determine the moral worth of that soul in the sight of God. Eventually, if the individual is sufficiently worthy, God will bless him or her with a heavenly reward. Some actions such as prayer, ordinances and repentance allow the individual's guilt to be overcome on the basis of Christ's merit. A central concern in much popular Mormonism discussion is the question of whether one's thoughts and deeds are right or wrong in the eyes of God. Beyond that immediate context, action loses religious significance. The moral culpability of the actor is more clearly and more commonly regarded as a religious issue than is the pain of the afflicted. Certainly, Mormonism teaches that man should seek to alleviate pain where possible, but the understood intention is to show kindness, to demonstrate or cultivate moral virtue, to keep the commandments, or perhaps to provide a future opportunity for moral growth to the person served—not because the succor itself has religious meaning.[13]

In addition to these moral consequences, there is an additional opportunity in mortality that Latter-day Saints also emphasize as having eternal significance.

> Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.[14]

As an individual grows in knowledge and exercises that knowledge for good (or evil), he or she participates in the life of the spirit; the soul is thereby either strengthened or weakened, and moral standing before God is determined. In practice, many LDS writers and speakers have overlooked the implications of their own doctrines of matter and spirit and have promoted the traditional religious condemnation of the physical world and the nobility of the pure unembodied spirit. It is not uncommon in Latter-day Saint discussions to hear for example the well-known and well-meaning sentiment that "we are not mortal beings having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a mortal experience." This idea seems to capture the essence of a common religious sense of identity, but it is not easily reconciled with the LDS understanding of embodiment and materiality. As we will see, there is no necessary distinction between the two realms in LDS doctrine, so the choice is not a necessary one.

This may at first seem a minor and insignificant point, but the perception of what is real

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[13]In fact, as we discussed in chapter two, suffering is commonly viewed as the means by which God either strengthens the character of his creations or deals his justice upon them. If that is consistently the case then it would seem reckless and morally counter-productive for the believer to offer relief at all. Only when faith in such a God runs out, when the suffering becomes simply too mindless and cruel to be tolerated could one justify charitable intervention.

[14]D&C 130:18-19. Notice, though, that intellect is gained by both diligence and obedience and not simply by the accumulation of facts. Following the definition applied by Elder Bruce R. McConkie in his influential *Mormon Doctrine*, intelligence is frequently understood by Mormons as "the *righteous* application of knowledge."

and what constitutes something to be of ultimate concern has exercised a profound influence upon the entire spectrum of Christian doctrine. In most LDS publications and discussions, the popular views of Christianity regarding the nature of sin, the method of repentance, the power of the atonement and the meaning of salvation form the basis of the discourse, with here and there a few obvious additions thrown in to allow room for the LDS understanding of the fall or the Mormon concept of heaven. As a rule, Latter-day Saints perceive a much more fundamental distinction between their own doctrines and those of Christianity generally than actually exists in practice. Mormons enthusiastically point out the obvious distinguishing characteristics involved in the acceptance of additional scripture and ongoing prophetic church leadership, etc., but the common Mormon views on the issues of sin, repentance, forgiveness and atonement, as well as other issues of central doctrinal concern, are almost indistinguishable from those of modern evangelical Christians. Sin is willful disobedience to divine commands. Repentance is forsaking sinful thoughts and behavior. Forgiveness is God's willingness to overlook past offenses. And the Atonement is the price that Christ paid to secure God's merciful judgment upon us. That is the prevalent understanding among Latter-day Saints, and it has offered them the same message of hope and inspiration that it has offered to most Christians in a majority of contexts. But the burden of this thesis is to suggest that LDS doctrine and scripture offer a significantly restructured view of the meaning of life and the Gospel message. This proposed interpretation is founded on the principles of a benevolent God and a revised Latter-day Saint understanding of the relationship between the body and the spirit.

THE MATERIALIST VIEWS OF JOSEPH SMITH

This exploration naturally begins with the Mormon belief in the corporeal body of God. LDS doctrine holds emphatically that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are two separate beings both of whom are embodied in flesh and bone.[15]

> "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us."[16]

The Son received his body in the resurrection and has now been exalted in the highest glory of the Celestial Kingdom. This idea was not exceptional in Christianity, but the corollary certainly was, viz. that the Father, too, received his body through resurrection following his own mortality and death.

> God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent

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[15]This is in contrast to "flesh and blood" which is used to describe mortal beings.
[16]D&C130:22.

> today, and the great God who holds the world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.…We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea.…These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.[17]

This teaching that God *became* God through a process of perfection undid (for LDS thought) the very framework of traditional metaphysics, but the idea that logically followed it caused even greater division between those who accepted Joseph's prophetic role and those who rejected him.

> Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.[18]

Not only did Joseph preach that God had once been like man, but he added the converse statement that man could progress to become like God. The language of deification that had been popular among so many of the early Christian writers but had been adamantly abandoned by orthodoxy since the fifth century unexpectedly resurfaced in the preaching of Joseph Smith.[19] But given Joseph's teachings about God as a resurrected and corporeal being, the doctrine cannot be spiritualized as it can in Christianity more broadly to suggest a mystical union. The doctrine of Mormonism that has perhaps resulted in the most animosity from proponents of

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[17]*TPJS*, 345-46.

[18]Ibid., 346-47.

[19]It is now widely recognized that many of the early Christian Fathers made reference to the eventual divinization of man, though such references are often dismissed as allegorical. Still, it is not easy to find justification for such an interpretation of Irenaeus (*Contra Haereses* III.18.7; IV.20.5-6; 33.4; 38.4; 52.1; V. praef.), Clement (*Exhortation to the Greeks* I.8.4; *Stromata* VI.14; VII.16; *De Oratione* 27.13; *On the Gospel of John* 11.3.19; 20.29), Origen (*Contra Celsus* III.28) and especially Athenasius (*On the Incarnation of the Word* 65; *Oration Against the Arians* II.21.70. See also Basil of Caesaria (*On the Holy Spirit* IX.23) and Gregory of Nazianzus (*Orationes* XXIX.19). This can hardly be glossed over as a Gnostic heresy since many of its proponents were the most outspoken critics of popular gnosticism. The basis of the idea can be recognized in Matt. 5:48; John 17:11; Rom. 8:15-17; and I John 3:2. These references are quoted in Keith Norman, "Divinization: The Forgotten Teaching of Early Christianity," *Sunstone* (Winter, 1975), 14-19. See also Philip Barlow, "Unorthodox Orthodoxy: The Idea of Deification in Christian History," *Sunstone* (September-October, 1983), 13. Hastings Rashdall discusses this idea at some length in *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology being the Bampton Lectures for 1915* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 168, 228, 239-41.

traditional Christianity is the assertion that after death the righteous will progress to become as God is.[20] These ideas provide a sweeping context in which to understand the significance of mortality, but Joseph made further claims that LDS doctrine must consider clearly and the implications of which must be made clear.

In response to the preaching of his day, with its emphasis on the transcendence of the spiritual world, Joseph made a radical departure. He speaks of the two realms, but redefines the spiritual dimension as belonging unquestionably *within* the material realm.

> In tracing the thing to the foundation, and looking at it philosophically, we shall find a very material difference between the body and the spirit; *the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance.* With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state *the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body*; that it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection, be again united with it.[21]

The implications of such a suggestion are remarkable. Instead of treating the spirit realm as belonging to a distinct reality, Joseph explains that spirit is part of the material world, but that it exists at an unobservable level. It existed in its material form prior to the organization of the body and will continue to exist materially after the death of the body and will in the resurrection again be united with the additional matter that designates embodiment. According to Joseph's unequivocal teachings, the material realm did not spring into being through God's creative act but has existed forever.

> Speaking of eternal duration of matter, I said: There is no such thing as immaterial matter. *All spirit is matter*, but is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes. We cannot see it, but when our bodies are purified, *we shall see that it is all matter.* (May 17, 1843.)[22]

Two distinct ideas are evidenced in this statement. First, in Joseph's theology the elements that constitute the material world have always existed. They have been organized into a specific structure, but they existed prior to their organization and will continue to exist after its disintegration. The material world, though capable of alteration, is not of transient but of everlasting duration. Of further significance, the spirit and the entire spirit realm is composed of this matter. Joseph was making the bold assertion that the heavenly kingdom of God as well as the entire spiritual plane belongs to the same physical universe with which we have direct experience. It is not all tangible, but it is all substance. If it is not matter, then it does not exist. Dealing as this teaching does with the fundamental nature of reality, few contributions of the

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[20]It is to be expected that if Mormonism begins to grow in predominantly Islamic countries with their concept of *shirq*, this will again be a major source of contention.

[21]*TPJS*, 207 (italics added).

[22]Ibid., 301-302 (italics added). This idea was later canonized in D&C 131:7-8.

prophet has more broad-reaching implications than this one. His doctrines of deification and his teachings about angels, ministering spirits and the gift of the Holy Ghost constitute integral features of this understanding that there is one reality in which man, spirits, angels and God all dwell together.

But Joseph made it clear that he did not consider all matter to be indistinguishable. His description of spirit-matter is fascinating. He states that it is "more fine or pure," more "elastic and refined" than physical matter as we regularly perceive it. It would be possible to debate whether Joseph was suggesting a dualistic (or pluralistic) physical universe in which spirit and body (and resurrected body) were all material but made of fundamentally different substances, or an attributive monism in which all existence is consubstantial but represents distinct forms of organization, but any of these interpretations is possible within an LDS framework.[23] It has been common to interpret Joseph's ideas as a dualist position, maintaining a fairly traditional rigid distinction between spirit and matter, but a monistic or pluralistic interpretation seems equally possible.[24] The dualist interpretation has at times been equated with the Book of Mormon reference to "things to act and things to be acted upon,"[25] associating them respectively with spirit and matter, but this way of thinking reverts easily in practice to an immaterial concept of spirit. Whichever way one decides to divide up substance, the message of Joseph's remarks is that the religious universe is that same cosmos in which we live, and move, and have our being[26] and that there are considerable portions of this physical universe with which mankind is generally ignorant.[27]

Joseph was an extreme and thoroughgoing materialist—not in the sense of accepting only that which can be empirically demonstrated, but in his assertion that everything that exists is material. We cannot perceive it all with our senses, but it is ultimately all made of the same substance. One fascinating and extremely relevant question for those involved in the discussion of Mormon doctrine is how LDS scholars might interpret and describe Joseph's ideas in the contemporary late 20th century environment, phrased as they are in the terminology of his day. What was the intention of terms like "element," "refined," "elastic," "pure," or "substance"? The

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[23]To suggest a parallel from particle physics, consensus has not been reached on whether the great variety of quarks, leptons and gauge particles demonstrates a pluralism of substances or whether all of these 'fundamental particles' are composed of other even more fundamental particles common to all which would suggest a renewed version of attributive monism.

[24]The first part of Joseph's statement above (at note 18) has been taken as supporting a dualist interpretation since he refers to a "very material difference between the body and the spirit." The context and especially the explanation that follows would suggest that his intention was to elucidate "a very material difference between [the revealed doctrine of] the body and the spirit [and those ideas imagined popularly]".

[25]2 Nephi 2:14 "And now, my sons, I speak unto you these things for your profit and learning; for there is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon."

[26]Liberation theology has taken a related stance in rejecting the dualism between natural and supernatural, temporal and spiritual, profane and sacred, but rather than combining the two into a greater whole, it rejects the significance or the existence of the spiritual world in order to focus on the secular.

[27]While attributive monism, functional dualism or pluralism are all possible within the LDS framework, the dualism of material and immaterial being is not. From the Mormon perspective if something is immaterial it does not exist.

only path to suggested interpretations is speculation, but the possibilities are intriguing when we bear in mind that Joseph was purposely drawing the saints' attention away from the transcendent realm of traditional metaphysics to focus on the reality of the world of substance of which humanity is an eternal part.

From Joseph's assertions, the "spiritual matter" of which he spoke is to be characterized and perceived as part of the physical realm (whether already discovered, merely theorized, or as yet unknown). But much of that which was classified in Joseph's early 19th century milieu as "unobservable," "invisible," and "imperceptible" is now routinely observed and studied.[28] LDS scholars should recognize that if Joseph's statements are to be taken at face value, technology may someday advance to the point at which it is possible to detect objects belonging to the "spiritual world". Indeed, it is consistent to wonder whether technology may not already have enhanced the abilities of our "impure" eyes to the point that at least some of what we can now discern is what would have been termed "spiritual" in 1843.[29] Whether technology will ever reach that capability or not is actually beside the point. Since Joseph made it clear that in the Mormon world view, there is only one reality and the spiritual dimension is a subset thereof, Latter-day Saints have no reason to balk at the suggestion that the individual spirit (which Mormons believe animates every living being) is potentially, or at least theoretically, discernible. The practical outcome of all of this is that there exists no mind-body problem for LDS theology. If the spirit is a part of the same material world as the body, theoretically observable but perhaps permanently unidentifiable, then the possibility of their interaction creates no philosophical dilemma.

Since our intent in this chapter is to suggest an original LDS conception of body and spirit, it does not much matter where one decides to assign spiritual existence once we recognize that to speak of the spirit and the spirit world in Mormonism is to discuss conditions that exist in the physical realm. Spirit could be theoretically linked in the model with anything from DNA to atomic forces, neural impulses, fundamental particles, or as yet unexplored possibilities that we may discover in the future. Whatever else the prophet's assertions may imply, they leave no room for treating the spirit as belonging to a distinct reality from that of empirical investigation. For those within the LDS community who are speaking or writing in a religious rather than a scientific context, the term "spiritual" would still be the most apt designation for this type of

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[28]Physics in the last century has discovered particles and postulated realities that we would today describe as physically evident and demonstrable—or at least predicted—but which would have been regarded as immaterial and perhaps even spiritual or pure fantasy in the context of the Newtonian conception of physics. In particular the relationship between matter and energy and the possibility of transformation at the subatomic level from one to the other offers a fascinating context in which to discuss the LDS perception of the nature of spirit.

[29]We might reasonably ask what our terms mean in practice for the LDS scientist. If matter is mostly empty space, at what point can something be legitimately called 'physical' as opposed to 'spiritual'? We cannot naturally see an electron or a quark, but with the proper equipment we can detect them. We recognize elements which have no mass and no charge (such as the photon, discovered in 1905) as an integral part of our physical world. That being the case, how can we define the boundary between what would in theological terms be called the physical and the spiritual realms?

material organization, but such writers should always bear in mind that in Mormonism, the term makes reference to a physical reality.

In Mormonism (as in many other religions) objects, events, and circumstances typically become imbued with religious significance as they are seen to relate to the world of eternity. If Latter-day Saints hold to a strong ideological distinction between this universe and God's, then events, places and actions become holy here and there as Mormons perceive God's hand reaching out and touching this world: a grove of trees, a temple, a book. The hierophany is not necessarily viewed as the irruption of a substantially different realm upon our own, but the mere manifestation of the otherwise "unseen world." That is one way to find religious significance in life, and it is an influential, almost archetypal paradigm, but it is not the only way for Mormons to discover meaning in mortality. If they instead take the view that this world is a part of the universe in which God dwells, then literally everything is imbued with 'religious' significance and value. Some things are good, others evil, and a great many are completely and intrinsically amoral, but every particle of the cosmos becomes relevant to LDS thought, and all human action in this universe indicates participation, of one type or another, in the life of God.[30]

## EMBODIMENT AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

Let us turn now to an examination of what the Book of Mormon has to say concerning materiality and the relationship between body and spirit. One of the most significant doctrinal discourses in the Book of Mormon providing insight into this topic is the account of Lehi's counsel to his son, Jacob. The first segment that we will evaluate deals with the results of obtaining a body as a consequence of the fall.

> And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.[31]

Lehi informs Jacob that had there been no fall into mortality, there would have been no posterity

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[30]Although working from a distinct logical grounding, LDS thought thus bears many similarities to the sacramental theology of Teilhard de Chardin or the piety of Buber's Hassidic Judaism in that every aspect of life can be considered to partake of and participate in the holy.

[31]2 Nephi 2:22-25. It should be noted that the fall in Mormon usage does not refer to sexual transgression. LDS doctrine holds that Adam and Eve were husband and wife, married by the blessing of God in Eden. Therefore, the consummation of that holy marriage is not considered a sinful act. Varying suggestions have been made in Latter-day Saint writings as to the nature of the fall, but other than the literality of its occurrence and its effects, little can be asserted as an official position.

of Adam and Eve, and even their capacity for experience was limited. But as a result of the fall the human race has entered mortality and experience is possible for all. The stated purpose of man's existence in mortality, the reason for embodiment, is to receive the opportunity to experience joy. Lehi does not clarify whether joy is to be found *in* mortality or simply as the ultimate possible result of mortality, but the point of the passage is that the fall was a necessary step in the process of providing bodies for humankind and opening the doorway to the possibility of joy. Whether embodiment is positive in itself or merely as the means to an otherwise unavailable end is not elaborated.

Reading this passage, one might suggest that Lehi views corporeality as a necessary evil through which the spirits of men must pass in order to realize their potential, but his intent proves more complex. One of the terms frequently employed by the Book of Mormon authors in discussing mankind is "flesh." Lehi uses the word in verse 29 in a way that is generally recognized as a comment about embodiment.

> And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; And not choose eternal death, *according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein*, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom[32]

It is natural for us to read into this statement the idea sometimes ascribed to Paul that the body is evil and seeks corruption while the spirit is pure and seeks holiness. This line of reasoning suggests a constant moral battle between an individual's spirit and flesh. But that is not the point being made by Lehi. First of all, the spirit that is seeking eternal life is not the spirit of individual people (in this case Lehi's sons) but the Holy Spirit, so the contrast is not between a man's flesh and his spirit, but between "the flesh" and the "Holy Spirit". This is important because it replaces the usual dichotomy with a more general one. Further, Lehi does state that there is evil inherent in the flesh, but this must be put in context. In verse 27 Lehi has already mentioned "flesh" but with a very different connotation. The two pathways toward good and evil are clear, but it is not evident that Lehi intended to suggest that a man's spirit would make one choice and his flesh the other.

> Wherefore, men are *free according to the flesh*; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.[33]

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[32]2 Nephi 2:28-29 (italics added). Since the Book of Mormon contains no italics in its text, the italicized portions which occur in its citations throughout this thesis should be recognized as having been added for the sake of emphasis or clarity.

[33]2 Nephi 2:27.

Lehi's emphasis here is on freedom, that man is free to choose his eternal destiny, whether it be joy or misery. He is not making a statement about the evil of corporeality, but he is pointing out something about the fallen condition. The Book of Mormon references to "flesh" that are seen as disparaging the body refer in fact to man's fallen nature as we will discuss in chapter four.

An interesting Book of Mormon insight into the concept of embodiment is to be found in Mormon's editorial comments on the narrative of Christ's post-resurrection appearance to the Nephites. Three of the chosen twelve disciples had requested that they be allowed to remain on the earth, continuing in the Lord's service until his return. Their desire was granted, but in order to make it possible, they needed to be physically changed.

> And now behold, as I spake concerning those whom the Lord hath chosen, yea, even three who were caught up into the heavens, that I knew not whether they were cleansed from mortality to immortality—But behold, since I wrote, I have inquired of the Lord, and he hath made it manifest unto me that there must needs be a change wrought upon their bodies, or else it needs be that they must taste of death; Therefore, that they might not taste of death there was *a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not suffer pain nor sorrow* save it were for the sins of the world. Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day; but *there was a change wrought upon them, insomuch that Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them*; and they were sanctified *in the flesh*, that they were holy, and that the powers of the earth could not hold them. And in this state they were to remain until the judgment day of Christ; and at that day they were to receive a greater change, and to be received into the kingdom of the Father to go no more out, but to dwell with God eternally in the heavens.[34]

This presents a clear insight into the concept of embodiment held by Mormon, the principal compiler of the texts. He, too, suggests that evil, or at least temptation, is a part of the physical body, but the remedy is not disembodiment as we might traditionally expect, but physical change. This transformation liberates the three Nephites from temptation and suffering, but it is not permanent, and it anticipates the "greater [physical] change" that will take place, according to Mormon, at the judgment. Even though mortal bodies are recognized in the Book of Mormon as subject to sin, it is clearly not corporeality that is the perceived problem. Matter is nowhere portrayed as evil by the Book of Mormon writers. In fact, corporeality is consistently referred to as the final state of man, either in condemnation or salvation.

Though many references could be cited, the clearest for our purposes is probably Amulek's preaching to Zeezrom and the people of Ammonihah.

> Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that *all shall rise from the dead* and stand before God, and be judged

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[34] 3 Nephi 28:36-40.

according to their works. Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death. *The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time;* and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but *every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body,* and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning the resurrection of the mortal body. *I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption.*[35]

The Book of Mormon writers are clear, consistent and emphatic on the doctrine of bodily resurrection. Obviously, though they make reference to the body being associated with evil, that correlation is not with matter itself, but with the condition of mankind.

MATERIALITY AND THE MORMON SOUL

The two central concepts that Joseph Smith proposed on our subject are that for LDS theology (1) matter in one form or another and the physical universe that it comprises have always existed and will always exist, although the elements can be organized, disorganized and reorganized, and (2) the spiritual realm is a subset of the material. Our discussion on the first point has not addressed the effects of the fall but the inherent nature of the material world.[36] There is a tendency in LDS writing to speak of the "fallen world" and the "physical world" as synonymous, but this is misleading and the failure to make this distinction is a common error. Since LDS thought insists on a literal understanding of the fall, it is easy to engage in the condemnation of the physical world; however, in Mormonism the physical world existed in its organized form prior to the effects of the fall and the essential matter from which it is composed has always existed. The material world in LDS doctrine is neither illusory nor inherently evil. The machinery has been tampered with and compromised, but the intention is not therefore to abandon it but to repair it—or eventually even replace it, but it will be replaced in kind. The fallen world is temporary, but the physical world is ongoing. Things in it will continue to change and develop, but it will never cease to be nor lose its significance in eternity. The new heaven

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[35]Alma 11:41-45. Amulek's usage of the word "spiritual" is interesting here, since he has emphatically stated that the resurrection will be corporeal. He clearly cannot be suggesting immateriality and must be intending another meaning.

[36]The fall will be addressed in the following chapter.

and new earth in Mormon understanding are tangible and physical.

We now turn our attention to the implications of Joseph's second point, that the spiritual realm is a subset of the material. The statement that 'everything that exists is material' is the functional equivalent of the insistence that 'matter is all there is' that has ever been the clarion call of humanism in the battle between science and faith. But if what Joseph said is to be taken seriously, Mormonism endorses the scientific position. "There is no such thing as immaterial matter….it is all matter." The material world *is* all there is. But for Joseph Smith that did not further imply that there is no God, no heaven, no spirits and no devil, only that they are part of the same physical universe in which he found himself—along with friends and family, stones, trees, and ancient records. Joseph Smith perceived of Mormonism as the search for truth about all things, including and informed by the meaning and significance of human life as members of the family of God. The religious universe that he declared was as much the abode of mankind as it was the habitation of Gods, angels, and devils. And this same religious universe was simultaneously the domain of experience and empirical data. For Latter-day Saints, "religion" encompasses every field of human inquiry. From this perspective, science contributes to the religious understanding of truth, but it is neither the sole nor even necessarily the dominant contributor.[37]

The concept of materialism does not insist that if something cannot be detected then it does not exist. That is not the assumption of experimental science, as any particle physicist investigating the properties of gluons or gravitons can attest.[38] In the physical universe something is assumed to exist, even if unperceived or imperceptible, if its existence adequately explains otherwise enigmatic evidence.[39] The doctrines of the restoration and modern science agree absolutely on the proposition that much of this universe lies beyond the vista of humankind's technological discoveries, and both also agree that scientists may not have recognized many of their findings for what they will ultimately signify.

The hypotheses we are suggesting in this chapter are clearly not intended as scientific assumptions, but as suppositions upon which to base LDS theology. The assumptions of science are based upon mathematical models, empirical data and experimental anomalies, while the suppositions presented here are based on scriptural interpretation and modern revelation. Although it is instructive to place these ideas within current scientific understanding of the universe and the body, they are not intended for application beyond the world-view of the

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[37]Especially relevant is the passage from D&C 88:118: "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith." This passage could be interpreted to suggest that the initial condition of a lack of faith determines the need for academic and social instruction.

[38]The Vienna Circle's logical positivism said nothing about what exists and what does not, only about what can be confirmed by sense experience, and what can therefore be rationally discussed within the confines of philosophy.

[39]This, of course, does not mean that the assumption is correct—only that it is a possible answer which stands until disproved or seriously challenged by a more reasonable explanation.

Latter-day Saint.[40] The point we wish to make is that Mormonism insists that everything that happens or exists does so within a single continuous reality. There is not one realm of the physical and another distinct realm of the spiritual. There is only one reality in which spirit and matter coexist. If one assumes otherwise then the conceptual realm of spirit functions at the practical level as fantasy.[41]

We come now to the issue of personal identity in a conceptual universe where all that exists is matter. Many world religions have fostered in their adherents the belief that personality exists independent of material being. The historical religious preoccupation with death and the possibility of conquering it insists that personality must persist even after the body returns to the earth. It is not an uncommon religious experience to view the self as something that transcends the natural world and exists in eternity. The real self is frequently imagined as inhabiting the material world as a stranger, dwelling in a body of flesh that inhibits and restricts the soul's abilities. In death this world will be overcome and the true self will be set free to receive its reward based on the adequacy of its response to the trial of corporeality. For Latter-day Saints the popular understanding is remarkably similar. Some day in the future the individual will receive a perfected body, but the view toward corporeality in the present is not markedly different from that in many other religious traditions: the body is something to be subdued, controlled and eventually overcome.

The idea of personality being preserved beyond death is a fundamental doctrine in Mormonism, as is the existence of the individual personality prior to birth. We have already noted that Joseph taught that "the spirit existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust."[42] The point that is often overlooked in popular LDS discussion and writing is the recognition that according to the teachings of Joseph Smith, that everlasting spirit is composed of matter. It "is a substance;…it is material, but…it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body." That which defines individual personality in Mormonism is and always has been matter. But this can be taken another step as well. In the LDS concept of eternity personality had its existence even prior to spiritual embodiment. Again, it is common in Mormon discussion to conceptualize the eternal "intelligences" as having an existence independent of materiality. Prior to mortality and prior to spiritual existence the self was already present as an intelligence. This is generally conceived of as a state of existence as pure mind, consciousness itself. But Joseph's statements leave no room for such an interpretation. If the intelligence exists, then it is matter. It may be markedly different from the matter that composes spirit and corporeality, but it must be material or else it has no

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[40]For the Latter-day Saint scientist (whether physicist, biologist, neurologist, psychiatrist, etc.) these speculative ideas may prove to be of professional interest as well on account of the continuity of all truth which exists in the LDS perception of knowledge

[41]Though not explicit, this is a common assumption at the level of popular religion which treats experience with the sacred as a natural phenomena. It is only mysterious in the sense of how one comes to perceive it.

[42]*TPJS*, 207.

existence. The largely unheeded implication of Joseph's teachings is that the individual and everlasting self, the personality that is co-existent with God, is a material being.[43]

Where Latter-day Saints are prone to think of the body as an unwieldy vehicle in which the real self is temporarily housed, the teachings of their founding prophet suggest that the physical body is actually an extension of what men and women have always been. At one stage personal identity can be classified as having been "intelligence," a sphere of existence distinguished as one specific type of organization of the material elements that compose this universe. Those elements together constituted the personality.[44] The intelligence did not exist separate from the matter that formed it; they were the same thing.[45] At some point supplemental matter was added to the intelligence, thus defining it as "spirit." This additional matter further defined the personality so that it was no longer appropriate to label it simply as intelligence. The self became spirit, created out of the materials of this universe although still in a way that we would describe as "intangible." At mortal birth subsequent material was incorporated into the self creating corporeality and again redefining the nature of individual personality.[46] In the terminology of modern revelation this new type of being is the "soul."

> And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. And the redemption of the soul is through him that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it.[47]

In LDS thought the "soul of man" is not the essential element within but the whole.

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[43]"The elements are eternal. That which has a beginning will surely have an end; take a ring, it is without beginning or end—cut it for a beginning place and at the same time you have an ending place." (*TPJS*, 181). Joseph later used this same analogy of the ring which here describes "the elements" to discuss the intelligence of man (see *TPJS*, 354). The immortal nature of intelligence for Joseph Smith appears to have been based upon the eternal nature of the elements which compose it. The following passage is also instructive. The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal with God himself....I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the intelligence of spirits is immortal, and yet that it had a beginning? The intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end. That is good logic. That which has a beginning may have an end. There never was a time when there were not spirits; for they are co-equal with our Father in heaven." *(TPJS*, 353). B. H. Roberts was uncomfortable with the implications of the term "co-equal" and substituted "co-eternal" to concentrate on the duration of existence but it seems that Joseph was also intending the idea that mind or intelligence is composed of the same *materials* as God. See for example the thought with which he later continued his remarks, "If I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. *God himself could not create himself*" (*TPJS*, 354 italics added).

[44]Many Mormons have come up with a very atomistic portrayal of reality in which every particle of matter has 'life' and in some depictions even consciousness. In the present interpretation matter only has life if it is organized in such a way as to create intelligence. Matter which is without form and void, although it may be considered the product of life (and energy), is "empty and desolate" according to Joseph [*TPJS*, 181] and does not have life in itself unless it is enlivened, incorporated into the life which already exists, animated by becoming a part of something living.

[45]This is the way we are interpreting the above quotation from Joseph that "we cannot see it, but when our bodies are purified, *we shall see that it is all matter*." Joseph was here speaking of the spirit, but seldom did he make a clear distinction between spirit and intelligence.

[46]The physical body could be conceived of as the material extension of the spiritual body (filling a bit of the empty space). The distinction between spirit and element may simply be the relative amount of empty space: add enough of the right kind of particles to spirit and it becomes 'material'.

[47]D&C 88:15-17. To avoid confusion we will use the term "soul" only in this sense from this point forward.

Identity is not what a person has been but what he or she is now and what eternity therefore holds in store. Because of the promise of resurrection in Mormon theology, human beings are forever more corporeal beings whatever we may have been in the past. There will be a time between death and resurrection in which that corporeality will be removed, but *that* is the temporary state in the present and ongoing reality—and even during that period materiality of some type is maintained. This suggests additional meaning for the reference in section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

> And I will show it plainly as I showed it unto my disciples as I stood before them in the flesh, and spake unto them, saying: As ye have asked of me concerning the signs of my coming, in the day when I shall come in my glory in the clouds of heaven, to fulfil the promises that I have made unto your fathers,
> For as *ye have looked upon the long absence of your spirits from your bodies to be a bondage*, I will show unto you how the day of redemption shall come, and also the restoration of the scattered Israel.[48]

Death, rather than freeing the spirit from the restrictions of materiality, is considered a bondage because disembodiment removes an essential part of the self.

MORALITY AND PERSONALITY

This discussion of materiality holds direct implications for an LDS understanding of the mind. Typically, the mind is associated with the spirit, or more fundamentally in popular Mormon discussion, with the intelligence. The mind is the independent conscious subject that enjoys an eternal existence independent of the body. But Joseph's bold assertion that the entire spiritual realm belongs to the same physical universe with which we have direct experience offers possibilities for a wholly revised concept of the mind as well. As we have already seen in discussing the spirit and intelligence, the idea of materialism holds that whatever the mind may be, it is fundamentally an arrangement of material. To differentiate one mind from another, this configuration must be organized in a definite and unique way. In other words, it is not the specific elements but their unique organization that defines individual personality.[49]

A recent popular article on the brain held that "scientists increasingly argue that everything we experience can be reduced to a physical component."[50] Thoughts, sensations, and emotions are all being traced to physiology. We must not suggest that all scientists are now dismissing the concept of mind. In fact, many revered scientists maintain a strict Cartesian

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[48]D&C 45:16-17 (italics added). See also D&C 138:50 describing the vast assembly of valiant spirits who had died and awaited the message that Christ had performed his mission: "For the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage."

[49]The particular elements are in a continual flux of organization and disorganization while the overall structure is maintained.

[50]Joel L. Swerdlow, "Quiet Miracles of the Brain," *National Geographic* vol. 187, no. 6 (June, 1995), 2-41.

dualism.[51] The point we wish to make is that Mormon doctrine has room to accommodate such a shift in the scientific view and need not rigorously defend a dualistic model. Among those scientists who reject the non-material world, many are currently arguing against a purely mechanistic view of mind in favor of a synergistic view of matter; the whole is greater than the sum of its material parts—and many are proposing that such a synergistic whole is the conscious mind.[52] From the perspective of the scientific method, the physical is all there is, so any explanation that goes beyond the physical is by definition unscientific. The actual surprise is that Joseph Smith's ideas about the spirit can be interpreted as taking a similar approach. Public perception of the mind may hold to the idea of a distinct personality independent of the body, but LDS theology need not do so. If we maintain the assertion that the material world (the domain of man and God) is all that exists, then we can gain insight from the scientific position.

The mind has always been an elusive object of investigation. In the West the mind-body problem gradually came under the domain of psychologists and neurophysiologists. Science is far from fully identifying the physiological components of consciousness within the brain and nervous system, and it may never reach such a goal, but Mormons need not be alarmed by the possibility that much of what we might consider our "spiritual geography" may some day be physically identified. People might point to axon terminals, dendrites and synapses in the brain, or neuropeptides stimulating electrical charges on neurons throughout the body as being the organic explanation for thought, emotion and memory, but if we allow that in the Mormon perception of the universe any of these might (at least in part) make reference to some portion of the spirit or even of the intelligence, the explanation that the mind can be entirely accounted for in terms of the physical body fits comfortably within LDS theology.

As an example, let us look at the experience of emotion. Emotions are not merely the way a person *feels*; they are a demonstration of the body's neurochemistry. In times of stress or under other conditions, the body creates various chemicals that circulate through the blood stream. When certain of those chemicals come into contact with specific receptors in the brain, an individual *feels* depressed. This is what happens physically, corresponding to a recognizable emotion. Similar processes allow the person in other circumstances to experience joy, sorrow, hope, love, and other emotions.

When confronted with such a biological description of personal experience certain types

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[51]See for examples, K. R. Popper and J. C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (New York: Springer International, 1977); J. C. Eccles, *Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); R. Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[52]One of the more outspoken on the view that the mind does not exist at all is Francis Crick in *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Scribner's, 1994). For the contrasting position that the material composition of the brain creates a consciousness that goes beyond mechanistic explanations, see for example, Gerald Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Other treatments of the mind-brain problem can be found in J.-P Changeux, *Neuronal Man: The Biology of Mind* trans. L. Garey (New York: Pantheon, 1985); M. Delbrück, *Mind from Matter?* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1986); J. R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); and in *Mind and Brain*, a special issue of *Scientific American* 267, no. 3 (1992): 48-159.

of questions are typically raised: What is the relationship between the body and the mind (the physical and the spiritual, the temporary and the eternal) and which one is cause and which effect? If we say that the physical is all there is, do we leave any room for the spirit and individual freedom? Is the physical manifestation simply the body's response to the reality experienced by the mind? Does the spirit somehow communicate with the body to trigger the production and release of specific chemicals? If so, why the redundancy? These queries are well defined and frequently brought out in the discussion of the nature of identity, but no responses are readily available. More importantly, these questions do not fit into the theological concept of the self that we are suggesting, based on Joseph Smith's teachings about the spirit. Rather than drawing a sharp distinction between the experiences of the body and the mind, we are proposing that they are indistinguishable.[53] What we think and experience is a part of what we are physically. The configuration of the neural pathways of the brain is apparently the result of both our genetic inheritance and the influence of a lifetime's experiences. As we learn, as we meet other people, as we feel heat and cold and sorrow and joy our physiology is affected.[54] In short, all human experience is an organic part of personal identity. The physical response, how the body reacts to the contingencies of life, is what defines the event as an experience.

The more interesting concept, however, is that from the LDS perspective, the same can be said of the spirit. It is generally accepted that the spirit can be influenced by mortal experience, but in what way? The hypothesis we are presenting is that the spirit is affected in the same way as the rest of the body—by the alteration of its material composition. Experience has a concrete influence upon the material structure of the spirit.

The LDS perception of spirit matter implies that since some matter persists in its organized and conscious form beyond death, the reduction of emotion, thought, intellect, and faith to the physical does not remove its ongoing (religious) significance. If the spirit matter has been influenced by the experiences of mortality, personal identity has been altered and the individual's position in eternity along with it. Since all experiences have an effect upon the spirit, everything about mortality has direct religious significance. Friendship, cruelty, learning, health and disease all exercise their influence upon personal identity.[55]

If we follow through with the ideas of Joseph Smith by saying that identity is defined materially, then in LDS thought the experiences of the body are important even if they cannot be classified as moral or immoral. Furthermore, all the moral effects of experience upon the

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[53]Since both mind and body are material according to out hypothesis, there exists no clear means of (or need for) differentiation.

[54]Individual biochemistry is also clearly influenced by experience.

[55]Religious systems which insist on an ontological separation between spirit and matter would be forced to take a different stance and choose between the reality of the spiritual world or the reality of the physical, usually placing significance only on that which influences the life of the mind, the moral worth of the spirit. If identity is defined as the spirit which resides inside the body then the only eternally significant occurrences are those which directly affect that spirit within. As a being of spirit—not corporeality—what really matters is what the spirit knows and feels (in an emotive sense) and whether its desires are moral or immoral. On those issues the individual will one day be brought to trial.

individual can be understood as modifications in the material configuration of the soul. Physical experience defines morality. If something makes an individual less pure (less like God, less *whole*) whether in mind or body, it is bad. If something makes the individual more pure (more like God, more whole) in mind or body it is good. In this way of thinking, the body is real here and now. It is not a mere practice package to determine the quality of the real body mankind will receive in the resurrection. It is real as it is and that which we experience and physically accumulate must either be reinforced or eliminated.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF CREATION

The final major question we will address in this chapter is why embodiment should hold such a central place in Mormon theology. Of course, God has a body and the ultimate LDS hope is to become like God, but what is the significance of God having a body? What is it about corporeality that makes it preferable to spiritual being? Joseph left no room for doubt that the need for a physical body is one of the fundamental purposes of mortality.

> We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine's body to having none.[56]

But what is the point in having a body at all if human beings already enjoyed a personal existence prior to birth? What benefit was to be found in adding corporeality to individual identity? The soul must be capable of things that were inaccessible to the spirit alone, or the significance of embodiment is lost. Again we turn to Joseph's sermons for his explanation. According to the prophet, the body is primarily an additional layer of capabilities and protection. On January fifth, 1841, he told the saints that "All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power."[57] Two weeks later after another sermon, one of the elders present recorded that,

> Joseph said that *before foundaition of the Earth in the Grand Counsel that the Spirits of all Men ware subject to opression & the express purpose of God in Giveing it a*

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[56]*TPJS*, 181.

[57]This account was recorded by William Clayton in his Private Book. William P. McIntire recorded his own abbreviated account in the McIntire Minute Book: "He [Joseph Smith] also said in testimony of the situation the saints in the presence of God. that they had flesh & bones & that was the agreement in Eternity to come here & take on them tabernacles & the Differance Between us & Satin in that Respect is that he fell & had Not opertunity to Come in the flesh—& that he allways is striving to get others as miserable as himself." See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 60-61, 82 [hereafter *WJS*].

*tabernicle was to arm it against the power of Darkness*—for instance Jesus said Get behind me Satan Also the apostle said Resist the Devil & he will flee from you. [sic][58]

The first obvious justification that Joseph offers for the corporeal embodiment of mankind was to provide them with a degree of protection against oppression of some kind. In March of that year, a further reference to this subject was recorded.

God is Good & all his acts is for the benifit of infereir inteligences— *God saw that those intelegences had Not power to Defend themselves against those that had a tabernicle therefore the Lord Calls them togather in Counsel & agrees to form them tabernicles* so that he might Gender the Spirit & the tabernicle togather so as to create sympathy for their fellowman—for it is a Natureal thing with those spirits that has the most power to bore down on those of Lesser power so we see the Devil is without a tabernicle & the Lord as set bonds to all Spirits & hence Come the saying thou son of David why art thou Come to torment us before the time, & Jesus Comanded him to Come out of the Man & the Devil besought him that he might Enter in a herd of swine Near by (for the Devil knew they were a coveitous people & if he Could Kill their Hogs that would Drive Jesus our of their Coasts & he then would have tabernicle enough & Jesus—permitted him to Enter into the swine. [sic][59]

The physical body offers protection against individuals who seek to oppress and destroy. But protection is not the only reason given for embodiment. In the revelation recorded in section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants, we are given a further explanation for the increased capacities inherent in corporeality:

For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and *spirit and element inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy; and when separated man cannot receive a fulness of joy.* The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple.[60]

In this revelation, the ability to experience a fullness of joy is described as being impossible without the combination of spirit and element or matter. Without the physical body, the joy that God experiences is beyond the capacity of his children. As we have seen, the ultimate intention for man's existence in LDS theology is to experience joy. Hence, spirit alone, without the body, is handicapped.[61] We recall again Joseph's statement that "the great principle of happiness consists in having a body." According to the teachings of the prophet of the restoration, embodiment provides humanity with both a measure of protection against evil and

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[58]McIntire Minute Book, 19 Jan., 1841 (*WJS*, 62) italics added.
[59]Ibid., 28 Mar., 1841 (*WJS*, 68) italics added.
[60]D&C 93:33-35 (italics added).
[61]Other possibilities could complement our understanding of the added capacities inherent in corporeality, including for example procreation and ordinances. But we do not know enough about either of these topics in their eternal context to speak meaningfully about them. What does it mean to have spirit children? What kind of children does an exalted being engender? In what way does an outward ordinance influence the soul?

increased potential for eternal life's consummating experiences of joy.

To conclude our discussion of the corporeal nature of humanity, we will make two further points. The LDS doctrine of creation teaches that God, through Christ, created the cosmos out of existing but disorganized elements. The creation in Mormonism is emphatically described as the *organization* of material. This idea has great relevance for the perception of embodiment.

> You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing; and they will answer, "Doesn't the Bible say He *created* the world?" And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the word *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end.[62]

Given that the purpose of the spirit's embodiment was to enable each individual to become more like God, we can make some basic assumptions about the nature of the organization of life. In this thesis we will assume that in the creation, the physical elements were organized in such a way as to provide the possibility of eternal life. The elements were deliberately arranged so as to create a body that is self-perpetuating and free from all malfunction. The very existence of life in the midst of universal entropy requires that the biological configurations in which life is organized promote individual and corporate survival. Whether one accepts the idea of a sentient creator or not, this has become something of a given in modern science. There must be something to account for the fact that living beings become organized as they do.[63] The suggestion we are making is that the original bodies formed in the creation were physically organized to endure.[64]

But it is not enough to say that these bodies have the ability to maintain themselves. If they are to become like God, they must also contain within their very structure the potential and the inclination to do so. We will therefore also assume that within the physical configuration of life there must exist the propensity for eternal improvement and growth. This is a hypothesis, but it is substantiated by a key doctrine of the Book of Mormon. LDS thought insists that within every human being there is a substance called the light of Christ that directs mankind toward that which is good and which provides the standard by which morality can be judged.

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[62]*TPJS*, 351-52.

[63]See for example John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), which discusses several branches of modern science building on the assumption that a "life-giving factor lies at the centre of the machinery and design of the world."

[64]On this point Hyrum Andrus held a similar position, though based on different assumptions in *God, Man and the Universe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 154.

> For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.
>
> But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.
>
> And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged.
>
> Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.[65]

The LDS understanding of embodiment, when addressed independent of the implications of the fall, teaches that corporeality is essentially a positive attribute of both God and man. God's act of creation formed bodies that, because of their organization, tend to wholeness, health and well-being. In addition, those bodies include—as part of their material structure—the light of Christ that instills in the individual personality a natural affinity for the attributes of godliness that we described in chapter two. Humankind is created in such a way as to seek fulfillment and is therefore naturally drawn to that which is constructive, positive and good. The complications for this view of man that are introduced by the doctrine of the fall will be the subject of our next chapter.

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[65]Moroni 7:16-19. We have already seen that the Book of Mormon prophets saw in the body the seeds of destruction as well as perfection. This subject will be the focus of chapter four.

# MAN'S FALLEN NATURE

> Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were
> it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.
> —from the martyr Abinadi's testimony (Mosiah 16:4).

## THE CONDITION OF MAN

For all religions, popular perception of doctrine is colored by the contemporary ideological climate that establishes the context for discussion. In response to the Christian doctrines of original sin and man's total depravity, and later responding to the perception of 'cheap grace',[1] Mormonism became well-known as a works-oriented religion, receiving such labels as "Pelagian," "a gospel of merit" and even "non-Christian." It was common to hear Latter-day Saints speak of "working out their own salvation" by "earning" eternal blessings. The Book of Mormon was persistently called on to bolster this gospel of works and to attack the imagined evangelical Christian complacency, most frequently citing Nephi to gain the field: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*."[2] The final phrase was often made so emphatic that the obvious message of the text went virtually ignored. For a significant portion of the church's history, the saints have felt compelled to prove to one another and to those outside that it is only after *we* have done all *we* can that we are saved.

In the last few decades, however, as emphasis on the study of the Book of Mormon has increased among the Latter-day saints, popular understanding of man's condition has undergone a rather dramatic change.[3] Exhortation about the necessity of fulfilling one's personal responsibilities as a disciple of Christ has not waned, remaining a focal tenet of the faith; however, with the growing incorporation of Nephite[4] teachings into contemporary LDS doctrine, the concepts of man's fallen nature and the grace of Christ have made an evident rise in prominence. In this chapter we will travel in the same direction as we seek to interpret the significance of man's fallen nature within the theoretical framework established in the first three chapters, noting the implications of God's benevolence and material embodiment upon exposition of the fall. We will explore where the fall fits into the LDS 'Plan of Salvation' and examine the material effects of the fall on mankind and the human sense of identity.

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[1]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 47.

[2]2 Nephi 25:23.

[3]The "increased acceptance and study of the Book of Mormon in the last few decades" has been documented in recent research by Noel Reynolds and Allison D. Clark examining "general conference addresses, Sunday School manuals, missionary plans, publications on the Book of Mormon and the BYU and Institute curricula." See *Insights: An Ancient Window* the newsletter of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, October, 1996, 3. Publication of the findings is forthcoming.

[4]Although not standard, we will employ the adjective "Nephite" to the teachings of the Book of Mormon, This is, of course, a misnomer in some circumstances but it is descriptive of the overall context of the book and allows us a useful synonym for the more lengthy "Book of Mormon".

THE BOOK OF MORMON AND THE FALL OF MAN

One of the questions that have traditionally caught the attention of theologians concerns the moral nature of man. Are people born good, or are they inherently evil? The discussion of humanity's inherent nature in LDS thought must be traced backwards in time not only to the fall of man, (as is common to western theology), but beyond that to what Mormons call the 'pre-existence'. In the pre-mortal council, Satan[5] rebelled against the Father and became the devil, leading many after him in his own fall.[6] Now he is actively seeking to bring mankind to destruction and sorrow. In the words of Lehi, "And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable forever, he sought also the misery of all mankind."[7] In the pre-mortal council, one third of the hosts of heaven rebelled against God's plan, choosing Lucifer as their sovereign and thereby forfeiting the opportunity to receive physical bodies. Consequently, all who enter mortality are recognized by Mormonism as having chosen God and Christ in the pre-existence. This is an important piece for puzzling out the Mormon conception of man's essential nature, providing as it does a significant statement about the righteous choice of every individual prior to birth. On this account, man cannot be easily categorized in LDS discussion as an essentially sinful being. Every member of the human race has previously demonstrated faithfulness in responding to the will of God. In that sense, Mormonism holds a universally positive perception of human nature.

The Book of Mormon contains a great deal of material about the fall to supplement this discussion, beginning with Lehi's lesson about Adam and Eve, which he bases on the material he found in the Brass Plates.[8] In this account we have the clearest portrayal in the Nephite record of the positive consequences of Adam's and Eve's actions. These positive consequences have taken central stage in the LDS presentation of the fall.

> And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. And *they would have had no children*; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, *having no joy*, for they knew no misery; *doing no good*, for they knew no

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[5]Although Satan is a perennial embarrassment for traditional theology, LDS doctrine *insists* that he is an "actual being from the unseen world," (*JS-H* 1:16) and the "enemy to all righteousness" (Mosiah 4:14; Alma 34:23). His place in the Mormon universe is doctrinally vital, but can only be maintained if God is *not* considered sovereign. If we revert to the concept of a sovereign God, Satan becomes a theologically unacceptable myth because he can ultimately be no more than a pawn in the hands of deity

[6]This teaching is very similar to the pre-mundane fall of the angels taught in Judaism and largely accepted in Christianity, with the notable exception that in the LDS interpretation these fallen beings are recognized to have been spiritual brothers and sisters in the pre-mortal family of man. The point made in the last chapter about the necessity of bodies to protect the spirit children of God from oppressive beings suggests that the revolt of Satan and his followers did not constitute the first example of rebellion in the family of the Gods.

[7]2 Nephi 2:18.

[8]The Brass Plates were a scriptural/historical record including the Pentateuch that Lehi received prior to journeying from Israel to the 'promised land'.

sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things. Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.[9]

Lehi teaches his children that new possibilities were made available to Adam and Eve as a result of the fall. They were enabled to bring forth posterity, experience joy and knowingly choose to do good. None of these was apparently feasible in the innocence of Eden. The record of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price (which may have been partially preserved in the Brass Plates) portrays Adam and Eve rejoicing at the products of the fortunate fall.

> And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and *in this life I shall have joy*, and again in the flesh I shall see God. And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression *we should never have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life* which God giveth unto all the obedient.[10]

The LDS treatment of the fall has consistently given prominence to this attitude of rejoicing at the blessings made available to mankind on account of Adam. Because of the fall humanity has been introduced to corporeality, their spirits being 'tabernacled' in flesh. Personal and empirical knowledge of good and evil has been made possible and mankind has been offered an increase of joy. It has been the desire of most Mormon writers to emphasize the fortunate fall in order to honor the parents of the human family and respond to the deprecations that are regularly heaped upon them.[11] This has often been recognized internally as a response to the concept of original sin, deploring the assertion that because of Adam and Eve humankind is born essentially evil. Mormon discussion of the fall has actively sought to highlight the blessings made available to humankind through Adam and Eve. Understandably in such an atmosphere, developing an LDS conception of the fallen nature of man has not been a high priority.

