

God and Man

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Joseph Smith claimed to have received a vision of God and Christ in upstate New York in the spring of 1820. Joseph and his followers also declared that the knowledge of the kind of being we worship and his nature began to come line upon line following the First Vision. Such concepts as the corporeal (physical) nature of God the Father and the belief that men and women could eventually become as God have been regular targets by critics of the Church. The latter doctrine, known in Eastern Christianity as theosis or deification, is a logical extension of Restoration teachings concerning the eternity of God and man. This chapter seeks to respond to some of the most frequently asked questions on this central subject.

Nothing is more fundamental than understanding the kind of being we worship and his nature. The scriptures affirm that it is life eternal to know God (see John 17:3), and so it is but natural to suppose that our Father in Heaven would make himself known—through the prophets and holy writ, and by the power of the Spirit.

An Infinite God

Occasionally it is said that Latter-day Saints worship a “finite God.” Our own scriptures state otherwise. From the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, we learn that Latter-day Saints worship “a God in heaven, who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth, and all things which are in them” (D&C 20:17). Our Father in Heaven is indeed omnipotent, omniscient, and, by the power of his Holy Spirit, omnipresent. He is a gloried, exalted, resurrected being, “the only supreme governor and independent being in whom all fullness and perfection dwell; . . . in Him every good gift and every good principle dwell; He is the Father of lights; in Him the principle of faith dwells independently, and He is the object in whom the faith of all other rational and accountable beings center for life and salvation.” [1] The Almighty sits enthroned, “with glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice, judgment, mercy, and an infinity of fulness” (D&C 109:77). He is not a student, an apprentice, or a novice.

As late as 1840, Matthew S. Davis, a man not of the Latter-day Saint faith, heard Joseph Smith preach in Washington, DC. In a letter to his wife, he explained that Joseph taught, “I believe that there is a God, possessing all the attributes ascribed to Him by all Christians of all denominations; that He reigns over all things in heaven and on earth, and that all are subject to his power.” Davis also reported that he heard the Prophet say, “I believe that God is eternal. That He had no beginning, and can have no end. Eternity means that which is without beginning or end.” [2]

Some who are aware of Joseph Smith’s later teachings about God our Father having a physical body (see D&C 130:22) insist that such a notion limits him. In fact, the concept that God has a physical body is inextricably linked to such doctrines as the immortality of the soul, the literal resurrection, eternal marriage, and the continuation of the family unit into eternity. In his corporeal or physical nature, God can be in only one place at a time. His divine nature is such, however, that his glory, his power, and his

influence, meaning his Holy Spirit, fill the immensity of space and are the means by which he is omnipresent and through which law and light and life are extended to us (see D&C 88:6–13). The Father’s physical body does not detract one whit from his infinite holiness any more than Christ’s resurrected body did from his (see Luke 24; John 20–21). The risen Lord said of himself, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Interestingly enough, research by Professor David L. Paulsen of the BYU Philosophy Department indicates that the idea of God’s corporeality was taught in the early Christian Church into the fourth and fifth centuries before being lost to the knowledge of the people. [3]

I have been fascinated with the work of scholars of other faiths who have commented on the possibility of God’s corporeality. James L. Kugel, former professor of Hebrew literature at Harvard, has written that some of scholars’ “most basic assumptions about God,” including the idea “that he has no body but exists everywhere simultaneously,” are not “articulated in the most ancient parts of the Bible. . . . We like to think that what our religions say nowadays about God is what people have always believed.” Further, “biblical narratives did not like to speak of God actually appearing to human beings directly and conversing with them face-to-face. The reason was not that God in those days was thought to be invisible, and certainly not that He was (as later philosophers and theologians were to claim) altogether spiritual and therefore had no body to be seen. Rather, God in the Bible is not usually seen by human beings for an entirely different reason; especially in the earliest parts: catching sight of Him was believed to be extremely dangerous.” Kugel later observes, “The same God who buttonholes the patriarchs and speaks to Moses face-to-face is perceived in later times as a huge, cosmic deity—not necessarily invisible or lacking a body, but so huge as to surpass our own capacities of apprehension, almost our imagination.” In time the God who spoke to Moses directly “became an embarrassment to later theologians. It is, they said, really the great, universal God” who is “omniscient and omnipresent and utterly unphysical.” He asks, “Indeed, does not the eventual emergence of Christianity—in particular Nicene Christianity, with its doctrine of the Trinity—likewise represent in its own way an attempt to fill the gap left by the God of Old?” [4]

The late evangelical scholar Clark H. Pinnock asked:

[If we] are to take biblical metaphors seriously, is God in some way embodied? Critics will be quick to say that, although there are expressions of this idea in the Bible, they are not to be taken literally. But I do not believe that the idea is as foreign to the Bible’s view of God as we have assumed. In tradition, God is thought to function primarily as a disembodied spirit but this is scarcely a biblical idea. For example, Israel is called to hear God’s word and gaze on His glory and beauty. Human beings are said to be embodied creatures created in the image of God. Is there perhaps something in God that corresponds with embodiment? Having a body is certainly not a negative thing, because it makes it possible for us to be agents. Perhaps God’s agency would be easier to envisage if He were in some way corporeal. Add to that the fact that in the theophanies of the Old Testament God encounters humans in the form of a man. . . . Add to that that God took on a body in the incarnation and Christ has taken that body with Him into glory. It seems to me that the Bible does not think of God as formless. [5]

Absolute Truth, Absolute Values

In the beginning, God, “finding himself in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. 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.” [6]

Joseph Smith and his successors have consistently instructed the Saints that truth is fixed, eternal, and undeviating. “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). Truth is not established by consensus, by popular vote, or by utility alone. Likewise, right and wrong are not defined by society. Mormons believe in absolute truths. They believe that because God’s laws are constant and consistent, people may depend with certainty upon the consequences of obedience and disobedience. Further, there is no way to establish and maintain a moral standard independent of God. That is, ethics are built upon absolute truths, upon a knowledge of the unchangeable attributes of Deity.

Perhaps one of the clearest statements by a Church leader on this subject was an address entitled “Absolute Truth” delivered at Brigham Young University by Spencer W. Kimball. His address was based upon a letter he had written to a young man whose faith had faltered because of doubts.

God, our Heavenly Father, . . . lives. That is an absolute truth. All [six] billion of the children of men on the earth might be ignorant of him and his attributes and his powers, but he still lives. All the people on the earth might deny him and disbelieve, but he lives in spite of them. They may have their own opinions, but he still lives, and his form, powers, and attributes do not change according to men’s opinions. In short, opinion alone has no power in the matter of