However, the Book of Mormon has much to say about the aftermath of the fall and with the exception of the one verse by Lehi already mentioned, every reference to the effects of the fall by the Nephite writers denounces those effects in the roundest of terms. It was a necessary (and in that sense 'positive') event through which to provide bodies and specific opportunities for the family of man, and Adam and Eve are duly honored by the Latter-day Saints, but the fall also introduced sin, suffering and death into the world. The Plan of Salvation as discussed in the Book of Mormon is a loving Father's response to the condition of mankind resulting from the fall. The Nephite prophets viewed the fall as the source of man's estrangement from God, the fountain from which flow all the evils that threaten mankind in mortality and eternity.

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[9]2 Nephi 2:22-25.
[10]Moses 5:11 (emphasis added).
[11]See Jacob 4:3.

MAN'S FALLEN NATURE

The Book of Mormon prophets discuss the reality of the fall and its consequences as a fundamental premise for understanding life and the working of God in the world. They assume historicity for the narrative and are not concerned with asking how, why or when the fall took place. It is taken for granted as exerting an undeniable influence upon all of the posterity of Adam and Eve and as having introduced evil into the world. Any LDS doctrinal discussion of the nature of man that fails to include the assumption of mankind's inherently fallen condition will inevitably prove inconsistent with the Book of Mormon. At the beginning of the Nephite record, Lehi speaks to his children of the influence of the fall, explaining the redemptive mission of Christ as a response to the condition of man. Nephi paraphrases him as saying, "Wherefore, *all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state*, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer."[12] Despite his understanding of the 'fortunate fall', Lehi leaves no question about his position that all of mankind has been directly and adversely affected by the fall of Adam.

Almost five hundred years later, in the confrontation between the people of Ammonihah and the missionaries Alma₂ and Amulek, the chief ruler Antionah confronts Alma on what he considers to be an error in doctrine. Antionah makes the claim that since Adam was separated from the tree of life, all mankind has been everlasting cut off from the possibility of immortality. Alma's response, which explains the subsequent purposes of God's plan of redemption, begins by accepting Antionah's assertion of man's condition:

> Now Alma said unto him: This is the thing which I was about to explain. Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.[13]

Alma goes on to explain how the fall is overcome by Christ, but the point he makes here is of vital interest. Because of the fall, "All mankind became a lost and fallen people." His explanation of this statement is that "death comes upon mankind, yea, that death which has been spoken by Amulek, which is the temporal death….Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption...there could have been no resurrection of the dead."[14] Years later Alma shares the same ideas with his wayward son, Corianton.

> For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated. But behold, it was appointed unto man to die--therefore, as they were cut off from

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[12]1 Nephi 10:6.
[13]Alma 12:22.
[14]Alma 12:24-25.

> the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth--and *man became*
> *lost forever, yea, they became fallen man.*[15]

Using a common Book of Mormon didactic technique, Alma proceeds to discuss what conditions mankind would encounter if there were no redemption. Since man had become fallen by nature, "their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. And now, *there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state*, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience."[16] This is not a situation that man is free to change. There is only one remedy offered for the condition of mankind and that is made available solely through the intervention of God. Tendencies toward Pelagianism in popular LDS discourse are irreconcilable with the Book of Mormon view of man's predicament.[17]

In the coronation speech for Mosiah₂ by his father, King Benjamin makes the declaration that "the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man."[18] This verse has been used at times in LDS discussion to suggest that man is born evil. Others have countered that the same scripture goes on to say that the solution to mankind's problem is to become "*as a child*, submissive, meek, humble, patient," and "full of love."[19] It is inferred from these words that, to the contrary, children are apparently born good and only become evil as they mature and develop.

This question is central to the exposition of the Latter-day Saint concept of the inherent nature of mankind in the world. What is the state of children prior to reaching an age at which they are intellectually and morally capable of committing sins? What impact, if any, does the fall exert upon mankind at birth? The LDS view of the condition of children has originated principally in the Mormon response to the implications of Original Sin. Latter-day saint doctrine emphatically denies the need for infant baptism, arguing that sins are not possible without conscious intent. The second article of faith written by Joseph Smith in the famous Wentworth Letter states, "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression."[20] Children are free from the guilt of Adam's choice and will not be punished for the sins of another. This discussion revolves around the notion of responsibility for action. Since children have not become involved in sins, they are free from any moral guilt and are deserving of no punishment.[21] The obvious Book of Mormon precedent for this interpretation is the statement of Mormon that Moroni quotes at length,

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[15]Alma 42:5-6.

[16]Alma 42:11-12.

[17]The Book of Mormon leaves no room for doubt on this issue and references to it are frequent. As a few representative examples, see 1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:5; 10:24; 11:6; Jacob 7:12; Mosiah 16:4; 27:25; Alma 22:14; 34:9; 42:15; Helaman 5:9; and Moroni 7:41; 10:33.

[18]Mosiah 3:19.

[19] Ibid.

[20]*HC* 4:535-541.

[21]This is ideologically related to the verse in the Doctrine and Covenants which states that through Christ "men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God." (D&C 93:38).

> Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician but they that are sick; wherefore, *little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin*; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me.[22]

Mormon teaches forcefully that little children are incapable of sinning and have no need of repentance or baptism. One might assume, then, that children are *by nature* deserving of an inheritance in God's kingdom. But if we look closely at Mormon's statement we see that he is suggesting something quite different. Rather than teaching that children (because of their innocence) are naturally fit for the kingdom of God, Mormon says that "the curse of Adam is taken from them" in Christ. Mormon does not say that the effects of the fall do not apply to children, but that Christ *removes* them so that the curse has no lasting "power over them."

The crucial point is that it is only through Christ that this condition prevails. Without the power of redemption, the curse would apply to children as much as to adults. The principle that the fall's consequences are "taken away" from children necessitates the presupposition that those consequences are first borne by children so that although they are in no need of repentance or baptism, they do require salvation. Their innocence from sins makes it possible for Christ to save them from all the repercussions of the fall, but freedom from culpability does not imply that they are immune from mankind's fallen nature, only that nothing is required of them in order to heal it. Jacob suggests this point when he describes the sufferings of Christ.

> And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam. And he suffereth this that the resurrection might pass upon all men, that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.[23]

The testimony of King Benjamin is the most direct of all:

> And even if it were possible that little children could sin they could not be saved [without the atonement of Christ]; but I say unto you they are blessed; for behold, as in Adam, or by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins.[24]

Although the Book of Mormon stresses the innocence of little children, it does not teach that they have a *natural* inheritance in the kingdom of God. It teaches instead that because children are free from sins, Christ has the power to save them without any conditions on their

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[22]Moroni 8:8.

[23]2 Nephi 9:21-22.

[24]Mosiah 3:16. In the context of the law of Moses there are several possible readings for the first and last phrases of the verse, but Benjamin is pushing the point that those who "drink damnation to their own souls" must repent and become as little children, not so that they thereby naturally deserve the blessings of salvation, but so that those blessings can be made available to sinners through Christ as they are for innocent children. (See vss. 16-21).

part. Since the Nephite testament proclaims that the atonement responds to man's fallen nature, and it further asserts that children are saved through Christ's atonement, it is clear that the Book of Mormon holds that children do experience the principle effects of the fall. The fall carries with it no sense of moral culpability for mankind at birth but the Book of Mormon is clear in pointing out that the fall does affect little children in other ways.[25] By entering mortality, all of humanity is affected in some way by the fall.

BENEVOLENCE, EMBODIMENT AND THE FALL

At this point, let us interrupt our discussion to point out the relevant implications of the two previous chapters. In chapter three we looked at the LDS perception of spirit and matter, basing the conclusions on the view of Joseph Smith that substance defines being. If a thing has no substance then it has no existence. If we accept this postulate, then any consequences resulting from the fall, whether designated as moral, spiritual or physical, must also be definable in terms of material substance or else they do not exist. All of the effects of the fall must be present at some level within the material composition of humankind. This means that for LDS understanding, the original physical organization of matter that we call the Creation was somehow changed by the events of the fall. That change in corporeality is passed on from one generation to the next, perpetuating the malignant consequences of the fall throughout the human race. The simplest description (although it may be incomplete) is to say the fall altered the physical state of the creation and introduced genetic traits that corrupted the material organization of humanity.

We must also consider the hypothesis about God's nature presented in chapter two. Traditionally, LDS writers have almost always implicitly assumed the idea of God's sovereignty in the world: all that happens here is part of his master plan. We are maintaining instead the opinion that God does not (and if he is like Christ, *would* not) create disease, defect, and tragedy nor the conditions leading to them and that these can better be understood as the outgrowth of an event or influence external to God's will and control. If we are to maintain the concept of a benevolent God, we can assert that the fall was foreseen and prepared for and even necessary, but we cannot simultaneously hold that God in any sense brought it about. A truly loving God cannot be the fomenter of such universal suffering. Of course, unless we wish to defend a concept of sovereignty that is foreign to LDS doctrine, there is no need to push the point at all. Accepting the reality of a devil in the universe, there is no theological necessity to look elsewhere for the cause of suffering. Salvation in the Book of Mormon is emphatically a response to the intolerable conditions created by the fall and the prophetic writers never attempt to make God

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[25]D&C 74:7 suggests a similar idea: "But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ; and this is what the scriptures mean." Mormon himself uses this logic following the original passage cited above. See Moroni 8:12,19-20.

the author of both. We pointed out in chapter two that it is perfectly reasonable to accept the idea that God can create blessings out of human hardships without requiring the additional idea that he created those difficulties. Lehi in the Book of Mormon insists that God cannot be the author of both good and evil or existence would have no meaning.

> For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.[26]

If it appears superfluous to insist on the point that the fall is the work of Satan rather than God, we need but recall the overwhelmingly prevalent assumption that "the supremely good God is directly responsible for the general situation in which human beings find themselves."[27] The Book of Mormon will not support that assertion since the fall has thoroughly changed man's situation, placing him under the subjugation of the enemy of God. It would be a ludicrous mockery to pray that God's will be done on earth (as it is in heaven) if such were already the case.

Much of the discussion below will cover the *moral* effects of the fall present in humankind's embodiment, but we must first address an aspect of man's fallen nature that is frequently overlooked. In chapter two we brought up the problem of natural evils: disease, accidents and so-called "acts of God." For those who have insisted upon the principle of sovereignty, there is no way to avoid the accusation that each of these is God's work—and therefore his will. The idea of God's direct influence in our tragedies is ironically comforting in one sense because it suggests that there is a grand purpose behind it all. In times of difficulty, people often cling to the idea of sovereignty in an attempt to bring at least ideological order to the chaos of life: 'if God has allowed this to happen, then there must be a reason for it.' Suffering becomes imbued with meaning and one can derive a sense of belonging, of being part of a larger scheme of things through the faithful expectation that God's will is being done. It is comforting to believe that there is always a distant purpose in our tragedies. But if God designs and orchestrates our sufferings, what kind of rescue is it if he later alleviates or eliminates them? And more importantly, if what we are suffering is God's will, then what sense can there be in turning to him for deliverance at all?

This common response to the problem of evil is made in good faith and is usually accepted as obvious by most practicing Mormons and their Christian friends. It helps to inspire

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[26]2 Nephi 2:11. Lehi's description of all things being "a compound in one" is an illustration of the rational inconsistency of the concept of sovereignty. His conclusions presume a given set of facts about the universe, but his logic does appear to be internally consistent.

[27]The quote is taken from the entry, "Purpose of Earth Life" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* Vol. 3. The assumption of sovereignty pops up everywhere.

people in their difficulties and trials, and gives them courage and hope to endure to the end. These are righteous, acceptable and brave ways of living in a fallen world, but the Book of Mormon offers an alternative position, the impact of which is enormous in its implications. It is comforting in times of loss to hold to the hope that God is working a higher purpose through our tragedy. But we would suggest that it is ultimately far more comforting to believe that God loves mankind so much that he would never be guilty of such things and that he will eventually find a way to free us from them. Our greatest comfort lies in the hope of a God who mourns with those who mourn—not in one who plans and provides the very tragedies that bring us to tears.

In our discussion of natural evils then, we will assume that they are *in all cases* the results of the corrupted composition of the world.[28] God is in no way responsible for them, but seeks to free us from them as soon as conditions will make that possible. This aspect of mankind's fallen nature is inherited at birth in the apparently random distribution of physical defects and disabilities common to humanity. In the words of King Benjamin, we are each "subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind."[29] The point we are making is that sickness and injury are religiously significant in the same way and for the same reasons that sin is significant: they make a person less like God, less whole. As we pointed out in the last chapter, we are not speaking of worthiness, but of flawlessness. That the problem (whether we choose to speak of sinfulness or suffering) will be remedied eventually does not make it acceptable in the present. Both predicaments will at length be rectified through the work of Christ, but in the meantime mankind has inherited conditions that are contrary to God's will and that we have a religious responsibility to alleviate and counteract in any way possible.

It is this aspect of man's fallen inheritance that is most obviously applicable to children. Diseases and accidents are more common among them than perhaps any other segment of the population, causing immeasurable suffering to those who bear no fault. The Book of Mormon insists that God himself agonizes over such affliction and that all innocent suffering along with its repercussive effects will eventually be compensated through the redemptive work of Christ.[30]

INTO THE BREACH

The Book of Mormon makes use of a wide variety of words and images to describe the fallen condition of man. Humanity is "lost,"[31] "hardened,"[32] "carnal, sensual and devilish,"[33] and

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[28] As we will discuss in chapter five, sins have consequences that duplicate those found naturally in the fallen world, but again God is not responsible for those consequences.

[29] Mosiah 2:11.

[30] Not only children but all those who suffer innocently and even those who sin in ignorance are apparently the recipients of Christ's unconditional redemptive power. See Mosiah 3:11 and 2 Nephi 9:25-26.

[31] 1 Nephi 10:6; Mosiah 16:4; Alma 12:22; 42:6.

[32] Alma 34:9.

[33] Mosiah 16:3; Alma 22:12; 42:10.

an "enemy to God."[34] The devil "has power over them"[35] and they must perish, being both spiritually and temporally "dead."[36] One of the most frequent descriptions of man's situation involves the image that humanity is in some fundamental sense severed from the presence of God, "cut off" from his creative power, his protection and his healing influence. This separation arises both as the direct result of the fall and as the inevitable consequence of conscious rebellion.[37] This is a recurring assertion of the New World prophets and will become a central focus for our subsequent discussion of atonement and salvation. In one of the most powerful and comprehensive discourses on the condition of man in the Book of Mormon, Jacob, the younger brother of Nephi describes the fall as the initial source of the gulf separating man from God and God from man.

> For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.[38]

The Book of Mormon relates the account of man's having been plunged by the fall into a deteriorated condition that separated him from the creative power and presence of God. It proclaims that there was only one remedy for the resulting cleft and that it required the intervention of God himself. In preaching the gospel to the father of Lamoni, Aaron₃ treats this as the essential starting point for the discussion.

> And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king--how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.
> And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.
> And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance, and so forth; and that he breaketh the bands of death, that the

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[34]Mosiah 3:19.
[35]Mosiah 16:3.
[36]Helaman 14:16; Alma 42:9.
[37]References to fallen mankind being thereby "cut off" from God follow in the text. The Book of Mormon speaks of the atonement as bridging that inherent gulf. However, as individuals become accountable and choose sin, the breach is re-opened. Repentance can call upon the atonement for reconciliation but rebellion perpetuates man's alienation from God. For examples of this usage, see 2 Nephi 2:5; 4:4; Alma 9:13-14; 42:7; and Ether 2:15.
[38]2 Nephi 9:6. This verse is often read as though death has passed upon all men *in order to* fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator. The context suggests instead that the power of resurrection is what fulfills the plan of God *in response to* the fact that death has passed upon all men. It would perhaps be more clear if the second comma were ignored. The sense is echoed by Moroni in Mormon 9:12, "Behold he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man."

grave shall have no victory, and that the sting of death should be swallowed up in the hopes of glory; and Aaron expounded all these things unto the king.[39]

The sermon is repeated frequently throughout the text: Samuel the Lamanite, crying to the people from the walls of Zarahemla declares that "all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual."[40] And Alma gives the same instructive counsel in the intimate setting of a father's blessing: "And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence."[41]

According to this interpretation of the Book of Mormon witness, the predicament that the fall created is that mankind's corporeal embodiment has become corrupted, stained, and by definition unclean. In such a state he suffers a natural alienation from God. God does not remove himself from man; man by his nature becomes removed from God. His fallen body is constitutionally incompatible with the presence of deity. Nephi is the first of the Book of Mormon prophets to declare that "no unclean thing can dwell with God,"[42] but his testimony is repeated by Alma, Amulek, Nephi₂ and Christ himself.[43]

THE AWFUL MONSTER

The first concern of the Book of Mormon prophets in discussing the fall is the fact of man's severance from the presence of God, but a second concern follows close on its heels. In his fallen condition mankind is not simply left to his own impotent devices. By descending from God's presence, mankind has necessarily fallen under the subjection of ruinous influences. In the discourse of Jacob mentioned above he attempts to instill in his audience an appreciation for the work of salvation offered in Christ by describing at length the situation in which man would find himself if there were no redemption and resurrection. He divides the effects of the fall into two categories that he labels as "death" and "hell". The first refers to the dissolution of the body and the second refers to the consequent subjection and corruption of the spirit.[44]

> [Without an infinite atonement] this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, *this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.*
>
> O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more *our spirits must become subject* to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

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[39]Alma 22:12-14.
[40]Helaman 14:16.
[41]Alma 42:14.
[42]1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34.
[43]Alma 7:21; 40:26; 11:37; Helaman 8:25; 3 Nephi 27:19.
[44]He also calls hell the "death of the spirit".

> *And our spirits must have become like unto him*, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.
>
> O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster, yea, the monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.[45]

Jacob rivets our attention upon the enemies of mankind, death and hell, which he describes as an awful monster grasping all of mankind within its subjugation. He insists that were there no redemption through Christ, death would everlastingly destroy the corporeal bodies of mankind and leave the spirits of all men within the hell of Satan's influence and subjection. Death and hell, the dissolution of the body and the corruption of the spirit, are the two powerful arms of the monstrous enemy of both God and man that was spawned by the fall. But God has provided a way of escape from those two clutching tentacles and Jacob called it the "merciful plan of the great Creator".

> And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.
>
> And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.[46]

None of the Nephite prophets paints a more vivid picture than Jacob of the disastrous and horrifying consequences of the fall and of man's desperate need for salvation.[47] "O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment." Because of the fall, the embodiment of humanity was assaulted and everlastingly jeopardized, leaving the spirits of all men, women and children subject to the limitless abuse of their enemy and tormentor.

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[45] 2 Nephi 9:7-10.

[46] 2 Nephi 9:11-12.

[47] 2 Nephi 9:19. In testifying before the wicked priests of King Noah, Abinadi also uses graphic imagery and language to describe the destructive work of the adversary. See for example, Alma 12:6, 17.

EMBODIMENT AND THE DEFILING OF CREATION

In Jacob's fiery description of the fall he examines the extreme plight of man, and many other Book of Mormon writers who are desirous of demonstrating the ultimate ends of the atonement tackle similar concerns, but the majority tend to consider more closely the effects of man's fallen nature upon mortality itself. What does the idea of fallenness mean in the present? What does it mean to sin? How and why should we repent? These issues fill the pages of the Nephite record as the writers testify of God's promised redemption through Christ. We therefore conclude this chapter looking at the effects of the fall upon mankind in mortality.

We have made the hypothesis in chapter three that the corporeal body as organized by the creative work of Christ tends naturally to wholeness, health and well-being. When we consider the ability of the human body to preserve itself in an environment of constant attack, the instinctual drive for self-preservation, and even the phenomenon of conscience or moral sense, it seems reasonable to suggest that an LDS perception of embodiment can include the idea that the body apparently maintains much of its original organization. However, as we incorporate the concept of man's fallen nature into our understanding of embodiment, it is obvious that the picture becomes seriously altered. Sin, suffering and death are the universal lot of man and each appears to be a demonstration of the effects of the fall upon the physical bodies of humanity. The Book of Mormon in no way decries materiality per se, but it does implicate the fallen nature of mankind's embodiment in the estrangement of sin.

> And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit; And not choose eternal death, *according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein*, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.[48]

In teaching his family, Lehi here makes the assumption that there is something inherent in "the flesh" that seeks dissolution and destruction.[49] The will has been corrupted so that Satan has the ability to influence humankind. Several Book of Mormon writers make this point explicit. Jacob, for example, echoes his father's counsel when he says, "wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh."[50] Abinadi warns of the torments awaiting those who give themselves over to their destructive impulses, stating that Satan gains control over mankind through the fallen body:

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[48]2 Nephi 2:28-29 (italics added).

[49]The idea of "the flesh" in the Book of Mormon frequently makes reference not to corporeality itself, but to the state of mortality. In this case, however, since Lehi is discussing the "will of the flesh and the evil which is therein," it seems reasonable to suggest that he is discussing the fallen body itself, since mortality as a state cannot be regarded as possessing a will, while the body can.

[50]2 Nephi 10:24.

> For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.
>
> Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.
>
> But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God.[51]

In speaking of the eternal significance of embodiment, Joseph Smith endorsed the idea that Satan's influence upon mankind is physically manifest:

> The punishment of the devil was that he should not have a habitation like men. The devil's retaliation is, he comes into this world, *binds up men's bodies*, and occupies them himself. When the authorities come along, they eject him from a stolen habitation.[52]

This brings us back to the verse we have cited previously regarding the condition of the three Nephites after their bodies were physically changed:

> Now this change was not equal to that which shall take place at the last day; but there was a change wrought upon them, insomuch that Satan could have no power over them, that he could not tempt them; and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy, and that the powers of the earth could not hold them.[53]

All of these citations propose that there is something amiss within the physical body as a result of the fall that creates destructive tendencies physiologically inherent in each individual and that offers Satan some degree of purchase upon the human will. Therefore the fall has created circumstances in which individuals become subject not only to the devil, but to the conflicting desires inherent in their own bodies. "And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see *they became subjects to follow after their own will*."[54]

In both traditional Christian as well as LDS understanding, the idea of organic bases for behavior has generally been an unacceptable hypothesis since if one assumes the sovereignty of

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[51]Mosiah 16:3-5. Mormon also teaches unequivocally that mankind's evil tendencies are abetted by Satan: "But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

[52]*TPJS*, 306 (emphasis added).

[53]3 Nephi 28:39.

[54]Alma 42:7.

God, the suggestion of a physiological catalyst that influences an individual's morality appears to undo the very meaning of sin. If God created man with what we would call evil tendencies, they must not be evil after all. One might even argue that there is no reason to change: God made us this way, so why fight it? But if sovereignty is removed and one assumes instead the Book of Mormon idea that the fall of man is an event that transformed the physical creation and placed it under Satan's subjection, there is no need to shy away from the possibility that there may be a physiological basis for negative emotions and the actions to which they tend.[55] There is a current trend in discussions of human behavior to identify organic bases for thought and action and then dissociate biologically rooted tendencies from morality. The data is not unequivocal and the debate will continue, but the interpretation of embodiment we are offering here maintains that even if all thoughts and actions are eventually shown to be the products of physiology, from an LDS perspective there yet remains significance in the concept of sin; biology does not eliminate morality. This discussion will be taken up in the following chapter.

In conclusion, let us summarize the main points we have made in our discussion of the fall. Although the fall is rightly regarded in common exposition as 'fortunate' in that it made possible the progress of mankind through embodiment, the treatment of the fall by the Book of Mormon prophets is overwhelmingly negative. We have therefore postulated that it was never God's will that man become fallen nor was it God's work that made him so. In the narrative of Eden, the Father goes to great lengths to dissociate himself from any participation in the choices that bring about mankind's predicament. The fall is the event that placed mankind in his desperate situation and brought about the necessity of the atonement. Without God's redemptive work, all mankind—men, women and children—would on account of the fall become everlastingly subjected to the cruel dominion of Satan. The fall corrupted the physical bodies of humanity so that they are subject to sin, suffering and death.

But this idea has connotations that are distinct from traditional notions of the depravity of man. Humanity's problem is a material one. Moral repercussions are evident, but not inherent and we will discuss them in chapter five. The predicament of man is the fact that the body has become impure, subject to disease, malfunction and death, and that the physical system influences the moral choices of each individual. Mankind's eternal health and happiness have been jeopardized by the fall. Whether we are talking then about cerebral palsy, schizophrenia or pride, the problem is linked to defects within the physical bodies of mankind. There are no inherently moral implications in the vast majority of physical illnesses; sin is neither their cause nor their effect and they represent the tragic results of the contingencies of mortality. But some of the physical defects that we inherit or develop constitute tendencies toward destructive thoughts and behaviors that have clear moral implications. The next step in our discussion will be to examine the Book of Mormon concept of human agency and to investigate its relationship to the LDS notion of embodiment proposed in this thesis.

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[55]This is the case if one maintains the concept of agency which we will describe in the following chapter.

# HUMAN FREEDOM

> All men know that they must die. And it is important that we should understand
> the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life and of death, and the
> designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our suffering here, and our
> departure hence. What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling
> away, to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal
> something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any
> other. We ought to study it day and night, for the world is ignorant in reference to their
> true condition and relation.
>
> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 324.

## PHYSIOLOGY AND ETIOLOGY

What the theory of human evolution did to traditional theology in the nineteenth century, the current study of genetics, microbiology and organic chemistry threatens for those twentieth century Christians who are seeking to defend established conceptions of God, sin and salvation. The hotly argued debates between science and religion that arose after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* pitted Christian fundamentalism against some of the brightest lights in western thought, and there can be no question that for the vast majority of those who have witnessed the debates down to the present, science has won the day. Many cling courageously and tenaciously to their faith in the God of creation, but far more have relinquished their conventional beliefs in favor of more relaxed interpretations of and commitments to organized religion. Looming large on the horizon are the boiling clouds of what may prove an equally divisive debate, and the first hailstones have already begun to fall.

It has become customary in much of the discourse of the physical (and even some of the social) sciences, when addressing the issue of organic bases for behavior, to dismiss entirely the notion of personal choice. When physiology is suggested as the catalyst behind all human action, behavioral results are often regarded as inevitable. But what happens to theology when scientific data can show a physiological basis for behaviors that are classified in Christianity as 'sin'? If organic chemists and geneticists can demonstrate (or at least argue cogently) from persuasive evidence that variables of lifestyle, attitude and sexual orientation have an organic precursor, what happens to conceptions of accountability, agency, morality and repentance? If a known rapist or a practicing adulterer can one day point to compelling evidence that his ongoing behavior is the result of his physiology, will that mean he has the right to full fellowship and participation in the religious body, including ordination? These very questions are currently being raised in Mormonism and many other Christian denominations, focused primarily on the issue of homosexuality. When the winds howl in the enveloping gale, Mormons, like many of their fundamentalist or traditional Christian neighbors, will be unavoidably embroiled in the debate and feel the fierceness of the elements combined against them. And if history decides to repeat a

trend, the harshest and most destructive attacks will likely come from those either currently or formerly inside the faiths who can no longer accept the prevailing ideas, opinions and attitudes.

The situation is an ironic one at several levels. Most of those involved in the genetic and biological research that is summoning the storm have no interest in challenging religious ideas or commitments at all; indeed, many of them are believers themselves. But the corpus of data they are compiling poses a profound challenge to some of the most fundamental tenets of traditional religion. A second irony inherent in the situation and specific to Mormonism will receive our direct attention in this chapter. While the typical Mormon position on sin and responsibility is being bolstered at present by a series of defensive maneuvers against the claims of science, the scientific data itself (when divorced from ideological interpretation) offers no real challenge to the LDS doctrine of man. In fact, as we have already suggested and as we will here develop more fully, the idea of physiological correlates to human emotions and behavior can fit very comfortably within the existing Mormon universe—as long as one refrains from appending to it the assumption of physiological determinism.

Latter-day Saints have exhibited a wariness towards the postulate that emotions or behaviors may be directly linked to individual physiology. The suggestion is usually taken as a challenge to the concepts of agency and accountability, and with legitimate reason, since that has most often been the intent of those raising the issues within a religious context. It is increasingly argued that if one is biologically conditioned to feel or act in a certain way then moral culpability is inappropriate to the discussion, that what used to be labeled as sin should now be viewed as the natural results of human biology, and that individuals should not be excluded from religious opportunities such as ordination or marriage based on an aspect of personality that is beyond the individual's ability to determine or control. It is clear why such ideas appear impertinent to those holding more conservative and traditional religious views. But most responses to these ideas have ignored the scientific discussion entirely, asserting instead scriptural and doctrinal viewpoints which are regarded as self-evident. The position taken is that since the scriptures proclaim that we are free and capable of choice, each person is responsible for his or her actions, and the faithless claims of detractors can therefore be dismissed. On those occasions when the scientific data has been addressed, the argument has usually revolved around the issue of etiology: which came first, the biochemistry or the behavior? It may be possible to detect and demonstrate physical correlates to specific types of emotions or actions, but correlation does not imply causation. One can as easily argue for the position that behavior exerts an influence upon physiology as that organic precursors determine behavior. Cause and effect are undetermined and probably indeterminable.

This is where the LDS discussion of the matter generally begins and ends: mankind is accountable for his thoughts and deeds, so any evidence to the contrary is inconsequential. There is no need to respond to—or even consider the implications of—the scientific data. But even if etiological uncertainty is granted, and physiology is not regarded as the antecedent cause of

behavior, other questions remain. If it is demonstrable that individuals with specific personality types, emotional challenges or behavioral tendencies exhibit common biochemical or genetic idiosyncrasies, what can be said of the relationship between those physiological traits and the correlating personal experiences, or between the body and the spirit? More to the point, since LDS doctrine generally excuses from personal accountability those who are psychologically, emotionally or intellectually impaired or undeveloped, how are those categories to be defined? At some point they begin to merge and overlap with less obvious, but equally common, irregularities and disabilities. Where and how does one draw the line? As we discuss the idea of agency in this chapter we will seek some partial responses for these and other questions.

THE COMPOSITE SOUL

The idea of embodiment that we are developing is multifaceted. In chapter three we suggested a pair of major hypotheses about materiality and embodiment from which we are proceeding. The first was that nothing exists external to the material universe. What we refer to as the 'spirit world' is composed of matter that is organized in a way that we cannot naturally discern. The second hypothesis stated that the physical body as originally created was organized in such a way as to maintain health and promote happiness indefinitely. The creation resulted in bodies that were physically sound and whole, free from all disease, disability and defect. This physical organization itself produced constructive emotions and tendencies within the individual. We also suggested that these traits have been passed on genetically to mankind, resulting in physiologically governed impulses towards constructive behavior. We have labeled these genetic traits 'the light of Christ' in order to conform with the Book of Mormon usage of that phrase. Chapter four added to the conversation the concept of man's fallen nature, suggesting that the results of the fall are physiologically manifest in the corruption of the body. In addition to physical suffering of all kinds, the material organization of man became altered, introducing physiological defects that can eventuate in destructive emotions and tendencies. These defects and deficiencies are also passed on in accordance with the laws of genetic probability. Therefore, the synthesis of the effects of the creation with the effects of the fall brings about not only the possibility but the absolute necessity of competing desires co-existing within the physical organization of the individual.

But this is still an incomplete account of the material composition of humanity from the Mormon point of view. Each person is more than a mere sum of genetic inheritance. In addition to the varied physiological traits that an individual receives from her or his parents, the LDS doctrine of embodiment requires the inclusion of the concept of the spirit, a personality which has, in some form, existed forever. We have described previously the Latter-day Saint concepts of the pre-existence of man and 'intelligence' that has become 'spiritually embodied'. It is common among Mormons to imagine the particular intelligence or the spirit as the immaterial

and everlasting personality which inhabits the body and gives it life.[1] Because it is recognized as imperishable, this is what is often regarded as the *real* self, the mind within the body, which is capable of original thought and conscious choice and which will persist beyond death. Most discussion of the concept of agency locates it here, in the spirit that exists within man, but which is independent of corporeality and therefore capable of decisions unclouded by the corruption of the flesh.

The hypothesis suggested in chapter three results in a somewhat revised picture for the LDS understanding of the person. If one suggests, as we have, that the spirit is composed of material substance, then its incorporation into the identity of the self requires that it contribute materially to individual physiology. Whatever process might be chosen to explain such a notion, the material elements of the spirit would somehow constitute a portion of the mortal body.[2] The spirit would be regarded not merely as the mind existing within the matter, but as an integral part of that matter. For our purposes, then, a description of the physical composition of the human personality would include (1) the material organization of the spirit, (2) genetically inherited traits that maintain health and predispose an individual to constructive emotions and desires, and (3) genetically inherited traits that impair health and predispose the individual to destructive emotions and desires.

AGENCY

This postulate about the physiological components of the self carries intriguing implications about the nature of agency for LDS thought. Where the concept of agency is usually located within the spirit, this thesis suggests that agency is a necessary characteristic of embodiment as well. Latter-day Saint exegesis holds that the spirit was capable of choice prior to receiving a physical body at birth. This ability was exercised in the pre-mortal development of the spirit and notably in the choices made during the 'war in heaven'.[3] It was possible as a spirit to discern between varying options and to make choices for or against them. Our model proposes that this capacity has now become an element of man's physiology along with those character traits that the spirit had developed in the pre-existence. But the model implies a further and equally significant point. Given the opposing nature of the attributes that humankind inherits through human genetics (the welter of emotions and desires that are physiologically evident in humanity), choice is not simply an ongoing capability but an unavoidable dilemma. Consciousness is, among other things, a constant process of decision making between the

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[1]Most Latter-day Saints assume a semi-Cartesian dichotomy between body and spirit (or intelligence). This makes the spirit quite similar in composition and function to the usual Catholic or even the Hindu concept of the 'soul'.

[2]The spirit need not comprise a measurable nor even a statistically significant *percentage* of the matter, but it must be present in embodiment and we would assume that it must perform an essential function in relation to consciousness.

[3]As mentioned previously, this was the occasion in which the pre-existent spirits chose whether to follow Christ and the Father or Satan. All who enter mortality chose the former.

conflicting tendencies inherent in mortal embodiment. The model of embodiment and agency we are proposing is graphically illustrated in the chart below.

In the central column, we begin with the LDS doctrine of intelligence and spiritual creation. Spirit and intelligence become one aspect of physical embodiment. On the left we have noted the idea of physical creation to which we have already referred; namely, that the body is composed in such a way as to maintain itself and to seek fulfillment through following the constructive tendencies innate in the body. On the right we show the effects introduced into the embodiment of humanity through the fall. The constructive tendencies inherent in creation are offset and challenged by inclinations toward destructive behaviors. All three of these factors are now combined in humankind's mortal embodiment, producing contradictory impulses materially present within each individual. Consequently, agency can be regarded by Latter-day Saints as a necessary aspect of embodiment in a fallen world.
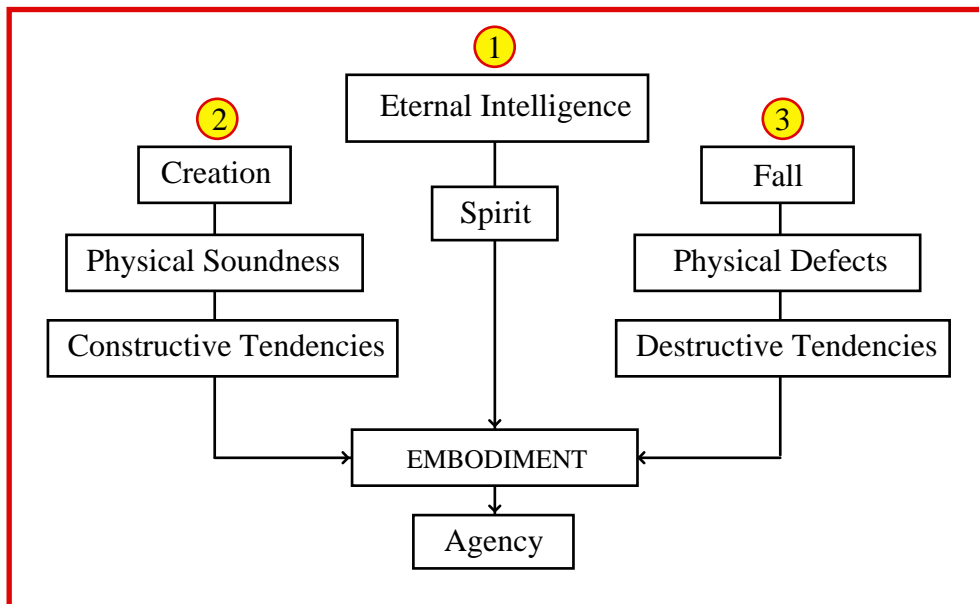


THE COMPONENTS OF HUMAN AGENCY

The consciousness of an individual is not simply the spirit or the mind, but the complex functioning of the various components of individual physiology. That which is referred to as 'spirit' in LDS terminology is only one portion of the matter which composes embodiment. Thus while it is legitimate—and in religious discussion customary and often useful—to speak of a distinction between body and spirit, it is likewise legitimate for Latter-day Saints to describe agency simply in terms of physiological processes.[4] Although this belief that consciousness can be reduced to the physical functioning of the body is interpreted by some as obviating the very possibility of human freedom, the current model posits agency and the capacity for choice as intrinsic to corporeality. The entire question of etiology turns out in this view to be irrelevant. There is no point in asking what is cause and what is effect since neither is applicable. The

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[4]This does not mean that the processes are by nature recognizable, only that they take place within material embodiment.

physiological and the intellectual (or the emotive) are taken to be indistinguishable.[5] They are two ways of describing the same process.


AGENCY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

The Book of Mormon prophets discuss human freedom as an essential characteristic of the life of man on earth. Alma₂ asserts that in consequence of the conditions of man's fallen nature, individuals are in a situation that naturally demonstrates the personal choices made between conflicting tendencies.

> Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, *placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good*—[6]

By Alma₂'s account, humankind is aware of the distinction between good and evil and can therefore choose to act in accordance with the drives that each person finds desirable. But he does not suggest that all choices are equally worthwhile as demonstrations of individual desires. He is clear in proposing that some of the tendencies inherent in the will are 'evil' and others 'good'.

Lehi had also insisted upon the concept of man's freedom, including the interesting suggestion that this freedom is the result of man's redemption from the fall.

> And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. *And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon*, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.
> Wherefore, *men are free according to the flesh*; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.[7]

Not only does Lehi insist that mankind is free to act in accordance with personal choices, but he categorizes this freedom as an aspect of embodiment with his suggestion that "men are

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[5]To explain the relationship we are proposing, we might compare it to observing a bottle of Italian dressing as the ingredients become separated. The rising oil does not cause the vinegar to sink any more than the sinking vinegar forces the oil to rise. They are two parts of the same process, two ways of looking at the same event. If we focus our attention on one perspective at the expense of the other, we may find it difficult to understand the nature of the total experience.

[6]Alma 12:31. King Benjamin asserts in Mosiah 2:21 that it is only the preserving power of God which allows men to live and thereby act in accordance with personal will.

[7]2 Nephi 2:26-27.

free according to the flesh". He also describes the consequences of decisions as being either liberty or captivity. His son, Jacob, likewise affirms that action is determined by personal choice rather than by the influence of inescapable forces working upon the will. "Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that *ye are free to act for yourselves--to choose* the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life."[8]

Samuel the Lamanite takes a similar approach in his preaching to the Nephites. Because of the inherent ability to choose between good and evil, men are responsible for their actions as well as the consequences which result.

> And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, *ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves*; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and *he hath made you free.*
> He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might *choose* life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you.[9]

In the view of man presented by the Book of Mormon prophets, the ability to make individual choices and to act in accordance with personal decisions is a vital part of man's condition in the world. Joseph Smith made a similar statement about the necessity of recognizing personal responsibility for actions.

> He [Joseph] then observed that Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. *The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary.* Those who resisted the Spirit of God, would be liable to be led into temptation, and then the association of heaven would be withdrawn from those who refused to be made partakers of such great glory. God would not exert any compulsory means, and the devil could not.[10]

The clear assertion of the Book of Mormon and the teachings of the restoration is that behavior, whatever its relation to physiology, is the result of choice. Within the LDS context then, it is possible to suggest that all experience has an organic correlate, but not that experience is determined by an organic precursor. The possibility of choice is fundamental to the Mormon concept of man's nature.

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[8]2 Nephi 10:23.

[9]Helaman 14:30-31. Samuel had already suggested the eternal implications of personal responsibility inherent in the possibility of choice. See Helaman 12:20-26.

[10]*TPJS*, 187 (italics added).

IDENTITY

At the beginning of this chapter we made reference to a controversy that is currently underway in certain Mormon circles. The debate revolves around the issues of agency, identity and accountability, and the polarization of those involved is both predictable and troublesome. The current arena for this debate is in the discussion of homosexuality, whether as a way of life or simply as an orientation.[11] On one side we hear the established position of LDS orthodoxy: *The Lord has intended that we think and act in certain acceptable ways and has issued warnings against those who go contrary to such norms. In matters of morality all are free to choose the path they will take, but if an individual has chosen sin, he or she will face the penalties of such decisions. The withdrawal of priesthood privileges and opportunities, the severing of fellowship and even excommunication are but the precursors of postmortal punishments for the unrepentant.*

From the other side we hear an entreaty for tolerance: *How can it be considered just or right to discriminate against an individual or a group based on an aspect of personality that is a simple fact of physiological makeup—no more the result of conscious choice than height or skin color. Volition does not alter sexual orientation. If everyone is free in matters of morality then this must not be a moral issue, since it is not the result of choice but of biology. And since an individual is not responsible for the particular attractions and impulses inherent within personal physiology, the practice of homosexuality is nothing more than the consummation of identity. How can you justify excluding homosexuals from temple marriage based on a biological trait?*[12]

The relative validity of the evidence for physical precursors to sexual orientation specifically is irrelevant to this thesis. However, the more general question of the relationship between biology, identity and morality is of central concern as it suggests a profound reinterpretation of traditional LDS views of human freedom, responsibility and sin.

The first issue which needs to be addressed is whether or not biology is related to an individual's desires. We have pointed out that the Latter-day Saint response to this subject has revolved around the uncertainty of etiology; it cannot be proven that specific physiological characteristics *determine* a corresponding emotional proclivity. However, in the model of personality proposed herein, this concern with etiology is displaced. That which is experienced as emotion is also evidenced in physiology but neither of the two precedes or causes the other. In the broad sense of materiality suggested by chapter three, emotion is a physiological phenomenon. There is no need to draw a fundamental distinction between the categories of brain and mind, which means that physiology (comprising the three material components of the self) not only contributes to but is inseparable from individual inclinations and agency.

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[11]The intention here is not to single out a specific group but merely to demonstrate the implications of these ideas in a recognizable context. Homosexuality has been selected because that is where the debate on these issues is currently being staged, but the example should be recognized as typical of the broader phenomenon.

[12]Or, within the context of assumed sovereignty, "how can you justify excluding homosexuals from temple marriage *based on how God made them*?" The way the issues have been framed in terms of biological identity means that the discussion takes on the aspect of a human rights concern, parroting the former dialogue concerning blacks and the priesthood.

The current LDS discussion of homosexuality tends to ignore this question, proposing (against the evidence of both science and the Book of Mormon) that human agency precedes biological drives. The homosexual is viewed as not only *acting* sinfully, but as determining the nature of biological impulses as well. This makes it possible to hold an individual responsible for desires that are viewed as aberrant or unnatural; however, as we have already seen in our discussion of the fall, the Book of Mormon prophets present a different concept. Although they make specific moral judgments about the impulses of the body, they attribute them to man's fallen nature and not to personal agency. Lehi speaks of "the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein."[13] Jacob likewise makes reference to "the will of the devil and the flesh."[14] And Abinadi asserts that as an inheritance man has become "carnal, sensual" and "devilish".[15] The writers of the Nephite scriptures do not disparage the physical world, but they do assert that the body can exert a deleterious influence upon mankind. They do not say that the physical body is evil or that its destructive desires are irrepressible—quite the contrary. However, they do insist that destructive impulses and tendencies are a specific aspect of embodiment in mortality. Those influences are logically prior to the exercise of agency, so the Book of Mormon supports the view that physiology affects the will.

The Nephite record supports the proposal that the fallen bodies of mankind are inherently subject to impulses, appetites, and desires that are involuntary and which we suggest tend in varying directions. Some lead toward generosity and altruism, others toward selfishness, gratification or pride. For our purposes we will assume that the way in which these impulses are likely to be manifest in emotion and behavior may also be determined organically. At the level of emotions, we are suggesting that one person may be organically inclined toward depression, another toward anxiety, and another toward anger or guilt, even when the external stimulus may be identical. Additionally, when faced, for example, with feelings of depression one person may have a natural (physiological) propensity for overeating, another for self-abuse and another for violent or anti-social behavior. These impulses constitute a physiological component of personality and the exercise of agency is, at least in part, a response to such inclinations. So how can identity be better defined than by the specific desires, hopes and dreams which compose the will, longings which are, according to this thesis, components of individual physiology? It is increasingly suggested that since predilections for certain emotions or compulsions are an innate element of human biology, they are therefore natural and should be accepted and embraced. In an amoral philosophical system this may be considered a logical interpretation of the data, but it is wholly unsuitable in the discussion of LDS doctrine. According to our reading of the Book of Mormon, biology does precede agency—at least in this life—but both exist within the larger context of morality.

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[13] 2 Nephi 2:29.
[14] 2 Nephi 10:24.
[15] Mosiah 16:3.

This discussion is related to the psychological conundrum of experience. How does something that happened to an individual at the age of five reach out through time to influence him or her at fifty? Either one assumes (as most religious thinkers do) a mind-body dichotomy to say that the event is registered in the Cartesian mind—or the soul—as a memory, or else one combines the notions of mind and brain to say that the event becomes embedded in neurology.[16] Given the previous hypotheses that the spirit is a subset of the physical body and that psychological compulsions may have a physiological basis, the simplest explanation available for LDS thought would be that experience *changes* a person physically. Since the brain responds to experiential stimuli through the alteration of its neural pathway configurations, (and in some circumstances by affecting the body's biochemistry as well), all human experiences are to some degree an organic component of human physiology. We are suggesting that negative experiences, whether actively chosen or merely endured (such as abuse or trauma), can become manifest in one's physical makeup as tendencies toward destructive emotions, which in turn can lead to destructive thought or behavior.[17]

What then is the relationship of agency to moral accountability in a world where experience affects biology and biology influences the will? The Book of Mormon implies that while individuals are not responsible for the particular physiological impulses they experience, they *are* responsible for their conscious reactions to them. The concept of accountability is frequently understood in terms of determining where blame is located and where punishment is therefore deserved. In this thesis accountability is regarded as significant solely because personal choices manifest themselves in identity, physiology and moral purity. Accountability implies the possibility of choice. If the trait in question exists independent of choice (which may be the case in circumstances such as psychopathologies, anomalous desires or destructive inclinations) then it would follow that the individual is not responsible for that characteristic; it can be viewed as a natural effect of living in a fallen world, and Mormon doctrine asserts that sooner or later it will be rectified. There are also circumstances that apparently preclude the possibility of choice at the emotional level. As an example, in a situation of shock or trauma (a child abused by a trusted adult, an unsuspecting victim of assault, a soldier under fire) emotions such as terror, anger, or shame are likely beyond an individual's ability to dictate or initially control. While choice may be limited or wholly impaired in such situations, physiological consequences do ensue. Those physical effects of unsolicited emotions may in some cases take years to remedy, or may at times prove untreatable. Thus, along with genetic inheritance, experience also plays a role in determining biological inclinations. This suggests that social determinism and naturalistic

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[16]For references to the scientific treatment of the mind-brain problem, see chapter three footnotes 51-52.

[17]This would further illuminate the glaring correlation between victims of abuse and various psychopathologies—especially dissociative-, anxiety-, personality- and affective disorders. We would not expect the correlation to be universally manifest. Rather, it would most likely be mediated, as suggested previously, by individual physiology.

determinism may be far more closely related than is often assumed.[18] Given the hypothesis that there is a physiological corollary for experience, every individual is a combination of the system of physical traits we have described in the model above and the alterations to the organism which are introduced by experience.[19]

Extreme circumstances may limit human agency, but at the point where choice becomes possible in common practice—and by definition this lies prior to behavior except in cases of psychosis or other severe psychopathologies—accountability becomes a central concern. Where agency is impaired (due to extreme physiological irregularities, the lack of intellectual development, or circumstances of trauma, etc.) accountability diminishes—not because the behavior will be overlooked on account of extenuating circumstances, but because personal purity has not been polluted by destructive *choices*. The assumption we are making is that physiology may be altered in accordance with the experience, but it will change in different ways than if the individual were fully accountable.

Impulses, whether for good or evil, do not wholly define personality. Identity is also to be discovered in the ability to respond to conflicting impulses within the self and to direct the subsequent course of thought and action.[20] This thesis would hold that regardless of the harmful tendencies or inclinations an individual may recognize as inherent in the will, one can choose an alternate path and ask as Nephi does, "Why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul?"[21] The assertions of the Book of Mormon record imply that the body, being the composite of God's creation and the corruption of the fall, is an inconsistent and unreliable guide to personal identity. Conflicting signals within an individual's disposition are genetically inherent and mankind must find a way of being healed from the consequences of the fall in order to be delivered from the damnation of a fractured will. This will found the basis of our discussion of the salvation of man.

CHOICES AND INFLUENCES

Let us now take a closer look at how the Book of Mormon writers describe agency and man's choices. The term "agency" never appears in the Book of Mormon. Instead, the writers speak of freedom or liberty and the significance of making choices for good or evil. Their treatment of the theme is instructive for our purposes since it defines the parameters of the

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[18]The determinism in such schools of thought is an assumption, not a conclusion, and an agentive interpretation of the data is equally possible.

[19]Significant or repetitive experiences—especially traumatic experiences in childhood—appear to have a recognizable effect upon individual inclinations toward specific emotions or behaviors.

[20]Allen Bergin has demonstrated that the strength of a stimulus complex can be mitigated by the consistent choice to act contrary to the stimulus. See Allen E. Bergin, "Toward a Theory of Human Agency," in *BYU Studies* 16:1, pp. 165-183.

[21]2 Nephi 4:27.

discussion and elaborates the context in which choice is possible. One logical place to begin our study is in the words of Amulek.

> I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you.
>
> For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.
>
> And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.
>
> Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.[22]

Here is a scripture that is frequently quoted in LDS speaking and writing, but the common interpretation goes counter to the text. Verse 34 is widely construed as saying that an individual's spirit will effectively remain as it is after death and if he or she has struggles and temptations in this life, it can be expected that those will continue beyond the grave. That idea is suggested in other LDS scriptures, but it is not the burden of the message here. The following verse clarifies the meaning:

> For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.[23]

In this citation, Amulek is teaching the Zoramites that through agency human beings can choose whom to follow, but that such is the extent of humanity's choice. A woman, for example, can choose Christ as her King and subject herself to his love and promises, or she can surrender to the power of the adversary and allow him to seal her his. It is not the individual's spirit inhabiting the mortal tabernacle that is being discussed in these verses, but the spirit which is chosen as one's guide. This is an important and consistent Book of Mormon concept. Hugh Nibley has related it to what he calls the "doctrine of the Two Ways," which holds that there are only two possible paths that can be chosen, the one leading to life and the other to death.[24] According to Amulek, the concern is not simply which path one chooses, but which spirit is

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[22]Alma 34:31-34.
[23]Alma 34:35.
[24]For further examples, see Alma 41:4; Helaman 13:29 and citations in the text. In Nibley's metaphor there turns out to be only one path and the choice made is one of which direction to move.

being followed. The two options for humanity which the Book of Mormon proposes are either to follow the Spirit of the Lord or the spirit of the devil. No other choice is offered. Some time after Amulek's preaching, his companion Alma₂ reiterated the same point to his son, Corianton.

> And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore, the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.[25]

This tendency to define man's moral responsibility as the choice between these two spirits occurs throughout the book. Early in the record, Lehi makes the choices and the consequences clear:

> And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and *choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;*
> *And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.*[26]

Jacob uses this same description of man's predicament when he counsels his hearers, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, *reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh.*"[27] The Book of Mormon writers extend this idea further, as well. Not only do an individual's choices lead in one direction or the other and therefore to ultimate consequences, but the two paths are both presented as appealing to man in his fallen state. Lehi introduces the concept with his treatise on the necessity of opposition.

> And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and in fine, all things which are created, it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.
> Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should *act for himself.* Wherefore, *man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other.*[28]

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[25]Alma 40:13.

[26]2 Nephi 2:28-29. We must recall that Lehi has just stated two verses previously that "men are free according to the flesh" so we are not justified in reading this verse as a statement about embodiment but simply as a description of one aspect of the body.

[27]2 Nephi 10:24. Nephi later makes a similar distinction between our choices in 2 Nephi 32:8.

[28]2 Nephi 2:15-16. Verse 17 gives Lehi's brief account of his ideas about the pre-mortal council: "And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.."

Again, Jacob echoes the concepts which his father had shared with him prior to his death. "O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against that Holy God, and also the awfulness of *yielding to the enticings of that cunning one*. Remember, to be carnally-minded is death, and to be spiritually-minded is life eternal."[29] The two spirits competing for mankind's attention are not represented as passively waiting for individuals to come to them, but as actively enticing the will in their direction.[30]

The clearest exposition of the general idea presented by the other Book of Mormon prophets occurs in Mormon's speech recorded in the seventh chapter of Moroni.

> For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.
>
> Wherefore, *all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil*; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and *inviteth and enticeth to sin*, and to do that which is evil continually.
>
> But behold, that which is of God *inviteth and enticeth to do good* continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.
>
> Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil.
>
> For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night.
>
> For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which *inviteth* to do good, and to *persuade* to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.
>
> But whatsoever thing *persuadeth* men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.[31]

As the Book of Mormon describes agency, the body does not compel people in one way or the other. Rather, the body makes it possible for external influences to "entice" an individual in a specific direction. Those influences work upon mankind physically and he is left to choose which to follow and which to dismiss. The body is the vehicle through which the evil spirit works to tempt mankind, but the Spirit of God works through this same vehicle to inspire.

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[29]2 Nephi 9:39.

[30]See King Benjamin's words and the response of his hearers in Mosiah 2:32, 37; and 5:2. Alma$_2$ used this image early in his preaching when he said that "whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil. Therefore, *if a man bringeth forth good works he hearkeneth unto the voice of the good shepherd, and he doth follow him; but whosoever bringeth forth evil works, the same becometh a child of the devil, for he hearkeneth unto his voice, and doth follow him.*" Alma 5:40-41. (See also Omni 1:25.)

[31]Moroni 7:11-17.

The modern revelations of Joseph Smith again take up the theme of external influences in their discussion of man's agency.

> And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet--
> Wherefore, it came to pass that the devil tempted Adam, and he partook of the forbidden fruit and transgressed the commandment, wherein he became subject to the will of the devil, because he yielded unto temptation.[32]

This suggests one more idea which is necessary to the LDS concept of agency. Even with both constructive and destructive tendencies inherent in the mortal body and competing spirits influencing mankind, agency does not become operative until knowledge makes it possible to identify choices in relation to an external standard of good and evil.

> And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.
> And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment.[33]

This would appear to be the sense in which Alma₂ understood the function of agency in determining one's eternal destiny.

> I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.
> Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.[34]

The Pearl of Great Price suggests an intriguing corollary to this idea by asserting that the devil is seeking to deceive mankind and in some way destroy his ability to choose the Spirit of the Lord, leaving him captive to the only other possibility available.

> Wherefore, *because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man*, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

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[32] D&C 29:39-40.
[33] Moses 6:55-56.
[34] Alma 29:4-5.

> And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, *to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.*[35]

Mormon scripture insists that humanity ultimately has only two options: to follow Christ, or not to follow Him. Every choice against Christ weakens or destroys man's agency.[36] The Book of Mormon repeatedly suggests a model by which to understand the pathway of life. There is only one road we can take and we must choose whether to follow it down through disappointment and despair into darkness, or up through peace and hope into God's marvelous light.

TESTING AND TRIALS

To this point in our discussion of human freedom we have been dealing with the definition and description of agency within the context of materiality suggested in chapter three. We will now turn our attention to the role of agency in relation to the ideas of God's benevolence set forth in our second chapter. The concept of human freedom in Mormonism corresponds to certain perceptions about the purpose of life. On the whole, Latter-day Saints have never been particularly reluctant to make bold statements about why mankind finds himself in this world and what significance this experience holds in God's purposes. The familiar LDS concept of the Plan of Salvation is recognized as a pronouncement not only upon the position of mortality in the cosmic epic, but about the meaning of mortality as well. It is generally held by Mormon writers that mankind came to earth in order to receive physical bodies and to learn to exercise faith within an environment of uncertainty. One of the most prevalent ways of describing life's ultimate purpose is through the incorporation of the analogy that mortality is a test and that God will not interfere with man's ability to determine the outcome. This model is latent in several passages of Mormon scripture and provides a framework upon which to construct an LDS understanding of the objective of life on Earth. In order to expand upon our discussion of agency, let us now explore the LDS doctrine of the purpose of life as it is discussed and presented in the Book of Mormon.

Eight different people in the Nephite record make reference to mortality as a time of probation.[37] It is generally held by the Latter-day Saints that this life is a time for people to prove themselves and their allegiance, a prolonged test of personal worth. In its essence, this metaphor does not require anything beyond the notion that through the choices made in mortality each

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[35]Moses 4:3-4. D&C 93:30-31 adds another interesting comment about man's agency: "All truth is *independent* in that sphere in which God has placed it, *to act for itself*, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, *here is the agency of man*, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light." See also D&C 98:8; 101:78, Moses 7:32.

[36]The Book of Mormon takes a similar position to that presented in Romans 6:15-16. We will discuss how this idea fits into the suggestions of this thesis in chapter six.

[37]Lehi, Laman, Lemuel, Nephi, Jacob, Alma$_2$, Samuel, and Moroni. See references below.

individual both demonstrates and establishes his or her ultimate desires. Every person is proving what they value, what they enjoy and also what they find disagreeable or repugnant. Through the decisions of life each soul demonstrates how completely his or her will corresponds to the will of God and thereby determines his or her eternal destiny. In this simplest sense and prior to further elaboration, the idea is wholly consistent with the teachings of the LDS canon. But in popular use the model of the test becomes remarkably embellished, thereby raising inevitable paradoxes. Life becomes not simply an environment of decision-making and development, but God's test of mankind whereby he can categorize and distinguish between those who will follow him and those who will not. God orchestrates and provides specific trials and tests for his children with the intention of separating the sheep from the goats. Life with its myriad contingencies becomes a sort of 'trial by ordeal' through which man can prove before God his worth, his faithfulness, his perseverance in the face of adversity and affliction. In this version of the model an abusive parent, a natural disaster, a disposition to unhealthy behaviors, or a crippling illness can all be labeled and accepted as the trials which God has engineered for the examination of his children.

It is reasonable to accept that some of the things which God might do for individual human development would be perceived from a mortal perspective as hardships and difficulties. One can imagine, for example, a benevolent Father preventing an individual from receiving a long sought after employment opportunity, or arranging for close friends to become separated by time or distance in order for personal growth in another direction to be made possible. These are things a loving parent might do for the benefit of his children. But we have already discussed the view of this thesis that there are other kinds of 'trials' or 'afflictions' which are customarily discussed in the same way, but which cannot reasonably be ascribed to a benevolent Father in Heaven. For God to submit individuals to *unnecessary* suffering is hideous cruelty; for him to tailor circumstances of suffering in order to manipulate individual human development is coercion. It is inconsistent to speak of a benevolent God who creates such 'trials' as disease and other physical suffering, temptations to sin, and tendencies to engage in specific destructive habits or behaviors.[38]

The Book of Mormon often employs the language of probation in describing mortality, but this is not the primary source for the LDS perception of life as a period of testing. The clearest reference to this idea is found in the book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. In a

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[38]The logic of the argument requires a means of determining whether an event or situation is itself good or bad. We suggested previously that one way of attempting to make such a categorization is to measure the event against the standard that if something makes an individual less pure (less like God, less *whole*) whether in mind or body, it is bad. If something makes the individual more pure (more like God, more whole) in mind or body it is good. This can easily become a tightrope walk: Would God give a person polio in the knowledge that it would assist in his or her development, that as a result they would eventually become more like him? This has been the ubiquitous suggestion of theodicy, but as we have shown, such a notion requires a radical redefinition of the concept of benevolence, defining it as practicality instead of love. Our model would insist that the answer is 'no'. A person stricken with polio might feel an increased desire to become like God, but such is a separate event. We are suggesting that the disease is always bad but that the repercussions (the feelings a person experiences in response to the difficulty), could be either good or evil. Clearly, if one is to maintain a comprehensible notion of God's benevolence, there must be limits to the types of trial a loving God can give to his children.

vision of the premortal existence, Abraham sees the noble and great spirits who are in the presence of God. "One among them that was like unto God...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; *And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.*"[39] In this verse Abraham records a discussion of at least part of the prospective purpose of life. Understandably, LDS writers generally interpret this verse to be a declaration that through the creation of a physical world mankind will be tested to determine individual obedience.[40] In order to ascertain personal worthiness, a world is created in which all of mankind may demonstrate their willingness to keep the commandments of God. This interpretation does not, however, justify the suggestion that the probation referred to will involve the creation of obstacles and afflictions. The test is not how mankind will respond to atrocities or even inconveniences, but whether they will "do all things" the Lord commands them.

The concern appears to be one of performance—of observance to law. But this interpretation likewise becomes problematic in view of the last section of the verse which would thus indicate that the intention of man's probation is to determine who is able to keep *all* the commandments of God. If the intention in creating the world was to discover which of God's children would offer perfect compliance to his every command, the results of the experiment have surely proven disappointing, since with only one exception man has universally failed that test. Obviously this interpretation requires some modification.

While it is customary to describe the probation of man in terms of his strict obedience to law, another exegetical possibility seems particularly appropriate for the development of this thesis. Shifting the emphasis in the verse from *do* to *all* might alter the meaning substantially: will God's children receive the fullness of his love, or will they pull back after a point and only accept a portion? Will individuals become everything that their Father offers to make of them, or will they resist his love and stunt their progress? In such an interpretation, mankind is not being tested against a scale of perfect performance, but of complete and ultimate acceptance of God's benevolent will.[41] Mistakes might be made along the path, but the undergirding choice of allegiance and direction is vital.

This reading of the verse corresponds to the suggestion of another well-known verse in the Pearl of Great Price in which God describes his own intentions and motivation for bringing the worlds into existence. "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the

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[39]Abraham 3:24-25.

[40]Interpretations are often dogmatic, but it is not entirely clear in the context whether it is the physical or the spiritual creation which is being discussed. If the latter, then other even more distinctive interpretive possibilities open up.

[41]It is significant that on the whole the Book of Mormon writers are not so concerned with a formulaic, rule-centered concept of obedience, as with the hearkening, relationship-focused response to God's love. The rules are known and accepted, but as evidenced by the frequent teachings respecting the law of Moses, the commandments are viewed as specific parts in a greater whole. We will treat this subject at greater length in chapter six.

immortality and eternal life of man."[42] God's work is not simply the moral or social categorization of mankind. That may be a practical result of mortality but of itself it is clearly not God's primary intent. His purpose is to exalt man, not to rank him.

With this in mind, it will be useful to briefly examine how the Book of Mormon uses the term 'probation'. Nowhere in the text is it employed in the sense of an examination of man. The two writers who offer the most explanation of what they mean by the term are Lehi and Alma$_2$. Lehi has been speaking about the consequences of the fall and he declares that God provided a time between transgression and death so that it would be possible for mankind to repent. Inheriting a fallen state, all who reach an age of accountability require this opportunity to offer their will back to God.

> And the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men. For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents.[43]

Alma$_2$ builds upon this idea, echoing the notion that God granted a space of time for mankind's repentance, but he augments the discussion of man's probation with further explanation. He relates the idea of probation to that of preparation. On account of the fall, a temporal period became necessary in which man could prepare himself for the future, specifically so that he could prepare to enter into the presence of God following the resurrection.

> And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.[44]

Alma$_2$ insists that repentance is necessary for redemption to be possible or else justice would be destroyed and God would cease to be God.

> And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God...
> Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state...

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[42]Moses 1:39.

[43]2 Nephi 2:21. Lehi uses the phrase again in verse 30. It is interesting to note that four of Lehi's sons, Laman, Lemuel, Nephi and Jacob all pick up on this phrase and use it in their own speaking or writing. See 1 Nephi 10:21; 15:31-32; 2 Nephi 9:27; and 33:9.

[44]Alma 12:24.

> Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.[45]

In 1842 Joseph Smith offered a similar opinion. "I would just remark, that the spirits of men are eternal...that when they appear upon the earth they are in a probationary state, and are preparing, if righteous, for a future and greater glory."[46] A full treatment of the theme was given in what is now section 29 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation has a great deal to offer an LDS understanding of agency and probation. The most significant point for our discussion is that the 'probation' discussed has nothing to do with enduring trials. It refers instead to the opportunity to either accept or reject the gospel of Christ. After explaining the pre-mundane fall of Satan and his hosts, the section continues with a vivid description of the idea of life as a time of probation—a time to repent and receive redemption from the power of the devil.

> But, behold, I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son.
> And thus did I, the Lord God, appoint unto man the days of his probation--that by his natural death he might be raised in immortality unto eternal life, even as many as would believe;
> And they that believe not unto eternal damnation; for they cannot be redeemed from their spiritual fall, because they repent not;[47]

The concept of probation has a specific usage in the scriptures we have mentioned. It is popularly linked to the idea of trials and testing, but the internal explanations suggest a markedly distinct interpretation. In the modern revelations of Joseph Smith as well as the writings of the Book of Mormon, the references to life as a time of probation are primarily used to discuss the necessity of mortality as a period of repentance, an opportunity to prepare to enter the presence of God.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have focused our attentions on the meaning and role of human freedom in Latter-day Saint doctrine. We have not been asking whether the idea of man's freedom is a defensible one, but how that freedom is to be viewed in LDS thought based on the

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[45]Alma 42:4, 10, 13. Samuel the Lamanite and Moroni$_2$ use the phrase in Helaman 13:38 and Mormon 9:28 respectively.
[46]*TPJS*, 208.
[47]D&C 29:42-44.

uncompromising Book of Mormon position that man is free. Chapters three and four have discussed the constructive and destructive tendencies of the physical nature of man, and we have promoted the idea that we are physical beings, that our embodiment is the essential element of what makes us who we are. In this chapter we have added a third factor. In addition to our innate physical tendencies toward self-preservation and fulfillment and our inherent physical tendencies toward chaos or destruction, Mormon doctrine teaches that we are also spirit and intelligence. This spirit itself was apparently capable of choice prior to mortality and it is now united with (as opposed to simply residing in) the material element described above. The situation is not that of the eternal self inhabiting a body which is foreign to it, but of the mortal personality which is the combination of (1) spirit (with its given tendencies), (2) created body and (3) fallen physical traits. An individual cannot be defined as any separate element of this union. We *are* the union. This description of the individual postulates agency as inherent in the composite will of the material body.

By postulating this original model of the components of personality, we have suggested that human agency is a necessary element of the mortal life of man. As long as all three elements are functioning, agency is operative and one both can and must constantly decide which tendencies to follow. To the degree that mankind is physiologically free to choose, he need not be subject to the impulses of a corrupted genetic inheritance. In Latter-day Saint understanding, individuals are capable of choices independent of their fallen physiology. While this model incorporates the favorite data of naturalistic determinism, it follows the Book of Mormon in rejecting the final conclusion by saying that man can opt out of the causal chain. This works both ways, however; the mind can be enticed in either direction and the choice of direction will determine the physiological effects which ensue.

We next inquired after the meaning of identity in LDS thought, proposing that it is manifest as much in the exercise of choice as in the physiological characteristics and tendencies one inherits. Finally, our exploration of the function and purpose of agency led us to re-examine the popular Mormon perception of life as a period of testing and trials, suggesting instead the view that the full intent of mortality is to provide the opportunity for God's children to prepare to enter his presence. Chapter six will continue to build upon the framework which has been suggested, augmenting the model of personality employed thus far in order to discuss the significance of sin and repentance and to describe their effects.

# Sin and Repentance

> It is one evidence that men are unacquainted with the principles of godliness to behold the contraction of affectionate feelings and lack of charity in the world. The power and glory of godliness is spread out on a broad principle to throw out the mantle of charity. God does not look on sin with allowance, but when men have sinned, there must be allowance made for them....The nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs.
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> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 240-41.

## Actions and Accountability

Examination into the nature and significance of sin has been one of the many common endeavors of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the broad remainder of Western religion, the inquiry evolving through various channels over the course of millennia: For which actions will a person be held accountable before God at the judgment day, and what will be the consequences of those acts? Is sin primarily a moral or a social issue? How does the behavior of an individual relate to the purity or impurity of the community? If a person has unintentionally committed an offense, is retribution necessary, and if so, how is it to be made? Once a person has entered into covenant with God, what is his or her responsibility *vis à vis* the law? What is to be done with those who fail to adequately obey the commandments? Which transgressions (if any) are reversible through some type of pardon, and are there misdeeds for which compensation is impossible? Can one person pay the penalty for another when a moral violation has taken place?

Latter-day Saint discussion has inherited a great deal from this investigation, drawing principally upon the concept of 'divine law' prevalent in all three major Western faiths. Mormons make frequent and emphatic reference in their writings, their worship services, and their classroom study to the dual issue of obedience and sin. The blessings of eternity are promised only to the faithful while the rebellious will be forced to suffer the rewards of their unrighteousness. In subsequent chapters we will look more closely at the LDS doctrines of forgiveness and salvation, so for our present purposes we will focus our attention specifically on the understanding of sin and repentance. In popular Latter-day Saint discussion, sin is a matter of unworthy behaviors or thoughts. Sins are man's mistakes, the violations of conduct he commits, his offenses against God—and such actions naturally bring in their wake a moral culpability that requires reparation. Laws have been broken and punishment is inevitable. The gospel announces that through the sufferings of Christ, the only sinless person in the world's history, the weight of that punishment can be transferred to his shoulders. The Savior has paid in full the demands of justice and through repentance, the post-mortal consequences of sin can be averted and forgiveness for iniquity can be granted. Not surprisingly, members of the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints typically place great emphasis on the necessity of obedience to divinely instituted statutes. In that context, sins are generally defined as conscious acts of defiance against the commands of God, and repentance requires both the abandoning of the wrongful act and the satisfaction of the broken law.

Chapter five made mention of the widespread notion that life is a period of testing for humankind. In this common parlance, the perceived test is often whether or not individuals will be willing to keep the rules for mortality proposed by deity, so that the commandments have come to assume the role of behavioral exam questions (Will you do this? Will you avoid that?) and individual conduct takes on relevance principally as a demonstration of fidelity. Compliance with divine law becomes the central issue of life. Since God will never enforce obedience upon his children, humanity is free and the test is considered a legitimate one. In such an account, sin is essentially a demonstration of an individual's unwillingness to do as he or she has been told. The commandments are clear, but the sinful man or woman defiantly decides to follow another path. Failing both to learn and to show obedience, the person forfeits the promised blessings and instead endures the wages of sin in suffering. Any such act of rebellion is an offense against divine decree and the justice of God requires that suffering be meted out until the punishment is adequate to recompense the broken law. Repentance might be described in this view as the sincere attempt to regain God's acceptance and thereby divert the punishment of justice.

Many Latter-day Saints, however, would balk at what they would regard as this trivialization of the concept of divine commandments. God is not training his children to do tricks at his bidding; he is teaching them what it is to be good. The laws of God, they would assert, are not simply arbitrary rules designed to test mortal conformity; they are specific and practical instructions given to aid humankind in achieving happiness and avoiding misery both in this life and into eternity. Happiness is the natural consequence of obedience, as misery is the natural consequence of sin. If a person is willing to keep the commandments, he or she will avoid much of the sorrow of this life and find great joy in the next. Justice surely requires punishment for every broken law, but part of that punishment is the suffering necessarily caused by sins themselves. Wickedness never was happiness and obedience is its own reward. Alma$_2$ states unequivocally that sin is not only about behavior, and if we are unrighteous, not only our words and our works but "our thoughts will also condemn us."[1] One can go through the motions of obedience and still be onerously burdened down in sin.

In this view there is a pragmatic basis for divine law, and God's intention in decreeing the commandments is to help man to recognize which types of actions are beneficial and which harmful, both in the context of mortality and eternity. The commandments have their basis in experience and represent the inexorable flow of cause and effect. Based on the material we have surveyed so far, we will suggest in this chapter an interpretation of sin that coincides with this

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[1]Alma 12:14.

latter assumption of practical commandments, but that additionally attempts to go beyond the issues of behavior, law and practicality.

SIN, SINS AND SINFULNESS

In our investigation of man's fallen nature and the meaning of agency in the Book of Mormon, two distinct sources of temptation have become evident. First, because of the fall, humanity is physically defective. Those defects may be genetically inherited (or otherwise present at birth), or they may be caused subsequently by accident, illness, or through the inevitable biological responses to experiential stimuli. Most of the defects present in humanity in terms of disease or impairments have no direct correspondence with sin and are altogether void of moral implications for the afflicted individual. However, there are aspects of embodiment that can be linked to harmful inclinations, which consequently are vitally relevant in our discussion of sin. The body, of course, also contains within it constructive and ennobling tendencies (as we have discussed), but the variety of impulses does not indicate that contradictory leanings cancel one another out. Instead, they become manifest simultaneously within human physiology. A woman can feel powerfully drawn to let go of malice, for example, while at the same time wanting desperately to lash out in anger. A man can long for love and acceptance while he concurrently fears it and thus prevents its happening. The first source of temptation, then, is the physical body itself.

However, the body receives relatively little attention in the Book of Mormon treatments of sin. The far more common concern deals with the belief that the devil can entice mankind toward evil. Given the notion of embodiment that we have been developing, it would be consistent to suggest that some of the defects that are physiologically present in humanity as a result of the fall facilitate the adversary's influence upon man to varying degrees.[2] Still, the primary source of man's impurity taken up by the Book of Mormon authors is not the evils of the flesh, but the influence of Satan.

Speaking to the survivors of the great destructions which in the Book of Mormon lands accompanied the crucifixion, the resurrected Christ lamented that the devil and his followers have had so much influence over the people:

> Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people; and it is because of their iniquity and abominations that they are fallen![3]

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[2]Since we do not know and are not presently concerned with identifying the specific aspects of physiology which might correspond to our understanding of the will, the distinction between the two sources of temptation described here is easier to assume in theory than to recognize in practice. It may in fact be wholly impossible to actually discern between the two, but the distinction is doctrinally significant.

[3]3 Nephi 9:2.

The Book of Mormon prophets consistently stress and warn against the influence and power of the spirit of the devil upon the hearts of men and in this verse, Satan and his angels are described as finding satisfaction in the misery of humanity. It is noteworthy then, given the acceptance of a multitude of evil beings by several Book of Mormon writers, that in the record the devil himself is afforded almost sole responsibility for evil and suffering. In discussing the external forces that work upon mankind, the only circumstance in which evil spirits (plural) are mentioned in the Book of Mormon is when they are cast out by Nephi[3] or Christ[4], or when the wicked accuse Christ and Samuel the Lamanite of "having a devil."[5] In contrast, the Book of Mormon writers consistently discuss the damning influence of "the spirit of the devil" as a single entity who manipulates the destruction of mankind.[6] This could either mean that they were not prone to think of illness and sin in terms of subjection by evil spirits, as the New Testament writers so clearly were, or that the idea was so ubiquitously accepted and understood as to preclude comment. Since the few references to unclean spirits being cast out are made by two of the major contributors to the Book of Mormon (Nephi and Mormon) and by King Benjamin in a public speech, and since no explanation of the ideas is offered to the audience in any of these cases, it may be most prudent to suppose that the latter was the case.[7] However, we must also bear in mind that while they likely accepted the idea of possession by evil spirits and may have interpreted psychopathologies in those terms, this was not the writers' primary concern. Their constant emphasis is upon the influence that the spirit of the devil exercises over humanity.

Thus Alma[2] asks the inhabitants of Zarahemla, "Can ye think of being saved when you have yielded yourselves to become subjects to the devil?"[8] and Amulek counsels the Zoramites to "be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptations of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day; for behold, he rewardeth you no good thing."[9] Throughout the Book of Mormon, the enticings of Satan are treated as humanity's most serious menace. The devil is credited with the ability (on

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[4]3 Nephi 7:19, 22; 1 Nephi 11:31; Mosiah 3:6.

[5]Mosiah 3:9; Helaman 16:6.

[6]One possible exception is Alma[2]'s statement that Korihor is "possessed with a lying spirit" (Alma 30:42). But however this is to be interpreted, Alma[2] immediately thereafter emphasizes that it is "the devil" that has power over Korihor and has exploited his pride in order to bring others to destruction.

[7]It is possible that the distinctions reflect perceptions changing over time, but this interpretation seems unlikely since they appear well spaced in the chronological history. Helaman 16:6 in which the wicked Nephites of Zarahemla (the capital of the Nephite nation) accuse Samuel the Lamanite of having a devil, suggests that demon possession *was* a popularly accepted notion.

[8]Alma 5:20.

[9]Alma 34:39. This is one of the most widely discussed issues of the Book of Mormon, creating a negative image to be contrasted with the consistent testimony of Christ as the Savior. Thus the devil plays a central role in the teachings of Lehi (2 Nephi 2:17-18, 27, 29), Nephi (1 Nephi 12:17, 19; 13:6, 29; 14:3-4, 7, 9-10, 17; 15:24, 35; 22:15, 22-23, 26; 2 Nephi 4:27; 26:10, 22; 28:19-23; 30:18, 33:5), Jacob (2 Nephi 9:8-9, 16, 19, 26, 28, 37, 46; 10:24; Jacob 3:11; 7:4, 14), King Benjamin (Mosiah 4:14), Abinadi (Mosiah 16:3, 5, 11), Alma[2] (Alma 5:20, 25, 39-41; 9:28; 12:4-6, 11, 17; 30:42; 37:15, 33; 39:11; 40:13; 41:4), Amulek (Alma 10:17, 25; 34:23, 35, 39), Nephi[2] (Helaman 7:15; 8:28), Christ (Mosiah 26:27; Alma 27:12; 3 Nephi 9:2; 11:29; 12:25; 18:15, 18; 21:10; 27:11, 32), Mormon (Alma 8:9; 15:17; 16:21; 28:13; 30:60; 46:8; 48:17; Helaman 3:29; 6:21; 12:4; 16:22-23; 3 Nephi 1:22; 2:2-3; 6:15-17, 28; 7:5; 28:39; 29:7; 4 Nephi 1:28; Mormon 1:19; 5:18; Moroni 7:11-12, 14, 17; 9:3), and Moroni (Ether 8:16, 25-26; 15:19).

account of the fall) to work upon the mortal bodies of mankind and lead them to destruction. But while his influence is considered unquestionable, his dominion is by no means absolute and requires the purposeful subjection of the personal will. We have already quoted the Prophet Joseph's remarks in this regard that "all beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power."[10] Thus the LDS position on temptation holds that while Satan works through the body to entice mankind, his influence is limited and dependent upon the choices made by each individual. "The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary."[11]

SINFUL BEHAVIOR

The Book of Mormon makes the assertion that by choosing which spirit to follow—Christ's or Satan's—each person determines both his actions and his character. In discussing sin, therefore, it may be helpful to move the discussion back a step away from behavior, and even prior to what are commonly called "sinful thoughts," in order to focus instead on the significance of the decisions that are made in every moment. In an attempt to make our point clear we will suggest a definition of sin that goes contrary to general usage and which is intended specifically for this thesis. When referring to thoughts or actions that violate the laws of God, we will follow convention by calling such behaviors 'sins'.[12] Thus murder, lust, covetousness and violence are all 'sins' of varying types. 'Sinfulness' in our discussion will designate that aspect of man's fallen nature that is characterized by destructive tendencies, the corruption within the body which makes sins enticing. The term 'sin' will be reserved for the unrighteous use of agency, which was summarized and illustrated in the previous chapter. Since we are suggesting that 'sins' refer to injurious thoughts and actions, we will employ the word 'sin as having reference to the initial *choice*, whether recognized or not, of granting influence to Satan by allowing 'sinfulness' to govern the will. It is that choice, even more than the consequences which may ensue from it, that will receive our chief attention.

According to these definitions, sins (as they are generally perceived) are the imaginative or behavioral *consequences* of what we are calling 'sin'. The choice to allow the enticings of Satan to control the will culminates in thoughts and actions that are characterized within the LDS community as sins. Therefore, sins are secondary in nature—sin is logically prior to sins. This does nothing to diminish the import of sinful behavior; it is merely an observation concerning its relationship to agency.

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[10]*TPJS*, 181. See also, Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 60-61, 82.
[11]*TPJS*, 187.
[12]When referring to one such action it will always be preceded by the indefinite article; i.e., "a sin."

Before moving on to the discussion of sin, we should clarify the gravity of this secondary concept of sins or sinful behavior. The suggestions which have historically been offered in Christianity are myriad, but most have agreed that sins, whether personally committed or universally inherited, have in one way or another brought humankind under Satan's dominion. Some, and most notably Anselm, have further concluded that sins, as violations against the injunctions of deity, constitute a personal offense against God himself and that his justice requires satisfaction. Sins are significant in such a scheme primarily because disobedience necessitates punishment before the alienation between God and man can be reconciled. The law has been broken and the offending party must provide reparation.

Latter-day Saint discourse on the relevance of sin has never been uniformly defined, generally following a loosely meshed weaving of ideas from a variety of sources. Although the link is indirect and largely unrecognized, Anselm—and to a lesser degree Tertullian—can be regarded as the ideological fore-runners of many of the popular LDS perceptions of divine law, obedience and sin.[13] In particular, the Mormon discussion of sins is prone to be formulated in strictly legalistic categories and vocabulary. Sins become functionally equated to crimes committed against God for which man is accountable. Divine law requires punishment before reconciliation is possible, and until that is carried out man falls into the grasp of justice, and Satan is given power as the jailer of the soul. This legal framework has largely determined the parameters of interpretation regarding the nature of sin for Latter-day Saints. In this chapter, however, we are principally interested in the more proximate consequences of sin, sins and sinfulness. Rather than maintaining that sins are relevant fundamentally as a violation of law or as a breach of contract, the interpretation of embodiment suggested by this thesis implies that sins are significant primarily because of their material consequences upon the sinner and all others negatively affected by the misdeed. If the commandments of God are not merely arbitrary rules dictated to test mankind's obedience, sin must produce actual negative effects.

The sins that Christ criticizes throughout the Mormon canon are not so often the socially disintegrating sins of the Decalogue, but the soul-destroying sins of selfishness, anger, callousness and hypocrisy, and the secondary suffering which they invariably cause. In short, the fundamental concern over sins does not lie in the fear that such actions will call down God's wrath, but in the belief that sins result in increased physical corruption, suffering, and subjection. In many instances (such as where the category of sins overlaps with that of violent crimes or substance abuse, for example) this is patently the case. But given the hypotheses that in LDS understanding the spirit is a material component of embodiment and that all relevant experiences affect the physiology of those involved to some degree, sins can be defined in a large measure by

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[13]For example, the usual interpretation of Alma$_2$'s discussion of justice and mercy, law and punishment, in Alma 41-42 is heavily influenced by common assumptions about divine satisfaction. We will investigate this much more closely in chapters seven and eight, discussing also the contributions of Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Abelard and others. Many of the interpretations of these Christian thinkers have become the *a priori* assumptions of later generations, even—ironically—in Mormonism which claims an independence from the Patristic pronouncements.

their detrimental effects upon the body. This thesis holds that God is not so concerned with what men or women may have done in the past as with what they are in the present—and according to the Book of Mormon, that is precisely what he is seeking to influence. Sin is damning not because it makes God angry or offended, but because it makes a person unclean and alienates her or him from God's saving power.

In the common discussion of sins, it is behavioral vices and faults that regularly capture the attention. This is where the effects of corruption are immediately apparent. The results of violence, immorality, and deception are unmistakably manifest in both the anguished cries of the innocent and the self-torture of the guilty. In these situations it is often a simple matter to isolate the problem and seek for a solution: eliminate the sinful behavior and thereby avoid the outcome. At the personal as well as the social level, this type of approach is necessary and demonstrably beneficial. But although the Book of Mormon insists upon the urgency of abandoning sinful behavior and alleviating suffering in discernible ways, it also indicates that this understanding of sin is incomplete.

The prevalent understanding of sin as a behavioral concern fails to address the more fundamental problem of which factors contribute to make an individual prone to sin, and until that issue receives direct attention, it will be difficult to formulate a lucid correlation between the relevance of sin and the meaning of salvation. The irony is that the common LDS focus on 'sins' (as unworthy thoughts and behaviors) can divert attention away from what the Book of Mormon claims to be their cause: the destructive use of agency. While the Nephite prophets consistently stress the importance of rejecting Satan's influence over mankind's basic desires and inclinations, contemporary Latter-day Saint discussion concentrates almost wholly on subsequent thoughts and behaviors.

In this discussion of 'sin', therefore, the specific problem which we are addressing is not mankind's offensive actions or even his inappropriate thoughts, notwithstanding the significance of both of those, but rather the constantly recurring choices which determine the orientation of the will towards good or evil. The Book of Mormon equates sin with the choice of subjection to the influence of Satan and insists that such a choice must be reversed if salvation is to become possible. In addition, if the consistent choice of sin can be altered, the Nephite record affirms that behavioral and emotional consequences will follow. As set forth in the earlier discussion of agency, the Nephite prophets insist that there are two ways open before mankind, two possible paths which men and women can travel in every moment. They are defined not by their particular slopes or curves, but by their distinct directions. Or even more precisely they are discernible by the guide who accompanies the traveler. The Book of Mormon proclaims unequivocally that there are two spirits vying for mankind's company. Although they may not be recognized or even noticed, these spirits are perceptible.

In such a situation sin becomes less a matter of thoughts and behavior and far more a matter of allegiance. The Book of Mormon portrayal of agency maintains that in every instant of

a person's awareness, the choice between one path and the other is possible. Sin is the choice to walk the path of subjection, to "yield to the enticings of that cunning one"[14] and capitulate to his hollow promises. He offers security, influence, mastery, and revenge and his duplicity is concealed, like a knife under a pillow, within the very offers he extends.

> For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.
> And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well--and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell.
> And behold, others he flattereth away, and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none--and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance.[15]

The eternal significance of sin according to the teachings of the Book of Mormon writers is threefold: first, sin widens the gulf distancing man from God, cutting man off increasingly from God's restorative ability[16]; second, it affects the impurity of man's physical being, rendering him 'unclean' and thereby incapable of enduring God's presence[17]; and third, it places man ever more surely within the tightening grasp of Satan's subjection[18]. "And thus we see how great the inequality of man is because of sin and transgression, and the power of the devil, which comes by the cunning plans which he hath devised to ensnare the hearts of men."[19] That is why sin is so destructive—not, as is often implied, because God is offended or disgusted or angry or annoyed—but because man distances himself from God's exalting power and subjects himself to the power of evil. This is not God's response to man's sin; it is the natural consequence of personal choices.

> And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.[20]

What Alma$_2$ declares to be the case of men in mortality due to the effects of the fall and subsequent sin is assumed by the other Book of Mormon writers to be applicable in the context of eternity as well. If people choose subjection to the degrading influence of the adversary, their ability to experience peace and joy will diminish accordingly. The direct result of sin, whether in

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[14]2 Nephi 9:39.
[15]2 Nephi 28:20-22.
[16]See 2 Nephi 2:5; 4:4; Alma 9:13-14; 42:5-7, 11-12; Ether 2:15.
[17]See 1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34; Alma 7:21; 11:37; 40:26; Helaman 8:25; 3 Nephi 27:19.
[18]See 1 Nephi 14:7; 2 Nephi 9:9, 16, 46; 26:22; Mosiah 16:5; Alma 5:41-42; 12:6; 34:35.
[19]Alma 28:13.
[20]Alma 41:11. This verse is immediately preceded by the famous phrase that "wickedness never was happiness."

this life or the next, is the misery of subjection to Satan's control. Samuel the Lamanite makes this message of ultimate consequences for sin when he preaches to the people of Zarahemla:

> ...but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.
>
> Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death.[21]

The Book of Mormon writers unitedly assert that there is a point at which those who reject the light of Christ and insist upon their will to choose subjection and sin will no longer be able to choose otherwise, but will be fully and eternally in Satan's power.

A SECOND FALL OF MAN

At this point in our discussion it will be beneficial to describe more fully what is meant in the Book of Mormon by the idea of subjection. Jacob, Abinadi, Alma₂, Amulek, and Mormon all use this image to represent the oppressive relationship of Satan to those over whom he gains power and influence. The word is frequently used elsewhere in the record to speak of political subservience[22] and is closely linked to the concept of 'captivity', another recurring Book of Mormon motif. The message being expounded is that as a result of the fall and through the further disabling process of sin, individuals relinquish their freedom and are brought under the power of Satan. Men and women become his subjects and he their lord as they surrender themselves to his will. Nephi uses the more powerful image of bondage when he asserts of those who become followers of darkness that "[the devil] leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever."[23] And Alma₂ combines the images of slavery with the language of subjection to make his point emphatic:

> And behold I say unto you all that this was a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction, according to the power of his captivity.[24]

The devil described in the Book of Mormon and in LDS doctrine generally is far removed from the simple idea of a malicious imp attempting to get man in trouble by goading him into breaking the rules. In Mormonism, Satan is a capable and designing spiritual being with

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[21]Helaman 14:18-19.
[22]Mosiah 7:18, 22; Mosiah 21:13; 22:13; 24;9; Alma 2"10; 43:7, 29; 47:6; 49:7, 26; 51:22; 54:18, 20; 61:12-13; 3 Nephi 6:30; and Ether 10:6.
[23]2 Nephi 26:22. Jacob makes a related statement in 2 Nephi 9:46 when he speaks of the devil "obtaining" the unrighteous and making them "prey to his awful misery."
[24]Alma 12:6.

a keen and commanding intellect who has resolutely given himself over to wickedness.[25] In his pride and ambition he has chosen hatred, rancor, and violence, finding a perverse delight in suffering and cruelty. He actively seeks to make all men as miserable as he himself is and in this fallen world he reigns in bloodshed and terror. He also commands a phalanx of followers who have chosen him as their lord and who assist him in his work of destruction. Subjection to such a being yields anger, mistrust and despair.

The model of subjection proposed by this thesis holds that individuals become progressively subject to the influence of the adversary as they choose to allow negative or destructive impulses to govern their will. It has been shown that a person may, through consistent choices, strengthen or weaken the physiological impulses he or she has inherited or developed.[26] Sin, then, is the willful exercise of destructive desires. As a person feels Satan's bitterness, selfishness, and pride she or he necessarily responds to those feelings. If an individual allows those sensations to influence his or her personality and direct the will, they will be mediated by personal physiology and biochemistry and become manifest in specific emotions, desires, thoughts and behaviors. In other words, while organic bases may determine the avenue of aberration, it is the relationship with Satan, recognized or not, that sets those forces in motion. Physiological defects increase Satan's ability to influence mankind and determine how that influence will be channeled into thought and conduct. But it is the choice to allow that influence to dominate the will that brings subjection.

Joseph Smith declared that "the devil has no power over us only as we permit him."[27] and that "the devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary."[28] These phrases need not suggest that all of mankind's weaknesses and corrupt tendencies are the result of conscious choices. Experience suggests that many types of negative impulses exist prior to choice. For our purposes we will therefore maintain a distinction between the direct influence of Satan and the natural consequences of the fall. By making that distinction it is possible to assert the idea that the devil's influence upon an individual is limited by his or her choices—Satan can have no power over people except as they allow him to—while recognizing that the fall has already played a part in humanity's genetic inheritance as well as in the surrounding environment, predisposing mankind to certain types of drives or behaviors that are in no way mediated by choice. In giving free reign to those impulses which the individual recognizes as destructive, he or she chooses subjection and becomes increasingly vulnerable to Satan's control.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship being proposed between the enticings of Satan (which we here refer to in Book of Mormon language as the "Spirit of the Devil"),

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[25] We are of course using the term "spiritual" in the sense suggested earlier, so that the devil exists within the realm of materiality, but has not been embodied.

[26] We discussed this in the previous chapter. See Allen E. Bergin, "Toward a Theory of Human Agency," in *BYU Studies* 16:1, pp. 165-183. His data focuses on how destructive impulses can be weakened through contrary choices, but the opposite case would also seem to hold.

[27] *TPJS*, 181.

[28] *TPJS*, 187.

humanity's fallen corporeal nature, the choice of sin (labeled "subjection") and the possible results which can ensue. The dotted lines represent the notion that agency can be exercised at any point in thought or conduct, and the choice not to involve oneself in sin is always possible.
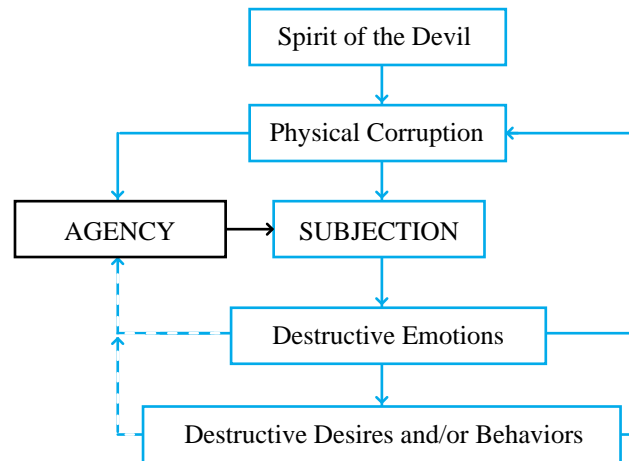


This model incorporates the previous hypotheses of this thesis, dealing with man's embodiment as well as various other aspects of LDS doctrine. As a result of the fall, there is present within each individual's body a variety of different types of physical corruption or defects. Some of those defects, especially those which correspond to the portions of human physiology commonly associated with the mind or the will, compromise the individual's innate constructive tendencies, increasing the appeal of other types of stimuli and creating a latent but seductive allure or even a fascination with destructive influences. We have previously designated the point at which an individual decides to entertain that type of fascination as 'sin'. By making that initial choice the person subjects his or her will to the destructive tendencies nascent in the body. This is represented in the model by the two central boxes labeled "agency" and "subjection." In choosing sin one enters into a self-perpetuating cycle of ruin.

But a further element must be added in order to make the model consistent with the teachings of the Book of Mormon. The "flesh and the evil therein" mentioned by Lehi[29] is not regarded as the sole factor enticing people to sin. Jacob uses the phrase "the will of the devil and the flesh"[30] making reference to the contribution of Satan to the temptations which face mankind. This idea requires that Satan influences the human body in some way to amplify the natural appeal of one's already fallen impulses. Considering the forces contributing to temptation, the choice may be heavily weighted and profoundly difficult to resist, but it is nevertheless a voluntary one so long as agency is assumed.

The model proposed above hypothesizes that subjection, whether to the power of Satan or to the fallen nature of the body, leads to diminished control over one's emotions, resulting in

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[29] 2 Nephi 2:29.
[30] 2 Nephi 10:24.

anger, depression, fear, greed, lust, selfishness, pride, ambition, guilt, anxiety, and so forth. These are the fruits of the spirit of darkness, and they each in their way affect one's biochemistry. The resulting material changes in the body allow Satan progressively more sway, placing limits and constraints upon one's agency. Therefore, when a person makes a choice to follow the impulses of the fallen body, he or she also makes the indirect choice of subjection to the influence of Satan. The same process follows as emotions lead to actions, creating an involuntary cycle of compulsive and destructive drives and behaviors. When a person *chooses* to feel offended, greedy, proud, angry, depressed, gluttonous, titillated, worthless, or a thousand other feelings which wound the soul and weaken the will, he or she is choosing subjection to the powers of darkness[31]. That choice alienates the man or woman from God's saving power and threatens the individual with misery.

An essential implication of this model merits emphasis. The notion of destructive impulses of various types and degrees being present in the very physiology of man means that every person faces and responds to a unique situation. The drives one feels compelled by may be wholly foreign to a sister or a neighbor and are therefore often accompanied by a sense of isolation, of not belonging, of not fitting in. This can itself become a contributing factor in drawing the will toward destructive choices. Perhaps most important of all, the discrepancy between each person's inclinations also indicates the impossibility of casting judgment upon one another. There is no way of knowing the full impact of the struggles which others face, so reckoning the severity of someone else's sin is a futile task.

As a person involves himself in sin, he experiences an increased tendency to destructive emotions and behaviors. His will is corrupted, or to use the scriptural language, he becomes unclean. This means that sin increases the intensity of an individual's subjection to destructive forces upon the will. The repeated choice of sin impairs agency; it restricts freedom and increasingly subjects the sinner to destructive powers and tendencies. In common experience it would appear that such cycles are temporary, reaching a point of saturation at which the fascination ends and agency is resumed. However, one of the most fundamental concerns of the Book of Mormon is the teaching that this destructive cycle can become unavoidably protracted and at some point even permanent. In such a situation agency has been completely surrendered to subjection and the individual becomes powerless to deflect the blows of the adversary.

Before King Noah and his priests, Abinadi issued this stern warning:

> Remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God.[32]

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[31]As one example of this general principle, see Christ's assertion about the source of contention and anger in 3 Nephi 11:29.

[32]Mosiah 16:5. For further examples, see 1 Nephi 14:7; 2 Nephi 26:10; 28:23; Alma 9:28; and particularly 40:13.

The Book of Mormon prophets are adamant about the doctrine that there is a point of no return beyond which an individual who has persistently subjected himself to the influence of Satan can no longer choose anything else. Amulek seems to make reference to the earlier ideas of his preaching companion, Alma₂, when he explains this principle to the people of Antionum.[33]

> For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.[34]

Alma₂ himself also describes this consuming cycle of sin's destruction, making the interesting point that as a person's subjection to the influence of Satan intensifies, his or her knowledge of the 'mysteries' decreases proportionally.[35]

> And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction. Now this is what is meant by the chains of hell.
> Then is the time when their torments shall be as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever; and then is the time that they shall be chained down to an everlasting destruction, according to the power and captivity of Satan, he having subjected them according to his will.[36]

Throughout the Book of Mormon we encounter the chilling exhortation to avoid following the spirit of darkness into sin, based on the insistence that Satan's subjection can become an everlasting condition. The writers are more prone to speak in terms of final possibilities and outcomes than of the immediate significance of thoughts or actions. The two paths before mankind are described with the intention of defining man's ultimate options and stating the connection between seemingly trivial decisions made every moment and the destinations to which they lead. This creates an intriguingly dichotomous discussion in which every choice carries with it moral implications. Not every choice is between white and black— sometimes both choices confronting an individual lead to good or both to evil—but there is no possibility of grey in this typical Book of Mormon consideration of ultimate ends.

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[33]Alma₂ had earlier made reference to the eternal destruction of the spirit as the "second death" in preaching to the Zoramites (see Alma 12:16). Samuel the Lamanite later picks up on this same wording in Helaman 14:17-19. Although it is possible to read Amulek's words as suggesting that one's opportunities for repentance come to an abrupt end following mortality (see also Alma 34:32), there is a doctrinal inconsistency in the idea which will be made clear in later chapters. Alma₂ avoids the inconsistency by making his distinction between the temporal death and the second death, the latter being the event horizon of Satan's subjection.

[34]Alma 34:35.

[35]We will discuss the Book of Mormon usage of the idea of 'mysteries' in chapter ten.

[36]Alma 12:6, 11, 17. We have already quoted Jacob's words to this effect from 2 Nephi 9:9 and 16 wherein he declares that those who ultimately choose darkness will be unable to enter the presence of God and will continue on their course of destruction until they become devils themselves.

Sin and Avoidance

While it may appear unusual in a culture accustomed to defining sin in terms of thoughts and behaviors, this description of sin as primarily an act of will—an exercise of choice—creates a revealing context in which to discuss morality. The behavioral interpretation of sin frequently results in a confusing and self-contradictory debate over the justification for categorizing actions as good or evil. We have described two distinct ways in which behaviors are commonly classified as sins. The first was on the basis of divine law. If the law is of primary importance and action is only relevant in relation to it, the result is a moral hierarchy in which obedience to law must take precedence over all else, including ethics. The letter of the law is the only consideration and any discussion of spirit is nothing more than a justification for disobedience.

The second approach defines behaviors as good or evil based solely on the practical repercussions that follow. This results at times in the abandoning of absolute standards of morality in order to accommodate situational contingencies. From this perspective, it can be argued that nothing is 'wrong' that does not have recognizable negative consequences. We stated at the outset that our discussion of sins would follow this pragmatic course. However, at this point we must make our departure.[37] While negative consequences of sins must be real, they need not be recognizable. It is consistent with LDS scripture to insist that some behaviors universally cause harm either in the perpetrator, a victim or both. The Book of Mormon would include among these behaviors such obvious moral infractions as murder, sexual immorality and stealing, as well as less dramatic examples of cruelty, lust, selfishness and deceit.[38] The Nephite prophets held that there are patently evil and cruel actions which result in immediate and foreseeable suffering, just as there are good actions which result in joy and peace. However, some actions do not necessitate such clear-cut results and a common behavior can have an entirely distinct meaning and consequence in varied circumstances or for different individuals. Therefore, the attempt to define sin solely in terms of behavior and repercussions becomes bogged down in the quandary of not always knowing which actions will bring good results and which bad.

By transferring the emphasis of the discussion of sin from conduct to allegiance, the actions themselves become imbued with a more profound moral significance. They not only represent obedience to or rejection of divine law, but truly significant steps in a path toward a person's eternal destiny. Even prior to the existence of moral thoughts or behavior, this investigation into the nature of sin asserts that critical moral decisions are already being made. The sin which we have addressed in this chapter and which the Book of Mormon indicates

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[37]We concluded in the previous chapter that agency exists within a pre-existing moral context, so absolute standards (of morality if not of conduct) do exist.

[38]It is understandable, given the consuming conflicts between Nephite and Lamanite culture and the suffering caused by dissent and treachery that the Book of Mormon writers would place such emphasis on the general concern over those who "delight in bloodshed." Lying, oath breaking, infidelity and pride likewise receive direct attention.

deserves mankind's full attention precedes all that the usual discussion of sins includes. The primary concern lies in the initial choice to allow the spirit of the devil influence over the will. The choice may be more easily recognizable once the incipient stimulus has been translated into obviously negative emotions or behaviors, but the Book of Mormon assumes that one can also learn to apprehend the original sense of Satan's enticings—a defensive instinct, an obscene thrill, a gambler's fascination—and consciously choose either to follow or reject that sensation.

We have so far devoted our attention to the varied circumstances of humanity's subjection. From distant realms man has entered a fallen world and a corrupted flesh for a purpose we have only sensed and glanced at. Our intent has been to describe the set on which the drama of salvation is played out, to paint in backdrops and mold a mock-up of the fixtures which define the meaning of Christ's work on man's behalf. Our stage has been assembled by drawing on the hints, the speculations and the prophetic utterances of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon prophets. The upraised curtain reveals a world in darkness, consumed with enmity and lorded over by a ruinous tyrant. Fallen man lies wrecked on a fatal shore. Corrupt and broken in his very being, temptations rage without as also deep within, so that—even contrary to longing—he lurches, stumbling, and falls again, and yet again. A hideous subjection to both destruction and Destroyer wounds him, scars his soul, and rends his heart. That is the story we have told thus far. Were our cast of players exhausted, no tale could depict more hopelessness nor deserve more tears. But our principal waits ably in the wings and as the story unfolds he will surely transform the humor from sorrow to rejoicing.

SUBJECTION OR SUBMISSION

In our earlier discussion of life as a probationary state, we noted that several of the contributors to the Book of Mormon make the suggestion that the purpose of mortality lies in the opportunity which it provides humanity to repent.

> And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was *a space granted unto man in which he might repent*; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.[39]

Repentance in the Book of Mormon is the way in which a person prepares to come into the presence of God. It is one of the book's central doctrines and the writers frequently make reference to its necessity.[40] Without repentance, there is no means by which men and women

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[39]Alma 12:24. See also 2 Nephi 2:21 and Alma 42:13.
[40]For examples, see 1 Ne 10:18; 22:28; 2 Nephi 9:23; Mosiah 3:21; 11:21-23; Alma 5:6-13; 31-33; 49-51; 7:14; 9:12; 13:10; Helaman 7:28; 12:23; 14:18; 3 Nephi 9:22; 27:19-20; Mormon 7:3; Ether 4:18; 5:5; Moroni 7:34; and 8:10.

can enter into God's kingdom because sin has rendered them unclean, and "no unclean thing" can dwell there. In the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price the Lord's words intended for the posterity of Adam confirm this assertion:

> Wherefore, teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.[41]

Because sin is so commonly defined within Mormon culture as a violation of divine law, it is easy for repentance to be interpreted primarily as an attempt to regain the acceptance of God through reconciliatory emotions and actions. With sin being treated as a behavioral issue, repentance has naturally followed suit, being viewed almost exclusively as a response to misbehavior. The vital intent of repentance in such a system is for the sinner to demonstrate before God that he or she has truly changed, and thereby to regain God's approval through forgiveness. The result has been the development of a technique-oriented interpretation of repentance. It has become paradigmatic in LDS instruction to speak of several 'steps of repentance'. These steps have been defined in various ways since at least the early 1960's in order to explain to struggling souls the process by which they might free themselves from the accumulated guilt of their sins and be made clean.[42] The steps most frequently listed involve such things as recognizing the sin, feeling sorrow or remorse, forsaking or abandoning the unworthy thoughts and actions, confessing to the appropriate parties, and making restitution wherever possible. The words of the Doctrine and Covenants, "by this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them,"[43] are often quoted as scriptural support for this approach, and in the minds of most of those who teach or learn such concepts, the process thus described is synonymous with repentance itself. These necessary steps are considered the method—the technique—by which the desired outcome of forgiveness can be achieved.

This common model of repentance maintains that because an individual has sinned by violating the laws of God through unworthy thoughts or actions, he or she must go through certain procedures to be worthy of God's forgiveness and to divert the punishment that necessarily attends disobedience. This thesis will instead employ a definition of repentance which places it in direct complement with the explanation of sin we have suggested. Since we are viewing sin as the destructive use of agency, we will characterize repentance as the constructive

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[41]Moses 6:57.

[42]See for example, William J. Critchlow, Jr., (Conference Report: April, 1962, p. 38) where he makes a list of seven steps of repentance which he arranges as recognition, remorse, relating, restitution, resolution, reformation, and realization. Other leaders have made similar lists. One obvious case is the inclusion of such a list in the standard discussions used by LDS missionaries throughout the world.

[43]D&C 58:43.

use of agency. By this definition, humankind's only options are sin and repentance. As long as humanity is subject to the effects of the Fall and mortality, there is nothing else. But as sin is the negative response to impulses which are fostered by Satan, repentance—as we will outline it— must also be a response to an external being. The choice of one is by its nature a choice against the other. Helaman₃ encouraged his sons with the following words:

> And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall.[44]

Our earlier model equated sin with subjection since any choice to allow destructive forces to influence the will decreases an individual's power to resist temptation, affording Satan increased control over the person's emotions, desires and conduct. Although the word is less frequently employed by the Book of Mormon writers, we will distinguish the choice of sin from that of repentance by referring to the latter as 'submission'. This follows the usage of King Benjamin in Mosiah 3:19.[45]

> For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.[46]

The following model represents the choice of repentance or submission to the will of Christ and the positive effects which result:

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[44]Helaman 5:12. Nephi makes a similar statement about the contrast between the word of God and the "fiery darts of the adversary" in 1 Nephi 15:24.

[45]Mormon describes a submissive people in Mosiah 24:15 and Alma₂ discusses submissiveness as a required attribute for salvation in Alma 7:23 and 13:28.

[46]Mosiah 3:19.
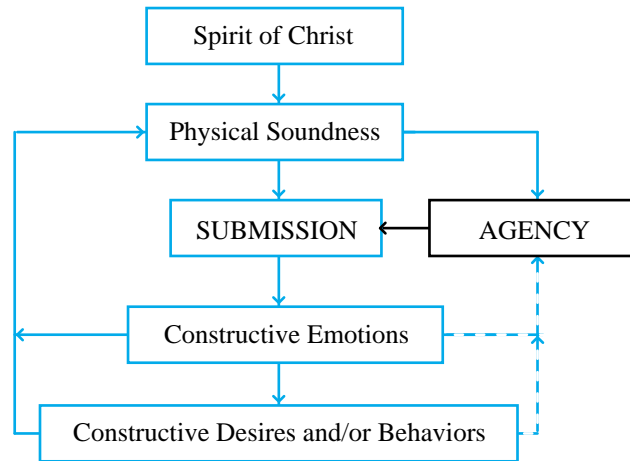
When a person chooses to allow the Spirit of Christ to influence the will, a constructive cycle is initiated which enhances the individual's desires for positive and healthy emotions and the actions to which they lead. As before, the dotted lines represent the possibility of interrupting the cycle by choosing contrary impulses and, in this case, entering into sin. The Book of Mormon doctrine of the Two Ways has formed the basis of the diagrams in this chapter which are intended to describe the dual options available for human agency and the contrasting cycles which reinforce them. In every moment a person can either choose subjection and the destructive impulses of the will, or submission and the constructive impulses which direct it. While the stimulus from both sides may be simultaneous and ongoing, the choices are mutually exclusive and constantly recurring. One can choose to continue in a self-perpetuating cycle, or break free of it to choose the opposing cycle. At the conclusion of this chapter we have also included a diagram which combines the assertions of chapters three through six to describe the overall relationship between humanity's corporeal creation and the fall, agency, sin and repentance.

In order for these suggestions to have significance beyond mortality, we must assume (as suggested in chapter three) that the choices made during a person's lifetime not only affect the physical body, but those elements of embodiment which compose the spirit as well. Regardless of how one defines the spirit within the Latter-day Saint paradigm, the possibility exists that it can be materially manipulated through the experiences of mortality. Indeed, such a hypothesis appears necessary given the assertions of Joseph Smith's material universe. Assuming that position, it would follow that certain types of choices, emotions and actions would have a more profound influence than others and would therefore have a more significant and lasting impact upon the soul.

The Book of Mormon asserts, as we have seen, that when a person chooses sin, Satan's ability to influence or control the will increases. Nephi also asserts the alternative notion that choosing submission to the will of Christ curtails Satan's influence. In fact, he boldly declares that the future era of millennial peace will be made possible by the peoples' choice to follow Christ.

> And because of the righteousness of [Christ's] people, Satan has no power; wherefore, he cannot be loosed for the space of many years; for he hath no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth.[47]

As individuals consistently choose submission to constructive impulses, Satan's ability to manipulate the will is diminished or wholly incapacitated. According to Nephi's declaration, the power of darkness is dispelled by allowing in the light. Likewise, the ability of Christ to influence the soul is conditioned by the choices which individuals make. Unless and until a person chooses submission, Christ's capacity to bless is limited. Helaman₃ declares that the Father gives Christ power to save mankind if they will accept him. "And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls."[48] Alma₂ reiterates that position.

> Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, *only on conditions of repentance* of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.[49]

Abinadi actually goes so far as to identify some of the limits of God's power: "Therefore ought ye not to tremble? For salvation cometh to none such [the rebellious]; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, *neither can the Lord redeem such*; for he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice when it has its claim."[50] The relative influence of both Satan and Christ is determined by the choices which people make either for subjection or submission.

In April of 1842, Joseph Smith made his own declaration concerning the two ultimate options which face mankind and the paths which lead in those directions.

> Notwithstanding this congregation profess to be Saints, yet I stand in the midst of all [kinds of] characters and classes of men. If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil.[51]

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[47]1 Nephi 22:26.

[48]Helaman 5:11.

[49]Alma 42:13.

[50]Mosiah 15:27. Many of the Book of Mormon prophets employ the imagery of law and justice to describe the workings of repentance and atonement. (See, for example, 2 Nephi 2, Jacob 9, Alma 34, and 42.) This is a powerful metaphor and provides a useful model for explanation, but as we will discuss in chapter nine, if it is applied to literally, the implications become inconsistent.

[51]*TPJS*, 216 (brackets in original).

According to LDS doctrine, these are the two possibilities which face mankind. Humanity can choose subjection to evil or submission to good, and every decision made is a choice for one or the other.

A RIGHTEOUS OFFERING

These two options assumed by the Book of Mormon writers suggest that every choice of submission to the Spirit of Christ and the constructive impulses of the body constitutes repentance. But the writers also imply that while every choice for submission may lead in the same direction, each is not of equal value. Since the prophets' role is to invite people to receive salvation, submission is typically described in its ultimate sense, so the prophets are explicit in their explanation of the requirements of repentance. Several contributors to the Book of Mormon draw upon the language of the Psalms to describe the full extent of submission as a "broken heart and a contrite spirit."[52] Lehi teaches his family that only those who submit themselves completely to Christ can receive the fullness of his salvation. "Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered."[53] Amaleki also employs the imagery of sacrifice to make the same point:

> And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. Yea, come unto him, and *offer your whole souls as an offering unto him*, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved.[54]

The usual framework which defines repentance as a response to misbehavior necessarily places its emphasis on compensating God's justice for the offensiveness of sins. But if sin is regarded as more than simply a behavioral issue, it is not the seriousness of sins, but the completeness of repentance that becomes significant. The necessity of repentance in the Book of Mormon is unconditioned by the gravity of past errors. Each person who has sinned to any degree is in equal need of repentance. More serious sins may increase the urgency of repentance, but not its requirements. The accounts of Alma$_2$'s conversion in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36 are perhaps the most complete depictions of repentance contained in the Book of Mormon, yet because his change of heart (like Paul's) was both sudden and miraculous, Latter-day Saints are prone to treat the event as an anomaly, which does not easily fit the understood pattern of the repentance process. Indeed, if one defines repentance in terms of procedure, it is difficult to comprehend Alma$_2$'s experience at all. However, if one instead regards repentance as the choice

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[52]Psalms 51:17. The image is also evident in Isaiah 57:15.
[53]2 Nephi 2:7. See also 2 Nephi 4:32; 3 Nephi 9:20; 12:19; Mormon 2:14; Ether 4:15; and Moroni 6:2.
[54]Omni 1:26.

to submit one's will to Christ, then the suddenness of Alma₂'s transformation can be readily assimilated given his obviously uncompromising submission. Amulek makes this suggestion in his message of repentance to the people who had been cast out of the synagogues in Antionum because of their poverty: "Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you*."[55]

While Alma₂'s conversion was unique in many aspects, he insists that the complete change of heart he experienced is not only possible for all people, but necessary in order for repentance to be unblemished. He uses the imagery of rebirth to illustrate his point:

> And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;
> And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.[56]

Thus Alma₂'s transformation can be recognized as prototypical, not of speed, but of commitment. Repentance ultimately requires a complete surrender of all that which is destructive and unclean in favor of the purifying and healing power of Christ.

It should be recognized that the Book of Mormon writers are not so concerned with a formulaic, rule-centered concept of obedience, as with the hearkening, relationship-focused response to God's love. The rules are known, accepted and followed, but as evidenced by the frequent teachings respecting the symbolic significance of the law of Moses, obedience to the commandments is viewed as the consequence at least as much as the demonstration of individual righteousness.[57] The underlying meaning of the concept of repentance in the Book of Mormon is encapsulated in Christ's invitation to those who survived the calamities prior to his appearance: "O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?"[58] As individuals surrender their will to the Savior they invite his healing power into their lives. Just as in the case of sin and subjection, this involves a material change in body and spirit. Repentance in the Book of Mormon is the response to Christ's offer of healing. That which Mormons typically describe as the repentance process turns out in the Book of Mormon to be the *result* and not the *method* of turning one's will to Christ.[59]
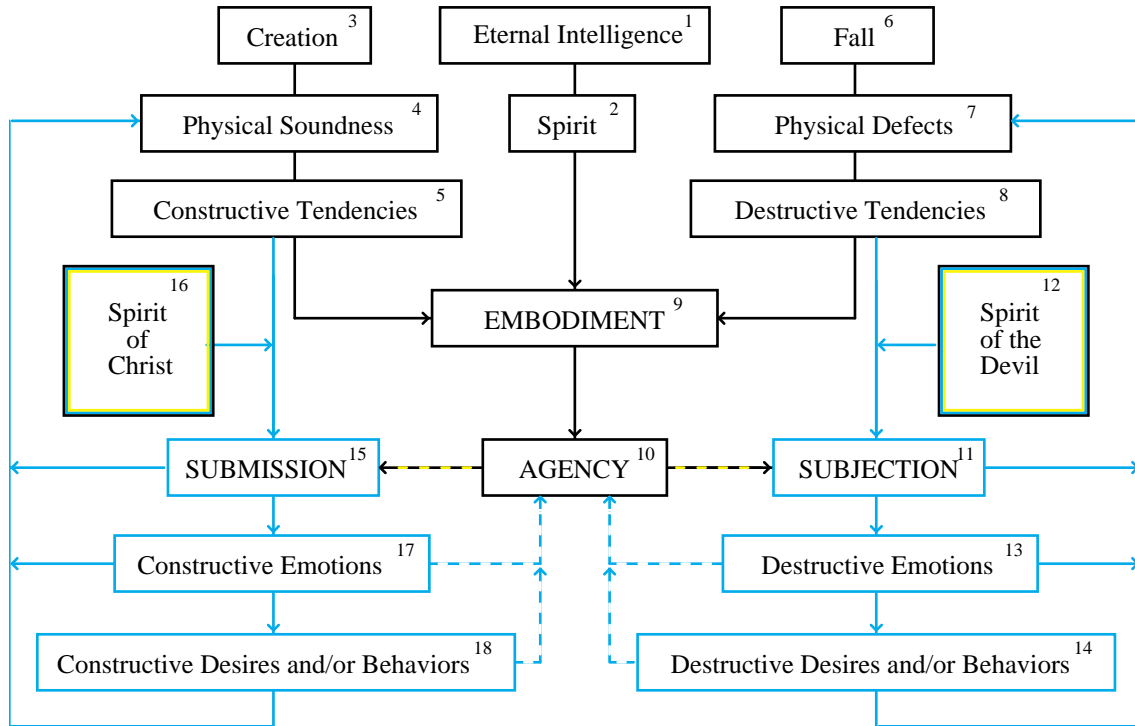
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[55]Alma 34:31.

[56]Mosiah 27:25-26. See Jacob 6:5; Alma 5:14-34; Helaman 3:35; Mormon 9:27; and Moroni 7:48 for other references to the idea that repentance requires complete submission.

[57]On the views of the law of Moses prior to Christ's appearance, see 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:24-25; Jacob 4:5; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 3:14-15; 12:31-37; 13:27-33; and Alma 25:15-16.

[58]3 Nephi 9:13. See also 3 Nephi 18:32.

[59]D&C 58:43 which we quoted earlier, can as easily be read to describe confessing and forsaking sin as the consequence rather than the substance of repentance. The technique-oriented approach to repentance offers an

THE SOURCES AND RESULTS OF HUMAN AGENCY

Creation [3]   Eternal Intelligence [1]   Fall [6]

Physical Soundness [4]   Spirit [2]   Physical Defects [7]

Constructive Tendencies [5]   Destructive Tendencies [8]

Spirit of Christ [16]   EMBODIMENT [9]   Spirit of the Devil [12]

SUBMISSION [15]   AGENCY [10]   SUBJECTION [11]

Constructive Emotions [17]   Destructive Emotions [13]

Constructive Desires and/or Behaviors [18]   Destructive Desires and/or Behaviors [14]

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[1] Uncreated intelligence which has existed eternally and which composes the core of each individual.

[2] The individual spirit prior to receiving a physical body. This is to be understood as a material being although the configuration of its elements is such as to make it intangible in mankind's current state.

[3] The priesthood power of Christ which organized matter and made possible for each individual the endowment of a corporeal body.

[4] The original state of the creation, organized such that the physical body naturally seeks fulfillment or actualization and is drawn to that which is constructive, positive or good.

[5] That which the body, as organized in Creation, seeks naturally. This is often referred to in the Book of Mormon as the Light of Christ which is present in each individual and which teaches mankind the distinction between good and evil and prompts him toward goodness.

[6] The effects of Satan's dominion upon the creation.

[7] The effects introduced by the Fall manifest in the body. These result in sin, suffering and eventually death. These include all types of somatic disability, although the most important ones for this diagram are those which directly affect emotion and behavior such as neurological disorders, some chromosomal or genetic defects, organic abnormalities of the brain or biochemical imbalances. This last group is demonstrably affected by experience in

individual's behavior to the demands of the law, but the Book of Mormon insists that what is fundamentally necessary is the offering of one's self to Christ.

addition to genetic inheritance. Thus, particularly traumatic experiences such as abuse can create a recognizable and sometimes injurious chemical imbalance. It is assumed that all human experiences have physiological manifestations to a greater or lesser degree (see 14 and 18 below).

[8]The natural effects of certain types of physical defects as described in 7 above. The way in which these destructive tendencies are manifest in emotion or behavior may also be determined organically. For example, when faced with feelings of depression, one person may have a natural propensity for overeating, another for self-abuse. The intensity of these compulsions may also vary due to fluctuations in biochemistry over time. The Book of Mormon often refers to this idea in terms of the 'natural man', asserting that because of the Fall man has become carnal, sensual and devilish. Further explanation is offered in 13 and 14 below.

[9]The 'self' or the 'will' materially composed of (1) intelligence and individual pre-existent spirit, (2) the physical body made up of the 'light of Christ,' and (3) those characteristics of the physical body which have been corrupted genetically or otherwise and which thus tend toward negative or destructive ends. These three acting in concert compose the individual personality.

[10]The ability and the necessity of choice, both of which are the natural result of the tripartite nature of the will. (Agency is possible as long as all three components of the will are operative. In some cases of severe physical abnormality—those, for example, which produce schizophrenia—the ability to choose has been largely or wholly obliterated by the defect.)

[11]Any choice not to follow Christ, which thus leads away from the perfection of the individual. This is so because in his fallen state man is "cut off" from the creative power and presence of the Lord except on conditions of faith.

[12]The destructive influence of Satan and his followers in mortality and eternity. This influence is mediated through the corrupted body (see 7 above).

[13]Subjection to the power of Satan or to the fallen nature of the body leads to a loss of control over emotions resulting in anger, depression, fear, greed, lust, selfishness, pride, ambition, guilt, anxiety, etc. It is possible, though, to exercise agency at this point in order to prevent such emotions from becoming manifest in thought or action.

[14]As negative emotion is translated into thoughts and actions (which we classify as 'sins') those experiences become manifest in the individual's biochemistry as well as in the dendrite links within the brain. Thus sins lead to increased tendencies to further sin, and exercise a destructive effect on personal agency. Even in the midst of destructive desires or behaviors one can exercise agency by abandoning them.

[15]The choice to follow Christ and seek personal fulfillment through the cultivation of Christlike qualities.

[16]The present and ongoing power of Christ to teach, bless and heal. This power resides in Christ and, to some degree, in those who are seeking to be as He is (whether they know or accept Christ at present or are simply drawn to 'goodness' without recognizing him as its source). These may be spiritual or mortal beings. This influence is also mediated through the constructive impulses inherent in the physical body, what we typically refer to as the conscience, or in Mormonism as the 'light of Christ" (See 4 above).

[17]Personal sense of emotional health and freedom brought about by submission to Christ and His influence. These emotions include love, altruism, empathy, joy, peace, hope, etc.

[18]As positive emotion is translated into thoughts and actions, those experiences become manifest in an individual's biochemistry, leading to an increased sense of well-being, thus influencing the will to seek further fulfillment.

# CHRISTIAN IMAGES OF ATONEMENT

> Who but those who have duly considered the condescension of the Father of our spirits, in providing a sacrifice for His creatures, a plan of redemption, a power of atonement, a scheme of salvation, having as its great objects, the bringing of men back into the presence of the King of Heaven, crowning them in the celestial glory, and making them heirs with the Son to that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away—who but such can realize the importance of a perfect walk before all men, and a diligence in calling upon all men to partake of these blessings? How indescribably glorious are these things to mankind!
>
> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 48.

## RAISING OLD ISSUES TO BEGIN ANEW

The first section of this thesis investigated the nature of God's benevolence, suggesting new possibilities that are available for LDS discussion based on Mormonism's explicit rejection of the theological creeds of normative Christianity. Section two explored the hypothesis that the spirit world as described by Joseph Smith can be viewed as a subset of the physical realm, looking at the implications of such a notion for Latter-day Saint perceptions of man's fallen condition, human freedom, sin and repentance. In our final section we will now undertake to explore the meaning of salvation in LDS thought, building upon the suggestions that have been introduced previously. As an introduction to that discussion, this chapter will seek to illuminate in broad terms the sequential and conceptual development of Christian atonement theory—the ongoing debate over the significance of Christ's work—as it relates to the understanding of the atonement in Mormonism.

This debate began shortly after the period of the Apostolic Fathers and in the analysis of most modern observers, it became divided over the intervening centuries into two broad camps. The first group, which has held the field throughout most of Christian history, has taken what is today considered a conservative position, interpreting Christ's work as having changed the order of the universe in some way. It is frequently given the label 'objective' because it has generally held that the effects of the atonement (or at least some of them) are real regardless of the world's response to Christ. Salvation is possible only because of the events of Christ's life and death and had he not intervened in history, mankind would be everlastingly doomed. The second group has balked at the ethical (and later the scientific) implications of these traditional views. Labeled as 'subjective', this more liberal strain has maintained that the effects of Christ's atonement are to be discovered not in the cosmos but in the lives of individual people as they respond to the love of God displayed by Christ. Christ lived and died not as a bartering piece in a cosmic transaction, but as a perfect example to man of the embodiment of love and the quintessential pattern of selflessness. The objective and subjective labels are imprecise and awkwardly applied, but the

primary distinction separating the two views, at least in contemporary religious thought, is the acceptance or rejection of the concept of miracle.[1]

With very few exceptions (all arising in the last two centuries), these contrasting views shared the basic assumption that Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, suffered and died for man's benefit in one way or another. The question has historically been, "Were the effects of Christ's sacrifice miraculous, working a change in the composition of the universe in order to make man's salvation possible, or are the effects to be seen (and more naturally understood) solely in the lives of individuals as they consider Christ's work and are moved to a deeper love of God and their fellow men?" In the last two centuries with the introduction of a radically humanist approach to theology, those who have wished to maintain the traditional position that God intervenes in history in ways that are beyond man's natural comprehension, have generally promoted objective interpretations of the atonement, while those desiring to distance modern Christianity from its 'mythological' roots have turned to subjective accounts. Our investigation will serve to introduce the prominent themes that have arisen in the historical discussion as well as the concerns some of these positions have raised, providing a mode of discourse through which it will be possible to then consider the LDS treatment of the same issues.

Although the Mormon discussion of atonement consciously relies on insights provided by the uniquely LDS canon, much of the basic interpretation of ideas and many of the models employed to describe the significance of Christ's work have entered the LDS discourse from the outside. It is neither possible nor necessary in this thesis to determine the extent to which Christian doctrines of atonement have defined the parameters and provided the terms for LDS doctrinal exposition, but it will be useful here to elaborate the broader Christian discussion in order that we might more clearly investigate the meaning of atonement in Mormon thought.

Converts to Mormonism during its 19th century infancy had Christian roots prior to hearing the message of the restored Gospel, and it is understandable that the first missionaries did not focus their preaching on that which their hearers already believed, but on that which distinguished the restoration from its sectarian alternatives. The emerging LDS faith had much that appealed to these investigators with its additional scripture (both ancient and modern), lay priesthood, millennial promises and the developing doctrines of God's Plan of Salvation for mankind. But while these offered a revolutionary understanding of man's relation to deity and the conditions of eternity, the reality of Christ's atonement—being among the most fundamental of tenets for Christian ideology—was understood and proclaimed in very traditional ways. In joining the church, these converts brought with them those convictions about the veracity and significance of Christ's atoning sacrifice which they had held prior to their exposure to Mormonism. Therefore, the early Latter-day Saint missionaries, as well as the church leadership itself, relied upon idioms and models derived from their own Christian heritage when speaking

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[1]Alternative descriptors for the two groups have included retrospective/prospective, juridical/moral, universal/particular, and constitutive/demonstrative.

of the meaning of Christ's work. Since the great majority of initial converts were gathered from northern Europe, it is also not surprising to find the discourse indebted more to the language of Protestantism than that of Catholicism.

The latter decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a diminishing interest in atonement theory in the theological schools of the English-speaking world[2], amounting to what one modern author has called "The Abandonment of Atonement."[3] Colin Gunton repeated this point in 1988, suggesting that "other matters have taken priority, among them a preoccupation with Christianity's moral and social responsibilities."[4] It is no longer a priority to inquire after a literal explanation of the way in which Christ's life and death have made salvation possible. In such a theological climate it may appear ill-timed to revive the discussion at a point when most authors have moved on to concerns they consider more pressing and immediate or even more real. What value is there in atonement theorizing when the vast majority of the human race remains untouched by such esoteric systematics? What can it offer to those in present need besides a psychological placebo to assuage feelings of guilt, or hollow promises of a better existence in an optimistic afterlife—following a miserable and wretched experience in the alienating realities of this world. Humanity needs real help, not theories, and the call of Christianity is to provide that help in present circumstances, not to ignore the reality of suffering through the insistent preaching of its eventual compensation.

It is with just such an intention that the issue of atonement theory is raised here, not to lift up an original system by which to intellectually capture and explain Christ's work for Mormonism, but to strengthen the LDS conversation of atonement, bringing the various colors of Mormon theory into the realms of experience, revelation and involvement. The assumption of this thesis is that by examining the two major historical branches of Christian atonement theory it may be possible to strengthen and focus the LDS discussion, avoiding both the insulatory dogmatism that has characterized one Christian camp and the humanistic denial of miracle that has dominated the other. LDS interpretation must look to its own internal sources of doctrine to clarify the issues that are of central importance to the restored gospel, and as Mormon writers increasingly turn to these sources, seeking in them an appropriate vantage point from which to both understand and participate in the doctrine of atonement, the contributions of each side of the historical Christian dialogue will be illuminated. This is a process that begins at the level of language, models, and intellectual schema. These tools facilitate the construction of a more personal and abiding testimony of Christ and a more ethical daily walk with man.

In this chapter we will therefore briefly sketch the development of Christian atonement theory as it has provided the foundation for LDS interpretation, attempting to present the

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[2]This has not been so clearly the case in continental theology, which, following Barth, has asserted objective effects resulting from the atonement, although it has been reluctant to ask specifically how such effects are to be described.
[3]Colin Grant, 'The Abandonment of Atonement,' *King's Theological Review* 9 (1986), 1-8.
[4]Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), xi.

several views in their historical contexts in order to illustrate the nature of the appeal that each carried for its proponents. While, as in Christianity, no single interpretation of the literal significance of Christ's suffering and death has ever been given official endorsement in Mormonism, the ways in which it has been described and taught in LDS preaching and writing became more or less standardized at a fairly early point in the Church's history. We will therefore follow this historical sketch up to the mid-19th century, at which point the ongoing Christian discussion ceased to exercise much recognizable influence on the Mormon understanding of atonement. In the chapters that follow we will look specifically at the LDS teachings of atonement and salvation in order to examine how traditional Christian assumptions have shaped LDS interpretation of its own scriptures and explore other interpretive possibilities available to Mormon doctrinal investigation.

## THE SEEDS OF IMAGINATION

The roots of the entire Christian discourse lie exposed in the texts of the New Testament. Without entering into a discussion of textual development and criticism, let us say merely that there are a wide variety of statements in the gospels that are attributed to the Savior and that have provided a basis for the language of atonement.[5] In the Sermon on the Mount we hear of Christ preaching that he has come not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.[6] He teaches elsewhere that the father loves him "because I lay down my life, that I might take it again."[7] Earlier he had said that he must be "lifted up" like the serpent in the wilderness "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."[8] We read that Christ testified to the apostles that "the Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many."[9] In the final days of his ministry he is recorded as promising that "now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."[10] And at the institution of the last supper, he referred to the broken bread as "my body which is given for you" and the cup after supper as "the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."[11] According to the New Testament, these and other sayings of Jesus were used to endow his disciples with a sense of his role as the Messiah. But while they are specific in assigning saving significance to Christ's death, they offer no more than glimpses into its meaning or function. When we consider the varied use of imagery that Christ employed throughout his

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[5]Our intention here is not to address the issue of Christ's self-awareness or the additional question of which of his sayings can be taken as genuine, but more simply what the text itself asserts since that is what has determined the direction in which traditional atonement theory has developed.

[6]Matthew 5:17-18.

[7]John 10:17.

[8]John 3:14-15.

[9]Matthew 20:28.

[10]John 12:31-32.

[11]Luke 22:19-20. (See Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; and I Corinthians 11:23-25.)

ministry in the instruction of his followers, the suggestion that we might from these few references create a systematic explanation of the actual workings of atonement seems precarious indeed.[12] The words recorded in the gospels support the assertion that Christ taught his followers that salvation was to come through his ministry and death, but further elucidation of the mechanics of redemption are unavailable in his words.

We turn, therefore, to the language of those who have become his literary witnesses, the writers who provided the remainder of the New Testament texts. John sets forth the idea that Christ is the "advocate with the Father"[13] and the "propitiation for our sins."[14] He asserts that the "blood of Jesus…cleanses us from all sin."[15] In the Book of Revelation, John grounds his ideas in the imagery of sacrifice, referring to Christ twenty-nine times as "the Lamb," and including also the intriguing description of the righteous washing their robes and making them white "in the blood of the Lamb".[16] Peter, too, employs this sacrificial imagery, declaring that "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things…but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot".[17] Explaining the glory of the crucifixion, he tells us that Christ himself "bare our sins in his own body on the tree."[18] In the epistle to the Hebrews, the sacrificial imagery gains the greatest prominence, explicitly linking the death of Christ to the offerings made under the Mosaic law. Christ is described as the great high priest who offers the acceptable sacrifice once for all. "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."[19]

The writer who has without question made the most influential contribution to later atonement theories is Paul, who begins his preaching from the assertion that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."[20] Against the background of the world of sin of which we are a part, Paul focused his attention on the cross. "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."[21] Because of Christ's atonement, salvation is available for all who will believe. "The wages of sin is death"[22] but "Christ hath redeemed us

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[12]Attempts to do so, such as George Smeaton's *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953 [c. 1871]) invariably rest on an overly literal interpretation of a handful of passages, which in other aspects of Christ's teachings would turn the parables from metaphors for a more complex truth into actual descriptions of it. The Kingdom of God, for example, would not simply be *likened* unto a vineyard, but would have to be conceived as *being* one.

[13]I John 2:1.
[14]I John 2:2; 4:10.
[15]I John 1:7.
[16]Revelation 7:14.
[17]I Peter 1:18-19.
[18]I Peter 2:24.
[19]Hebrews 9:22-23.
[20]Romans 3:23.
[21]I Corinthians 2:2.
[22]Romans 6:23.

from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."[23] The legal accusations written against man in the heavenly record were nailed to his cross.[24] Throughout his epistles, Paul declares with boldness that "Christ died for our sins."[25] "God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us."[26] He recalls the ransom language already mentioned by insisting that we are "bought with a price."[27] He also emboldens the imagery of the ritual offering when he asserts that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."[28] God has set Christ forth to be "a propitiation through faith in his blood."[29] He "made peace through the blood of his cross."[30] Paul develops the imagery of the marketplace, the altar of sacrifice, the cosmic battlefield, and the court of law without distinction, often combining two or three metaphors to portray his witness, sometimes within a single passage.[31] He is insistent that man's salvation has been gained through the work of Christ on our behalf, but he never attempts to elaborate an exclusive systematic theory of how that has taken place. It has been pointed out that "Paul's great genius as a proselytizer lay in his adapting his message to his audience,"[32] and partly on account of his inclusion of such a wide variety of images, the message stands as an undeniable testimony of Paul's faith in Christ.

The language of the New Testament indiscriminately suggests a wide variety of images to describe the significance of Christ's death, and it was not until more than a century later that anyone thought it necessary to suggest an official interpretation of the doctrine of salvation through Christ. Therefore, the categorization of salvation imagery into distinct groups is a fairly late convention, and at the popular level is rarely made exclusive even today. Christianity's understanding of the cross and redemption has evolved slowly and cautiously, building as much upon its own internal discussion as on the original texts. It is in some ways surprising that, unlike the doctrines of the Trinity or the Incarnation, no universally accepted definition of the manner of Christ's achievement of salvation has ever been formulated.[33] Like seeds cast on the wind, the words of the New Testament writers have settled into a complex variety of uses, sprouting up quickly or laboriously as specific images and metaphors, to be developed by later interpreters as elaborate metaphorical models or even fully developed theories of atonement.[34]

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[23]Galatians 3:13.
[24]Colossians 2:14.
[25]I Corinthians 15:3.
[26]I Thessalonians 5:9-10.
[27]I Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; cf Acts 20:28.
[28]I Corinthians 5:7.
[29]Romans 3:24.
[30]Colossians 1:20.
[31]The best example is Romans 3:24-25. For a recent discussion of the metaphorical diversity of this passage, see Gunton, Ibid., 85.
[32]Keith E. Norman, "Toward A Mormon Christology: Are We Disciples to the Christ of History or the Christ of the Creeds?," *Sunstone* 10/4 (April 1985), 21.
[33]See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* fifth edition, quoted in McIntyre, John. *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1992), 1.
[34]McIntyre (Ibid., 75-76) holds that models develop into theories that are then worked out into metaphors, but his use of the terms (which follows Soskice) seems counter-intuitive. It would appear more sensible to rearrange them

THE CHURCH FATHERS

As Christianity began to spread in the first few centuries, it encountered a wide range of competing ideologies that both challenged Christian understanding and helped to define its doctrine.[35] The writings that have survived from the Apostolic Fathers exhibit the same indiscriminate use of metaphor that we are familiar with in the New Testament. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp and their contemporaries adopted the images of their predecessors to proclaim that through Christ, salvation and life eternal come to those who embrace the cross, that through his work a ransom from evil has been provided, delivering man from darkness and death. But there is no attempt during this period to systematize the images or give a rational explanation of the mechanics of redemption. These earliest documents were written before the canon was standardized and some of them were originally venerated as scripture, and held an equally significant position in the teachings of the church.[36]

Four decades later, Justin Martyr was focused on the role of Christ as the Second Adam, restoring the cosmic order which had been lost in the fall. Justin built on the Johannine imagery of Christ as the truth that dispels the ignorance of evil spirits, the same imagery that was gaining prominence at the time among certain gnostic groups. Marcion, Saturninus and others were teaching that the God of the Jews was the Demi-urge who had created the material world and who later brought about Christ's death. He was the oppressor from whom the true and benevolent God, now revealed in Christ, had set both Christ and man free. The standardization of the New Testament canon by c. 175 C.E. resulted in an increased reliance on authority than had earlier been the case, as the Church Fathers began to develop responses to the growing gnostic rationalism and the anti-materialism of men like Valentinus and Basilides. Irenaeus, the staunchly traditional bishop of Lyon, fashioned the pattern for a more logical and systematic treatment of salvation based on scriptural authority, tradition and philosophy. He taught that the corruption of original sin had alienated man from God, and that Christ's work is the recapitulation of human nature, restoring man to God from the realm of Satan. Through sin man had sold himself into the captivity of the devil, but God (to whom man rightly belonged) sent

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to say that *metaphors* are the images which provide an analogy between two concepts, *models* create a system of discourse out of metaphor, and *theories* seek to interpret such systems. This is how we will employ the terms.

[35]Due to space constraints, the ideological sketches in the text can offer but glimpses into the complex worlds of individual writers. Any such sketch will necessarily and somewhat arbitrarily emphasize certain points over others. I am indebted in this section to the work of many scholars who have sought to categorize the history of atonement theory. Prominent among them are F. R. Barry, *The Atonement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968); F. W. Dillistone, *The Christian Understanding of the Atonement* (Digswell Place, Welwyn, Herts.: James Nisbet, 1968); H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ in Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985); Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology being the Bampton Lectures for 1915* (London: Macmillan, 1919); and John R. Sheets, ed., *The Theology of the Atonement: Readings in Soteriology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

[36]For a discussion of the rocky development of canonization, see Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* translated by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). His suggestion that the Gnostics maintained the original message of Christianity is overstated, but his description of the relationship between orthodoxy and heresy is very illuminating.

Christ who redeemed mankind not by force or violence, as was his right, but by persuasion and obedience, gaining power over Satan's kingdom and delivering his prey. Through his writings, Irenaeus constructed several models of atonement that built upon—but were never reconciled to—one another.

At the same time, but in distinct circumstances, Tertullian, a Carthaginian lawyer, was expanding Paul's use of the images of legalism, reinforcing the salience of the language of debt, merit, guilt, satisfaction and compensation. Concerned with the weakening of commitment in many Christians under the severity of Roman persecution, heavy impositions of penance had been instituted by which the *lapsi* could regain communion. Tertullian placed this penance into the context of Roman law, insisting that satisfaction must be made for post-baptismal sin, either through penance or pardon. Forgiveness for pre-baptismal sin was available through faith (the belief in all the articles of the orthodox creed) and baptism. He held at first that repentance was possible for one mortal post-baptismal sin. However, concerned by the sharp distinction between those who lapsed into the denial of their Christian faith and those who suffered the tortures of persecution and martyrdom, he later reversed his position to emphatically deny the possibility of post-baptismal forgiveness.[37] By holding that the church participated in that process, he opened the door for the additional suggestion in the later writings of Cyprian that Christ's work was the satisfaction of the Father's justice that demanded payment for sins and that God must be "placated" by prayers, tears, almsgiving, fasting, and self-inflicted suffering.[38] Eusebius would later clarify the idea that it was Christ's punishment in man's place that put an end to God's wrath.

In Alexandria, a young man who had narrowly escaped death in the persecutions of 202, succeeded Clement of Alexandria at the age of eighteen as the head of the catechetical school there. One of the brightest (albeit one of the more controversial) thinkers of the early church, Origen, following up on the work of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, became interested in the discussion of Christ's ransom, asking to whom it was paid, and the nature of the price. His response, which represents the first truly systematic explanation of the mechanics of atonement and the first clear example of what came to be known as the ransom theory, agreed with Irenaeus' assessment of man as having fallen under Satan's dominion through sin. But Origen pushed the idea further, reasoning that Christ was the ransom that was paid to the devil in exchange for the souls of men. He explained, however, that since Christ was sinless, the devil had overreached himself in the transaction and it was torture for him to try to retain Christ in his possession. Therefore, Christ triumphed over Satan and the captivity that he had exercised upon man through death. Origen shared with much of Gnosticism the duality between spirit, goodness

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[37]Tertullian is the first of the Fathers to make the suggestion that the spectacle of the persecutors in torment would contribute to the joy of those in heaven. The idea had already been taught in the apocalyptic literature of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. It had such appeal and persistence that it survived as a salient feature in Dante's *Inferno*.

[38]Nascent in these teachings is the idea that the saints and confessors gain a superabundance of merit with God that can be transferred to the benefit of others, an idea which had parallels in Judaism during the intertestamental period.

and light on one hand and matter, evil and darkness on the other. The ascent from darkness to light in Origen's writings is only possible through the possession of the true knowledge (*gnosis*) of Christ's gospel.

A century later, Athanasius made his contribution to the discussion. Echoing Irenaeus and Origen in many regards, Athanasius stressed the condemnation of the world under the law of death. Since God had decreed in the garden that death would be the consequence of sin, the world lay under the curse of death. Christ, the divine Logos assumed that curse upon himself, suffering the punishment of the law against a sinful world. He was not so much suffering the penalty of individual sins as the punishment of the law of death itself. The focus of salvation for Athanasius was, like Origen, on knowing (possessing the *gnosis*) that Christ had performed the work of redemption. He is thus often characterized as promoting the Christian mysticism that so profoundly influenced the Eastern Fathers.

In the mid-4th century, Cyril of Jerusalem chose to place his emphasis on the righteousness of Christ, rather than on the tyranny of the devil; however, he failed to provide a systematic explanation of atonement. He suggested that Satan was deceived by the cross, but he never fully developed a ransom theory. He absolutely repudiated the concept of original sin and maintained that the unrighteousness of mankind's sins was less than the righteousness of him who died for us. Through Christ's superabundant merit, he more than compensated for the debt man owed through sin. Although he left many of his conceptions vague and undefined, his idea of imputed merit through the obedience of Christ would play a major role in many later theories.

Gregory of Nyssa pushed Origen's ransom theory yet another step. In earlier versions, God removed Satan's power because Satan had stepped beyond his bounds in trying to hold the innocent Christ. In Gregory the transaction is previously understood and agreed upon. Satan is tricked into miscalculation by God who offers to allow Satan to kill Christ if those whom Satan has enslaved through sin will be set free—withholding the information that Christ has the power to rise from death. Gregory is the first to introduce the fishhook analogy that compares Christ on the cross to a baited hook that caught Satan unaware and overthrew his dominion.[39] Gregory of Nyssa's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, took a very different position, denying the idea that the crucifixion was a ransom paid to the devil. He stressed that Christ was man's representative and substitute who made our sins and offenses his own. Wishing to defend God's sovereignty, he suggested (as many others would later) that God could have saved man in an infinite number of ways, but chose the course of the cross as that which would best exhibit his love and sympathy and invite men to an imitation of such love in their relations with one another.[40]

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[39]Almost two hundred years later, Gregory the Great took up this illustration to teach that God's incarnation was a divine stratagem to catch leviathan.

[40]Although we did not address this in chapter two, many theologians have been troubled by the fact that the very idea of the need for redemption through atonement calls God's omnipotence into question. Because of this, several of them contended that God *could have* forgiven sins or provided salvation without the incarnation, suffering and death of Christ, but that he chose such a course for some valid reason. Besides Gregory of Nazianzus, this position

Ambrose of Milan took the ransom theory in a different direction, making it a civil rather than a criminal transaction. Through the fall, Adam had incurred a debt to the devil that humankind had inherited. Christ bought humanity with the purchase price of his blood, thus assuming the debt to himself and canceling the interest. Like Athanasius, Ambrose taught that the word of God had promised a punishment for sin and since the divine decrees could not be changed, it was more fitting that a substitute bear the sentence than that the sentence should be ignored. Since the divinity of Christ made his value above all, he could offer himself for all and his death could relieve man's debt of sin.

John Chrysostom was more prone to metaphor than logic, but through his study of scripture he formulated a conception of the atonement that stressed both the depth of God's love and the superabundance of his sacrifice. The cross was the work of both the Father and the Son, God sending Christ to offer deliverance from death and justifying man as God's heir. Since Christ's death was equivalent to (or even greater than) the death of all, his punishment constitutes mankind's pardon:

> A creditor throws in prison a debtor who owes him ten pence, and not only the debtor, but his wife and children and slaves with him. A third person enters the scene and gives the ten pence required and over and above, 10,000 talents of gold.…After this could the creditor have any thought of ten pence? So it is with us, Christ paid more than we owed, an ocean for a single drop.[41]

For Chrysostom, God's love is beyond human comprehension, but whatever its full significance may be, it met the requirements of divine necessity.

Augustine surveyed the broad range of interpretation over the meaning of atonement and adopted many of the ideas as his own. In spite of the influence that portions of his work would later exert on Luther and then Calvin, his was primarily a restatement of many of the notions that had preceded him, without attempting to reconcile them or to place them into a systematic expression of the work of Christ. For Augustine, the entire purpose of God's condescension was to restore man to the life from which sin had alienated him. Man had not been overcome directly by Satan, but through sin had incurred God's judicial sentence, which caused God to withdraw and left man within Satan's power. The devil had gained sovereignty over sinful man and justly administered death as a consequence. However, in bringing death to the sinless Christ, Satan exacted a penalty for which no wrong had been committed. "Dying for our offences, he submitted as man, and for man, to bear the curse which accompanies death."[42] By this means it was just for those who believed in Christ to find deliverance through him who had become the devil's conqueror. Employing the words of Paul, Augustine asserted that Christ

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was defended by Augustine, Anselm, Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas, Zwingli, Calvin, Wesley, and in his own way, even Barth.

[41]*Homily On 2 Corinthians* 12:4 (in McDonald, Ibid., 152). As we will see in the next chapter, a strikingly similar metaphor has become central in the modern LDS discussion of the atonement.

[42]*On the Manichaean Heresy* 14.6.7 (in McDonald, Ibid., 160).

was made sin and that sin was then offered up as a sacrifice to appease the just wrath of God. Like Gregory of Nazianzus before him, Augustine defended the sovereignty of God by insisting that he could have effected man's redemption in any way he chose, but found in the incarnation, the sufferings, and the crucifixion, the most fitting and effective mode of deliverance. Despite Augustine's strongly philosophical leanings, his explanation of the atonement rests heavily on a variety of metaphors that he did not attempt to bring together into a single rationale, but allowed to stand as traditional and powerful, if somewhat independent, images of the work of Christ.

Not long afterward, Cyril of Alexandria brought new life to the ransom theory. In vigorous opposition to Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril stressed the union of Christ's two natures. In taking human nature upon himself, Christ penetrated man with his divine life. While promoting a mystical theory along the lines of Athanasius, Cyril also emphasized a rational explanation of the workings of atonement. As mankind's full equivalent, Christ's life was given in exchange, accepting the punishment of sinners and putting an end to the ancient curse through his suffering on the cross. Satan lost his hold on humanity because he was unjust in causing the death of the sinless Christ.

The last of the Church Fathers, John of Damascus incorporated most of the imagery of the ransom theory but vehemently rejected the idea that a transaction was made with Satan. On account of sin, the devil had obtained power to bring death to man. Christ became man and suffered death at Satan's hand, but since Christ had no part of sin and was therefore unworthy of death, the adversary was condemned as unjust. Since death could not hold Christ, mankind through Christ was offered freedom. But John was adamant in his insistence that the devil was neither caught by God's subterfuge nor engaged in a divine negotiation over the release of the prisoners. He held that such propositions were offensive to the holiness of God.

In the five and a half centuries following the canonization of the New Testament, several of the Fathers of the Church began to advance reasonable explanations for the method of man's salvation through Christ. The earliest Church Fathers found adequate significance in the promises embodied in the symbols and images of atonement, but with the introduction of gnosticism's rational accounts of the mechanics of salvation, many were moved to offer their own 'orthodox' responses. Drawing on the language of the evangelists and of Paul and Peter, they sought for theories that would explain what Christ's suffering and death actually accomplished and how it did so. Those promoting the ransom theory asserted that Christ's death was the agreed upon price by which Satan would free mankind from his captivity. Others emphasized the justice of God, which demanded that the law decreed in Eden be fulfilled, and taught that Christ became incarnate in order to accept upon himself the punishment of that law, thus conquering the victory of death. Still others were principally concerned with the effects of individual sins, teaching that Christ had taken upon himself responsibility for those sins and suffered their penalty on man's behalf. While the majority of the Fathers never developed exclusive theories of atonement, many of the images suggested by the New Testament language

had begun to take on an independent life, especially in the West, becoming viewed as literal portrayals of events in the cosmic reality. The devil had made an agreement with the God of heaven, setting Christ's life as the ransom price for his hostages. The gates of Satan's prison had in actual fact been torn from their hinges as Christ won the victory and set the captives free. The blood of Christ had literally been offered up as a sacrifice of propitiation to appease God's wrath. Christ had actually been arraigned before God's tribunal and punished for the sins of humankind, which he had taken upon himself. These theories, especially the well-developed notion of the ransom paid to the devil, grew and spread during Christianity's first millennium, inspiring artwork and hymnody, and developing a symbiotic and self-perpetuating relationship with ritual, both informing the liturgy and being reinforced by it. At the turn of the twelfth century, two men—near contemporaries—would lean their ladders against opposing sides of the maturing tree of atonement theory and forever influence the direction of growth, each clinging to one branch and denying the strength of the other side.

ANSELM AND ABELARD

Following the Norman conquest, a Benedictine monk named Anselm, who had been born in Italy and trained in France, was pressured by both king and country to become the new archbishop of Canterbury.[43] Anselm was wholly opposed to the appointment, even refusing to take the episcopal staff so that the bishops present held it against his closed hand, but he finally submitted to the needs of the diocese and was consecrated in December of 1093. The king requested of Anselm a gift of one thousand pounds as a show of gratitude for his kindness, which Anselm refused to send, claiming that such a sum would constitute simony. Relations between church and state were already troubled and Anselm spent much of his time as archbishop seeking resolutions to his political concerns, twice being exiled from England over disputes with the kings. It was during these times of exile that Anselm found his greatest peace in the chance to study, teach, and write.

Prior to his appointment, Anselm had already published some of his writings at the request of his confreres in the monastery at Bec in France. In those publications he developed his own unconventional rhetorical style of using rational arguments and analyses in his discussions of the nature of God and faith rather than relying primarily on the authority of scripture.[44] He was prompted to adopt this style by the younger monks and scholars who valued his rather revolutionary approach to theology. During his first exile he found the time to write

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[43]Much of the historical information on Anselm has been drawn from Colleran's extensive introduction to his translation of *Cur Deus Homo.* [Joseph M. Colleran, trans., *Why God Became Man and The Virgin Conception and Original Sin by Anselm of Canterbury* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1969).] The descriptions of the cultural background for the period borrow from Timothy Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Some of the general European and church history was found on the New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia [CD-ROM] (release 6, 1993).

[44]One of these was actually titled *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* "Faith Seeking Understanding".

his masterpiece on the nature of salvation, *Cur Deus Homo*, which employs this same type of rational argument.[45] Anselm wrote it as a dialogue between himself and a close friend, Dom Boso, and in it he sought to show the reasonableness of the incarnation as the method of man's redemption while refuting what he regarded as the unworthy implications of the ransom theory. Anselm's principal concern in the book was to respond to the question of why God chose to redeem man through the means of incarnation and crucifixion, rather than in some other way that might seem more fitting to his perfection. His rationale has become known as the 'satisfaction theory' and although it never gained prominence in quite the formulation which he proposed, his contribution focused Christian attention on the issues of law, merit, justice, and mercy, and determined the direction of conservative atonement theory for the West down to the present.

The background premise of Anselm's work involves the intention of God in creating man. With the pre-mundane fall of the angels, God's honor was lessened, so man's destiny was to replace the original numbers of worthy beings worshipping God in heaven (*Cur Deus Homo* I, 16-18).[46] However, Satan had seduced man to fall and the human race had become sinful and unworthy of taking the place of the originally sinless angels (I, 19). Man in his fallen state and through the perpetuation of sin was withholding honor from God, failing to offer to God that which was his due (I, 10-11), but since his condition had been influenced by external powers, his redemption could be effected by intervention (II, 21). Reparation could be made and the honor of God restored either by the infliction of punishment that is sin's natural result or by satisfaction through an adequate offering (I, 12-13). However, man was incapable of providing such a satisfaction (I, 11-15, 19-24; II, 4) and his punishment would not bring about the condition of sinlessness which was necessary to fulfill the purpose of his creation (I, 19; II, 1).

Therefore, God became man while not partaking of sin through the virgin birth (II, 16-17) so that he could, through his divine nature, offer an appropriate satisfaction to God's honor (I, 25; II, 6) and, through his human nature, do so as man's representative (II, 6). In making such a voluntary sacrifice of himself, Christ merited a reward, but no reward was adequate for such a being (II, 19). Thus the merit of his work could be passed on to those whom he chose to represent, and man can thereby be freed from the condition of sin (II, 16). In this way God's honor is restored even as his purposes in man's creation are fulfilled (I, 19-20; II, 1, 4). God did not become incarnate in order to conquer the devil or to make an offering to him, or to liberate man from his grasp, since he could have accomplished these through any number of other means (I, 17; II, 19). God became man in order to satisfy his own perfect holiness with love and

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[45]The title has been variously translated as 'Why God Became Man,' 'Why the God-Man?' 'Why There Should Be A God-Man,' and 'The Reason For The God-Man'.

[46]The fallen angels could not be redeemed because they fell by choice rather than by seduction, and their redemption thus required an internal source which they lacked. Furthermore, Christ's work of redemption was efficacious for man because God became man, but for that very reason it was not efficacious for angels who are each of a distinct species and can have no common representative (II, 21).

mercy (II, 20), restoring man to his immortality—to eternal misery for those who reject him, or to eternal felicity for those who accept him and take up the positions of the fallen angels (II, 3).

Anselm's use of the word 'satisfaction', from the 'satisfactio' of Roman law that was being rediscovered in Bologna, has been traced to Teutonic law and the payment of *wergild* to offer compensation for an offense. The feudalism that had been introduced to England by the Norman conquest had begun to create a situation in which society was viewed as an organic whole and the severity of a crime was conditioned by the relative social status of offender and victim. In order to avoid the death penalty and outlawry by which a criminal could be hunted down without mercy, the church had supported the system of compensations through which the offending party could buy back the peace he had injured through the payment of 'satisfactions'. These fines were determined in accordance with social position, since an injury to a person's honor constituted a threat to the order of society. In such a context the idea of a sin against God suggested the notion of an infinite offense which could only be compensated by an infinite satisfaction. The focus on justice and the restoration of honor in Anselm is not so much concerned to meet the demands of an abstract law, as to act responsibly toward the social and the cosmic orders, not allowing sins to be ignored so that the balance of creation might be maintained.[47]

But the times were changing—as even Anselm's rhetorical innovations attested—and over the next two centuries the world of feudalism would slowly be overturned. Class structure was gradually being redefined as merchants increased in wealth and prestige and land tenure became less important. The eleventh and twelfth centuries marked the rise of individualism in Europe and Gorringe points out that in the realm of religion the age evidences a dramatic increase in popular focus on Christ's passion, on the elements of his suffering and death as emphasized through the Eucharist, and on the efficacy of personal suffering in paying the price of sin.[48] But before Aquinas would make his definitive theological contributions in the thirteenth century, another voice would challenge the traditional interpretations of both the Fathers and Anselm, cultivating the sporadic but influential growth of a new humanism in Christian thought.

Peter Abelard was in his late teens when *Cur Deus Homo* appeared. Anselm had helped to popularize the rationalistic approach to theology and the move away from reliance on the authority of scripture, and in this sense, Abelard was involved in the same movement. He received much of his training in Paris under one of Anselm's scholastic opponents, Roscelin. Recognized early as a brilliantly insightful teacher, a promising career in academics beckoned. But in 1118 he fell in love with his student Heloise, nearly twenty years his junior. They married secretly, incurring the displeasure of her uncle, canon Fulbert of Notre Dame, whose anger over the affair led to his having Abelard castrated. In public disgrace, Abelard took his vows to

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[47]Gorringe, Ibid., 94. See Gunton, 88: "Anselm's God is the upholder of universal justice—it is not that God himself is personally offended or affronted, but that the order and beauty of the universe for which God is responsible is at stake." Anselm suggests that God would cease to be God if he did not uphold justice.
[48]Gorringe, Ibid., 104-108.

become a Benedictine monk. He continued his theological studies and writing, eventually establishing his own convent near Troyes. Perhaps influenced by his own treatment at the hands of the clergy and by the fact of his departure from contemporary society into the monastic life, he became distressed by what he saw as the cruelty of the legal system of his time, the system which had formed so much of the basis for Anselm's reasoning. He questioned the morality of a code of law that had more consideration for station than personal circumstance, more delight in punishment than in restoration, and he easily read these implications into Anselm's treatment of atonement through the satisfaction of God. "How cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world!"[49] Disregarding Anselm's methodological subtleties by which he defended God's honor, Abelard took a step back to ask why Christ's death was necessary at all. Why would the God of Christianity be bound by laws of punishment or satisfaction?

Abelard was attempting to move away from the depiction of God as aloof and distant from man and precariously maintained on his throne by the honor offered him by his creatures, in order to emphasize God's love and the profoundly personal demonstration of that love in Christ's suffering and death. Abelard pointed out that God's forgiveness was not conditioned by Christ's passion, since forgiveness had been available even in the days of the Patriarchs, and Christ himself routinely extended forgiveness during the course of his earthly life. Clearly, then, God was not waiting for Christ's death before he would offer forgiveness, so the reason for the crucifixion must lie elsewhere. Abelard agreed that Christ removed the penalty of man's sins, but the purpose of his dying was to win humanity over to a life of grace by kindling his love within us. As Christ illuminates the world by his wisdom he excites it to the love of himself. As man responds with love, the grace of God quenches in him the desire for sin.

Abelard's treatment of the atonement was not entirely thorough, but such does not seem to have been his intention. Many since have leveled the criticism that Abelard failed to adequately explain the basis upon which Christ's life and suffering must be seen as such an overwhelming demonstration of love. The conservative theologians who followed have often vilified him for failing to give appropriate stress to the objective effects of Christ's suffering and death, placing his emphasis instead on the individual's response to Christ. Liberal theologians have occasionally faulted him for allowing too many objective assumptions into his formulations. Both accusations are likely accurate from their own perspectives, but perhaps also completely irrelevant to Abelard's position. Abelard does not seem to have concerned himself with an attempt to investigate the objective effects of the atonement, but he clearly accepted their

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[49]Peter Abelard, *Commentary* tr. E. R. Fairweather *A Scholastic Miscellany* (London: SCM, 1956), in Gorringe, 109.

reality.[50] Objective aspects of Christ's work, such as the removal of the penalty of sins, are the presupposition to Abelard's work, but Christian theology up to his time had created interpretations of that work that went far beyond scripture or even logic, developing cosmic mythologies of redemption which offended Abelard's moral sensitivities. His constant emphasis is on the denial of mythological interpretations of Christ's work, which spoke of a transaction between God and Satan, or depictions of God that seemed to deny the personal nature of his love in favor of an abstract conception of divine justice. Abelard wanted to focus his and others' attention on the love of God and his freedom to forgive without waiting for legal technicalities to be satisfied, so he inquired into the significance of Christ's death, proclaiming that such a willing demonstration of solidarity with humanity and self-sacrifice on man's behalf was the greatest possible witness of love, inspiring all those who carefully consider it to make a corresponding offering of love to God. This denial of myth and the focus on the love of God communicated to man through the cross appears to have been Abelard's primary intention and it is possible to look at the subsequent history and suggest that in many regards he accomplished this desire.

But Abelard's work also led to the crystallization of the discussion of atonement theory into a debate over the significance of Christ's suffering and death and in later centuries into a controversy over the reality or illusion of objective interpretations of atonement. Eventually, both Anselm and Abelard would be reinterpreted in such a way that the pair could represent completely opposed approaches to atonement theory. Anselm would be regarded as the foremost representative of the objective view and Abelard the archetypal stimulus of the subjective. Neither of them intended such a division, but having made their contribution to the field, it remained in other hands to determine what to do with their thoughts.

## DIVIDING THE FIELD

One of the first to enter this debate was Abelard's contemporary, Bernard of Clairvaux, who inimically misrepresented Abelard's teachings on the Trinity and the exemplarist rendering of the atonement in order to have one of his books burned at the Council of Soissons in 1121. He finally succeeded in arranging Abelard's condemnation for heresy in 1140 at the Council of Sens. But Bernard did not so much make an original contribution to atonement theory as simply denounce the subjective branch of the debate. For Bernard the outpouring of God's divine love offered salvation in a mystic fashion based solely on Christ's vicarious sacrifice and independent of the individual's response. In the same time period Peter Lombard was drawing on Abelardian teachings of God's perfect love while he simultaneously fully endorsed the traditional ransom

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[50]It must be recognized that Abelard frequently insisted that it was grace and not our own will, works or merits that promised redemption. In a letter to Heloise he assures her that Christ "suffered truly for your salvation, on your behalf, of his own free will, and by his suffering he cures all sickness and removes all suffering," Abelard, *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard*, tr. B. Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), quoted in Gorringe, 111.

theory and the view that Christ extinguished guilt by suffering the penalty due for sins. In contrast, Hugh of St. Victor held a view of vicarious punishment based on the precept that God could not intervene to advocate man's cause until the debt was entirely paid and God's wrath appeased because until that occurred, God was still angry at man for his sin.

The contributions of Thomas Aquinas in the following century would become the ideological mainstay of Roman Catholicism, and the centrality which he gave to God's justice in his interpretation of salvation through Christ would also receive strong endorsement in the work of the reformers. Like Augustine before him, Aquinas' contributions in the realm of atonement theory lie not so much in their originality or clarity as in their presentation as part of a comprehensive understanding of Christian theology which itself drew from a variety of sources and had a profound and perpetual influence on the views of orthodoxy. The writings of Aristotle played a significant role in Aquinas' theology, forming the basis of his descriptions of knowledge, faith and mysteries. With the rise of the merchant class, the model of society that had appeared so fundamental to Anselm was breaking down, especially in the Italian centers of trade such as Naples where Aquinas attended the university and later headed the Dominican house of studies. Owing in part to the rediscovery of Roman civil law, this was a time of legal revolution that was promoting significant reinterpretations of the concepts of crime and sin, turning to the discussion of personal responsibility and distinguishing between those offenses which were *mala in se* and those which were merely *mala prohibita*. This was also a time in which religious sentiment was concentrated acutely on the spirituality of suffering and the inevitability of punishment, seeing in Christ's passion the penitential ideal, evidenced among other things by the institution of the papal inquisition and the rise of the flagellant guilds.[51] These influences are each in their ways apparent in Aquinas' explanation of Christ's satisfaction for sins.

Aquinas defined law within four distinct categories. The principal manifestation he called "eternal law" which was intrinsically associated with the plans and purposes of God. Related to this are the sacraments and obligations of the Church and its adherents that are revealed through "divine law." Furthermore, mankind can discover eternal law by reason, creating the category of "natural law." Finally, civil institutions and legislators are responsible for the creation of "human law" for the maintenance and preservation of society.[52] Sin is located in the will, as opposed to being identified simply by action, and contradicts all levels of law. Sin therefore requires several levels of punishment: reason or natural law results in remorse of conscience; human law demands recompense for the crime; and divine law (as the earthly representation of eternal law) necessitates the restoration of the order of divine justice through punitive restitution.

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[51]The episcopal inquisition had already begun in the 12th century against the Waldenses and the Albigenses. The first flagellant movements began in Italy in 1260. The sufferings resulting from famine and war were interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure over the world's sinfulness and voluntary group flagellation was viewed as an ascetic denial of the world and a penance for sin. The flagellant groups died down with time but found renewed impetus in the years of the black death, maintaining their strength through the end of the 15th century.

[52]Both human law and divine law are categorized as types of positive law. Aquinas generally divided experience into the three orders of reason, government, and God's rule, since eternal law is beyond man's perception.

As the sinner offers an appropriate penance or willingly embraces the suffering imposed by God for sin, satisfaction is made to God, but this punishment is less than man actually deserves and does not in itself suffice to restore the divine order.[53] God's justice was fully satisfied through Christ's perfect life so that the combination of his life and death produced a work of supererogation that merited both forgiveness and salvation for man. Therefore Christ's passion provides not only a sufficient, but a superabundant atonement for the sins of those who accept him as their head and become members of his body through baptism. Although the means was not strictly necessary and God could have forgone satisfaction entirely if he had chosen, such a course was fitting to his nature. Christ's death was a sacrifice that placated God for the crimes man committed against him. However, despite his predominant rationalism, Aquinas had no reservations about the inclusion of the *unio mystica* as the vehicle through which Christ's merit could be transferred to man.[54] Through the reality of Christ's passion, members of the church are both freed from sin and moved to love God and live a better life. In one sense, then, Aquinas was consciously representing both the Anselmian and the Abelardian traditions, but his rationale for the atonement leans heavily in the direction of an objective change in the relation between man and deity through the satisfaction of justice, and this was the aspect of Aquinas' atonement doctrine which would have the greatest impact on subsequent generations.

Aquinas' greatest successor was undoubtedly John Duns Scotus who took Aquinas' and Anselm's ideas in a novel direction by teaching that exact satisfaction or equivalent punishment is impossible, owing to the immeasurability of sin and the ineffability of God's greatness in relation to man. Sin (as the work of man) and atonement (as the work of Christ as man) are both finite. The meritorious work of Christ is incommensurable with the demerits of sin, so it offers salvation to man solely on the grounds that God accepts it as a sufficient work of atonement. The value of Christ's life and death is not inherent in his person or in the actions he performed, but in the fact that God accepted him as man's Savior and his acts as providing salvation. Christ's satisfaction bestows initial grace upon the elect, which turns them from sin and disposes them toward glory. In Duns Scotus the discussion of law and necessity was set aside in favor of a powerful assertion of God's sovereignty.[55]

In the years after Duns Scotus, as Europe became increasingly involved in local wars and faced the hardships of famines and the grim threat of the Black Death, the church's focus on suffering continued and intensified. Mystical theologies began to dominate Christianity through

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[53]"*Passio non est meritoria in quantum habet principium ab exteriori; sed secundum quod eam aliquis voluntarie sustinet, sic habet principium ab interiori, et hoc modo est meritoria.*" ["Suffering is not meritorious as long as its source is external; but to the extent that a man endures it voluntarily it has an internal source and so is meritorious," author's translation.] For the discussion of atonement theory during the Middle Ages I am indebted to L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920).

[54]Aquinas did not see in the mystical union with Christ or his other frequent mystical leanings any contradiction with his theological dialectic, but they became a major source of dispute for more positivistic scholars.

[55]Duns Scotus followed the nominalist school that was opposed to Thomistic realism, but he was less interested in Avicenna's notions of the necessary emanation of all things from God than in voluntarism, which insisted upon the absolute primacy of God's free will and which so profoundly influenced the work of William of Occam..

the works of Meister Eckhart, Suso, Thomas à Kempis, and others, so it is not surprising that we find very few direct contributions to atonement theory between Duns Scotus and the Reformation. The mystics themselves paid less attention on the whole to the idea that suffering atones for sin than to the idea that sin causes God to suffer and that by entering into suffering one embraces the experience of God in his denunciation of sin. Their various forms of asceticism were not so much a penance as a means of achieving the *unio mystica* with Christ. As one approaches God, he or she feels the awfulness of sin ever more keenly. But there are at least two sides to the concept of self-denial and both are evidenced in the work of the mystics and the more general thinking of the time. In one approach, asceticism was understood as a demonstration of a person's humility and total submission to the will of God, setting aside all thought of self in an attempt to find new life through Christ. But in another less refined and perhaps more common vein, medieval mysticism imbibed freely from the church's endorsement of penance as the necessary means of achieving forgiveness, and focused its attention on *poena satisfactoria*, the efficacy of suffering for one's own sins. In this second way mystical self-denial was actually promoting the concept of earning grace through personal merit.[56]

It was in this period, of course, that the sale of indulgences, which stressed the roles of the individual and the church in gaining the remission of punishment for sins, earned such a significant position as a source of church revenue. But it was insufficient for the times and with the disheartening end to the Crusades, the loosening of feudal alliances, and the growing tensions over conciliarism, the church was losing control of Europe and, during the period of the Great Schism, even the Papacy was openly challenged in its right to govern. The heavily trafficked toll roads of Latin orthodoxy had grown bemired and congested during this era of violence, doom, and corruption, and there was a heightening sense that something was gravely amiss.

In England, the theologian John Wycliffe was seeking to reaffirm the absolute necessity of all God's acts, including the atonement. He was generally following the pattern set forth by Anselm, but rather than grounding the necessity in God's honor, he reintroduced the notion of an abstract principle of justice that God satisfies, a rationale more pertinent for his day than the social affects of a rejected feudalism. According to such a notion of divine justice, all sin must of necessity be punished. The absolute distinction between satisfaction and punishment that had been so crucial to Anselm has been lost and the two terms have become functionally synonymous. When Wycliffe speaks of satisfaction the sense is not that the Savior offered an adequate recompense to God *instead of* being punished, but that Christ through his sufferings actually endured the very penalties due to man's sins, that mercy satisfied justice by enduring man's deserved punishment. It is interesting to note that both here and previously in Anselm the discussion of justice as an infinite attribute of God does not begin from the assumption of God's omnipotence as we might expect (and as it does later in the Reformation), but has its roots in the desire to explain the necessity of Christ's death. Because of the troublesome implications of

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[56]See Grensted, Ibid., 167-68.

God's wrath, the notion of universal retributive justice was pressed into service in order to defend against the implicit challenge to God's goodness. Wycliffe's ideas were condemned by the church in 1382 and his Oxford disciples were forced to recant. His suggestions would resurface two centuries later, but historical circumstances had not yet prepared the populace for a generalized rebellion against orthodoxy. With the innovations of the 14th to 16th centuries, which increased the level of education, refocused attention on the ancient Greek and Roman classics, and promoted the rhetoric of humanism in contrast to scholasticism, the way was paved for the Protestant reformation. And as the Medieval period drew to a close, the church's focus on the merits of the martyrs and confessors, on the sacraments, and especially on the efficacy of indulgences would provide the catalyst to set it in motion.

## REFORMING THE SENSE OF ATONEMENT

Martin Luther's history is well known. Born in Eisleben in 1483, he entered the University of Erfurt at the age of eighteen. Four years later, in 1505, he began to study and prepare for a career in law. But when he survived a portentous thunderstorm that summer, he vowed to become a monk, and was ordained in 1507. He continued his studies in Wittenberg, lecturing in moral philosophy, and received his doctorate in theology in 1511 along with an appointment as professor of Scripture. By that time his sentiments regarding the church had already been influenced by a visit to Rome the previous year where he witnessed a disillusioning venality among many of those of high ecclesiastical positions. Fully versed in the scholasticism which permeated the theology of his day, he focused his own studies on the Bible and particularly upon the Pauline epistles. This effort resulted in a broadening gap between his own views and those of his scholastic tutelage, particularly in the areas of justification and faith.[57] In contrast to the prevailing views that stressed man's role in gaining forgiveness, Luther recognized the unyielding link between such ideas and the corruption that he saw within his church. He worried that orthodoxy had alienated itself from what he viewed as the uncompromising testimony of Paul that Christ was the sole mediator between God and man, a testimony that stood in fierce defiance against the doctrines of a Treasury of Merits, of indulgences, and of the possibility of mankind's earning rewards through good works. Consciously jeopardizing his very life, he posted his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg castle church on the eve of All Hallows' Day in 1517, hoping to encourage a more scriptural discussion of sin, repentance, and the truth of the gospel.

Like many of those who would follow, Luther was not directly concerned with trying to remodel the doctrine of atonement, but the underlying principles that he defended necessitated a

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[57]However, it is not Anselm, but Abelard—or more accurately his follower, Peter Lombard, whose teachings of satisfaction through penance had been promulgated by Luther's scholastic teachers—whom he most piously rejected.

revised understanding of the role of Christ as man's savior. Intending to expose the corruption of the doctrine of indulgences and to refocus attention on the sufficiency of Christ's work, Luther's emphasis revolved around the principle that man is justified exclusively by God's grace, which is received not through the sacraments but through faith alone.[58] Giving expression to his own frustrations over repeated personal attempts at repentance, Luther declared that man cannot accomplish—nor even will—any good thing. Free will is impotent and only reliance upon the grace of Christ can justify the sinner. Man is freely justified through faith as he becomes associated with Christ through the Spirit, so that it is on the basis of the sole sufficiency of Christ and not to any degree on the supposed merit of man's good works that salvation is extended.

Nevertheless, salvation is not merely the natural product of divine goodwill but the specific accomplishment of Christ's suffering. God's own work—his *opus proprium*—is grace and mercy, but on account of mankind's sinfulness, he has another externally imposed work, an *opus alienum*, which calls for wrath, judgment and damnation.[59] Here Luther incorporated into his theology, perhaps wholly unaware that he was doing so, the changes that had occurred in the common perceptions of society and law.[60] In Anselm's time law was seen as dealing with the maintenance of local or cosmic order, but over the intervening centuries law had come to be regarded as possessing an absolute intrinsic validity, "claiming punishment from the offender not on personal grounds, or on grounds of expediency, but simply on grounds of justice."[61] Luther's daring image is that of God against himself, meeting his own fealty to justice with the vicarious suffering of the Christ. Since justice demands that sin be punished, Christ became sin and guilt and suffered the wrath of God against sin so that justice could be satisfied. In Luther, the crucial point of Christ's suffering and death is that he took man's place and endured the punishment that was due to sin.

Grensted writes that "before the Reformation, only a few hints of a Penal theory can be found." In this he has probably overstated the case, but he is accurate in further asserting that "after the Reformation it becomes common ground for the great majority of Protestant writers."[62] And it is certainly true that no one until Luther had founded an explanation of atonement so solidly in the concept of legal justification (through Christ's suffering the punishment of all sin), and in the unmerited application of God's grace. However, Luther was more mystic than theologian and while he laid the foundation and set the terms of debate, formulaic expression of the Penal theory would be presented by subsequent voices. The focus that Luther and other Reformers placed on man's sinfulness and helplessness naturally served to

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[58]It is interesting that the Joseph Smith Translation of Romans 3:24 (in the footnote of the 1988 LDS edition) reads "*Therefore* being justified *only* by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". However, the original manuscript is unclear as to where in the verse the word "only" was to be placed. For a discussion, see Robert J. Matthews, "A Study of the Text of Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible," *BYU Studies* 9/1 (Autumn 1968), 3-16.

[59]See Gorringe, 134.

[60]Machiavelli's *The Prince* appeared the same year as Luther's 95 Theses.

[61]Grensted, Ibid., 197-98.

[62]Grensted, Ibid., 191.

bring the notion of atonement to the fore. Justification would soon become the central concern of Christian discussion and the concept of merit would provide the basis for distinction between Catholic and Protestant treatments of the subject.

While Luther was active in challenging Latin orthodoxy in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli was independently working for church reform in Switzerland. He, too, based his concerns in a return to the scriptures, but where Luther's views emerged out of his own experiences with sin, faith, and grace, and his horror over ecclesiastical abuses, Zwingli's approach was more fundamentally grounded in the scholastic philosophy and humanism he had studied in Vienna, Bern, and Basel. In his treatment of the atonement, which appears equally concerned with the defense of God's sovereignty, Zwingli insisted that God is free to do whatever he wills and has elected salvation to whom he would. Despite this defense of God's absolute sovereignty, he advocated a penal theory that was similar in many ways to Luther's, never attempting to reconcile the two. His ideas were influential, but in terms of atonement theory, his contributions were minimal.

Philipp Melanchthon, a Lutheran by admiration and a humanist by temperament, gave systematic treatment to Luther's thought, being the principal author of the Augsburg Confession. From the time of Paul, writers on the atonement had almost universally spoken of reconciliation as a change in man or in a disordered universe, by which man could regain communion with the holy God, for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,"[63]— and not himself to the world. But the priority of the Reformers' thought lay in the attempt to abandon the odious doctrine of merit, and this could best be accomplished by redirecting attention to the sufficiency of God's work in Christ. There was no room left to speak of an objective change in man since it was the grace of Christ alone that altered man's position before God. Working within the forensic metaphor, 'justification' as the term was used by the Reformers, most often made reference to the idea of 'acquittal', release from the well-established verdict of guilty. But by removing all soteriological relevance from human will and conduct, thereby making God the only actor in the drama of salvation, reconciliation had to be attributed solely to a change in God. In the language of the Augsburg Confession, Christ is said to have "truly suffered, been crucified, dead, and buried, that He might *reconcile the Father to us*, and might be a Victim not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men."[64]

The distinction from previous formulations appears slight, but here it is not man nor the cosmos that requires transformation and which is therefore reconciled, but God the Father. Prior to the atonement, God responded to sin in one manner, afterwards in another—his response altered by the intercession of the Son. This is a critical shift from earlier positions because when carried to its extreme, there is no alternative but to assert that God had been provoked to fury by man's sins and that he it was who demanded that a recompense be made to

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[63]II Corinthians 5:18.
[64]*Augsburg Confession* 3 (in Grensted, Ibid., 205), italics added. The Church of England's 39 Articles follow this language.

justice. Only after his vengeance against sin was fully spent was God prepared to look upon man with compassion. The language of sacrifice began to assert itself more strongly in Melanchthon, gaining a prevalence that would endure and increase, but it was wholly transformed from the primary scriptural context of an offering of praise and worship into a propitiatory offering, shedding blood in order to turn aside the wrath of God.[65] The central fact of Melanchthon's teaching is that God's justice must be avenged and cannot be denied, but that it is fully reconciled in the sufferings of Christ.[66]

> Such is the severity of His justice that reconciliation would not be made unless the penalty were utterly paid. Such is the greatness of His wrath that the eternal Father would not be placated save by the entreaty and death of the Son. Such is His mercy, that the Son was given for us. Such love was in the Son towards us that He drew down this true and great wrath upon Himself.[67]

In order to utterly reject the notion of personal merit gained through good works, Melanchthon followed Luther in removing the keys of salvation from man's hand entirely, but in taking these ideas to their extreme, and from that position formulating a theory of atonement, Melanchthon introduced Christianity to an angry God, outraged by sin and pouring out his vengeance upon the crucified Lord. All attention is diverted from the sinner to the Savior who willingly offered himself on man's behalf and was stretched out cruciform upon God's rack.

It is in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that we find the fullest and most systematic expression of the doctrines of the Reformation. God in truth does not hate the sinner, yet in his righteousness he wholly abhors sin and his wrath is necessarily poured out in punishment upon it. Furthermore, man is not merely sinful in his thoughts and actions, but is depraved in his very being, wholly incapable of righteousness and meriting in himself only condemnation. Since man is so thoroughly identified with sin, God's love can find no place in him and he must experience the fury of God's wrath. This depravity of man cannot be denied, and justice must be fully and truly avenged. Christ as man's substitute endures the furor of God's vehemence against sin. Calvin used as his model Anselm's satisfaction theory, but revised it so extensively that the original argument is wholly absent. Where Anselm had been concerned with the re-establishment of order through the restoration of God's honor, Calvin presumed a cosmic context of criminal law, which has been upheld through the appropriate distribution of punishment. Where the definition of sin as the failure to render God his due was vital to Anselm's understanding of redemption, Calvin focused on the concept of man's depravity and interpreted sin as defiance

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[65]This change of interpretation is already evident in the Bible itself, and was often employed by the Church Fathers, but as the natural metaphorical counterpart to the Reformation's penal theory, it gained such acceptance that the original meaning became completely recessive.

[66]Gorringe has asserted that "the penal consequences of this doctrine were grim indeed. As it entered the cultural bloodstream, was imaged in crucifixions painted over church chancels, recited at each celebration of the Eucharist, or hymned, so it created its own structure of affect, one in which earthly punishment was demanded because God himself had demanded the death of his Son," 103.

[67]From Melanchthon's *Corpus Doctrinae Christianae* quoted in Grensted, Ibid., 206.

against divine law. Anselm had insisted that Christ circumvents punishment by the full payment of man's debts. Calvin explained Christ's suffering as the vicarious penalty of sin.

But along with Luther, Calvin emphasized love as a central character in God, without seeing a need to reconcile that attribute with his justice except in and through the work of Christ.

> If we seek redemption, we will find it in his passion; acquittal in his condemnation; remission of the curse in his cross; satisfaction in his sacrifice; purification in his blood; reconciliation in his descent into hell; mortification of the flesh in his sepulchre; newness of life in his resurrection; immortality also in his resurrection; the inheritance of a celestial kingdom in his entrance into heaven; protection, security, and the abundant supply of all blessings in his kingdom; secure anticipation of judgment in the power of judging committed to him. In fine, since in him all kinds of blessings are treasured up, let us draw a full supply from him, and none from any other quarter.[68]

Calvin gave central attention to the working out of God's sovereignty in conjunction with man's depravity, declaring that God's will had predestined some to election and others to eternal death and condemnation, a position that none before him had dared to openly endorse, but which flowed logically from Luther's utter rejection of human merit. Because of Christ's suffering, the elect are *declared* righteous; but they never actually *become* righteous, and it remains true that "there is none good but one, that is, God."[69] Nevertheless, Christ's righteousness is imputed to man so that even though he remains wholly unworthy of salvation, yet through grace he is made free from the debt of sin. Only in the elect, who have been chosen according to God's eternal decree, can one find a will inclined to good, and such a will "flows from that same good pleasure in which we were elected before the creation of the world."[70] Calvin pushed Luther's ideas to the limits of his rationality, going farther in his exposition of sin and justification than even Augustine, his guiding light, had ventured.

But the Reformers had introduced to Christianity an unusual way of understanding God that dwelt as much on his animosity and displeasure as upon his love. They had picked up the lamp lit by Anselm, hardly realizing in filling its reserves that they were burning a startlingly inconsonant oil. By redefining the work of Christ within the context of God's absolute and undeniable justice, the stage was set for the modern debate over Christian atonement theory and the opening statements of rebuttal would not be long in coming.


RESPONDING TO REFORM

The vitality of the movement which began with Luther's challenge against the selling of indulgences had been gravely underestimated and initially unchecked by Rome so that although

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[68]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.19.
[69]Matthew 19:17.
[70]Calvin, Ibid., 2.3.8.

Luther himself was excommunicated in 1521 the uprising swelled, and by 1530 the leadership of electoral Saxony united in signing the Augsburg Confession, declaring their allegiance to Protestantism. Not until 1534 under the new leadership of Pope Paul III did the Roman Catholic Church have the direction to actively respond to the religious protests expanding throughout Europe. In this same year, seven students in Paris took vows of poverty and chastity, placing themselves at the Pope's disposal and founding the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. Devoting their energies to education and foreign missions, the order expanded rapidly and when Paul III initiated the momentous Council of Trent in 1545, several Jesuits took the lead as theologians in the discussion.

The Council gave voice to the cause of Counter-Reformation, responding to the threat posed by the Protestants and addressing the abuses and other concerns that had arisen within the church. The Protestant argument was undermined by the declaration of the Council that tradition (the teachings of the Church Fathers and Doctors) was coequal to scripture as a source of knowledge in spiritual matters, and that the church—and no individual—has the unique right to interpret the Bible. By refusing any concessions to Protestant innovation, the Council succeeded in codifying and standardizing the dogma of Roman Catholicism for the next four centuries. It reaffirmed the seven sacraments and insisted upon the necessity of good works in addition to faith in effecting justification. Answering Protestantism's doctrine of human depravity, the Council endorsed the doctrine of 'infused righteousness' insisting that not only are the justified declared righteous on the basis of Christ's merit, but they are actually infused with faith, hope and love to become living members of Christ's body. Human good works wrought through this power are meritorious in themselves and truly deserving of reward from God. Because of the context in which the Council took place, the doctrine of the satisfaction wrought by Christ—although it was assumed and fully endorsed—was generally overshadowed in the discussion by the satisfaction offered by man in penance. Where the atonement itself was addressed, the writers followed the Thomistic or Scotist positions indiscriminately. The metaphor of sacrifice gained prominence over that of satisfaction, but the Catholic theologians refrained from the literalism that characterized the Protestant Penal theory, focusing instead on the love of God communicated to man through Christ.

The judgment of the Council of Trent to accept tradition as authoritative effectively removed Catholicism from further atonement debate—maintaining a variety of internal positions, but not seeking to establish any one as official—and with very few exceptions Catholic atonement theory into the twentieth century did not diverge far from the principles laid down as the Medieval period came to a close. It is therefore within the movement of Protestantism that we find the continuing development of atonement interpretation.

The most significant response to the Penal theory in terms of its historical influence came in the work of Faustus Socinus, a participant in the Italian Reformation whose *De Jesu Christo Servatore* challenged the concept of substitutionary punishment that had already become

the standard explanation of Christ's work for Protestantism. Deeply influenced by his Uncle, Lelio Sozini, who had been in close contact with Calvin, Melanchthon and others, Faustus demonstrated an unflinching willingness to question established views, demanding that theology conform to rational and comprehensible rigor and that its implications be recognizably ethical. In addition to challenging the doctrine of the Trinity, he launched a serious rational attack against the theory of satisfaction as it was being developed in the Reformation. It is, in fact, in his deconstruction of the Penal theory, rather than in his own interpretation of atonement, that his real contribution was made.

Although he was fundamentally a doctrinal and not a social reformer, his primary objections to the prevailing opinions were ethical in nature and he adamantly sought to unmask the shadowy character behind the image of the satisfied God. How is it possible, he inquired, to attribute the quality of forgiveness to a God who grudgingly refuses to extend mercy until after full payment has been made for sin? If a sovereign God punishes guilty man or his innocent son, he does so simply because he chooses to do so, not because he is constrained to such action by justice. God is free either to punish or to pardon as he wills. If unconditional forgiveness is not a question of willingness but of ability, it would appear that God is in no way sovereign, that he has in fact less power than human beings since even man is capable of forgiving offenses committed against him without requiring punishment or recompense. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Christ's message was that it is both right and good to do so. Satisfaction and pardon are mutually exclusive; God can either forgive, or he can demand and execute punishment, but to do both is to destroy the very meaning of forgiveness. On this logic, Socinus derided the arguments of the Reformers, which had attempted to prove God's mercy through Christ's satisfaction:

> To a free forgiveness nothing is more opposite than such a satisfaction as they contend for, and the payment of an equivalent price. For where a creditor is satisfied, either by the debtor himself, or by another person on the debtor's behalf, it cannot with truth be said of him that he freely forgives the debt.[71]

Socinus likewise insisted that vicarious punishment is unscriptural and contradicts any sense of morality; it is simply repulsive to virtue that one person should be punished for another's guilt. "For what is that justice, and what too that mercy, which punishes the innocent, and absolves the guilty?"[72] To demand the punishment of the wrongdoer may be considered and somewhat arbitrarily defined as 'just', but to transfer that punishment to the undeserving is to introduce a twisted representation of mercy at the absolute forfeiture of justice. In reality, such a notion of suffering has ceased to belong to the category of punishment at all and would more suitably be designated as torture.

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[71]Faustus Socinus, *Racovian Catechism* v. 8 (in Grensted, Ibid., 284).
[72]Ibid.

The point of Socinus' attacks was to show that any theory suggesting a transaction between Christ and God by which the former has secured man's justification from the latter does injury to the concept of a constant, loving, and integral God. The satisfaction theory, whether in its original Anselmian form or in its later renderings, places mercy and justice at odds with each other, the Son performing a work that not only redirects but contradicts the intentions of the Father. The essence of Socinus' argument, although he did not develop it as far as we might (in retrospect) anticipate, is found in his statement that "there is no such justice in God as requires absolutely and inexorably that sin be punished."[73] God is not bound by a law of justice that compels him to exact a penalty for sin. "If we could but get rid of this justice, even if we have no other proof, this fiction of Christ's satisfaction would be thoroughly exposed, and should vanish."[74] Socinus believed that God loves mankind and forgives freely in exactly the way that Christ taught. This led him to the conclusion that the entirety of Christ's purpose in suffering must be exemplary.

> Christ takes away sins because by heavenly and most ample promises He attracts and is strong to move all men to repentance, whereby sins are destroyed....He takes away sins because by the example of His most innocent life, He very readily draws all, who have not lost hope, to leave their sins and zealously to embrace righteousness and holiness.[75]

Socinus' final attack was leveled against the concept of man's depravity and the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Nothing is so absurd as the suggestion that one person's righteousness can be viewed by God as the righteousness of another who is manifestly unrighteous. How credulous would such a God have to be to mistake one individual's depravity for Christ's holiness simply because Christ's arm has been placed around the sinner's shoulders? To pardon fault is wholly acceptable, but to proclaim something to be that which it clearly is not is simply nonsense. The doctrine of the *unio mystica* would not do for Socinus who required that theology conform absolutely to rationality. His conclusion was that such a conviction invites antinomianism because if the elect are justified solely on the basis of God's grace and not by their own actions, any degree of sin can be overlooked and disregarded as an inevitable example of man's inherent depravity.[76]

The subjective branch of atonement theory had seen few contributions since the time of Abelard. But the writings of Socinus encountered a Christian world primed by educative and social advancements and thereby prepared to consider doctrinal innovation. Subjective interpretations would receive sporadic but persistent reinforcements until by the mid-19th

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[73]Socinus, *De Jesu Christo Servatore* i. 2 (in McDonald, 198).
[74]Socinus, Ibid., iii. 3 (197).
[75]Socinus, *Praelectus Theologiae* (in Grensted, Ibid., 287).
[76]It is surely ironic that Socinus' own ideas have been employed to support the modern denial of sin.

century (especially through the influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher)[77] the objective approach would eventually find itself relegated to a secondary position in the schools of Christian theology.


FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Atonement theory from the beginning of the 17th century has widely recognized the significance of Socinus' challenges and responded in a variety of ways. Some have adopted his iconoclastic temperament while rejecting his soteriology, either offering their own (often mystical) variations[78] or preferring to dismiss the notion of atonement altogether in favor of a strictly exemplarist interpretation of Christ's work.[79] Others have made counter-attacks at Socinus' logic[80] or have sought to adapt the traditional theories to accommodate his accusations.[81] But many have categorically denied the relevance of his questions, resolutely

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[77]As the "father of modern theology," Schleiermacher's influence is second only to that of Calvin for evangelical Protestantism. But although his humanist interpretation of Christianity became the prototype for academic discourse, it did not gain an immediate influence in the broad conversation of mainstream churches. His work exerted no recognizable influence on the popular Mormon understanding of doctrine for the additional reason that those attracted to the preaching of LDS missionaries were predominantly those from religious movements prone to reject the new humanist reading of scripture in favor of traditional conservative interpretations. The doctrinal innovations of Mormonism were tremendously significant, but they did not challenge the fundamental premises of God's intervention in history or the reality of his miracles and spiritual gifts which were becoming major issues of contention between conservative and liberal theologians. The majority of Mormonism's early converts were 'seekers' or 'restorationists' who were committed to the Bible and looking for communion with the Spirit.

[78]Socinianism had a direct influence upon the development of Universalism through the work of Hosea Ballou, but perhaps the best example outside that context is to be found in William Law who in the early 1700's systematically rejected the satisfaction theory on logical and ethical grounds, following instead a course of mysticism influenced by Jakob Bohme. Similar positions were endorsed by John Taylor of Norwich, Joseph Priestley, and William Blake. A century later Horace Bushnell in America, F. D. Maurice in England and Albrecht Ritschl in Germany suggested their own views. John McLeod Campbell offered his interpretations in the 1860's which were consciously taken up by R. C. Moberly fifty years later.

[79]Friedrich Schleiermacher sired this "modern theology" which has become increasingly evident in late 19th and 20th century. Since it has had little effect on LDS interpretation it will not be elaborated here. For examples, see Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology being the Bampton Lectures for 1915* (London: Macmillan, 1919), Adolf Harnack, *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought* (London: James Clarke, 1907), and what Vernon White has called "John Hick's theological 'Copernican Revolution' whereby we no longer claim that Christ is the necessary centre of salvation" in *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973). M. F. Wiles promoted like ideas and Auguste Sabatier offered similar views in continental theology. H. R. Mackintosh gave great insight into the ideas of sin and guilt as moral hindrances to fellowship with God.

[80]Philippus van Limborch questioned Socinus' theories of atonement, asserting that they effectively denied the necessity of Christ's offering and thus rendered it meaningless.

[81]Grotius gives the first example in his fully developed governmental theory which abandoned the transcendent law of justice in favor of the idea of punishment as a deterrent to sin. Christ was punished as an example to the world of God's response to sin that the public order might be sufficiently maintained. The Arminians adjusted the Reformers' views of suffering in response to Socinus to declare that the sacrifice of Christ was not a complete satisfaction for sin, but a substitute for punishment. In 1730 John Balguy offered his own "premial theory." James Denney tried to combine subjective and objective aspects of atonement, ending up with only a more profound subjectivity. Karl Barth insisted that the work of atonement although real was incomprehensible. In 1931 Gustav Aulén revived the discussion by promoting the Lutheran view through a consciously metaphorical understanding of Christ's work informed by the model of Christ as the Victor over the realm of evil. Paul Tillich's systematic theology followed Bushnell in interpreting all theological language as symbolic, turning his attention to the relationship between man and the Ground of Being. H. A. Hodges reinterpreted the *unio mystica* as between man's repentance and Christ's work. One of the most original theories is to be found in Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*,

insisting on a transactional interpretation of Christ's suffering.[82] This final group has represented the conservative views of mainstream Protestantism for several hundred years and has defended the established interpretations of atonement theory. Like modern Hassidic Jews who, in the most sincere and commendable piety, clothe themselves in the apparel of their east-European forefathers—even while living in 20th century New York or Jerusalem—these Christians have for generations reverently and devoutly retained the ontological assumptions and scriptural readings of their 16th century predecessors, venerating them as the unquestionable touchstones of faith. And this conservative milieu provided the ideological background from which Mormonism received the majority of its early converts.

The aggregate influence of Socinus' arguments has proven considerable, yet in the two hundred years following his work they remained obscured within the shadow of the penal theory that was promoted in various manifestations by those taking the lead in guiding the Protestant Reformation to its supremacy in so many of the countries of northwestern Europe. During this time the discussion of Christ's active and passive obedience became widely discussed, separating the *satisfaction* offered by his sinless life from the *merit* gained through his undeserved suffering and death. It was not until the early 18th century in the work of Englishman William Law that a subjectivist position again gained substantial influence. Law condemned the satisfaction theory on much the same grounds as Socinus before him, adding that the contemporary view of God's wrath was Spinozist, reducing God to Nature. Law's writings impressed John Taylor of Norwich, Joseph Priestley and later William Blake who all spoke out strongly against the way in which the church's atonement doctrines of just punishment had endorsed and encouraged a corrupt and oppressive political atmosphere.[83]

At this same time on the other side of the Atlantic, Jonathon Edwards was promoting religious revival through his Calvinist evangelism. Contrasting Christ's work of satisfaction and merit against the hellfire and brimstone that is man's just due, Edwards insisted that God was constrained to punish all sin with infinite punishment since an equivalent sorrow and repentance was impossible, so Christ took the entirety of that punishment upon himself, offering satisfaction to God even while garnering merit by which to procure man's title to happiness. The revival that Edwards initiated was strengthened and expanded primarily through the work of George Whitefield who brought to the colonies the Calvinist Methodism of John Wesley.

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trans. S. Bann and M. Meteer (London: Athlone Press, 1987) which argues that the Bible contains the record of God's ongoing attempts to teach a self-absorbed world about the reality of love, interpreting Christ's trial and crucifixion as the absolute rejection of mankind's insistence upon retributive justice. The most recent approach to atonement theory is to discuss it solely at the level of metaphor (rather than attempting to link types with antitypes) as in Gunton, Swinburne, McIntyre, White and Gorringe.

[82]This has been the basic approach of such influential writers or preachers as John Owen, Jonathon Edwards, John Wesley, J. A. Haldane, Francis Turretin, Charles Hodge, R. W. Dale, A. A. Hodge, A. H. Strong, W. G. T. Shedd, L. W. Grensted, Emil Brunner, and recently H. D. McDonald.

[83]John Wesley was responding directly to Taylor when he defended God's sovereignty by insisting that as "Lord and Proprietor," God has a perfect right, if he so chooses, to destroy his creatures. Gorringe's *God's Just Vengeance* offers a wonderfully insightful analysis of the symbiotic development of atonement theology and penal strategy.

Religious interest escalated rapidly, a phenomenon internally labeled the Great Awakening, and Calvinist theology thereafter became a major influence in American religious thought.

This religious enthusiasm diminished markedly between 1750 and 1795 but was revitalized at the turn of the century through the evangelical work of preachers like Charles Finney. Known as the Second Great Awakening, this revivalism, which drew its replenished strength from Arminian doctrines of free will, created the environment of "unusual excitement on the subject of religion" that Joseph Smith encountered in his youth and described in his history.[84] This movement was led by itinerant preachers representing Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist or less conventional religious sentiments, whose competitiveness in seeking converts was often keen, but whose sermons were frequently ecumenical, promoting a common reliance on scripture and personal involvement in the life of the Spirit. The vast majority of Mormonism's early converts were directly involved in the religious excitement of the period or (in England, Scandinavia and elsewhere) were exposed to Mormonism by the efforts of missionaries such as Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Hyde or dozens of others whose religious background had been shaped by the contemporary search for spiritual revival.

The popular preaching of the time dealt with issues of sin, repentance, free will, and salvation, but the understanding of atonement itself was not given systematic treatment and hardly represented a point of contention between the various groups. They were united in accepting the role of Christ as the Savior of mankind and promoted the various traditional doctrines of atonement interchangeably, without seeking theological precision in their formulations or exalting one metaphor over others. Christ was the sacrificial lamb who, because of his love, paid the price of sin and overcame death and the powers of hell through resurrection. The movement was influenced by the Calvinist literality of Methodism but the harshness of its portrayal of God had been toned down by the Arminian focus on human participation in the process of salvation.

This was the religious world in which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came into being. On many issues of vital religious significance it stood apart from the majority views of contemporary Christianity, drawing converts from the vast numbers of seekers and restorationists who had grown discouraged with traditional doctrines and practices and were actively searching for a renewal of the New Testament church with its original organization and spiritual gifts. Through the disclosure of additional scripture, the restoration of ancient priesthoods, and later with the revelation of temple ordinances for the living and vicarious work for the dead, the church offered these people the long-awaited Gospel for which they were searching. But in the preaching of Christ's atonement, Mormon revelation had not provided a clear and original interpretation, and the prevailing images of Protestantism were universally employed to describe the fundamental doctrine of the faith. This uncritical adoption of external language and metaphors aided the church in its missionary efforts as well as its internal growth

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[84] *JS-H*, 1:5.

and teaching, but at the popular level it also resulted in a variety of common notions about the character of God the Father that prove upon examination to stand in contradiction with other accepted doctrines of the church. It is with the intent of recognizing such contradictions and seeking possibilities for their resolution within LDS scripture and revelation that we now turn to an investigation of the doctrine of atonement in Mormonism itself.

# The LDS Conversation of Atonement

> The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and influence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.
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> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 354.

## Metaphors, Models and Myths

We have briefly reviewed in chapter seven how the language of the Bible became developed over time into a variety of theories by which to explain the meaning of Christ's atonement. Some of these theories were overlapping and interdependent, others systematic and exclusive, but each represents an attempt to explain the New Testament assertion that Jesus Christ is the Savior of humankind. Interpreters who have adopted forensic images to describe the atonement have found the basis for such in the early Christian language of law, justice, and mercy, of penalty, punishment and pardon, of God as the judge and Christ as the advocate, intercessor, and mediator for man. Others, looking to ritual imagery have focused on the language of sacrifice, with Christ as the lamb who was slain and whose blood was shed as a righteous offering of atonement or propitiation to God. Those concerned with the image of man's liberation from Satan's bondage have drawn upon the language of ransom, speaking of Christ as the purchase price, the payment which redeems humankind from captivity.

But these images and others that have been employed do not adequately serve to explain Christ's work, and have in turn been elaborated over time in a variety of ways, corresponding to contemporary social circumstances as well as political and religious ideologies. Legal language, for example, has been developed into both forensic and governmental models. Ritual imagery has generated models based on praise and thanksgiving, on propitiatory or vicarious bloodshed, and on the scapegoat ceremony of Yom Kippur. Even the image of bondage and captivity has variously been depicted as imprisonment, slavery, and spiritual subjection. These varied analogies that have been used to portray the work of redemption have most frequently been applied to the New Testament imagery in retrospect, adapting the original language to fit each proposed model of reality. Many of the examples we sketched in the last chapter took one final step, substantiating the disparate models through the proposal of specific theories of atonement. In many cases the common phraseology of the New Testament writers was pressed into service to sanction whatever theory was being championed. Several of the Church Fathers developed Ransom theories suggesting that Christ somehow purchased man from Satan. Anselm and many of those who followed him said that the payment was made to God, and furnished theories that relied on the principle of satisfaction for sin and guilt. Penal theories became common in the work of the Reformation, insisting that the payment satisfied an abstract law of justice through

Christ's vicarious punishment before the bar of God, even as the imagery of sacrifice gained prominence as the way of metaphorically describing this forensic situation.

These theoretical constructs have served to give substance to Christian claims of salvation through Christ, offering the believer a system by which to rationally conceive of the work of atonement. As challenges have been raised against the various theories, constructs of redemption have been adapted and buttressed in order to faithfully maintain Christian belief against the perceived threats of detractors and infidels. The anthropological assessment of Geertz is applicable here: "Man depends upon symbols and symbol systems with a dependence so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability and, as a result, his sensitivity to even the remotest indication that they may prove unable to cope with one or another aspect of experience raises within him the greatest sort of anxiety."[1] Rather than abandoning metaphors that have proven inadequate, there has been instead a profound religious motivation to correct and improve their formulation, offering variations that can circumvent the criticisms that have been raised, criticisms which are frequently viewed as challenges to Christian faith itself. Through this process of ideological evolution, Christian mythologies of atonement are born and given life in themselves, independent of the theological debates that made their existence possible. Some of these mythologies have become permanently outdated, the casualties of social, political, or psychological change, but others maintain a diluted but recognizable influence over many conservative branches of Christianity and contemporary society in turn.

From the perspective of modernity it is not difficult to dismiss the antiquated and over-developed ransom theory of Gregory of Nyssa or the feudal intrusions upon Anselm's doctrine of satisfaction, but the task of evaluating the legitimacy of theories that enjoy common currency is a predictably emotional undertaking, raising the defenses of modern believers and too frequently abetting an atmosphere of confrontation and conflict. It is therefore perhaps judicious that current academic discussion of atonement theory has replaced the question of validity with that of value. Rather than viewing the metaphors themselves as constitutive of faith and worthy of allegiance and veneration, many writers are now asking what benefits can be discovered in the analysis of a wide range of interpretive models. What does the language of sacrifice or law or captivity have to offer today's Christian? Some have turned to such issues in order to avoid discussions of an objective reality behind the atonement, but others are emphatic that the metaphors represent an external (although perhaps incomprehensible) event. As Barry put it, "theology deals with a truth that is unchanging, but if it is to mean anything at all to men and women at any given period it must inevitably be presented in the thought forms and language of the period. Thus actual theological formulations must be subject to constant revision and restatement. There can be no 'final' theology."[2]

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[1]Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (New York; Washington; Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 13-14.

[2]Barry, F. R., *The Atonement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 15. In linguistics the very concept of *literal language* is currently under fire, not as a denial of the existence of a world beyond language, but as a denial of the

The matter that concerns us at this point in our discussion is the correspondence between traditional Christian atonement theory and Latter-day Saint atonement doctrine. What are the images and models through which the atonement is conceived in LDS thought and are they the product of modern revelation and scripture or the residual echoes of a Protestant religious heritage? Which of those images are to be understood as literal descriptions of reality and which as metaphorical representations? How much can Latter-day Saint sources contribute to a revised Mormon understanding of Christ's work? It may be true, as many have suggested, that it is impossible for man to comprehend what truly happened in the atonement. If that is accepted, then the focus of the discussion of atonement models becomes one of usefulness rather than truth. As long as one accepts that there exists a reality behind the models, a reality which the models attempt in various ways to communicate, the suggestion that the models are culturally derived poses no threat to the believer. Only if one denies the reality of the thing signified by claiming that all models are heuristic fictions—and therefore equally true in themselves—is the vital object of faith challenged. We will therefore examine the models of Mormonism from within the parameters of LDS acceptability to ascertain their usefulness for Latter-day Saint conceptualization as well as the liabilities with which they may be burdened.

A great variety of metaphorical models have been suggested in Mormonism, comparing Christ's work with everything from lifeboats and ladders to fountains and fruit, but these models are consciously symbolic, explicitly intended as analogies. Of more relevance are those models developed or adopted in the LDS discussion that assume some degree of literality for the imagery they extol. As we consider how the atonement is perceived and taught in the restored church, we will relate those findings to the imagery employed by the Book of Mormon writers in order to suggest some adaptations or improvements that might be made, looking for models that are both germane to the LDS discussion and internally consistent with the doctrines of the restoration. In so doing, there exists the danger of inadvertently inventing a new Mormon mythology. Therefore, instead of proposing theories to explain the mechanics of atonement, we will direct out attention to the coherence of the models themselves, seeking merely for better ways to comprehend and teach the atonement within the conversation of LDS doctrine.

## EARLY LDS FORMULATIONS

In response to some of the questions that were frequently asked of Joseph Smith, he offered the following in 1838: "The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only

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ability to comprehend it in literal terms. One might expect Mormons to promote Barry's position with vigor, given the rejection of credal pronouncements and theological formulations and the belief in the ongoing revelation of truth. However, Latter-day Saints frequently demonstrate the way in which boundary definition promotes a solidifying effect upon perceptions of doctrine.

appendages to it."[3] Like most of his Christian contemporaries, Joseph Smith regarded the death and resurrection of Christ as the central defining reality of the Gospel. This was the *a priori* basis for Christian belief, so fundamentally and universally accepted and assumed that it went almost unmentioned in Joseph's public preaching. Yet it established the necessary background for the work he restored, providing a framework in which to locate his teachings about priesthood, covenants, and eternity, making them intelligible parts of a larger whole. The snatches we find in Joseph's[4] discourses and conversations indicate that he saw salvation as conditioned upon the shedding of Christ's precious blood, and he made use of the prevalent language and imagery of sacrifice, quoting in this regard the epistle to the Hebrews that "without shedding of blood is no remission."[5] But he never offered a theory by which to explain the process of atonement. We do not find in his teachings a discussion of how Christ's sacrifice made salvation newly possible.

Joseph gave much greater attention to the corollary doctrine of Christ's resurrection, calling it "the point on which the hope of all who believe the inspired record is found."[6] His discourses made frequent reference to the importance of the corporeal resurrection of humankind, universally accomplished through Christ, but again, he did not create a theory to explain the chain of events by which the Savior's resurrection influences the condition of man. He likewise taught that remission of sins is offered through Christ's atonement on conditions of faith and repentance, but he was apparently content to retain the discussion of the mechanism of these central truths at the level of metaphor. His preaching had its basis in the doctrine of Christ's atonement, but he did not dictate to the Saints how that doctrine was to be taught or understood. His own references to the doctrine are testimonial rather than didactic in nature and the images suggested in his witness remain inchoate, drawing upon the various perceptions implied in the scriptures and in the discussions of the Christianity of his time.

> Notwithstanding the transgression, by which man had cut himself off from an immediate intercourse with his Maker without a Mediator, it appears that the great and glorious plan of His redemption was previously provided; the sacrifice prepared; the atonement wrought out in the mind and purpose of God, even in the person of the Son, through whom man was now to look for acceptance and through whose merits he was now taught that he alone could find redemption, since the word had been pronounced, Unto dust thou shalt return.[7]

Of more direct applicability to our inquiry are the revelations collected in the Doctrine and Covenants, many of which offer illuminating insights into the meaning and purpose of

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[3]*TPJS*, 121.

[4]It is standard in LDS usage to refer to some of the earliest church leaders by first name, i.e., Joseph, Brigham, etc. and we follow that convention herein for variety. Later church members are likewise referred to by title and last name (President Taylor, Elder Lyman, etc.) or merely by their surname (Talmage, Roberts, etc.).

[5]*TPJS*, 58. (See Hebrews 9:22.)

[6]*TPJS*, 62. In a letter to the elders of the church in 1835 Joseph seems to suggest that Christ's resurrection is the result of his redeeming work as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Ibid., 84).See also p. 149.

[7]*TPJS*, 57.

Christ's atoning sacrifice. No new theories are postulated, but the language employed and the relationships suggested between concepts are enlightening. In June of 1829, a revelation to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer gave this instruction,

> Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;
> For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.
> And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.[8]

Several passages make reference to Christ's role as the mediator, pleading to the Father for his brethren by virtue of the sinless offering he has made through the shedding of his blood.[9] His suffering and crucifixion are linked with the remission of sins,[10] and humankind's redemption is tied in with the resurrection made possible through Christ.[11] The language of victory is also put to use in saying that Christ has overcome the world.[12] In the vision of the Three Degrees of Glory, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon witnessed that,

> …all the rest shall be brought forth by the resurrection of the dead, through the triumph and the glory of the Lamb, who was slain, who was in the bosom of the Father before the worlds were made.
> And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—
> That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;
> That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him.[13]

Here several images are used in concert to testify of Christ's role as the Savior of humankind, but we look in vain for a systematic theory of atonement. The metaphors suggested through the Hebrew rituals of sacrifice, vicarious guilt, and ceremonial ablutions are all put to use as symbols of Christ's work, but there is no indication that they are to be taken as literal descriptions of the acts he performed. One of the most significant passages of the Doctrine and Covenants that discusses what the Lord accomplished on man's behalf is found in section 19. This frequently cited scripture has often been used by Latter-day Saints to promote a transactional view of sin and forgiveness through Christ's offering of himself to God. It is reasoned that justice requires that sin be punished with suffering, and that Christ therefore bears

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[8]*D&C* 18:10-12.
[9]See *D&C* 29:5; 38:4; 45:3-5; 76:69; 110:4.
[10]See *D&C* 21:9; 27:2; 35:2; 45:4; 46:13; 53:2; 76:41.
[11]See *D&C* 18:12; 76:39.
[12]See *D&C* 50:41; 88:106.
[13]*D&C* 76:39-42.

such punishment on man's behalf. If people repent they will avoid the penalty of sin, but if they reject Christ they will be forced to pay the price of pardon themselves.

> For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;
> But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;
> Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—
> Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.
> Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.[14]

To the modern reader raised on the atonement imagery of the penal theory, this sounds very much as though each sin has a corresponding penalty of pain and that God will enforce this law of justice against all those who refuse to repent. What could be more clear than the endorsement this verse gives to the testimony that Christ *literally* paid the price of sin, enduring the penalty earned by man's rebellion? But as we further investigate the Mormon concept of salvation below, alternative approaches to LDS interpretation will be suggested for this and other verses. We turn for the time being from the contributions of Joseph Smith to those of his successors and followers.

Brigham Young had somewhat more to say in his sermons than had Joseph on the topic we are addressing. Whether his own thoughts on the matter of Christ's atonement were more methodical than those of his predecessor or whether his treatment of the subject merely reflected a change in dialectical concern among the Saints or a response to liberal Christian discussions is difficult to ascertain.[15] But Brigham was often more direct in his discussion of the method of atonement. He viewed man's condition as wholly influenced by the sins of man's first parents, and Christ's death as paying the debt that their transgression incurred.[16] He made a clear

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[14]*D&C* 19:16-20.

[15]It is clear in some of Brigham's remarks that he is responding to an increased humanism in Christian discourse. By 1872, five years prior to Brigham's death, Orson Pratt would make this observation: "There are those in the Christian world, so called, who profess to believe in Christianity and yet deny the efficacy of the atoning blood that was shed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. More especially has this been the case for a few years past. I suppose there are many thousands who deny this now, where there were but few at the time of the rise of this Church." (*JD* 15:254). Pratt does not attribute this trend to liberal theology, however, but to spiritualism.

[16]"The Latter-day Saints believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, who came in the meridian of time, performed his work, suffered the penalty and paid the debt of man's original sin by offering up himself, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended to his Father; and as Jesus descended below all things, so he will ascend above all things." *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 11:123. Hereafter cited as *JD*. See also *JD* 12:69, "Our Lord Jesus Christ--the Savior, who has redeemed the world and all things pertaining to it, is the Only Begotten of the Father pertaining to the flesh. He is our Elder Brother, and the Heir of the family, and as such we worship him. He has tasted death for every man, and has paid the debt contracted by our first parents."

distinction between the objective and subjective aspects of atonement, verifying both as necessary approaches to interpretation.[17] In the following long excerpt of a speech given in 1870 he addresses the ontological reality of Christ's objective work, but he does not extend the imagery to inquire after the meaning of the divine debt that is owed or in what manner Christ's suffering paid the required price.

> Is there a debt contracted between the Father and his children? There is. Our first parents transgressed the law that was given them in the garden; their eyes were opened. This created the debt. What is the nature of this debt? It is a divine debt. What will pay it? I ask, Is there anything short of a divine sacrifice that can pay this debt? No; there is not.
>
> A divine debt has been contracted by the children, and the Father demands recompense. He says to his children on this earth, who are in sin and transgression, it is impossible for you to pay this debt; I have prepared a sacrifice; I will send my Only Begotten Son to pay this divine debt. Was it necessary then that Jesus should die? Do we understand why he should sacrifice his life? The idea that the Son of God, who never committed sin, should sacrifice his life is unquestionably preposterous to the minds of many in the Christian world. But the fact exists that the Father, the Divine Father, whom we serve, the God of the Universe, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father of our spirits, provided this sacrifice and sent his Son to die for us; and it is also a great fact that the Son came to do the will of the Father, and that he has paid the debt, in fulfillment of the Scripture which says, "He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."
>
> Is this easy to understand? It is perfectly easy to me; and my advice to those who have queries and doubts on this subject is, when they reason and philosophize upon it, not to plant their position in falsehood or argue hypothetically, but upon the facts as they exist, and they will come to the conclusion that unless God provides a Savior to pay this debt it can never be paid. Can all the wisdom of the world devise means by which we can be redeemed, and return to the presence of our Father and Elder Brother, and dwell with holy angels and celestial beings? No; it is beyond the power and wisdom of the inhabitants of the earth that now live, or that ever did or ever will live, to prepare or create a sacrifice that will pay this divine debt. But God provided it, and his Son has paid it, and we, each and every one, can now receive the truth and be saved in the Kingdom of God. Is it clear and plain? It is to me, and if you have the Spirit of God, it is as plain to you as anything else in the world.[18]

Brigham's witness of the necessity of Christ's atoning sacrifice is absolute. He proclaims with boldness here as elsewhere that only Christ had the ability to perform the work of restoring man to the presence of God and this doctrine he regards as plain and straightforward. But the

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[17]"The errand of Jesus to earth was to bring his brethren and sisters back into the presence of the Father; he has done his part of the work, and it remains for us to do ours. There is not one thing that the Lord could do for the salvation of the human family that he has neglected to do; and it remains for the children of men to receive the truth or reject it; all that can be accomplished for their salvation, independent of them, has been accomplished in and by the Savior." *JD* 13:59.

[18]*JD* 14:71.

images of debt and payment by sacrifice in which he characteristically frames the discussion are not truly explored nor developed. As would be the case for the influential Mormon speakers and writers who were to follow, Brigham, like Joseph before him, was more concerned with testimony than theology.[19] The accounts of Christ's work that have been given throughout the Church's history are more fundamentally confessional ("*He did this for us!*") than soteriological ("He did *this* for us").

Another whose work had a significant impact on the doctrinal views of the church in its first fifty years was Orson Pratt. Equal parts philosopher, natural scientist and disciple, Orson gave frequent discourses on a wide variety of topics to the early church members.[20] He was more prone than many of his generation to rely on the Book of Mormon witness of Christ and we hear its words echoed in his descriptions of the atonement. But his interpretation of modern scripture drew upon the theological assumptions of the general Christian conversation of salvation, and the substance of his treatment of the atonement would hardly seem out of place in the sermons of contemporary theologians like Charles Hodge or R. W. Dale. Orson focused more intently than Brigham on the laws of justice and mercy, which he found presented in the Book of Mormon, and he developed an explanation of Christ's work that corresponds with his interpretation of divine law. The fall of Adam subjected man to the demands of justice, which consigned him to eternal death and misery. Mercy became impossible without an atoning sacrifice. "God could not exhibit the attribute of mercy on any principle whatsoever, only for a sinless being to suffer in behalf of sinful man. Inasmuch as the sin was against an infinite being—a transgression of a law issued by an infinite being, the atonement must be an infinite atonement."[21]

Orson himself saw it as natural that the restored church's concept of atonement would be consistent with that of the broader assessment of Christianity. After describing the salvation made possible through the shedding of Christ's blood, he commented, "I believe that almost every Christian denomination has the same views in regard to the atonement of Christ…hence, so far as faith in God the Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and repentance and reformation are concerned, there are few distinguishing characteristics between us and the outside world."[22] The one major distinction between Orson Pratt's views of atonement and those of the conservative Christian theologians of his day lies in his inclusion of the LDS doctrine of the pre-existence and the foreordination of Christ in the pre-mortal council. Foreseeing Adam's fall, the Father is

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[19] See *D&C* 76:22-24.

[20] 127 of his speeches are recorded in the *Journal of Discourses*. This number is exceeded only by those of John Taylor (162) and Brigham Young (390). It is possible, and indeed likely, that if we had full accounts of more of Joseph Smith's speeches we would find an emphasis on the atonement similar to that of his successors, but the majority of the accounts which we have from this earliest period are from personal journals which naturally focused more on those aspects of Joseph's teaching which provided new insights or specific instruction.

[21] *JD* 7:255-56. Pratt's language is consciously drawn from the Book of Mormon prophets Jacob and Amulek, to whom he elsewhere makes reference, but his logic more closely resembles that of Jonathon Edwards.

[22] *JD* 16:284-85.

portrayed as instructing his firstborn in the spirit of the salvation that can be made possible through him:

> If you, a pure sinless being, my only begotten Son, are willing to go and take upon you the same kind of body that the fallen sons of men have taken upon themselves--a fallen body of flesh and bones, subject to pain, disease, sickness, temptation, and finally death, and offer yourself as a sacrifice, (although it is not required of you, for you have committed no sin that I should cause death to come on your body; yet if you do this voluntarily, and keep my commandments in all things, and not sin against me,) I will accept the sacrifice which you make in behalf of your younger brethren; and I will have mercy on them, otherwise no mercy can be shown to them: justice must have its full effect, and they must suffer eternal misery, being captive to that being whom they have consented to obey.[23]

This pre-mortal covenant explains in Orson's view the fact that mercy was extended prior to Christ's coming in the flesh, since his voluntary offering was made first in heaven before the foundation of the world, and the Father accepted there what would take place in the meridian of time. In the writings and discourses of Orson Pratt, the atonement of Christ was set forth as a sacrifice to God by which the law of justice could be satisfied and mercy extended. But the nature of divine justice was consistently regarded as the eternal requirement that pain be endured in response to sin, that God must of necessity punish offenses by the infliction of suffering—a view that had not been clearly developed until the Reformation. And since it apparently never occurred to him to question the provenance of such a fundamental Christian notion, no other interpretation of justice was considered in his work.

We can see a similarly faithful approach in the writings and addresses of John Taylor, whose *The Mediation and Atonement* was to become the standard LDS reference on the topic, leaving its unmistakable imprint on the discourse of the next generation of Mormon scholars.

> There are eternal, unchangeable laws associated with God, and with all his plans, his works and ways, the requirements of which must be met. Nor can they be evaded or changed, except on certain principles provided for and contained in the laws themselves. When man had transgressed, an atonement had to be made commensurate with the act, and fully adequate to meet the inexorable demands of justice; so that, as stated, justice might be satisfied, which, if it had not been, the law pertaining to this matter could not have been carried out, and must necessarily have been violated.[24]

Law and justice were again central in the explanation of atonement given by John Taylor. He viewed the necessity of Christ's sacrifice as rising out of the eternal nature of God and the laws to which he subscribes. The laws dictate that an infinite sacrifice must be made in order to

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[23]Ibid., 256-57.

[24]John Taylor, *An examination into and an Elucidation of the Great Principle of the Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1882), 163.

provide mercy to humankind. He has no hesitation in speaking of Christ's "propitiatory offering" since his formulation is concerned not so much with an offended deity as with a broken law. Yet, he admitted emphatically and persistently that the mechanics of such a system were beyond understanding.

> But what is the reason for all this suffering and bloodshed, and sacrifice? We are told that "without shedding of blood is no remission" of sins. This is beyond our comprehension. Jesus had to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, the just for the unjust.…And as He in His own person bore the sins of all, and atoned for them by the sacrifice of Himself, so there came upon Him the weight and agony of ages and generations, the indescribable agony consequent upon this great sacrificial atonement wherein He bore the sins of the world, and suffered in His own person the consequences of an eternal law of God broken by man.[25]

Throughout the chapter in which President Taylor elaborated Christ's agony in Gethsemane and upon the cross, he repeatedly reminded the reader that he was not attempting to explain precisely how the atonement accomplished man's salvation, but simply to testify that it did so. He was not involved in the exercise of logical ratiocination of the atonement, but in providing (as a special witness of Christ) his personal testimony of the Savior's redemptive work.

> In some mysterious, incomprehensible way, Jesus assumed the responsibility which naturally would have devolved upon Adam; but which could only be accomplished through the mediation of Himself, and by taking upon Himself their sorrows, assuming their responsibilities, and bearing their transgressions or sins. In a manner to us incomprehensible and inexplicable, he bore the weight of the sins of the whole world; not only of Adam, but of his posterity; and in doing that, opened the kingdom of heaven.[26]

James E. Talmage would push man's ignorance of the matter even further in his own study of the mission of the Lord, not even mentioning eternal justice or divine law in his chapters on the sufferings of Gethsemane and Calvary:

> Christ's agony in the garden is unfathomable by the finite mind, both as to intensity and cause.…In some manner, actual and terribly real though to man incomprehensible, the Savior took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world.[27]

As with Orson Pratt, the atonement was not viewed by Talmage as a tenet that set LDS thought apart. "The Atonement of Christ is taught as a leading doctrine by all sects professing

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[25]Ibid., 149-50.

[26]Ibid., 148.

[27]James E. Talmage, *Jesus The Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to the Holy Scriptures both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 613. He does make passing reference to law and justice and Christ's sacrifice in chapter three, but he never attempts to explain the relationship between such ideas. Most of his references in this regard are quotes from *Mediation and Atonement*.

Christianity. The expression is so common a one, and the essential point of its signification is so generally admitted, that definitions may appear to be superfluous."[28] The atonement was therefore presented by Talmage in traditional conservative Christian images and in harmony with mainstream interpretation. Thus Talmage continued the work of his predecessors, considering the wider Christian discourse to constitute an adequate explanation of atonement for the members of the restored church as well. Talmage's writings continue to offer great appeal to a wide Mormon audience and his contributions have maintained an ongoing influence upon LDS thought.

At that point in the church's history, however, we sense the stirrings of a subtle and certainly isolated shift in method. So far in our investigation, the contributions have shown an interesting parallel with those of the Apostolic Fathers. We mentioned in chapter seven that no systematic Christian soteriology existed until after the rise of a variety of Gnostic systems that claimed to provide explanation for the process of Christ's atonement. The beginnings of Christian atonement theory in Origen can be seen as his conscious response to Gnostic speculation. A similar pattern is evident in LDS thought. As long as ideas of the atonement were assumed to coincide with general Christian understanding, there was no reason to become deeply involved in systematic formulation of doctrine. While the writings are replete with confessional witnesses of Christ's redemptive work, there is nothing we can truly call soteriology. Even in John Taylor's *Mediation and Atonement* where we might expect a more precise treatment of the subject, we find everywhere the insistence that this is an unfathomable and deeply enigmatic subject that deserves our attention and commitment, but which plainly exceeds our capacity to understand. In all of these writings we see the powerful affirmation of the reality of Christ's atonement and the adoption of traditional images and metaphors with which to describe that work, but its true nature eludes comprehension and is recognized as beyond man's intellectual grasp.

But one other writer requires our attention here because he had familiarized himself with the historical Christian discussion of atonement theory and, in response to that ongoing dialogue, sought to formulate a more systematic understanding of salvation from sin and death within a specifically LDS context. In 1911, B. H. Roberts continued his authorized texts for the yearly instruction of the Seventies' quorums with a volume devoted entirely to the atonement.[29] In the April General Conference of that year Roberts related the personal impact that his study had generated: "I account it for myself a new conversion, an intellectual conversion, to the atonement of Jesus Christ; and I have been rejoicing in it of late, exceedingly."[30] His research

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[28]James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1924), 74. He makes a similar point in *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston, Massachusetts: Gorham Press, 1919), 58: "Belief in the efficacy of the death of Jesus Christ as a means of atonement, whereby redemption and salvation are made possible, is an essential feature of distinctively Christian religion.…Nevertheless, to most of us, the fact of the Atonement is a great mystery."

[29]B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology Fourth Year: The Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1911).

[30]*Conference Report* April, 1911, 59.

was based on a renewed investigation of the Book of Mormon in conjunction with an examination of Christian soteriology. He placed the necessity of "the method and manner" of the atonement in the demands of law, describing justice as an uncompromising and exacting principle that demands satisfaction for the injured honor and majesty of God, inexorable except through God's own act of mercy. "The sin of Adam was a sin against divine law; a sin against the majesty of God. Only a God can render a satisfaction to that insulted honor and majesty. Only Deity can satisfy the claims of Deity."[31] There were only two ways in which justice could be satisfied and the moral government of the world maintained: either for punishment to be "inflicted upon the actual sinner, leaving man to satisfy justice by an endless misery;" or for God to "satisfy his own claims against man" making a satisfaction to justice through a vicarious atonement.[32] This act of mercy is nothing more than active love, which "prompts God to make reparation to God's honor, and satisfy Justice by undergoing the penalty due to Adam's sin."[33]

The work of B. H. Roberts, which has recently regained increased popularity through the dual publication of his final opus, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, represents the first serious attempt to move away from metaphor into ontology in the LDS discussion of atonement.[34] Although Roberts' formulation does not differ substantially from that of John Taylor, drawing upon the same images of law, justice, mercy and sacrifice, Roberts leaves far less room for interpretation, establishing in his arguments the nature and location of divine law and its relation to deity and treating as concrete and actual that which had previously been more semantic and pedagogic. His influence upon Latter-day Saint understanding is most readily apparent in this increased tendency to treat justice and law as absolutes, existing either independently in the universe or within the person of God, but creating in either scenario an environment in which reparation must be made to God's honor and majesty, and sin must result in the execution of punishment. The majority of LDS writers in the 20th century can be placed ideologically somewhere between Roberts and his predecessors, admitting the incomprehensible nature of atonement, but viewing the concepts of divine law and retributive justice as absolute constituents of reality. The images that have thus gained prominence in the LDS depiction of atonement are almost entirely forensic in nature. In chapter seven we presented some of the ethical concerns that have been raised historically when such legalistic images of atonement have been adapted into explanatory models or further developed into established theories. Such a system if pressed to its extremes invariably impugns the character of the Father and distances his work from that of the Son. While no clear theories of atonement have been widely adopted or officially endorsed by the church, the primary model by which the atonement is explained in church education and missionary work relies upon the

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[31]Roberts, *Atonement*, 94.

[32]Ibid., 108.

[33]Ibid., 109

[34]The book was concurrently published almost 65 years after its completion as *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology* ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), and as *The Truth, The Way, The Life, An Elementary Treatise on Theology: The Masterwork of B. H. Roberts* ed. Stan Larson (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994).

assumptions of a cosmic system of forensic law and the personification of justice and mercy. The model has certainly proven useful within a specifically motivational context, but when stretched beyond its logical limitations—and lacking other models with which to work it is constantly called upon to provide further explanation—it has unintentionally introduced moral quandaries into the LDS discussion of Christ's work and God's purposes.

CONTRASTING POSITIONS

The predominant understanding of the atonement in the church down to the present has consistently been that which we have outlined above, conceptualizing the doctrine within the conservative Protestant discourse of law and justice, and incorporating modified versions of the established penal theory into LDS exegesis. The first outspoken critic of such a position was Elder Amasa Lyman, who in 1862 preached a sermon in Dundee, Scotland, that flatly denied the necessity of Christ's atonement. When called before the council of the twelve five years later, after preaching similar views among the saints of Utah, he humbly asked forgiveness, going so far as to publish a public apology in the *Deseret News*.[35] But he persisted in his views and his preaching and was eventually excommunicated in 1870. The origins of his heterodoxy have been traced to the nurturing of his Universalist grandfather and to the teachings of spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis. "Under the influence of his loving guardian, Lyman learned to disdain the harsh teachings of Calvinism which taught that man was innately evil and that only a few predestined elect could hope to escape the wrath of an angry God and a fiery hell."[36] Eventually, his sensitivity to the plight of the poor and the oppressed, coupled with his fascination with spiritualism, led him to the view that humankind is saved through knowledge and truth, and that Christ's suffering was nothing more than a commendable "example of learning righteousness, which, if followed by others, could save them."[37] For Lyman it was knowledge—and not the shedding of Christ's blood—that offered salvation, and following his excommunication he fostered a spiritualist movement in Utah that "publicly espoused universalism and the rejection of physical resurrection, the concept of a personal god, successive priesthood organization, the reality of Satan, the authenticity of the Bible, the efficacy of the atonement, and the divinity of Jesus."[38] Although his motivations may have been moral and his convictions sincere, the positions he chose to endorse were so radically opposed to the essential tenets of the church that they cannot be regarded as belonging within the compass of LDS thought. Lyman's case is instructive as a contrasting backdrop against which to view both the official beliefs of the church

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[35]For a brief discussion, see B. H. Roberts, ed., *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 269-271. Roberts mentions a connection between Lyman and the Godbeite movement.

[36]Loretta L. Hefner, "Amasa Mason Lyman, The Spiritualist" in *Journal of Mormon History* volume 6 (1979), 75.

[37]Ibid., 80.

[38]Ibid., 84.

and some of the more analytical or schematic interpretations that have been promoted in the last decades.

In more recent years, a few attempts have been made to suggest alternatives to strict penal theories of atonement while maintaining fidelity to Mormon scripture and to the testimony of Christ as the Savior of humankind. None of these have exercised significant influence on the views of the general membership of the church or its leadership, but they are worth recognizing as feasible alternatives to the usual LDS discussion and the legalism that it can engender. On the conservative side, Cleon Skousen developed a revised explanation of Christ's work that he based upon principles of animism and a personalized justice and compassion external to God.[39] In his formulation, the material universe is composed of a nearly infinite number of individual intelligences, which possess the attributes of consciousness, justice and compassion. The order of the universe and the power of God to act in it are maintained by the honor these intelligences offer to him on account of his justice. If he were to act unjustly, he would forfeit his honor and consequently his control over the cosmos. Because of the fall and sin, humankind is undeserving of heavenly glory and the intelligences of the universe recognize the justice of man's exclusion. But God loves his children and devised a method of calling upon the inherent compassion of the universal intelligences, convincing them to overlook the sins of man on account of the suffering of Christ. The intelligences are moved by the injustice of Christ's undeserved anguish, and reason that it is just that he receive according to his desires and that salvation be extended to man. Skousen's hypothesis is significant in that it is the only serious attempt that has been made to explain the workings of the atonement in an original way based primarily upon an interpretation of modern LDS scripture, but his formulation has proven too speculative and farfetched to be widely convincing.

Approaching the topic from a very different angle are some who have sought in recent years to avoid the ethical concerns posed by traditional theories by giving additional emphasis to the subjective aspects of the atonement, drawing the attention away from supposed changes in the person of God or in the universe and towards the changes made possible in man through Christ's love. It is not uncommon in traditional understanding to think of personal repentance and the exercise of faith in Christ's work as the means of convincing God to forgive our sins. "There has always been a tendency, in both Jewish and Christian thought, to adopt the pagan notion of trying to please or 'propitiate' God."[40] But the message of the Gospel embodied in Christ is that God's love is constant and does not require change. The change necessary for

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[39]Skousen, W. Cleon. *The First 2,000 Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1953). Skousen's ideas have further gained exposure through a popular audiocassette titled "A Personal Search for the Meaning of the Atonement" in which he elaborates his views more fully.

[40]Eugene England, *The Quality of Mercy* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 16. In an earlier essay, England had promoted Abelardian over Anselmian concepts for LDS understanding. ["That They Might Not Suffer: The Gift of the Atonement" in *Dialogues With Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Orion Books, 1984), distributed through Signature Books, Midvale, Utah]. In his later book, he builds on his prevalent concern over eliminating feelings of guilt and alienation, but he also incorporates the concept of Christ's satisfaction of divine justice by fulfilling the penalty against sin.

reconciliation to take place lies within man. Nevertheless, the power to effect that change lies beyond man's grasp and only through the love which is manifest in Christ can individuals find the strength to overcome the estrangement caused by their guilt. In analyzing the words of Amulek, Eugene England suggested that

> *knowledge* of Christ's sacrifice—of his merciful suffering if it is clearly perceived by us—is uniquely capable of striking through a barrier that may be part of our very nature. This barrier, which seems to be our insistence on judgment and punishment as well as our understanding of the demands of God's justice—for ourselves as well as for others—prevents us from overcoming our estrangement from God and ourselves and moving on to achieve the exalting power to act as we know we should.[41]

In a related vein, Lorin Hansen recently asserted that Mormonism has "a significant and unique position on issues basic to the Atonement."[42] After reviewing the history of Christian soteriology, he concluded that "the Mormon concept of the Atonement (in contrast to traditional Orthodoxy) has a rich concept of subjective process and (in contrast to traditional Liberalism) has an unequivocal concept of Atonement as objective event."[43] The problem with this suggestion is that *every* interpretation of the atonement, whether 'liberal' or 'orthodox', that accepts the historicity of a man named Jesus, posits some sort of objective event, and all but the strictest Calvinists agree on subjective processes of response. The question that has become confused and obscured in the debate is not over the objectivity of the *event* of the atonement, but over its objective *results*.

Keith Norman has also pointed out some of the distinctive aspects of Mormon doctrine that have a clear bearing on how the atonement might be perceived. Referring to concepts presented in the Book of Mormon, he promotes the exemplarist view that,

> Christ's role is not to let us off the hook, but to show us that it is possible to achieve holiness, to become perfect as God is perfect, to demonstrate how to do it, and to motivate us to follow his example. One of our fellow men has overcome every obstacle, including guilt and estrangement, and realized the full potential of our divine humanity. Knowing this truth makes us free to do likewise.[44]

Each of these writers has raised valid concerns about the implications of popular LDS concepts of the atonement while substantiating the profound significance of recognizing and responding to the love of God displayed through the example of Christ.[45] In so doing they have

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[41]Ibid., 24-25.

[42]Lorin K. Hansen, "The 'Moral' Atonement as a Mormon Interpretation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27/1 (Spring 1994), 196.

[43]Ibid., 227.

[44]Keith E. Norman, "Toward A Mormon Christology: Are We Disciples to the Christ of History or the Christ of the Creeds?," *Sunstone* 10/4 (April 1985), 18-25.

[45]Similar concerns are raised by J. Clair Batty in "The Atonement: Do Traditional Explanations Make Sense," *Sunstone* 8/6 (November-December 1983), 11-21, but he does not offer viable solutions to the questions he raises.

sought to clarify LDS perceptions and have brought to the fore a crucial and much neglected aspect of the atonement: that the narrative of Christ's submission to suffering can inspire personal emotional change, weakening the walls of alienation raised by insecurity, pride and sin.[46] But the substance of their suggestions has been generally dismissed for the same reasons which the moral influence theories of Abelard, Socinus, William Law and others were rejected: they fail to adequately address the claims of objective *results* attributed to the atonement.[47]

In Mormon scripture the most obvious difficulty with a purely subjective approach to soteriology is the constant and incontrovertible insistence upon universal corporeal resurrection effected through the work of Christ. Though it is possible, no one has yet produced a wholly subjective LDS interpretation of Christ's work that fully incorporates the fundamental doctrine of the resurrection, and any account of the atonement for an LDS audience that fails to at least assert the connection between the two events will continue to prove unconvincing. If one wishes to suggest within the Mormon context that *all* of the results of the atonement are subjective, the resolution to the dilemma would seem to lie in the doctrine of pre-existence. Universal resurrection can be viewed as the inherent result of the *subjective* choice to accept Christ prior to mortal birth. There is nothing then that necessarily limits the scope of a subjective interpretation of the atonement for LDS doctrine, but explanations that incorporate objective changes in the universe are clearly also possible.

An additional obstacle confronting these recent doctrinal innovations is the intellectual and emotional challenge for the believer of maintaining a distinction between personal (or corporate) interpretation of core doctrines and the doctrines themselves. Since these writers have challenged metaphorical images that are deemed virtually synonymous with the atonement, their views are easily regarded and labeled as injurious to faith and subversive to orthodoxy. In such an atmosphere it is unlikely that their contributions will be widely considered among the LDS mainstream. The established language of legalism and propitiation are perhaps too deeply embedded in the cultural conception of atonement to easily allow for alternatives, and the supremacy of these images perpetuates itself through the ongoing experience of worship. Since ordinances and rituals make clear and repeated reference to sacrificial imagery, it is natural that the regular participation in covenant making and renewal, which characterizes Latter-day Saint life (in weekly sacrament meetings, in the performance of ordinances and in temple worship), serves also to inadvertently reinforce inherited assumptions as to the meaning of religious metaphors. The symbolism of ritual does not dictate understanding directly—being conditioned

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[46]In the parallel Christian case, even McDonald is willing to grant that Abelard's work had the positive result of shifting the discussion from metaphysics to morality, from abstraction to experience: H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ—in faith, revelation and history* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 180.
[47]Purely exemplarist theories are second order models and can be attributed with unique significance only through *a priori* assumptions about the meaning of Christ's example. England did not really address this in his later essay, but his inclusion of an objective satisfaction of divine justice, although it remains unexplained, helps him to avoid the problem.

and mediated through exegesis and instruction—but as a reinforcer of established concepts, its influence is potent.[48]

ATONEMENT IMAGES OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

It is time now to turn our attention back to the examination of traditional Mormon atonement doctrine in order to look more closely at the most common metaphors used by the Latter-day Saints and at the implications which they bear. As already indicated, these metaphors have been the means of discussing and teaching the most fundamental tenet of the faith. The atonement of Christ is the doctrine that gives substance and significance to all other aspects of the restored Gospel. But while the reality is considered accessible in experience, it is not so in language. The atonement models of normative Christian discussion that have been assumed into the LDS conversation have been attempts at conceptualizing the meaning of Christ's role as the Savior of humankind.[49] However, these attempts have raised formidable ethical concerns over the nature of Christian redemption. Confronted with the troublesome question—originally raised by orthodoxy's gnostic rivals—of what Christ's suffering and death could mean, the time-honored response has been to retrace the well-worn steps up the mountain of sovereignty and to fashion upon its exalted summit the image of a God whose manner and majesty might be appropriate to the prevailing philosophy. If such a God then demanded bloody sacrifice and suffering, or declared eternal vengeance against his rebellious subjects, who among those kneeling before him could afford to contemplate the sacrilege of questioning his will?

Thirty years ago, Clifford Geertz divided his study of religious symbols into what he called "models *of* 'reality'," and "models *for* 'reality'," suggesting that some models are intentionally descriptive, while others endeavor to influence the recipient of the model by acting as a catalyst for certain types of emotions and actions.[50] In the discussion of atonement, we have seen that the latter type of model was gradually transformed into the former. It has been extensively argued that the images of sacrifice and slave trade, of laws and penalties were originally invoked as models *for*, intended primarily to motivate faith in Christ and reformation of life by the didactic use of analogy. But with the externally imposed need for a more rationally coherent faith they came to be employed as models *of*, being extended in the hands of subsequent theologians into increasingly literal, rather than metaphorical explanations of Christ's

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[48]Gorringe has made this point regarding the understanding of atonement during the medieval period: "That this pattern of sensibilities was focused week in week out by *ritual* was vitally important, for rituals do not just "express" emotions—they arouse them and organize their content; they provide a kind of didactic theatre through which the onlooker is taught what to feel, how to react, which sentiments are called for." Timothy Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[49]LDS perceptions have never fully (or at least not systematically) focused on the passion. Gethsemane has been central, but not the bleeding wounds or the sacred heart. The attention has been drawn to his suffering over the sins of mankind in the garden and the voluntary offering of his life on Calvary.

[50]Clifford Geertz, Ibid., 7.

work.[51] We have noted a similar although less pronounced tendency in the more recent LDS discussion, but the models which have directed Mormon understanding apparently took their pre-eminent place by cultural default rather than by examination and selection.

The significance of the atonement is a fundamental issue that serves to illuminate the world-views of those who accept it. White contends that the idea of universal redemption follows the notion of a universal redeemer.[52] This argument is possibly substantiated in the New Testament, but it is not clearly so in the Old Testament or the Book of Mormon because the belief in a universal fall dictates the potential scope of redemption and some interpretations of the fall, especially as held by Book of Mormon writers, require it absolutely. Gorringe, in fact, makes the opposite argument by suggesting that as man's sense of community guilt increased it reached a point at which it required a universal expiatory offering.[53]

Those who have been constrained by convention, faith, or piety to rely exclusively on the New Testament and its early commentators as the source for doctrine have most often promoted some type of transaction theory. This has been the long upheld position of Western conservativism. But like liberal Christian theology, Mormonism has insisted that there is more information on which to base interpretation and that man's understanding of Christ's work cannot be bound solely to a collection of texts that were revised and adapted in the process of canonization and that are in their present arrangement largely the product of early Christian political controversy. It is therefore fascinating, if somewhat ironic, that so few in the LDS mainstream have sought to break away from the traditional Christian assumptions by undertaking an independent investigation of their own canon and the implications of modern revelation.

Nevertheless, even with the significant additions provided by the expanded LDS canon, far too many pieces remain missing to try to assemble a reliable model, although it is possible to assemble some of the clues and outline potential configurations that Mormon models could take. In this matter, we find the words of H. D. Mackintosh both sobering and inspiring in that they indicate a conceivable change of direction for atonement theory:

> We are constantly under the temptation to suppose that the reason why we fail to understand completely the atonement made by God in Christ is that our minds are not sufficiently profound. And doubtless there is truth in the reflection that for final insight into the meaning of the cross we are not able or perspicacious enough. But there is a deeper reason still. It is that we are not good enough.…Let the man be found who has undergone the shattering experience of pardoning, nobly and tenderly, some wrong to himself, still more

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[51]Despite the arguments, it is still possible that the New Testament writers intended their images to be understood literally, but if that is the case, the moral conundrums raised against the later theologians must be redirected to the evangelists and to Peter and Paul.

[52]Vernon White, Ibid., 8-9.

[53]Gorringe, Ibid., 34.

> to one beloved by him, and he will understand the meaning of Calvary better
> than all the theologians in the world.[54]

We take his point as a stern warning against the heady desire to intellectually grasp and systematize the sense of atonement, recognizing that the truth of any religion lies in its experience more profoundly than its teachings. But this does not mean that we are wholly incapable of comparing the value of various models or of seeking to adapt their formulation in order to improve their internal consistency and instructive capacity. It simply means that models need to be recognized as models and that the distinction between metaphor and reality must be vigilantly maintained.

As we consider this ongoing Mormon discussion, we must bear in mind Geertz's proposal that models have varied purposes. If a model's principal intent is to influence behavior and emotions, fanning the flames of faith, some hermeneutic details and intellectual concerns can be legitimately overlooked. But if the primary purpose of a model is to make assertions about an ontological reality, then all of its implications are relevant and should conform to the system in which the model is placed. In either type of model, however, internal consistency and coherence with the accepted larger system will normally be regarded as assets. The models at which we will be looking fall somewhere between these two positions. They are often employed as descriptors of the cosmic drama—portraying the universal reality in a literal if limited sense (and thus obscuring their symbolic role)—but they also clearly seek to move the believer toward increased commitment and discipleship. Some of the models that we will examine have proven quite effective in the second role regardless of their descriptive limitations. Recognizing this, our intent is not to intellectualize that which is intentionally emotive, but to enrich and strengthen the images that contribute to the LDS sense of purpose and community.

To begin with, let us again recall the larger context in which these models are to be placed. Latter-day Saints use the language of the Book of Mormon in referring to this context as 'The Plan of Salvation' and it describes in general terms God's work and glory in bringing about the exaltation of his children. Man's existence had no beginning and will have no end, but his condition is in constant flux. Because of the Father's abiding and personal love, he has engineered a plan by which each individual may progress through stages to become as he is. Part of the plan involves the receiving of a physical body with its increased capacities and the protection that it affords against malicious forces. The Plan of Salvation describes the sequence of events from man's earliest pre-mundane beginnings to his final resurrected condition either inhabiting one of the kingdoms of glory or rejected as perdition to dwell in Outer Darkness.

In a more specific sense, the Plan of Salvation refers to the full scope of the atonement itself as the response to man's fallen condition and the subjection it has caused. Salvation is offered to man in the context of his need for deliverance and, as we have reviewed previously,

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[54]This quote is taken from *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* quoted in Dillistone, 299.

the discussion of the atonement in the Book of Mormon is consistently regarded as the solution to the predicament of man initiated by the fall.[55] The Book of Mormon prophets are adamant about the belief that humankind has fallen under the oppression of Satan and his retinue and that Christ's work is the extrication of man from eternal spiritual oppression and torment. The first type of model we will look at from the Book of Mormon, then, is the concept of ransom as the payment made by Christ to secure man's liberty.

THE PAYMENT OF RANSOM

The early Christian ransom theories of Justin, Origen, Gregory and others were challenged and eventually replaced in the Middle Ages because of the troublesome nature of their claims. If God found it necessary to negotiate with the devil for the souls of man, it would appear that Satan was in a position to command God and coerce his death through extortion. If God's payment to the devil was not necessary but simply fitting, then by what right did Satan set the terms of man's liberation? And can it truly be considered fitting that God regained his suzerainty through deception, ostensibly conceding to the devil's terms, but knowing from the outset that Christ had power over death and that Satan would not be able to keep his coveted prize?

Although we do not find anything like a developed ransom theory in the Book of Mormon, it is not difficult to identify many of the presuppositions that led to its development among the Church Fathers. The devil is considered an actual entity who stands in open rebellion against God and is seeking humankind's eternal misery.[56] He contributed to the fall of humanity, which introduced sin into the world and formed a breach in the relationship between man and deity. Abinadi proclaimed that the members of the human family are "carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all humankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil."[57] Since Satan has the ability to torment fallen man, the atonement offers escape from his oppression. It is Nephi's brother, Jacob, who makes this point most clear:

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[55]See for example, 1 Nephi 13:40; 2 Nephi 2:8; Jacob 7:12; Mosiah 16:4, 9; 27:25-27; Alma 34:9 42:9; 3 Nephi 9:17; 12:19-20; Mormon 9:12. Since the atonement in LDS understanding is a response to the fall and is infinite in scope, either the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden must also have been infinite (which is not generally held), or the atonement must be a response to a condition prior to and far exceeding the confines of this world. If the latter is suggested, then references to 'the fall' may have a historical (earthly) antecedent, but they could also denote whatever caused that prior condition that makes an infinite atonement necessary. (If the latter is assumed, then the former can be seen as symbolic without challenging the significance of the atonement. If we hold that the fall has reference to something larger than this world, then all of our heated arguments over the age of the earth, evolution, etc. fizzle out of importance.)
[56]In this connection Joseph Smith asserted that "there are three independent principles; the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of the devil." *TPJS*, 189-90.
[57]Mosiah 16:3

> O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit....
> O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.[58]

One of the most pervasive Book of Mormon images used to describe Christ's work is the release from captivity. Man was universally enslaved through the fall but his freedom has now been restored and the way opened to everlasting liberty. The Nephite discussion is rooted in the witness of what the Savior saves *from*. A point that should be made in this regard, however, is that nowhere in the Book of Mormon does the language of a transaction with the adversary appear. The atonement is described through a variety of images, but in no case is it given the significance of a payment to Satan to barter for the release of the captives. The image is frequently one of deliverance, but never of negotiation. The metaphor of ransom is certainly an appropriate analogy by which to portray the work of Christ, but it carries little conviction as an attempt to literally describe the Savior's actions.

LEGALISM AND LITIGATION

Of far more gravity is the persistent image of law and punishment. In Christian discourse this mode of interpretation has been popular since its introduction by the lawyers of Carthage who had expanded upon the language of Paul, and it has sustained its ascendancy over other atonement theories since the eleventh century. "With the translation of the New Testament into Latin, the loss of Byzantium, and the hegemony of Latin as the language of both government and intellectuals, the New Testament was inevitably read through the interpretive lens of the Latin genius, which was law."[59] But as legal paradigms were developed and adapted in response to societal changes, so were the forensic explanations of Christ's work. As part of the Christian cultural tradition, Latter-day Saints would likely be pleased by the suggestion that an understanding of the atonement has inspired the modern civil perception of justice. But it is equally true that the concept of God's retributive justice handed down from the Medieval period through both church and state sponsorship has framed the ideological setting in which the atonement has most frequently been portrayed.

The Book of Mormon prophets make frequent mention of the concepts of justice, mercy, and law when seeking to explain the meaning of the atonement and this has served to reinforce the legal conceptions of Christ's work in Latter-day Saint doctrinal exposition. But from the LDS perspective it would seem critical to ask whether the interpretation usually applied to the text has been colored by modern assumptions or whether the book is actually read as an

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[58]2 Nephi 9:7-10, 19. We have discussed this point at length in chapter four.
[59]Gorringe, 224.

independent discussion that became permanently estranged from the rest of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the 7th century B.C.E. Since Latter-day Saints consider the Book of Mormon to be a modern translation of an ancient record, their interpretation of specific words is rightly based in 19th century American usage. But if the claim of ancient authenticity is to be maintained, the interpretation of abstract concepts such as law or justice should make reference to the pre-exilic Jewish context in which the earliest writers are assumed to have been raised.[60] This is by no means an original suggestion and many interesting parallels have been noticed by some LDS writers between legal concepts in the Book of Mormon and ancient Israel. But many of the more revered scriptorians in the LDS tradition have been unaware of these legal and linguistic complications and have interpreted the passages dealing with justice and mercy from a straightforward modern Western perspective. It would also be a methodological error, however, to presuppose that the thought patterns of pre-exilic Israel persisted unvaried over a period of more than a thousand years. It is but reasonable to suggest that with the growth of Nephite society and the development of several complex legal systems that were in ongoing conflict and competition throughout the history of the culture, paradigms of law and justice would likewise have adapted and evolved.

The notion of retributive or proscriptive justice appears as one of the common threads running through the fabric of legal discussion in almost every culture and time period. Systems of law commonly draw strength from the principle that when a statute is violated a corresponding punishment will be exacted. Retributive justice is one of the principles from which the concepts of reward and penalty—in their myriad manifestations—are universally derived. The basic idea asserts that sooner or later, to individuals or societies, to one generation or another, all choices and actions will be compensated. If an individual is upright and diligent then justice will ensure an appropriate restitution to balance the order of the cosmos. Likewise, if a person rebels against the law or violates the proscriptions of taboo, justice will pour out punishments in response.[61] In most human affairs this retribution is the responsibility of the governing body that enforces societal laws through penalties, fines, or other types of imposed suffering, so that the guilty party can 'pay' for the crime. This payment might be viewed as satisfying a debt owed to society for a breach of the community contract, as a propitiation offered to pacify the anger of an offended deity, as a recompense made to the injured party, or as the natural consequence of the misdeed which God or the universe itself would otherwise (immediately or eventually) exact from the offender. When viewed as a governing principle of the universe, as in the Hindu or Buddhist law of *karma*, the retribution becomes impersonal and absolute, the simple and unvarying fact that all action carries with it inherent results that will

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[60]For a discussion of Jewish legal concepts and their relation to atonement theory, see for example F. W. Dillistone, *The Christian Understanding of the Atonement* (Digswell Place, Welwyn, Herts.: James Nisbet, 1968), 161-71.

[61]Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark Books, 1966) is an interesting introduction to this topic as it deals with the issues of maintaining and restoring balance and wholeness in 'primitive' religions.

determine each individual's destiny. If, however, justice is conceived as either an aspect or a creation of deity (as is the case in the Christian tradition), then it is most often the majesty or honor of God that is spoken of as having been violated by wrongdoing and which requires a settlement of accounts.

Retributive justice is the pivotal concept that forms the constant and unwavering basis for the LDS legal interpretation of Christ's atonement. Although there has been some disagreement over where it is to be located in the universe, its eternal existence is everywhere affirmed. B. H. Roberts, for example, held that the universe is governed by the "reign of law" through which God works to secure the salvation of his children. The atonement is necessary because,

> …a law is broken. The penalty must be paid. The majesty of law has been violated; the law must be vindicated. It must be conceded that the law is just; for to suppose that the law itself is defective would be to challenge the whole moral system of the universe. If the law be conceded to be just, then its penalty must be executed by rigid enforcement *or a propitiation made.*[62]

But this reign of law was one of the very points that concerned the Quorum of the Twelve enough to decline the publication of Roberts' final book as a church manual. Instead of a law of justice external to God, to which God gave total compliance, several members of the Twelve held that law—like all else—was a creation of God.[63] The issue has never been officially determined for the church and the question is still frequently raised, but the point we will attempt to make here is that while either interpretation is possible within LDS doctrine, both views incorporate disturbing ethical implications if they are based upon the premise of retributive justice, as is most often the case.

This approach to the concept of justice stresses the demands it makes upon the universe, and the means by which those demands are met. Wherever it is deemed to reside, retributive justice is regarded within LDS speculation as a law that maintains a strict but indirect moral balance in the universe between sin and punishment, righteousness and reward. Good acts may not reap immediate benefits, but will surely be tallied in the heavens and receive eventual recompense. Misdeeds may go unanswered during the sinner's lifetime, but the balance will be restored through post-mortal penalties. In this scenario, Christ's atonement performs the role of mercy, which, although unable to deny justice its claim, can nevertheless offer a substitution for its demands. Thus Christ's infinite pain and his godly death are interpreted in a variety of ways as the satisfaction offered to justice on man's behalf. Justice demands that sin carry a penalty and the Lord accepts that penalty upon himself. But let us examine what this means if we construe it as a literal description of the universe in which we live.

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[62]Welch, ed., *Roberts: TWL*, 408-409 (italics in original).
[63]Skinner in Ibid., cxlvi.

We will first address the idea of retributive justice as a personal attribute of deity. Justice so conceived is one of several defining characteristics of God. Because of his ultimate and perfect righteousness, all evil is an offense against his nature and requires his rejection. He "cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance,"[64] and he must exact a penalty for sin or cease to be God. His nature therefore demands that sufficient punishment be imposed to balance the entire debt of human sin, but he offers through his mercy to redirect that punishment to the voluntary and capable shoulders of his sinless son. This interpretation of the atonement is viewed as sacrosanct and undeniable by many LDS writers, yet it assumes far more than Mormon scripture will vouchsafe, presupposing concepts of law that far postdate the internal chronology of the texts and which have been handed down in Western Christian discourse for nearly a millennium. This is the sovereign God of Christendom who has decreed and will personally exact a punishment for sin.[65] But this quasi-legal understanding of forgiveness as a pardon or exculpation suggests that the Father is either unwilling or unable to do that which Christ performed at every turn. If Christ's life is to serve as an example of the love of God, we must suppose that the Father has no more desire nor moral need to punish man than Christ displayed.

In addition to the inconsistency suggested between the members of the Godhead, the basic ethical problem with this formulation lies in the fact that the punishment is transferable. By this we do not merely intend the common concern that Christ's innocent suffering is itself unjust; we are suggesting that the very proposal that a penalty can be removed from the account of the guilty and transferred to someone else requires categorically that punishment be under the direct control—and therefore the responsibility—of a conscious agent who *chooses* to accept the substitutionary offering and forgive the offense. An abstract demand cannot be 'satisfied' by a substitution; only a cognizant actor can determine that an indirect but acceptably meritorious offering is sufficient. If the punishment were borne by the perpetrator, then this justice could be viewed as a simple and irrevocable law of God's being, unchangeable and beyond his influence, and wholly merited by fallen man. But once the idea is put forth that the punishment earned by man can be borne by another, the God of retributive justice necessarily becomes not a God of mercy, but of vengeance. The suffering is no longer the direct consequence of sin, but a penalty that is consciously imposed and that can be purposefully manipulated.

McIntyre has recently protested that "this model has long been the victim of caricature, the God of whom it speaks being construed as a bloodthirsty oriental monarch, or some deity of primal anthropology, whose whims and caprices have to be cajoled. The very mention of punishment in relation to sin, it is sometimes suggested, is redolent of 'the primitive instinct for

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[64]Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31.

[65]Gunton suggests an ideological link between the Christian concept of a retributive God and the classical Greek justice of Zeus, which is manifest in "that 'violent grace' by virtue of which he punishes, late or soon, a man who has done injustice to another, either in his own person or in that of his descendent," (following Hugh Lloyd Jones), 99.

revenge'."[66] He defends the model for its insistence upon the "absolute sovereignty of God" and the gulf of guilt that separates him from sinful man. "In a universe in which the will of God is paramount, sin, as disobedience to God and violation of his will, *merits* punishment, which if dispensed in an appropriate measure would result ultimately in the destruction of the sinner."[67] This he calls a "properly moral result." But what substantive conceptual options are possible within this view? One can either create an abstracted caricature of this deity as McIntyre points out, or suggest that God is actually constrained (either by his nature or by the laws of the universe) to respond to sin with violence—and that he is unable to do otherwise. Given specific conditions, the violence can be "mercifully" displaced, but it is held to be absolutely unavoidable. This is surely a conceptual possibility, but it is difficult to reconcile with the God we come to know in Christ unless we take the historically developed interpretation of retributive justice to be more doctrinally binding that the Savior's own teachings of love and forgiveness.

Who is this God whose sense of justice demands that a profusion of pain be inflicted *somewhere* in the universe in order to compensate for the insult caused to his righteousness through the world's sins? What is this character trait of justice that can demand an abstract quantity of agony and thus compel God—apparently against his will—to offer his son as a substitute payment? Why does a benevolent God reject sincere repentance and an honest change of heart unless a penalty in suffering is exacted as well? The God we are describing is a psychotic and shattered image, going to infinite lengths to circumvent the vengeful impulses of his own being. The atonement thus depicted becomes the appalling self-deception of a God compulsively satisfying his own mandate of misery through the torture of his son.[68]

Why would the God of Christianity be so utterly committed to the necessity of punishment that in the cosmic equation he should order that someone—and preferably his innocent son—must suffer a specific amount of agony and anguish for each and every sinful thought and act generated by man. It is not uncommon to simply ascribe such inconsistencies to the 'mystery' of godliness, but the more conscionable reasoning employed in the majority of LDS discussions is that God himself neither desires nor requires punishment, but is bound by the independent and immutable law of eternal justice to which he must subscribe, which demands that all misdeeds—whether performed knowingly or innocently, whether acted out or merely considered—must be requited by a penalty of pain. The greater the offense against justice, the harsher the consequential torment.

The flaw in this assertion, as discussed above, is that the Christian depiction of retributive justice must of necessity be personal and sentient in order to be capable of receiving

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[66]John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1992), 45.
[67]Ibid., 46 (italics added).
[68]What Studdert Kennedy would later say about the omnipotent God, William Blake had argued about the God of satisfaction: "Where are those who worship Satan under the Name of God? Where are they? Listen! Every Religion that Preaches Vengeance for Sin is the Religion of the Enemy and Avenger and not of the Forgiver of Sin and their God is Satan," from *Jerusalem* 52, quoted in Gorringe, 189.

satisfaction through an offering that is foreign to its natural demands. If the penalty is viewed as the natural consequence of action then the law we are speaking of is *descriptive*, like physical laws such as inertia or entropy, stating the outcome of a given course and requiring no intervention to bring it about.[69] If, however, Christ's suffering can compensate the law on man's behalf, then justice has ceased to be a blind force operating unconsciously upon the universe and must be described as a conscious power imposing penalties for sin and capable of redirecting those penalties upon the undeserving. What is justice that it can control God, make adaptable demands, and be satisfied by deicide? Blind forces simply do not operate in this way and by definition this type of law is *proscriptive*—like governmental laws of speed limits and taxes. Such a concept of justice must either be an incongruous attribute of God or take on a life of its own, becoming reified, personified or even deified in the thought patterns and word pictures that portray it. In practice, the popular LDS discussion of atonement rarely takes justice to be a descriptive law, merely explaining the natural consequences of action and existing solely as a mental construct. Rather, it is implied to be either inherent within God himself or else a self-existing and cognizant proscriptive law, intervening in history to bestow rewards or impose punishments. Christian penal theory as it has been developed in the Mormon tradition has consistently followed a forensic rather than a physical model of law. Western concepts of criminal justice have been projected upon the universe and God is assumed to be bound by them.

But it is man and not God who insists upon punishment as a form of payment or compensation for sin. It is certainly conceivable that from God's perspective the atonement has absolutely nothing to do with guilt or punishment, but only with the possibility of providing forgiveness and healing, and that it is man's sense of justice that insists upon a retributive and substitutionary interpretation for the atonement in order to quench the consciousness of sin. The requirement of retributive justice is assuredly no attribute of Christ. It is a profound and prevalent psychological desire of man, but it wholly contradicts the Christian message of forgiveness.

> Human self-respect wants so desperately to have its sins washed away, however purgatorially, that we are willing to go through the most fantastic ceremonies, conjurations, and ordeals to have our scarlet souls made whiter than snow. We naturally prefer to lay our sins on scapegoats or on the Cross, if our neighbours will let us off so easily; but when they will not, then we will cleanse ourselves by suffering a penalty sooner than be worried by our consciences.[70]

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[69]In religious terms, this most closely resembles the idea of *karma* we mentioned earlier. The problem is not with retributive justice *per se*, but with retributive justice reified as a conscious law or personified as a vengeful God—the only two options available within a penal view of atonement.

[70]From George Bernard Shaw's introduction to Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *English Prisons under Local Government* (London: Longman's, 1922), cited in Gorringe, 241.

However, the Book of Mormon is not so concerned with addressing the psychological issue of guilt as the moral (and in the terms of this Thesis, 'material') issue of impurity. The problem as we have described it is not that God is keeping a careful tally of offenses and that he holds a grudge against sinners, but that sin renders a person less like God and less able to abide his presence. The Nephite prophets concur that it is the work of Christ that makes resurrection and the return to God's presence (which they call 'redemption') possible.[71]

It would seem important to ask whether it is necessary in LDS thought to posit justice as a self-existent entity. This is the question of the existence of Value Absolutes in the universe.[72] Philosophers since the pre-Socratics have questioned whether values such as good and evil or justice and mercy can be said to truly exist or whether they are mere intellectual constructs, heuristic tools for categorizing the cosmos. William Blake made his view clear when he proclaimed that "The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins and has no Moral Precepts; those belong to Plato, & Seneca & Nero."[73] But the argument often raised by religious minds is that if moral values do not possess an absolute existence, then all morality becomes relative. Unless God is conforming to some external standard of righteousness, to call him good is nothing more than a tautology; whatever he does is good simply because he defines it as such. Various arguments have responded to this concern, but the religious universe of Joseph Smith offers a unique possibility. Good and evil, justice and mercy, love and cruelty do not require an absolute metaphysical existence in a universe that admits an eternal community of sentient individuals. Each of these values can be defined in terms of the ongoing relationship between real beings. The community itself creates in the relationships between its members the categories of good and evil—not arbitrarily, but in the actual interactions of Gods and devils, angels and demons, and the multitude of beings morally positioned between them. In other words, Mormonism can suggest a criterion of justice, or righteousness, or love that is external to God and with which he complies, but that does not have any real or independent existence except as a standard that is defined and recognized as self-evident by the community in which God is a participant.

If we dispense with the belief in a cosmic law of justice demanding payment for sin, and with the impression of an angry God who seeks to punish offenders, what sense can be made of the suggestion that Christ "paid the price" of sin? One possibility, although it appears crude and foreign to most modern minds, is to apply the idea to the image of sacrifice by suggesting that God's anger was propitiated through the offering of his sinless son. But while the metaphor of sacrifice is instructive and in some senses appealing, if it relies on the idea of propitiation or substitution in this way, then the implications for the character of God are again obviously

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[71]For examples of this use of the word "redemption," see 2 Nephi 1:15; 2:3-6; Jacob 6:8-9; Omni 1:26; Mosiah 15:23; Alma 11:41; 12:25, 30-33; 42:11; 58:41; Helaman 8:23; Mormon 7:6-7; 9:13; and Ether 3:13. The Book of Mormon makes redemption in its ultimate sense virtually synonymous with resurrection, although in a more immediate sense it refers to Christ's power to overcome the effects of the fall through healing, etc.

[72]This is a concern which must be raised in connection with the assertions of Joseph Smith (presented above in chapter three) that if something is immaterial it does not exist.

[73]Quoted in Gorringe, 190.

troublesome.[74] The more common understanding is that which we have been addressing in terms of law and justice—that Christ suffered for the sins of the world in order to pay the requisite price of punishment. The fact is that Mormon scripture employs phrases like this in describing the atonement. Christ is said to have taken upon himself the sins of the world, and this is generally read to mean that he assumed responsibility for those sins and suffered their penalty as a vicarious payment for man's debt. If these passages are thus interpreted, one winds up promoting inconsistent and ethically troubling assumptions about the Father. We have asserted that logical and moral concerns are immediately raised by the introduction of transactional models of the atonement, but is there any other justification in the LDS context for suggesting the possibility of an alternative interpretation?

In the Book of Mormon we find a notable linguistic indication that this idiom may have a non-transactional meaning. In the description of the three Nephite disciples who were promised that they would tarry on the earth, Mormon, the compiler of the texts, uses an intriguing phrase to describe that event. It sounds very much like the language we often insist must be taken literally regarding the atonement, but it would never be interpreted here in the sense of making a payment for sin: "Therefore, that they might not taste of death there was a change wrought upon their bodies, that they might not *suffer* pain nor sorrow save it were *for the sins of the world*."[75] In this verse Mormon is describing the physical experiences of the three Nephites who would tarry on the earth and he writes that they would not suffer except "for the sins of the world." In any other context we would expect such language to make reference to Christ's atonement, but because of the situation and persons involved there is no mistake. To suffer for the sins of the world can be understood as suffering *on account of* those sins, rather than paying off a cosmic debt to an impersonal or unidentified creditor.

In seeking to interpret the words of LDS scripture, we must determine whether the basis of our exegesis will be linguistic literalism or the moral teachings of Christ. If God is described as treating his children in ways that for man would be immoral, then how can we love him, and why should we worship him? If, however, his love is more constant than our own, does it matter if he uses language and metaphor that reduce his righteousness to the common level of human

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[74]There is a great deal of literature examining the language of sacrifice as an image of atonement, but since it is generally accepted as having a metaphorical or symbolic meaning within LDS discussion, it is not necessary to rehearse it here. There are two precedents for sacrificial imagery in Mormonism—Adamic and Mosaic—and the first does not involve the idea of substitution. There is a tendency to read later Christian interpretation of the atonement back into the Old Testament sacrificial images, but it is not intrinsic to the metaphor. In Mosaic sacrifice we find the concept of propitiation (as would be expected, since it is also apparent in neighboring religious systems) but the concept of substitution is not necessarily linked with sacrifice. We must bear in mind that the idea of making a sacrificial offering to the Lord because of the recognition of sin does not imply the further suggestion that the offering is receiving the penalty owed to the offerer. Rather, it more clearly signifies the repentance of the sinner in returning from sin to the worship of God. The scapegoat, which *is* linked with substitution in the Old Testament, is *not* sacrificed (and most scholars now hold that the scapegoat was a post-exilic addition to Israelite worship). In addition to the works already cited, see S. W. Sykes, ed. *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Frances M. Young, *The Use of Sacrificial Ideas in Greek Christian Writers from the New Testament to John Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979).
[75]3 Nephi 28:38.

understanding?[76] Working from the original assumption developed in chapter two that both the Father and Son are characterized by love, it follows that the models that interpret the atonement as a propitiation or payment must be understood allegorically and not as an ontological description of the cosmos. This in no way denies the reality of Christ's work; it simply allows it to be consistent with the Father's.

JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

It has been common for Latter-day Saints to read into the Book of Mormon justice passages a variety of retributive assumptions that are not necessarily present in the text itself. As a contrasting approach, let us briefly review those passages to suggest the diversity of interpretive potential that exists in the Nephite record. The first and most extensive reference we will consider is found in Lehi's explanation of the atonement in chapter two of Second Nephi.

> And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.
> Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.
> Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.
> Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.
> Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved.
> And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement—[77]

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[76]D&C 1:24-28.

[77]2 Nephi 2:5-10. The notion of "punishment" in verse ten can be regarded either as God's consciously imposed penalty for sins, or as the natural and ultimate consequence of sinfulness. The phrase which begins "the ends of the law" is interrupted and never resumed, so it is unclear what the "ends" refer to. It is generally read as the "requirements" of the law, but its meaning would seem to call for a parallel with the later "ends of the atonement."

This passage is invariably read as a forensic discussion of an eternal *proscriptive* law, but the imagery is indiscriminately combined with the idea of sacrifice, and it is certainly possible to read the verses to suggest a *descriptive* concept of law and justice that is not dealing with legal necessities but with the ultimate results of positive or negative choices, in conjunction with the everlasting distinction between good and evil that Lehi asserts in verse 11. Rather than positing an absolute system of legal punishments demanded by a conscious universal force, Lehi's description of justice can be read as the simpler notion that righteousness leads ultimately and inevitably to joy while sorrow is the natural and ongoing result of sinfulness. The critical question for exegesis in verses 5-10 revolves around the unspecified definition of "the ends of the law." Lehi does not say that the law forces God to punish offenses or that a broken law must be answered. He says that by the law men are cut off from God but that the Holy Messiah intercedes to make redemption possible by bringing to pass man's resurrection. The ends of the atonement (verse 10) are to provide resurrection and judgment before God, not necessarily to propitiate deity or to redirect the punishment from man to Christ.

The language of reward and punishment used throughout the scriptures is sensible as an image of eternal consequences for choices, but if taken literally as a description of the way in which God responds to his children, ethical concerns must surely develop. That the Book of Mormon prophets insisted that sin and rebellion would result in misery and subjection is unquestionable, but to further assert that God (or a conscious actor called justice) intervenes in the process to cause the suffering adds an unnecessary and troubling step to the explanation. The principle of justice throughout the early portions of the Book of Mormon does not seem to make reference to a law that demands the imposition of punishment in response to sin, but the assertion that man's eventual condition will reflect precisely and without exception what each individual warrants. Therefore, the frequent and vivid language of blessings and punishments can best be understood in our view as the direct and natural results of choices, rather than as God's artificially imposed responses to human actions.[78]

Nephi adds support to this use of justice in his own writings when he repeatedly equates the justice of God with the gulf which separates the wicked from the righteous.

> And [Laman and Lemuel] said unto me: What meaneth the river of water which our father saw?
> …And I said unto them that it was an awful gulf, which separated the wicked from the tree of life, and also from the saints of God.
> And I said unto them that it was a representation of that awful hell, which the angel said unto me was prepared for the wicked.
> And I said unto them that our father also saw that the justice of God did also divide the wicked from the righteous; and the brightness thereof was

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[78]This does not require that the writers of the text held these same views since the questions we are asking of the material are not the precise questions being addressed by the writers themselves.

like unto the brightness of a flaming fire, which ascendeth up unto God forever and ever, and hath no end.[79]

He also makes it clear that he is referring to ultimate conditions, rather than intermediate penalties, in his description of justice as that which determines the "*final state* of the souls of men."[80] His brother Jacob's discussion of justice and law can also be read in this sense, with the additional implication that justice demands that those who are ignorant of the law receive the true law that is in Christ and thereby receive deliverance.[81] If we refrain from applying modern presuppositions to the text, Abinadi's testimony before the wicked priests in Shilom also suggests the possibility of interpreting justice not as that which demands punishment for sin, but that which makes necessary the redemption of man.[82] Not until the discourse of Amulek to the Zoramites do we find a description of justice that must be understood in forensic terms, and he makes it clear that he is drawing on conceptions of Nephite law to metaphorically describe the workings of atonement.[83] Alma$_2$ elaborates this same image to explain the concept of atonement to his son through the juxtaposition of justice and mercy.[84] John Welch has suggested that Alma$_2$'s position as chief judge may account for his unique interest in the relationship between the two principles and this can also be seen as the experiential background that helped him to develop his forensic metaphor.[85] It should be noted, however, that although Alma$_2$ frames his discussion in the context of law, he in no way implies the notion that Christ suffered the penalty that was man's due. Rather it is the resurrection provided through Christ's work (in connection with man's repentance) that he signals to as the means of deliverance from "destruction and misery." It is also unclear in what sense Christ's atonement "appeased the demands of justice". Alma$_2$'s central point about salvation being provided through the work of Christ is clear, but since we cannot assume that current paradigms are wholly applicable to the issues he is raising, it is difficult to determine how literally he intends his images to be taken.

The language used by Joseph Smith in translating the Book of Mormon incorporates the idioms of law that were common in the religious discussions of his contemporaries, but we must recall that if the book is to be studied as an ancient record, the concepts it describes must be examined independent of the philosophical and cultural discourse that arose subsequently in the West and which colors the usual interpretation. Exegesis of the forensic imagery in the Book of Mormon should attempt to define the terms in reference to the contextual clues offered by the

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[79]1 Nephi 15:26, 28-30. Compare 1 Nephi 12:18 (which explicitly equates the gulf with the word of God's justice); Alma 26:20; Helaman 5:12; 3:29.
[80]1 Nephi 15:35.
[81]2 Nephi 9:26.
[82]Mosiah 15:7-9.
[83]Alma 34:11.
[84]Most of Alma chapter 42 is dealing with these two principles.
[85]John W. Welch, "Ten Testimonies of Jesus Christ" in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon: The 1991 Sperry Symposium* eds. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 233. Amulek had used this imagery previously, but since he was taught by Alma$_2$ it seems likely that he was echoing the language of his companion rather than vice versa.

writers themselves. Nowhere in the Book of Mormon is it suggested that forensic models need to be read as literal descriptions of the universe or that abstract concepts such as justice or law should be posited as value absolutes.[86] In most instances in the Nephite record, the word "justice" can best be understood as the immutable distinction between that which can endure God's presence and that which, due to uncleanness, cannot. There are instances in which people are made clean through repentance and resurrection and justice then places them in God's presence, but the constant assertion is that the two possibilities cannot mix. If the distinction between good and evil were not maintained then God would cease to be God. When justice describes separation, suffering is the consequence, but the Book of Mormon writers are consistent in preaching that such suffering can be avoided or overcome by repentance and receiving Christ.[87]

CONCLUSION

The atonement of Jesus Christ is recognized as the most fundamental doctrine of the restored gospel. It is the central claim upon which all else in LDS thought can be said to rest. Yet it has not received a great deal of direct attention or original interpretation by Mormon writers and from its earliest years the assumptions of the Christian (especially Protestant) background that provided Mormonism's cultural heritage have generally been adopted to explain its significance. Over time, the model that has gained currency in Latter-day Saint discourse and education is that which had become popularized through the Reformation and which relied heavily upon the forensic imagery of Paul. This model had been adapted and developed over nearly two millennia in order to reflect the legal assumptions of various ages and cultures, but the discussions of justice and mercy in the Book of Mormon seemed to endorse the validity of the model, even suggesting that God was bound by an eternal and unwavering principle of justice to exact a specific amount of physical and emotional punishment for each misdeed committed by man. This reading of the Nephite record has served to cement the metaphysical assertions of the model within the Mormon conception of the cosmos so that in most current LDS thought and writing, the principle of retributive justice is assumed to have an absolute existence either as an attribute of God or, more frequently, as a governing principle in the universe. The few writers who have suggested alternative ways of considering the meaning of the atonement within the Latter-day Saint discussion have received scanty support both because such alternatives are easily

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[86]In a similar way, many scholars have asserted that there is clear justification for questioning the traditional interpretation of Paul as promoting the idea of substitutionary punishment. Only five or six passages imply such a notion and none of them explicitly (Col. 1:19-23; Eph. 2:11-16; 5:2; Phil. 4:18; I Cor. 5:7; Romans 3:25-26).

[87]When "the demands of justice" refer to the *separation* between the wicked and the righteous they are everlasting, but when that phrase makes reference to the *suffering* resulting from such separation, those demands are temporary since they are the indirect results of the former and can be overcome.

viewed and labeled as subversive to faith, and because they have generally failed to address the significance of the more objective results attributed to the atonement in LDS scripture.

But there is an additional reason why the forensic model has proven capable of offering such a persistent appeal over the centuries since it was first developed: as a model that seeks to convey to believers the significance of the debt owed to the Savior, it works. People are genuinely moved by the wonder of Christ's gift and the declaration that Christ's suffering in Gethsemane and upon the cross paid humankind's debt to justice, and this model has encouraged innumerable Christians to devote their energies toward a more faithful and committed discipleship. If by turning my will to Christ I can rely on his mercies to shield me from the penalties due for my follies and sins, then there is a clear motivation to live a better life.

However, along with this impetus for faith and devotion have come worrisome implications about the nature of God the Father that have made it difficult for many to reconcile his character to that of the Son. The less philosophical but more immediate concerns of this doctrine of a universal law of retributive Justice, to which the Father himself must submit, lie in the personal estrangement experienced by those weighed down by feelings of guilt or inadequacy who find it all but impossible to pray with faith to a being who is intent on punishing them for their inability to respond adequately to his imposed test of righteousness. The Father is faithfully acknowledged by Latter-day Saints to be a concerned and loving parent, yet the most prevalent models used by the Mormon people to explain the meaning of the atonement and the purpose of life conjure the specter of an angry and vengeful God who haunts the shadows cast by feelings of insecurity and guilt, robbing far too many of the hope which the restored Gospel heralds—the very hope that makes repentance possible.

Since the message of forgiveness is so central to the teachings of LDS scripture, we might well ask how long a God of perfect love will hold a grudge. Or, if such a concept is inherently nonsensical and offensive, we might better inquire what it means to obtain forgiveness from a loving Father who holds no animosity and seeks the exaltation of his children. We have discussed in this chapter the implications of suggesting that the Father is responding to a law of retribution that lies outside his ability to control. We now return to the earlier suggestion of this thesis that the primary defining characteristic of God is his benevolence, so that we can reasonably seek an explanation of the atonement that is fully consistent with the LDS doctrine of the loving nature of the Father. We therefore offer the hypothesis that God does not want to condemn individuals for their obvious unworthiness before him; he wants to heal them in the most literal sense and bring them home. The Book of Mormon insists that what Christ did for humankind was both real and necessary in order to save us from what was otherwise our damnation. It will be the burden of chapter nine to suggest improvements for the LDS discussion of the purpose and meaning of atonement, adapting old models or creating new ones in order to more consistently describe the significance of Christ's work and offer new

approaches to understanding the meaning of justice, mercy, forgiveness, salvation, and the kingdom of God.

# AN LDS SENSE OF SALVATION

> I have a declaration to make as to the provisions which God hath made to suit the conditions of man—made from before the foundation of the world. What has Jesus said? All sin and blasphemies, and every transgression, except one, that man can be guilty of, may be forgiven; and there is a salvation for all men, either in this world or the world to come, who have not committed the unpardonable sin, there being a provision either in this world or the world of spirits. Hence God hath made a provision that every spirit in the eternal world can be ferreted out and saved unless he has committed that unpardonable sin which cannot be remitted to him either in this world or in the world of spirits. God has wrought out a salvation for all men.
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> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 356-357.

## A LOOK AT DELIVERANCE

In the last two chapters we have considered the various ways in which Christian theologians and Mormon writers have chosen to interpret the significance of Christ's work. We now mold that discussion into the earlier suggestions of this thesis, to clarify the meaning of 'salvation' in the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Salvation has come to mean many disparate things in the parlance of those who study religion, but in common LDS usage, it has a fairly specific sense. When a Mormon employs the word "salvation," the term almost always refers to a future state of joy in which those individuals who have been saved can dwell eternally in God's kingdom and partake of his goodness and love. However one may choose to further define the term, within the Latter-day Saint parameters of discussion, the doctrine that man's salvation is somehow made possible through the work of Christ is an absolute assertion. One may choose to debate the relative objectivity or subjectivity involved in gaining personal salvation, or speculate about the method by which Christ's actions altered mankind's potential. But there is no justification in the accepted epistemological sources of Mormon thought for dispute over the principle that were it not for the fact that Christ lived, died, and rose again from death, there would be no redemption for man. Whether 'salvation' is taken to be synonymous with the LDS concept of 'exaltation' or is more broadly interpreted in relation to one or more of the three degrees of glory depends on the intentions of the particular writer and the questions which he or she desires to address. In this chapter, we will primarily speak of salvation in its straightforward etymological sense of 'deliverance', asking the question of what man needs to be saved *from* and referring back to the earlier hypotheses regarding man's fallen nature and subjection to Satan. The emphasis in the final chapter will proceed to address the additional concept of what Mormonism suggests man is saved *for*.

In broad terms it could be said that the first question is the particular domain of the Book of Mormon writers while the latter concern was more fully and consciously addressed by Joseph Smith. This is surely an oversimplification, but it serves to illustrate the general tenor and scope of these distinct sources for LDS doctrine. Although, as we have noted, Joseph Smith made many significant statements regarding the concept of salvation as deliverance (at one point

teaching on three separate occasions within a week's time that "salvation is nothing more nor less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet"[1]), he it is to whom Mormons turn for virtually all of their understanding of man's ultimate potential. Though not necessarily derivative, his teachings of deliverance and oppression by evil spirits are clearly anticipated and even analyzed in depth within the Book of Mormon. It is equally true that the Nephite prophets give an essential place to the teachings of salvation as entering into the rest of the Lord and taking one's place in God's kingdom, but they do not attempt to describe with any precision what that might mean.[2] Furthermore, they consistently place such ideas against its background of spiritual subjection resulting from the fall and sin, so it is to the Book of Mormon writers, and particularly Jacob, that we might turn for the most comprehensive teachings available regarding the LDS doctrine of salvation as deliverance.[3]

Where traditional Christian thought has addressed the question of what Christ saves from, the response has most often revolved around the concept of punishment for sin. On account of Christ's sinless offering, the penalties due to man's offenses against a just God have been conditionally redirected or recalled and men and women can therefore receive God's blessings instead. However, while there has been room to speak of hellish torment and damnation at the hands of the devil for those who fall outside of Christ's grace, when God has been understood as sovereign the decree of damnation has come directly from his mouth and the flames of hell have ultimately been fanned by his angry breath. Consequently, much of the traditional discussion of salvation suggests that Christ is attempting to save man from the wrath of God—the forgiving Christ offering to deliver man from the God of Justice. Wherever LDS thought has adopted the discussion of sovereignty or of transactional theories of atonement, this has been the unintentional (although at times fiercely defended) result.

We have already presented at some length in chapter four the Book of Mormon approach to the question of what it is that Christ saves from. Throughout the book, the doctrine is asserted that as a result of the fall, the nature and disposition of man has been corrupted to the point that Satan has the ability to oppress the earth's inhabitants and subject them to his malice. The further point, which deserves equal attention, is the ongoing insistence that were it not for Christ's work and the deliverance offered thereby, all mankind would continue in this subjection until eventually being completely consumed and transformed by it. "And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself."[4] Because of its

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[1]*TPJS*, 297, 301, 305.

[2]The closest we find to such a description is King Benjamin's final testimony which he shares so that his "immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God." This image is suggested previously by Nephi in describing his father's vision of the heavens (1 Nephi 1:8) and appears again in Alma$_2$'s vision (Alma 36:22) where he is perhaps consciously comparing his own experience with that of Lehi. Jacob adds only that "their joy shall be full forever," (2 Nephi 9:18).

[3]This was the purpose of the discussion of man's fallen nature in chapter four.

[4]2 Nephi 9:9.

assumptions about the nature of deity, which leave plenty of room for a legitimate doctrine of the devil, the Book of Mormon avoids the conclusion that Christ is man's deliverer from the hands of an angry God. Instead, Jacob proclaims,

> O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell.…And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel,…death and hell must deliver up their dead…and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.[5]

This is the assertion that one finds constantly reiterated in the Nephite record: that through the fall man has become prey to Satan's subjection, but that Christ offers deliverance and hope through the promise of resurrection. In our discussion of salvation and the LDS models used to portray it in this chapter, we will focus primarily on this understanding of salvation as rescue, recovery and liberation. Our intent is not to suggest a specific theory to describe the *method* by which salvation is made possible through Christ's intercession; in other words, we are not attempting to explain in Mormon terms *how* the atonement works. We are rather hoping to suggest possibilities for strengthening the LDS didactic presentation of the *meaning* of the salvation wrought for man by Christ.

A MEDIATOR FOR MAN

In the previous chapters we introduced the discussion of metaphors, models, and theories that have been used to describe the work of Christ. We have seen that in Mormon history there has been a general tendency to maintain the discussion at the level of metaphor, incorporating the images that had become standardized by the Protestant discourse of salvation and popularized through the preaching of the First and Second Great Awakenings. Very few actual theories of redemption have been proposed by LDS writers and fewer still have gained more than marginal notice or acceptance. But between the metaphors and the theories lie the more elaborate models through which Mormons attempt to express their witness of man's redemption. As we have noted, most of these models are intentionally symbolic and are recognized as such, comparing the atonement to a rope tossed to a struggling swimmer or a ladder placed against an unassailable cliff. However, there are other models that have introduced some confusion into the LDS treatment of salvation, since—despite their originally stated intentions as analogies—they have frequently been conscripted into the service of subsequent Mormon teachers and writers as 'theories' by which to explain the mechanical process of redemption.

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[5]2 Nephi 9:10-12.

The most important of these atonement models, and the one which has carried the greatest currency in Mormonism in recent years, is geared around the competing principles of Justice and Mercy. It has proven deeply meaningful for Mormon understanding, becoming the primary model used by LDS missionaries to describe the significance of the atonement for their investigators. The majority of Latter-day Saints today would recognize it as *the* LDS model for describing the atonement. Interestingly, however, owing to its original purpose as a metaphorical lesson attempting to elicit a moral response, it remains descriptively imprecise and offers nothing peculiarly 'Mormon' to the discussion of atonement. In all its principal aspects it is a model that has been taught, assumed and debated in normative Christianity since the time of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.[6] In its bare bones this model is as follows:

> *An individual receives a loan from a creditor but is later unable to pay off the loan. The debtor pleads for lenience, but the creditor refuses to compromise the terms of the contract. He demands full and immediate payment and threatens the debtor with confiscation of the property and imprisonment. In the midst of the foray a kind friend of the debtor steps in to make the payment on the debtor's behalf. The individual now finds himself free from the creditor's demands but indebted to the friend, whose requirements of compensation are reasonable and loving.*

The creditor, it is explained, represents Justice, that immutable and unyielding law that demands payment in suffering for all sin. The deficient debtor represents each individual who reaches the age of accountability and accrues the debt of sin. But the stated purpose of the model is to focus on the role of Christ as man's only possible Savior, the one who loves unconditionally and seeks the welfare of the oppressed even at the price of his own suffering. He represents the principle of Mercy extended to all who will accept it. That this model has proven valuable is sufficiently attested to by the enduring popularity it has gained in the LDS community. Its usefulness lies in its immediate applicability and simple, easily understood analogy: each person owes a debt he or she cannot possibly pay, but the loving Christ assumes to himself the payment. Man is therefore eternally indebted to him and can accept his gift through the repentance of sins and the reciprocation of his love. There is no question that this model has been a beneficial way of explaining to Mormons—and to the much larger audience of devoted Christians who have employed the model down through the centuries—mankind's dependence on Christ for salvation.

At the level of metaphor, then, this model holds an important place in the Latter-day Saint discussion. However, in the absence of literal explanations by which to describe the method of man's redemption, it is frequently forced to assume a literalism that becomes immediately problematic. From the outset there is a logical difficulty in extending the model beyond its given limits because it relies on a mixed metaphor: it combines the images of a monetary transaction with a quasi-legal discussion of retribution. This often goes unnoticed

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[6]John Wesley traced its lineage to Matthew 18:23-35.

because the second metaphor (revolving around Justice and Mercy) is rarely recognized as such, being commonly regarded and presented as the cosmic antecedent which the transaction image is meant to portray. Rather than viewing the forensic concept of justice as an analogical representation of a more fundamental reality, it is taken to have an independent and irresistible existence as a universal law. It is noteworthy that the historical discussion has not usually required that mercy be granted the same status, regarding it more simply as a quality of character, embodied in this case in the Savior himself.

And this brings us to the more fundamental concern of the model, which is rooted in the unidentified nature of the creditor. Christ personifies mercy and fallen man is represented by the indigent debtor. But who is it that puts on the garb of justice to play the final role? This is a creditor who demands a strict recompense in punishment for sin, and who—because of faults on each individual's slate—relentlessly seeks retribution from humankind. He will be satisfied by nothing less than a complete settling of accounts, the debt to Justice being required in full. And he it is who presumably exacts that cost in torment from the friend of man. Since it is Christ who embodies Mercy and it is explicitly stated elsewhere that Christ is man's mediator with the Father, troubling implications from the model are far too easily assumed, if not so comfortably accepted. Christ the Savior, the Mediator, the Friend stands between humankind and the demanding, vengeful, punitive hand of God—the Father. For who else could be acting behind the mask of Justice?

We need not rehearse yet again the dangers of identifying the evolved forensic concept of retributive justice with the Father. If Christ and the Father are one in purpose (as Mormon doctrine forcefully asserts) then LDS writers and teachers should be extremely wary of any precept that would imply that the Father responds to sin in one way and the Son another. If the Son extends the hand of fellowship and forgiveness, then we must insist that the Father is equally moved to compassion on man's behalf. The responsibility of LDS writers and teachers who seek to portray the work of Christ lies not in defending a psychological or philosophical construct of just retribution inherited from external sources, but in learning the scriptural requirements of the salvation offered through Christ and seeking to make that understanding accessible to others. Our discussion will turn to those issues shortly, but for the present we will continue our consideration of the use of models to depict the LDS understanding of man's salvation.

The model of the debtor threatened by justice and rescued by mercy remains a worthwhile means of communicating in simple terms the love exhibited on man's behalf by the Savior. We need not change the model so much as simply recognize and clearly acknowledge its limitations. It has proven precarious to force such a model toward its logical extremes in order to produce doctrinal implications that clearly lie outside of its scope. But with a distinct set of assumptions—particularly about the meanings of justice and mercy—the model can become a consistent analogy of the love demonstrated not only by the Son but by the Father as well. We

will seek to clarify such a sense of justice and mercy in the ensuing discussion as we examine a few other common models from Mormon dialogue and writings.

AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER

We have suggested that the model of the creditor and the debtor is weakened by its attempt to portray two distinct metaphors, the transactional and the forensic. We have also previously sought to challenge the assumption of retributive justice as a universal principle or cosmic law. However, since such images are clearly present in Mormon scriptural sources and have become so fully absorbed into LDS ideology, it is worth taking the time to look more closely at the forensic model in order to suggest possible adaptations in its presentation, thereby making it more consistent with revealed Latter-day Saint thought and more applicable to Mormon instruction.[7]

There is a great deal of precedent in LDS scripture for the inclusion of a forensic model in describing the work of Christ. The titles of "Mediator," "Advocate," and "Intercessor" appear frequently, all suggesting the image of a court of law in which a representative pleads before the judge on behalf of one who has been brought to trial. In his appearance to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland temple in 1836, the Lord declared, "I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father."[8] In an earlier revelation, he had said, "I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them."[9] If we desire to build a model from this imagery, it seems certain that its basic elements must include the accused party, the Father who sits in judgment, and the Son who intercedes to represent the accused before the Father. There is obviously a danger here of creating the same type of situation that we have encountered so frequently before, in which the Father becomes the embodiment of wrath. Troubled by this dilemma, J. Clair Batty has written,

> Is an advocate or mediator necessary because the Father doesn't know us as well as the Savior does, or doesn't care about us as much as the Savior does or is more stern than the Savior is or has a different opinion about the plan of salvation than the Savior does? Are they arguing over who gets saved and who doesn't? This idea seems wildly inconsistent with the many scriptural declarations of "oneness" of the Father and the Son. They claim to be one in

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[7]While the model to be proposed here may be more intellectually consistent than many other models, it may also offer far less emotional appeal. It might prove quite useful in explaining certain concepts, but completely inadequate to stir someone's soul. Again, in our employment of models, we need to be aware of their contexts and applicability.
[8]D&C 110:4.
[9]D&C 38:4.

mind and purpose. Why would the Son have to plead our case with the Father who authored the plan of salvation in the first place?[10]

It is surely not uncommon when working with such a model to fall into the logical trap of assigning the roles of justice to the Father and mercy to the Son while the accused party must sit looking on in fear that his case may not be exactly airtight, that despite the influence of his able representative, the facts of the case are known all too well by the demanding judge.

The model thus represented or conceived leaves far too much room for disastrous assumptions, but if fleshed out more explicitly and clearly presented at the level of analogy, it can provide a useful basis for discussion that maintains consistency with the LDS canon. The first important point to bear in mind is that the Father is portrayed as the judge and not the prosecutor. In order for the model to be consistent with Mormon doctrine, another character must take his place at the tribunal. Wherever there is an advocate, there must of necessity be an adversary, and since that role cannot be played by the Father without turning the trial into a farce, it would seem worthwhile to introduce a fourth actor into the courtroom drama. For our model to be consistent we will suggest that it is Satan who calls upon justice as an accusation and a condemnation against fallen man, knowing that the demands of justice have claim upon men and women in their fallen state.[11] The prosecution appears to have a strong case. We likewise need to avoid the suggestion that Christ's plea for mercy will temper the administration of justice. Justice cannot be compromised in the least degree or it simply ceases to exist, so we will maintain that justice must be fully administered regardless of the trial's verdict. The point of contention which needs to be resolved by the judge concerns the cases that the rival counsels each make for the defendant. The Father does not rule for or against the accused directly in this model but weighs the legitimacy of the competing claims presented by the two intermediaries.

We come now to some significant questions that Latter-day Saints must resolve for the model to be wholly functional, and they are questions we might have thought already answered. The first is "Who is on trial here?" The identities of all the other principal players have been established, but who is it that has been arraigned before the court? Does this model represent the judgment that each person can expect after passing beyond the portals of mortality? Will there come a time when every individual will stand before the Father to be judged in this manner? Latter-day Saint doctrine commonly asserts that it is Christ who will be the judge before whom each man and woman will one day appear, so it may seem that this model has unwittingly confused the assigned roles. But the confusion is not actually over the identity of the judge, but of the judgment. The final question we should ask (which will help us respond to both inquiries)

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[10]J. Clair Batty, "The Atonement: Do Traditional Explanations Make Sense?" *Sunstone* 8/6 (November-December 1983), 13.

[11]According to Gunton, Satan began his Biblical career (as described in the prologue of Job) at the left hand of God as the adversary, or counsel for the prosecution. "He had therefore a legal function, representing the rule of law, order and punishment." See Gunton, *Ibid.*, 83-84.

is "What judgment is being described by this model?" A possible explanation begins to take shape through Christ's words in Doctrine and Covenants section 45.

> "Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—
> Saying: father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;
> Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life."[12]

It is interesting and certainly instructive to note that in *every* scriptural instance in which reference is made to Christ as the mediator, the advocate, the intercessor, or the one pleading a cause before the Father, this is described as taking place on behalf of a group.[13] We would therefore suggest that the model in which Christ is portrayed as the mediator for man does not seem to apply to the judgment of individuals but to that of mankind as a whole—or more specifically of all those who accept the requirements of Christ's salvation.[14] When we employ the courtroom model to describe Christ's saving work, we can strengthen that model by making three things clear. (1) The Father and the Son are equally interested in man's salvation. One does not win it from the other; they bring it about together. (2) If we wish to assign the role of justice in this model to an individual, it makes most sense to include the role of Satan as the adversary. This is a limited and specifically forensic use of the term 'justice'. (3) The trial being described is not of each soul being weighed in the balance before God for final judgment. The model is rather a sort of parable used to present the legitimacy of Christ's claim as the Savior of mankind.[15] Since that claim is the central declaration of the restored Gospel, the verdict of this trial is already evident. "I am your advocate with the Father; and it is his good will to give you the kingdom."[16]

The Father passes judgment upon the case of the prosecutor, who pursues an immediate and finite application of justice by asserting the sins and sinfulness of fallen man and claiming humanity as his own, and the merciful case of Christ who demonstrates his higher claim upon the souls of his redeemed. The world stands trial and Christ establishes the validity of his claim upon all who accept and choose him. This model serves to illustrate the primary assertion of Mormon thought, that Jesus Christ is literally the deliverer of mankind—the Savior of the

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[12]D&C 45:3-5.

[13]Isaiah 53:12; Galatians 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; 9:15; 12:22-24; 1 John 2:1; 2 Nephi 2:9-10, 27-28; Mosiah 14:12; 15:8; D&C 29:5; 32:3; 38:4; 45:3; 62:1; 76:69; 107:19; 110:4.

[14]According to LDS scripture, man's personal judgment will take place before Christ, and *his* decree is for salvation to all those who repent and believe on his name. We will discuss below the nature of the group that this describes.

[15]The model of the court in which all of mankind is being judged is the concern even in Romans which has been the primary source for individual legalism and personalistic punishment. (cf. Gunton, 102). We might note that the scapegoat ritual (which has likewise become a resilient image of Christ's work and has been used to lend strength to the concept of Christ's suffering man's due punishment) also dealt not with individual but corporate guilt.

[16]D&C 29:5.

world—but we should repeat that there is no need to convert such a model into a mythology. Rather than suggesting a cosmic drama in which such a courtroom scene actually takes place in some distant time or location, this model provides a symbolic portrayal of the saving mission that Christ has already performed, the events Mormons refer to generally as his atonement. The forensic model provides a didactic tool through which to discuss the accomplishment of man's deliverance from evil.

THE GULF OF JUSTICE

Having suggested a possible way of refining the forensic model for use in LDS instruction, we turn our attention once again to the more specific issue of the nature of justice and mercy, since these are repeatedly employed within the Mormon canon to describe two of the underlying principles that define the meaning of Christ's atonement. We have already dealt with the difficulties inherent in portraying retributive justice as a universal law and mercy as Christ's vicarious suffering of man's due punishment. We have also sketched the outlines of a revised description of justice suggested by the Book of Mormon writers. It remains but to clarify how we intend to define and make use of these terms so that they will be consistent with the models we are presenting. To begin, we are interpreting justice—in its ultimate sense—as a descriptive, as opposed to proscriptive, law. The forensic metaphor employs a finite concept of justice typical of the Nephite record, characterizing it as the enemy of fallen and sinful man. However, the Book of Mormon also uses the term 'justice' as an attribute of God that relates not only to fallen man, but to humankind redeemed through the atonement of Christ.[17] In this more comprehensive sense, justice transcends the legal metaphor to become that which defines the unceasing distinction between good and evil, between those things that belong in God's kingdom and those that do not. It is no longer considered a conscious force to which God must submit but a simple description of the restored Gospel's universe and the reality of moral divergence therein.

There may not be an immediate intuitive link between the concept of justice and the discussion of moral contrast in the cosmos, so this may seem a strange coupling of ideas, but there is good reason for making such an association in LDS thought. One of the constant messages of the Nephite record is that no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God. In LDS interpretation, this is often given a proscriptive slant, presuming that God decrees and enforces such a law, predetermining the purity of his realm and studiously limiting access to its joys. But the descriptive and more defensible interpretation would hold that there is an actual distinction between the clean and the unclean which itself determines the range of possibilities available to each group. This moral differentiation is what makes the identity of God possible. If God is to be defined in terms of his righteousness and love, as we have hypothesized, then there

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[17]2 Nephi 9:46; Alma 41:2, 14.

must of necessity be a point of demarcation between God and that which is not God. If there were no ongoing distinction between moral opposites, then God would cease to be. Similarly, if God's kingdom is defined by the condition of righteousness, then such a condition simultaneously defines that which does not pertain. This would appear to be Lehi's point in asserting that "there must needs be an opposition in all things."[18] The significant aspect of this otherwise obvious suggestion is the fact that the separation to which we are referring is at times made synonymous with God's justice by the Book of Mormon writers. The gulf which divides the wicked from the righteous in Nephi's vision is paralleled with "the word of the justice of the Eternal God."[19] God's justice is that which defines his being and at the same time defines that which is in contrast to him.

It is therefore consistent for the Book of Mormon writers to assert the love that God feels for each of his children on the one hand, even expressing the hope that all might be saved, and on the other hand declaring that the justice of God hangs like a sword to cut off the wicked from his presence. Instead of God's weapon of vengeance against the unrighteous, the sword of justice becomes the unwavering declaration that an individual's moral choices will define his character as either belonging with God or not. When the day of accounting arrives, there will be those who through their choices have become fit for God's kingdom as well as those who "shall be filthy still."[20] Justice, as we shall employ the term, is the unalterable fact that a person cannot dwell with God unless he or she is worthy to do so. Although it appears at first an anomalous (and perhaps even horrifying) thought, the justice of God that the Book of Mormon proposes insists that each person will eventually receive precisely what he or she deserves, and nothing–not even Christ's mercy—can rob justice of that demand.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GETHSEMANE

In our analysis of the models which Mormons employ to teach the significance of Christ's saving work, we have sought to focus at the level of language and mental constructs, dealing more directly with images and intellectual schema than with the historical events to which they point. We have tried to offer alternatives for a few of the most firmly established models in order to eliminate some of their more obvious inconsistencies and increase their potential as teaching tools. But by disengaging the models from their historical antecedents, we have perhaps created a conceptual vacuum. If Christ in Gethsemane and on the Cross did not *literally* pay off a debt, or propitiate an offended God, or recompense a broken law, what purpose did his atonement serve? Why did he then suffer and die, and what meaning can his actions have

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[18]2 Nephi 2:11. Equally relevant is Samuel the Lamanite's accusation that "ye have sought for happiness in doing iniquity, which thing is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head," (Helaman 13:38).
[19]1 Nephi 12:18; cf. 15:28; Alma 26:20.
[20]2 Nephi 9:16; Mormon 9:14.

for Latter-day Saints? It is surely true, as some have suggested, that Mormons could benefit from considering more fully the example of selfless love demonstrated in Christ's voluntary self-offering. Yet LDS scripture also asserts incontestably that Christ's acts were more than exemplary. The consistent position of the Mormon canon is that the Savior personally experienced man's suffering and death and, through his resurrection, provided immortality to all of mankind. It is further categorically affirmed that had Christ not performed his act of atonement, the salvation of man would have been impossible. Before we look for clarification of the ultimate meaning of salvation in the LDS sources, we must inquire into the more immediate significance of Christ's final earthly acts.

We offer here one possibility for considering Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the garden tomb from an LDS perspective without drawing upon transactional, sacrificial or substitutionary imagery. The cross has become the fundamental symbol of Christianity, and in conservative thought it is generally viewed as the locus of man's salvation. According to that way of thinking, it was on the cross that the Lord bore the sins of man and performed his saving work. While Latter-day Saints often teach that the imposed afflictions of the cross were neither so intense nor so meaningful as the agonies that preceded them in Gethsemane, the crucifixion does play a significant role in the Mormon concept of atonement and in its most sacred ceremonies. Christ himself taught its centrality to his Nephite witnesses in the New World through his testimony that "my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me."[21] But why the cross? Did that specific mode of death bring about salvation for humankind? Christian theologians have argued frequently down through the centuries that the cross provided the necessary method by which salvation was secured. LDS interpretation has not sought that type of etiologic precision when discussing the cross itself, but it is clear in Mormon scripture that it was necessary that Christ pass through death in order to fulfill his mission. "For it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him."[22] Jesus the Christ found it necessary to enter into the world and take upon himself flesh. Man's situation demanded that the Christ die in order to make salvation possible since only through death could resurrection be obtained. But the specific death chosen for him by his accusers and foreseen by the prophets need not be regarded as salvific in itself. Death *per se* and not one particular mode of death was apparently what was required. As Samuel the Lamanite explained,

> For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

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[21] 3 Nephi 27:14.
[22] 2 Nephi 9:5.

> Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death--that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.
>
> But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.[23]

From Calvary let us turn our gaze east to Gethsemane, where Latter-day Saints are most inclined to locate the act of atonement. The Mormon discussion of Christ's night of anguish in the olive grove echoes the wider Christian treatment of the Cross as the point at which the Lord took upon himself the sins of mankind. This change in focus is founded in the additional witness of restored and modern scripture. LDS sources provide prophetic glimpses into that night of agony that augment the New Testament accounts and offer further insights into the Latter-day Saint image of atonement. King Benjamin described the then-future event by saying that the Lord would

> suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people…
>
> And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him.[24]

Earlier, Jacob had given his witness that "he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam."[25] Perhaps the clearest Book of Mormon account is to be found in the words of Alma$_2$ to the people of Gideon:

> And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.
>
> And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.
>
> Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me.[26]

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[23]Helaman 14:15-17.
[24]Mosiah 3:7,9. See also Abinadi's speech in Mosiah 15:5.
[25]2 Nephi 9:21.
[26]Alma 7:11-13.

It has not been uncommon for Latter-day Saints to assume traditional Christian meanings for such passages, reading into them the common transactional and forensic explanations of the atonement. However, these are not inherent in the Mormon scriptural descriptions, and other interpretive possibilities do exist. To fill the void we have created by questioning the applicability of the traditional models, we wish to suggest an alternative metaphor by which to understand Christ's act of atonement.

To introduce this model we will make reference to the well-known etymological origins of the word "atonement" in order to consider that concept independent of the word's contemporary meanings of appeasement, propitiation, and compensation, the meanings that have been applied to it through the assumption of traditional atonement theory. The word in its essence describes the state of being "at one," or the act of uniting those who have been divided. It connotes companionship and restoration, community and contact or, to stretch the metaphor slightly, perhaps even adoption. Within the LDS perspective, the idea could even be conceptually related to the doctrine of 'sealing'. We need not assert that this idea of reuniting man with God is always the most accurate English translation of the Greek or Hebrew words that were rendered as "atonement". The point we are making is that the image of personal contact suggested by the English word "at-one-ment" provides a surprisingly apt metaphor by which Latter-day Saints might consider the meaning of Christ's work. As we ponder what the Lord experienced in Gethsemane and throughout the agonizing events that followed, we will suggest that the metaphor of at-one-ment as personal contact provides a simple way of comprehending the sense of salvation set forth in Mormon scripture.

The Book of Mormon descriptions of Christ's suffering which we have already quoted provide an important addenda to traditional atonement theories. Not only did Christ suffer on account of the sins of fallen man, but in LDS doctrine he experienced *all* the pains, the temptations, the infirmities and the afflictions suffered by the family of Adam. Were his afflictions imposed by an external force as we oftentimes have imagined, or can we understand them as the direct result of his perfect love? We might venture to imagine what it would have meant to the mortal Christ, who "groaned in the spirit, and was troubled," to the point of openly weeping on account of Mary and Martha's temporary but real grief, to come—in one consummate, eternal moment of compassion—to an unblemished recognition of every individual sorrow and affliction experienced by humankind. How would it have affected this man of Galilee, who mourned over Jerusalem and was concerned even for those who later tore his flesh and hung him on the cross, to suddenly, voluntarily, contemplate with perfect understanding all the individual griefs and shocking atrocities of a world gone awry? The outcome of our reflections on this matter cannot be far from the description of the solitary night of anguished prayer in the olive grove. We are proposing that in Gethsemane the Lord came to a comprehensive and intimate understanding of all of the effects of the fall. In a desolate garden, on the loneliest of nights, God reached out to man across the gulf forged by the fall and entered

anew into personal contact with his otherwise doomed creation.[27] By entering through the gate of mortality into the presence of evil and enduring the worst a fallen world could conjure, the Lord descended below all things and brought them back within his loving embrace, offering salvation to all those who would receive it. The agony of every sinful thought and act was comprehended, the torment of each tragic loss subsumed, absorbed, and endured. In that night of solidarity with the suffering, Christ the Lord submitted himself to the full force of Satan's reign upon the earth, so that as men and women now stumble through the grief of their personal Gethsemanes, they find the ground already soaked and stained with another's blood.

Surely it would not introduce a moral loss to the LDS sense of atonement if the metaphors of payment and satisfaction were replaced with the idea of a loving Savior experiencing an unqualified empathy with all of his fallen brethren, and thereby bearing with them the full weight of each of their sorrows.[28] His sufferings in Gethsemane and on Calvary were wholly real, but the suffering itself was not salvific. Only when suffering introduces the possibility of change is redemption made possible, and it is the nature of that change that we will now seek to address.

## RESURRECTION AND HEALING

We can now begin to examine the meaning of salvation itself as it is presented in LDS scripture, and as we do so we will culminate our earlier discussions of sin, repentance, and the meaning of forgiveness. We have already defined sin and repentance primarily in terms of the initial choices an individual makes to follow either destructive or beneficial impulses evident within the material composition of his or her being. We have also asked what it means to obtain forgiveness from a benevolent God who holds no animosity towards the sinner, and it is now time to suggest a response to that question. As we normally employ the term, forgiveness means the letting go of hostility, the cessation of resentment, and the pardon of faults and offenses. However, none of these ideas is applicable to a being whose love is constant and who has no disposition to take offense. We will assume, therefore, that the language of forgiveness of sins is to a degree metaphorical—not that sins are illusory or contextual, but that a loving God has no need to forgive, at least in terms of letting go of the offense which has been committed against him. Forgiveness as it is normally defined is inherent in his being. But that does not mean that man is therefore clean. God may not concern himself with 'guilt' in its traditional sense, but he is

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[27]It is not our purpose to speculate upon the mechanism by which this sealing contact might have been made.

[28]This brings to mind the contention expressed by Brian Hebblethwaite in his chapter of *Incarnation and Myth* [ed. Michael Goulder (London: SCM Press, 1979), 94] that "only if we can say that God has *himself*, on the cross, 'borne our sorrows' can we find him universally present 'in' the sufferings of others. It is not a question of 'awareness' and 'sympathy'. It is, as Whitehead put it, a matter of the 'fellow-sufferer who understands'. This whole dimension of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, its recognition of the costly nature of God's forgiving love, and its perception that only a suffering God is morally credible, is lost if God's involvement is reduced to a matter of 'awareness' and 'sympathy'." This is also the prevalent theme in Vernon White's *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

vitally concerned with the effects that sins have caused upon each individual. The sense we have chosen to assign to the notion of forgiveness is that of healing. Rather than considering forgiveness as God's decision to pardon a sin, we would suggest that the notion makes reference to the actual healing of the wounds caused by sin, wounds which may be considered physical, emotional, or psychological, but which in the terms of this thesis are all manifestations of material degeneration. In this way of thinking, forgiveness is what restores perfect agency to man.[29]

Our choice to so redefine God's forgiveness is unusual, but it does rely upon scriptural association of the two concepts, which usually appear so distinct. The best-known example is found in the epistle of James, and it is a passage that has been frequently cited in Latter-day Saint writings from the time of Joseph Smith.

> Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:
> And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.
> Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.[30]

Other New Testament passages also draw a connection between the healing of physical ailments and the forgiveness of sins. When Christ startled his critics by responding to the palsied man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee,"[31] he went on to explain his actions as follows: "For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."[32] We might consider that from the Lord's perspective the two activities are one and the same.

In the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Lord likewise associates forgiveness with healing. To those who heard his voice following the great calamities attending his death, he offered the invitation,

> O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and *repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?*
> Yea, verily I say unto you, if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me.[33]

And when he later instructed his disciples on how to treat the wayward member, he told them,

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[29]There is also support in the Book of Mormon for applying the idea of instruction to forgiveness, since agency requires both physical freedom and intellectual understanding.

[30]James 5:14-16.

[31]Matthew 9:2.

[32]Matthew 9:5-6. See also Mark 2:3-12; and Luke 5:18-26.

[33]3 Nephi 9:13-14.

> Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; *for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them*; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them.[34]

This discussion of God's forgiveness leads naturally into the Book of Mormon treatment of the Plan of Salvation. The fall introduced upon the world a reign of blood and horror in which Satan's ability to exercise control was increased and a partial barrier was created between God and his creation. Mankind became subject to the deleterious effects of material corruptibility. His will became prone to sin, his nature exposed to suffering, and his body subject to death. This is the constant backdrop against which the Book of Mormon writers seek to explain the necessity of the "great plan of the Eternal God." The objective of that plan is to entirely reverse the effects of the fall and permanently deliver man from the subjection that it has caused. This explains why attention is so persistently drawn in the Nephite record to the resurrection as the mechanism through which salvation is made possible.[35] Through corporeal resurrection, the children of God are restored to wholeness, health and immortality. Amulek explains,

> Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil…
>
> I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption.[36]

It is the Father's desire that his children be perfectly healthy in body and spirit and thereby made free to choose according to their true desires, and the atonement promises to accomplish that everlastingly.

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[34]3 Nephi 18:32.

[35]This point is made emphatic in the teachings of Lehi, Jacob, Abinadi, Amulek, Alma₂, Samuel, and Mormon, and it is frequently made reference to elsewhere. See, for example, *Lehi* 2 Nephi 2:8; *Jacob* 2 Nephi 9:6,12,22; 10:25; Jacob 4:11-12; 6:9; *Abinadi* Mosiah 13:35;15:20-26; 16:7-8,11; *Alma₁* Mosiah 18:2; *Amulek* Alma 11:41-45; *Alma₂* Alma 12:12,24-25; 33:22; 40:1-23; *Aaron* Alma 21:9; *Lamoni's Father* Alma 22:18; *Samuel the Lamanite* Helaman 14:15-17; *Christ* 3 Nephi 26:5; *Mormon* Mosiah 26:2; Alma 4:14;16:19; 27:28; 3 Nephi 6:20; Mormon 7:6; Moroni 7:41; *Moroni₂* Mormon 9:13.

[36]Alma 11:44-45.

DIVISIONS IN THE RESURRECTION

Although salvation and resurrection are frequently linked in the Book of Mormon, the latter is more frequently the vehicle of salvation than its synonym. In Mormon doctrine there are two separate resurrections that must both be understood if we are to clarify the meaning of salvation as it is described by the Nephite writers and in the revelations of Joseph Smith. The most frequent labels for these are the first and second (or last) resurrections and they are expounded upon in several of the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. The clear and accepted LDS doctrine asserts that the first resurrection will take place prior to the millennium and will raise from death all those who have accepted Christ as their Savior prior to that time. In Mormon categorizations, this includes those who belong to either the Celestial or the Terrestrial kingdoms.[37] During the millennium, the rest of the dead will suffer in spirit prison until the time of the second resurrection when all who remain will be raised to immortality.[38] This second throng is composed both of those who belong in the Telestial kingdom and of the Sons of Perdition who will be cast into Outer Darkness.

Another method of describing two types of resurrection that occurs in the Doctrine and Covenants involves the titles "resurrection of the just" and "resurrection of the unjust." It has naturally been commonplace to use these terms interchangeably with the first and second resurrections. Therefore, those belonging to the Celestial and Terrestrial kingdoms are also spoken of in common usage as those who participate in the glorious resurrection of the just, while the Telestial inhabitants and the Sons of Perdition take part in the resurrection of the unjust, or what some have called "the resurrection of damnation." This second group is made up of liars, whoremongers, sorcerers, murderers and the like, the supposition being that a large portion of them will suffer for their sins and then go on to their place in the Telestial glory.

On account of these two groupings, one might reasonably conclude that the Telestial kingdom is inhabited—at least in part—by recidivists and miscreants who only escaped perdition because they were too lazy or too ignorant to deserve it.[39] They are not infrequently described as enduring throughout eternity the onerous burden of regret as they ponder the blessings they could have received had they ceased from their uncleanness. Several additional tenets have been developed from this conceptualization and have exercised a significant impact upon LDS doctrinal discussion over the meaning of salvation. The first concerns the meaning of the phrase "kingdom of God" as used particularly in the Book of Mormon. Since it is regularly avowed that "no unclean thing" can enter that kingdom, and since the Telestial kingdom is apparently

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[37]See D&C 45:53-55; 76:50-70; 88:98-99.

[38]See D&C 63:18; 76:28-38; 85; 88:101.

[39]"All sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition. What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against Him. After a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost, there is no repentance for him. He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it." *TPJS*, 358.

composed of the unclean, the kingdom of God is taken to be a reference to exaltation (or salvation in the highest degree of the Celestial glory). And since the Book of Mormon writers also frequently equate the kingdom of God to 'salvation',[40] the latter term is often interpreted in its narrowest possible sense.

Another relevant outgrowth from these formulations, which is based upon a forensic model of atonement, involves the method by which entrance is gained into the three kingdoms. Those in the higher two degrees of glory have accepted Christ and his atonement, so it is by his merit and on account of his sufferings that their entrance has been gained. But those in the lowest degree of glory are those who rejected Christ and who will suffer for their own sins throughout the millennium. Having paid their debt to justice to the utmost farthing, they are then admitted into their final estate. In such a formulation, the concept of 'salvation' applies to the Celestial and the Terrestrial inhabitants, but is not truly applicable to the Telestial, since they rejected the Savior's promise and in effect paid the price of their own entrance.

Although these views have gained a significant acceptance within the membership of the church and can be found even in many officially endorsed publications intended for church instruction, they suggest several inconsistencies in the LDS doctrine of salvation. The most important of these for our discussion revolve around the description of the Telestial kingdom and the conclusions which have drawn from it. We have been portraying this lowest degree of glory as the abode of the unrighteous, a place peopled with murderers, abusers, and heartless reprobates. Yet the description of this lowest kingdom which is provided through Joseph Smith's vision of the three degrees of glory is hard to reconcile with such an impression. It is true that those who were evil in life and rejected Christ's atonement will be those who eventually inhabit this kingdom, but what do we know of their condition there?

The Telestial kingdom is the lowest of the 'three degrees of glory," witnessed by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in their joint vision of February 16, 1832. It is distinguished as one of the kingdoms of "Heaven," and portrayed as "magnificent" and "beautiful".[41] After describing the individuals who would receive the lowest degree of glory, the Prophet recorded the following: "And thus we saw, in the heavenly vision, the glory of the telestial, *which surpasses all understanding*; And no man knows it except him to whom God has revealed it."[42] This revelation was so significant that eleven years later, a poetic rewriting of the vision by Joseph Smith appeared in the *Times and Seasons* under the unassuming title, "A Vision." The stanza which corresponds to the quote just mentioned reads as follows,

> And thus I beheld, in the vision of heav'n,

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[40]*Nephi* 1 Nephi 15:33-35; 2 Nephi 25:13; 31:21; *Jacob* 2 Nephi 9:18, 23; 10:25; Jacob 6:4; *Abinadi* Mosiah 15:11; *Amulek* Alma 11:37; *Christ* 3 Nephi 9:22; 11:33; *Ether* Ether 15:34; *Moroni* Moroni 10:21, 26. The wicked are presented in 2 Nephi 28:8 as believing they can suffer for their sins and at last be saved in God's kingdom regardless of their unworthiness.

[41]See the description in *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (Feb. 1, 1843), 81.

[42]D&C 76:89-90.

> The telestial glory, dominion and bliss,
> Surpassing the great understanding of men,—
> Unknown, save reveal'd in a world vain as this.[43]

It is even widely repeated that Joseph once taught that if man could but gain a glimpse of the Telestial kingdom he would be tempted to commit suicide simply to get there.[44] So it is that members of the church simultaneously hold that the Telestial kingdom is glorious beyond description, its inhabitants eternally joyful in blissful satisfaction, and that it is filled with the unrepentant, the unjust, and the unclean.

The other discrepancy that occurs in this way of thinking is the suggestion that the Telestial inhabitants have "paid for their own sins" during the millennium and are thereby able to take their place in this lowest kingdom. There is no equivocation in the scriptural designation: the Telestial kingdom consists of "heirs of salvation"[45] and salvation is only made possible by Christ. Of course, there are many ways in which these inconsistencies can be rectified, but most of them run into other problems of equal severity. We will suggest an original approach to the problem which will form the basis for our further discussion of salvation.

THE TWO WAYS

The Book of Mormon is a book of contrasts and extremes. The prophets are wont to divide the universe into opposites such as God and devil, light and darkness, clean and unclean, saved and damned. This polarization of principles is often jarring to modern ears accustomed to further definition, greater resolution, and the common conversation of 'gray areas'. Take, as one representative example, Alma$_2$'s admonition:

> Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been--if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they will reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil.[46]

How does one apply a modern LDS categorization of three degrees of glory to such a statement? For the Book of Mormon writers there are only two eventual alternatives: to dwell in endless happiness in the kingdom of God or to dwell in endless misery in the kingdom of the

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[43]*Times and Seasons, Ibid.*, 82-85; See also *Millennial Star*, Vol. 4, 51-55.

[44]See for example, Eldred G. Smith (BYU Speeches of the Year, 1964 (March 10), 4). Despite the popularity of this suggestion, I have been unable to locate an original statement of the prophet to such an effect. According to one writer, "Wilford Woodruff referred to a saying of Joseph Smith, which he heard him utter (like this) That if the people knew what was behind the veil they would try by every means to commit suicide that they might get there, but the Lord in his wisdom has implanted the fear of death in every person that they might cling to life and thus accomplish the designs of their creator." (*Diary of Charles L. Walker*, August 1877, p. 596).

[45]D&C 76:88.

[46]Alma 9:28.

devil.[47] The clean will be saved and the unclean will be damned. If we apply the earlier assertions to the Book of Mormon witness, the problems are multiplied. If those in the Telestial kingdom are the unclean (having come forth in the resurrection of the unjust) then by this description they have no place in God's kingdom and must be miserable forever.

It is vital that we examine the Book of Mormon evidence in order to discover where the line is internally drawn between light and darkness, salvation and damnation, and to see if such a system can be placed sensibly within the modern LDS ideological model. Several in the Latter-day Saint tradition have chosen to interpret 'salvation' in the Book of Mormon as synonymous with exaltation in the highest degree of Celestial glory. This avoids the problem of explaining the inclusion of the other degrees of glory, but it also suggests that the Book of Mormon, in its bi-polar emphasis, fails to address the great bulk of humanity who will neither be exalted nor cast out into perdition. The problem is that nowhere does the Book of Mormon explicitly mention divisions within the kingdom of God, so applying such categories to the material is hazardous at best. However, it may be that we need not look for references to the three degrees in order to find where the Nephite prophets divided between the righteous and the wicked.

Speaking of the fact of universal resurrection, Abinadi explained that men would be raised, "if they be good, to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation."[48] Here again we can observe a division between two resurrections, but the usual [Celestial, Terrestrial] and [Telestial, Perdition] distribution does not seem to apply.[49] Those who inherit the Telestial kingdom are subjected to the devil during the millennium, but not in or after the resurrection. King Benjamin also spoke of the judgment and described the state of the unrighteous:

> And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into *a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls.*
> Therefore they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it should deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, *mercy could have claim on them no more forever.*[50]

The clearest picture comes in Alma$_2$'s description of the final state of the wicked, a portrayal made more vivid because of his own experience of repentance and the fact that he

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[47]Cf. Alma 41:4. See also 1 Nephi 15:33-35; 22:23; 25:13; Alma 7:21; 40:26; Moroni 10:26.
[48]Mosiah 16:11.
[49]Abinadi discussed at greater length the idea of the 'first resurrection' which consisted of the righteous who had died prior to Christ and would be raised with him. The only others in the Book Lof Mormon to make such a categorization are his convert, Alma$_1$ (Mosiah 18:9) and the latter's son, Alma$_2$ (Alma 40:16-21.).
[50]Mosiah 3:25-26.

claims personal knowledge of the matter through revelation.[51] He first describes the conditions of men following death but prior to the resurrection. He explains the separation of the spirit and the body and declares that the righteous spirits are received into a state of happiness, rest and peace.

> And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil--for behold, *they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord*; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house--and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and this because of their own iniquity, being led captive by the will of the devil.[52]

He then describes a similar division at the time of the resurrection:

> Behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for *they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out*, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup.[53]

LDS thought is comfortable with the idea of two resurrections, but the Book of Mormon categories do not exactly parallel the descriptions of the first and second resurrection as portrayed in the Doctrine and Covenants. In many Book of Mormon passages, the resurrection of damnation cannot make reference to the inhabitants of the Telestial kingdom, but is limited to the Sons of Perdition. One might assume that there is a lacuna in the Nephite theology, that the extremes are dealt with, but not the norm. Since nothing unclean can dwell in the kingdom of God, what is the end of those who were unclean but not so wicked as to merit perdition? There is an alternative to such an interpretation, however, and it is essential to a consistent interpretation of the Book of Mormon record. Again we turn to Alma$_2$ for clarification.

> Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame—mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one on one hand, the other on the other.
> The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

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[51] Alma 40:3, 10.
[52] Alma 40:13.
[53] Alma 40:26.

And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.[54]

The way in which we interpret verse four is crucial. We might have expected Alma to say that corruption would be raised corrupt and incorruption raised pure, but he does not. His point is not to suggest that the resurrection will maintain the type of existence one has on earth. But next comes the most relevant verse because it makes reference to all of those who will receive a kingdom of glory and it seems especially applicable to those of the Telestial kingdom:

These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; *yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness*; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or evil.[55]

It would appear reasonable to suggest that the Telestial kingdom is part of what the Nephite writers refer to as the kingdom of God, where no unclean thing can dwell. The obvious implication is that those who receive a Telestial glory have not simply paid the price in suffering that justice required for their sins, but have become clean through true repentance and the full acceptance of Christ. "And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God."[56] The requirements for entrance into God's kingdom are laid out unequivocally in the Book of Mormon, and those who merit the designation of murderers, liars, and tyrants will have no place there. Many who once were wicked, but who have since chosen righteousness and been spiritually reborn to become pure as little children will find a place prepared for them in the mansions of the Father.

Not until we recognize the requirements for entrance into the Telestial kingdom can we begin to make sense of the modern revelation of the three degrees of glory. The interpretive problem has been founded in the mistake of associating the first and second resurrections with the resurrections of the just and the unjust. The division being described by the categories of 'first' and 'second' is one of time and sequence: either preceding or following the Millennium. But the distinction portrayed by 'just' and 'unjust' is one of type: the saved and the damned. One may overlook this central concern of section 76 by failing to understand either the question that initiated the revelation or the Lord's response to it.

RETHINKING THE VISION

This vision occurred in 1832 while the prophet was living at the Johnson farm in Hiram, Ohio, and working on the inspired translation of the Bible. It was in this vision that Joseph learned that there are three kingdoms of glory in the eternal world. The impact of this vision on

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[54]Alma 41:4-6.
[55]Alma 41:7.
[56]Mosiah 27:26 (See vss. 25-29).

LDS doctrine was paramount since it effectively redefined the entire understanding of the afterlife. Traditional discussion in terms of heaven and hell were placed within an expanded and explained context. Latter-day Saint focus when discussing this vision has consistently dealt with the expanded view of the eternities that it offers. That is the impact it had on the prophet and it is certainly appropriate to emphasize its significance. But while the clarity of the vision and the precise understanding of the Three Degrees were revolutionary additions to the prophet's knowledge, the idea of multiple divisions in heaven was not new to him at all. In fact, it was that prior recognition of the necessity of various divisions that initially led Joseph to wonder about the translation of John 5:29. He wrote by way of introduction to the vision,

> Upon my return from Amherst conference, I resumed the translation of the Scriptures. From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of man had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled. It appeared self-evident from what truths were left, that if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body, the term 'Heaven,' as intended for the Saints' eternal home, must include more kingdoms than one. Accordingly, while translating St. John's Gospel, myself and Elder Rigdon saw the following vision.[57]

So Joseph had already reached the conclusion that 'heaven' had to refer to more than one kingdom. That was not his question. His confusion actually arose over the opposite concept. Joseph was translating the New Testament through the gift of revelation with Sidney Rigdon acting as his scribe. They reached the twenty-ninth verse of John which, in the King James Translation, is as follows:

> And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

This describes a traditional two-part division in the resurrection, but Joseph clearly already recognized that such a conception of the afterlife was incomplete. From his reaction, it appears that Joseph expected to receive additional revelation showing further divisions in the resurrection—which is what we have in section 76—but that is not what he received at first, and therein lay the confusion.

> For while we were doing the work of translation, which the Lord had appointed unto us, we came to the twenty-ninth verse of the fifth chapter of John, *which was given unto us as follows*—
> Speaking of the resurrection of the dead, concerning those who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man:
> And shall come forth; they who have done good, in the resurrection of the just; and they who have done evil, in the resurrection of the unjust.

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[57]From the preface to Doctrine and Covenants section 76.

Now this caused us to marvel, *for it was given unto us of the Spirit.*[58]

The Spirit gave Joseph a slightly different version than the King James, but Joseph had apparently expected much more significant changes. Joseph and Sidney marveled that the inspired version maintained the concept of a binary partition in the resurrection when they presumably expected further categorization in the new translation. Their question, then, was not "Is there more than a dual division in the judgment?" as they already assumed, but rather, "What significance is there in bisecting the resurrection into two clear divisions?" as the Spirit had just given it to them.

Read this way we gain another insight from this section that we otherwise miss. Even when assuming divisions within God's kingdom, it does make sense to speak of two distinct resurrections, the just and the unjust, as long as it is clear where the boundary lies. One common LDS interpretation would place the boundary between the Telestial and the Terrestrial kingdoms (based on the idea of *when* the resurrections take place). But that is not what we find here, since this is not discussing sequential divisions but classifications of type.

After the vision of the glory of the Father and the Son (20-24) Joseph begins the description of what Mormons have come to call 'Outer Darkness.'

> And while we were yet in the Spirit, the Lord commanded us that we should write the vision; for we beheld Satan, that old serpent, even the devil, who rebelled against God, and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ—
> Wherefore, he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about.
> And we saw a vision of the sufferings of those with whom he made war and overcame, for thus came the voice of the Lord unto us:
> Thus saith the Lord concerning all those who know my power, and have been made partakers thereof, and suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome, and to deny the truth and defy my power—
> They are they who are the sons of perdition, of whom I say that it had been better for them never to have been born.[59]

The vision continues with a description of these beings who will suffer eternally, "the only ones on whom the second death shall have any power; yea, verily, the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord, after the sufferings of his wrath."[60] And then comes the division:

> *For all the rest shall be brought forth* by the resurrection of the dead, through the triumph and the glory of the Lamb, who was slain, who was in the bosom of the Father before the worlds were made.

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[58]D&C 76:15-18.
[59]D&C 76:28-32.
[60]D&C 76:37-38.

> And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—
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> That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;
>
> That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him;
>
> Who glorifies the Father, *and saves all the works of his hands, except those sons of perdition* who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him.
>
> *Wherefore, he saves all except them*—they shall go away into everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment, to reign with the devil and his angels in eternity, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, which is their torment—[61]

Finally, verse 49 completes this section that describes the sons of perdition: "And we heard the voice, saying: Write the vision, for lo, this is the end of the vision of the sufferings of the ungodly." The rest of the vision contained in section 76 describes those who, through the power of Christ, will be saved in the resurrection. According to this reading, the underlying concern of the vision is the same issue which captured the attention of the Book of Mormon prophets. In resurrection some will be worthy of the designation "just" through choosing Christ as their Savior, while others will forever be unjust because they will knowingly and purposely reject him.

## THE EXTENT OF SALVATION

We have made the point in this thesis that God is not involved in the work of categorization, but of salvation. In this chapter we have sought to restructure some of the models by which salvation is described, and to understand what that salvation means in the LDS doctrinal sources. To conclude, we will consider a few of the implications of these ideas. The interpretation we have proposed asserts that one cannot enter into even the lowest degree of glory without first being redeemed through the power of Christ. We wish to be clear on this point. It is not the *imputation* of Christ's righteousness that grants entrance to God's kingdom, as is sometimes suggested, but the actual *endowment* of righteousness. This brings us back once again to the topic of justice, for we have stated that justice in the Book of Mormon is the immutable law describing the fact that each person will eventually receive exactly what he or she deserves, and mercy cannot rob justice. LDS writers have commonly understood this phrase within the context of transactional models to assert a mythology in which the eternal law of Justice demands a payment from Mercy before allowing mankind salvation. But what would it mean outside of the forensic or slave market metaphors? If God's justice is the perpetual need for a real distinction between good and evil, light and darkness, it means that mercy (or love, or pity,

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[61]D&C 76:39-44.

or charity) cannot under any circumstances provide entrance into God's kingdom for the unclean. That would destroy the work of justice. Only when individuals are made clean—holy—so that they truly belong in God's kingdom can they justly enter to dwell.

If God were forced to judge humanity in its present state, the Nephite record proposes that justice would not deal kindly with man. However, God's plan of salvation was the introduction of the principle of mercy through the work of his son. Through Christ's at-one-ment with man, the gulf of separation between man and God was bridged and the effects of the fall could be reversed on conditions of faith.[62]

> And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters.
> And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.[63]

As individuals exercise faith in the Son of God and allow his healing power into their lives (whether in mortality or eternity) the subjection of sin, suffering, and eventually death are eternally overcome. This transformation is completed in the resurrection of the just, when the bodies of mankind are purified and made free. This appears to be the sense of Joseph Smith's statement that,

> Salvation is nothing more nor less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet. And when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world, and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come, then we are saved, as in the case of Jesus, who was to reign until He had put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy was death.
> Perhaps there are principles here that few men have thought of. No person can have this salvation except through a tabernacle.[64]

Thus the resurrection becomes the key to the salvation offered by Christ. The principal concern in the plan of salvation is mankind's freedom to be like God (and therefore his ability to be with God): possessing a loving, purified selfless will and a flawless corporeal body. Those who have received forgiveness are no longer subject to wickedness but become new creatures in Christ. In such a state, having been voluntarily recreated in the image of God, one discovers that the effects of justice have been reversed, while its demands have remained constant. Justice then demands that those who have become clean through the blood of the Lamb receive an

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[62]"Gregory Nazianzen's celebrated tag summarizes a pervasive and influential stream of thought: 'the unassumed is the unhealed'; and since Christ assumed all human nature, then it is all accessible to his healing." in White, *Ibid.*, 11.
[63]Mosiah 27:25-26 (See vss. 25-29). See also, Alma 7:14; 11:37; 34:36; 3 Nephi. 14:21; 27:19; Moroni 10:21. Suffering for sins does not make a person clean; it only makes him sorry.
[64]*TPJS*, 297.

inheritance in the kingdom of God.[65] The Father's justice is not a response to man's mortal condition, but is the means by which humanity can ultimately be cleansed, purified, transformed and healed—and thus made *deserving* of a place in God's kingdom. Rather than placing justice at odds with mercy, the "great plan of happiness" creates a new situation for mankind in which God's eternal justice and his mercy will at last work together to save his children. Mormon's words are significant:

> And I would that all men might be saved. But we read that in the great and last day there are some who shall be cast out, yea, who shall be cast off from the presence of the Lord;
> Yea, who shall be consigned to a state of endless misery, fulfilling the words which say: They that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation. And thus it is. Amen.[66]

Resurrection is frequently equated with salvation in the Book of Mormon because for the righteous there is no distinction: the resurrection of the just *is* salvation. For the wicked, however, resurrection is damnation. The conclusion we are drawing is that eventually all, except the sons of perdition, will freely choose Christ as their Savior and submit themselves fully to his love.[67] Then, when every knee has humbly bowed, and every tongue joyfully confessed that Jesus is the Christ, "he shall deliver up the kingdom, and present it unto the Father, spotless."[68]

However, there is one final point we cannot afford to ignore. We must emphasize that the doctrine that Christ will eventually save *all* except the sons of perdition does not in any way condone sin. No one can enter the kingdom of God until they belong there and for the vast majority of mankind, whether vile sinners or complacent saints, that will require the painful process of change and consecration, a process aptly described as suffering. Repentance is by no means an easy choice. In fact, it is ultimately the costliest choice. In a letter to his proud and rebellious brother William, Joseph stated that, "God requires the will of his creatures to be swallowed up in his will." A great many will apparently choose to remain in the torment of sin and guilt throughout the millennium, rather than let go of their desires for wickedness. The sufferings of hell are as intense and real as Alma$_2$ described them after his conversion. His testimony was that all men will eventually be required to submit their will wholly, completely, irrevocably, to God—as he did—or else assert their independence in the bitterness of

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[65]"Justice" does not demand punishment or payment. Justice requires the resurrection so that man's eternal destiny will be just. (See Alma 41:2-3.)

[66]Helaman 12:25-26.

[67]Given the Book of Mormon witness of Christ's power to save "all mankind", and the additional descriptions of salvation as "free," it is easier to understand how the apostate universalist promises of Nehorism, which simply ignored the necessity for repentance, wielded such influence within the Nephite culture. Since the prophetic emphasis was that many "if not all" would be saved in Christ's kingdom in that great and last day, the typical diabolical distortion was to push that idea one step further and assert that Christ would save all *regardless* of their acts in this life. That constitutes at least part of the doctrine of every anti-Christ within the Book of Mormon.

[68]D&C 76:107-110. The Telestial Kingdom is obviously a part of the work which Christ will perfect in the previous verse.

perdition.[69] Until the final choice is made, we are reminded of another statement of the prophet, "Hence the salvation of Jesus Christ was wrought out for all men, in order to triumph over the devil; for if it did not catch him in one place, it would in another;…All will suffer until they obey Christ himself."[70] We will conclude this chapter with the Lord's words from section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants (which we introduced in chapter 8), words that might now offer a very different sense than they are usually given.

> For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;
> But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;
> Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.[71]

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[69] *HC* 2:342. In addition, salvation requires knowledge: "We have thieves among us, adulterers, liars, hypocrites. If God should speak from heaven, he would command you not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to covet, nor deceive, but be faithful over a few things. As far as we degenerate from God, we descend to the devil and lose knowledge, and without knowledge we cannot be saved, and while our hearts are filled with evil, and we are studying evil, there is no room in our hearts for good, or studying good. Is not God good? Then you be good; if He is faithful, then you be faithful. Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, and seek for every good thing. / The Church must be cleansed, and I proclaim against all iniquity. A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God." *TPJS*, 217. We will address the idea of knowledge in the final chapter.

[70] *TPJS*, 357.

[71] D&C 19:16-19.

# THE QUEST FOR EXALTATION

> I want to ask this congregation, every man, woman and child, to answer the question in their own heart, what kind of a being God is? Ask yourselves; turn your thoughts into your hearts, and say if any of you have seen, heard, or communed with him. This is a question that may occupy your attention for a long time. I again repeat the question—What kind of a being is God? Does any man or woman know? Have any of you seen him, heard him, or communed with him? Here is the question that will, peradventure, from this time henceforth occupy your attention. The Scriptures inform us that "This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."
>
> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 343-44.

## JOURNEY'S END

The time has come to shade our heads and remove the dusty shoes from our feet, for we have reached the conclusion of our explorations, and are perhaps beginning to tread upon holy ground. We set out initially to investigate the possibility of—and the justifications for—a plausible interpretation of several core Mormon doctrines. Along the way we have sought to demonstrate that some of the assumptions informing contemporary Latter-day Saint discourse are derived from a Christian metaphysics that stands in obvious contrast to key tenets of the 'restored Gospel'. These assumptions have sometimes led to logical inconsistencies in the LDS discussion of salvation. It remains for us now to review the central points we have made and to comment on the implications of the LDS doctrinal schema we have developed.

Our journey began by reflecting upon the very nature of God. From the imposing mountain of sovereignty we descended, leaving it behind that we might better contemplate it from a distance. We wandered through a world pervaded with suffering, and surmised that no God who truly loves his creation can possibly be considered sovereign. Either God is a sovereign tyrant, creating pain and agony in order to subdue and exploit humanity, or sovereignty is but a mythical holdover from neo-Platonic ratiocination, an unnecessary addendum to the LDS understanding of God. Seeking the deity of Mormon scripture, we set out to discover a benevolent God and found him sleeping in a stable of Bethlehem, teaching by the shores of Galilee, and later pierced, wounded and dying on a cross. We asserted that for LDS ideology, the character of the Father of humankind has most clearly been revealed to humanity embodied in the person of Christ, a figure morally worthy of emulation and worship. His power was not absolute, curtailed at times by others' faithlessness, but his love was constant and his empathy complete. He promised salvation to his followers and claimed the power to bring it about. God the Father can be perceived within Mormon thought as 'finite yet sufficient'. His abilities are limited by his righteousness, but he possesses all the power necessary to save his children.

On the next leg of our journey we set out to investigate the terrain of the spiritual realm. Most commonly characterized as preternatural, we found in the teachings of Joseph Smith an incentive for assigning it instead a position *within* the material world. We theorized the palpable

cosmos to be an extension of the universe of spirit, similarly composed and etiologically bound. From this vantage, we surveyed the significance of the fall of man, the freedom of the will, and the meaning of sin and repentance. We began to see morality removed from its usual context of proscriptive law, and discovered religious significance in all the experiences of the embodied soul. Although frequently understated in LDS discussion, we stressed humanity's fallen condition. We hypothesized a diagram of the mortal body in which agency is inherent. And we removed the discussion of sin and repentance from one of behavior to one of choice.

The third and final portion of our pilgrimage took its course once again uphill, toward a lonely garden and a vacant tomb. Along the way, we witnessed throngs who had made their journey before us, and we sought to catch a glimpse of the Savior's work from their varied perspectives. We rested for a time viewing the Lord's atonement from a rise upon which the majority of Latter-day Saint writers had taken their place, a site formerly occupied by others of faith and devotion who had cleared the ground for forensic descriptions of salvation. But finding the view obscured by the many branches of legalism, we sought for an untroubled clearing from which we might witness anew the events of Christ's atonement and the promise of man's deliverance. We chose a position overlooking Gethsemane and imagined we could see God reaching across the gulf of humanity's alienation to draw each one back to himself, if and when they would take his hand. As we have sought for a clearer representation of LDS doctrine, our journey has steadily withdrawn from the mount of blackness and tempest that burned with fire, to seek an approach to Mount Sion, discovering along our path a way to speak of sin, of suffering, and of salvation, illumined by the radiance of a benevolent God.

KNOWLEDGE AND MYSTERIES

This thesis has attempted a systematic presentation of Latter-day Saint beliefs, the rational formulation of Mormon conceptions of God, man, and the Plan of Salvation. Given the purposes of such a study, we have constructed it upon a discussion of knowledge and understanding—of metaphors, images, and conceptual models. Inherent in such an undertaking is the assumption that the way in which one comprehends God and salvation directly influences the approach to worship. Latter-day Saint beliefs regarding God's nature, the condition of humanity in a fallen world, and such issues as the context of sin and repentance or the atonement of Christ necessarily inform LDS religious life. If the possibility exists (within the limits of LDS acceptability) of reconsidering some of these basic religious concerns in such a way as to allow for a more consistent model of the Mormon cosmos, such a possibility deserves exploration by Latter-day Saint writers, offering as it would a more coherent background for and impetus toward personal discipleship. The schema hypothesized herein postulates that there is room within the parameters of the 'restored gospel' to seek revised interpretations of scripture and new approaches to worship, but the explorations we have undertaken are merely prelude to

the actual journey described by LDS doctrine. In order for such a cerebral study to be of any value to those within the Latter-day Saint community, it must be regarded and put to use as an intellectual aid to religious practice, rather than being viewed as somehow significant in itself. Knowledge of facts is useful and important in Mormonism, but only if those facts lead to something quite different.

The Book of Mormon prophets make frequent reference to what they call "mysteries," and it is common in LDS thought—as it has been in many other historical religious movements—to conceive of 'mysteries' as a set of secret truths or ritual acts of worship that offer the possessor a unique ability to call upon God's blessings. If the correct set of facts is discovered (through personal scripture study, consideration of temple rites, or fasting, prayer, and contemplation), an individual will possess knowledge that provides an advantage over those who are ignorant of such truths. In this view, the 'mysteries of the kingdom' become a *gnosis kruptos* promising special and privileged access to the power of God. The obvious potential is to create a neo-gnosticism within the LDS community, with church members claiming sole possession of the elusive secret knowledge. Because of the distractive dangers inherent in such a view, church leaders since the time of Joseph Smith have repeatedly counseled members to "let mysteries alone" and to concentrate on the fundamental principles of the gospel.[1] As a rule, the church membership has heeded this counsel, and unofficial doctrinal speculation is widely perceived as dangerous and suspect.

Nevertheless, the references to 'mysteries' in LDS scripture are numerous and persistent, and there are those within the church who are sorely tempted to speak in hushed tones and guarded hints of the arcana they have uncovered.[2] Joseph Smith himself counseled the saints, "I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness."[3] The discrepancy between the two quotes raises a question: "Is it appropriate in the Latter-day Saint community for an individual to search for knowledge that goes beyond the officially endorsed fundamentals?" As we bring our explorations to their conclusion, we wish to suggest a response to that inquiry through a revised interpretation of the concept of mysteries and even of knowledge itself.

LDS scripture places a high premium on knowledge, going so far as to declare that "it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance."[4] However, there is an alternative to the view that such saving knowledge consists of an intellectual grasp of select information. Let us instead consider the possibility that the 'mysteries' extolled in the Mormon canon are not a *gnosis*, a hidden set of facts to be learned or uncovered, but a way of *being* that can only be known through experience. It is correct to say that propositional knowledge plays an essential role in the

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[1]*TPJS*, 292.
[2]See for example, 1 Nephi 1:1; 2:16; 10:19; Mosiah 1:5; 2:9; 8:19; Alma 12:9-11; 26:22; D&C 6:7, 11; 11:7; 42:61; 63:23; 76:7; 84:19; 107:18-19. See also Abraham 1:2.
[3]*TPJS*., 364.
[4]D&C 131:6.

Mormon understanding of salvation, but we suggest that it functions primarily as a bridge to "relational" knowledge. To "know" another person implies more than a mere awareness of traits and characteristics; it implies some degree of shared perception and sentiment. Only as one begins to "know" God can the mysteries be unfolded, because the mysteries of godliness are the experiences of God—the depth of his love, the cost of his work, the extent of his joy. Such knowledge cannot be communicated through analytical means but only by participating in such experiences. The 'mysteries' thus remain utterly incomprehensible for those who fail to respond to God's invitation to follow him. To "know" the mysteries is to be in the process of becoming more like God, knowing as we are known and seeing him as he is. In the context of salvation as we have described it, this means that the love manifest in Christ can expand the human capacity to respond with love, so that in coming to know the Savior one concomitantly receives the first fruits of salvation.[5] Every man and woman who is saved in a kingdom of glory will first come to experience the love of God and freely choose that love over all other desires. Each will eventually reach the point at which they are "cleansed from all unrighteousness" and made worthy of a place in the Father's kingdom.


BEYOND SALVATION

This thesis has elucidated a definition for salvation that insists upon complete repentance for all who will be saved. We have imagined God's kingdom filled by those who have chosen light and righteousness, having abandoned all desires for wickedness—a kingdom wherein all have been filled with the love of God and have become purified as he is pure. There remains for us, then, one final question to answer, one last survey of the landscape through which we have traveled. If all those who are eventually saved in the kingdom of God become equally pure, how do we propose to understand the LDS doctrine of varying degrees of glory, and what is it that constitutes the distinction of exaltation?

Mormons have sometimes been prone to treat salvation and exaltation as if they were prizes offered for obedience and devotion. If individuals are good enough, their judgment will be favorable and the power of the atonement will offset their shortcomings to open the door of God's kingdom. Those who have demonstrated greater faithfulness will merit additional blessings of glory and honor. But mortality as described in the teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon is not merely God's test of humankind to determine which individuals will receive the coveted prizes, but an actual and necessary step in the ongoing progression of God's children. Salvation is not merely the prize for obedience, but the natural result of righteousness.

However, purity of desire does not necessarily imply equality of capacity. LDS doctrine promises that through the power of Christ's resurrection, the bodies of those who are saved will be renewed and strengthened to provide an impenetrable shield against all malignant forces in

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[5]"The principle of salvation is given us through the knowledge of Jesus Christ." *TPJS*, 297.

the cosmos that have sought man's subjection. But those resurrected bodies apparently vary in accordance with each person's capabilities. The division of degrees of glory may therefore have reference to the condition of the resurrected soul and its capacity to love, serve and experience joy. In fact, one need not insist that those within God's kingdom are separated by location at all—perhaps mingling together, but living at different levels of discernment and ability. Some will rejoice eternally in a state of telestial glory while others will love so perfectly that they become all that the Father is. We see a glimpse of this in the way in which Christ described his own glory to his Nephite followers: "And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one."[6]

We have completed the circuit of our exploration, returning now to the original theme of the nature of deity, but considering in conclusion the Mormon understanding of the destiny of man. The quintessential LDS doctrine of humankind's potential goes beyond salvation to the possibility of deification. Joseph Smith introduced the doctrine to the saints who had gathered for a funeral with these words,

> These are the first principles of consolation. How consoling to the mourners when they are called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to know that, although the earthly tabernacle is laid down and dissolved, they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die any more; but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What is it? To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a God.[7]

Such aspirations to godhood sounded to many in Christendom as the vilest of blasphemies, a proud and sinister acceptance of the devil's Edenic enticings for humans to become as gods. The accusation remains one of the most common challenges leveled against Mormonism by its Christian opponents. Since Latter-day Saints hold a distinct view of the events of Eden, believing that man's deification was always the intent of God, such objections have never struck home. However, the censures against Mormonism's presumptuous claims to divinity perhaps deserve further attention from Latter-day Saints. The gospel of Christ does not promote a vaulting ambition that would eagerly yearn for the glory of deity. Even in Mormon scripture, it is the devil who demands of God, "give me thine honor."[8] Nevertheless, traditional depictions of the sovereign God can transform the LDS doctrine of divinization into a vainglorious quest for power and influence. If God is defined primarily by his omnipotence then the desire to be like him is the ultimate will to power.

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[6]3 Nephi 28:10.
[7]*TPJS*, 347. The occasion was the April General Conference of 1844, so there were around 20,000 saints present, but the prophet's remarks were intended as the funeral sermon for Elder King Follett.
[8]Moses 4:1.

But the view changes completely when God is perceived in terms of his benevolence. If one worships the God of love, then to strive for exaltation is to seek for charity, not primacy. It is to set aside ambition in favor of ministration. It is to become the servant of all. Mormon doctrine proclaims that humanity has been invited to become as God. One day, when we submit ourselves freely to his fellowship, we will know as we are known and love as we are loved. Having sought in this thesis for a coherent account of the Latter-day Saint understanding of God's Plan of Salvation, we deem it appropriate to conclude with Moroni's final verses in the Book of Mormon. His words provide a fitting sense of closure for our journey of discovery.

> Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.
>
> And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.
>
> And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen.[9]

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[9]Moroni 10:32-34.

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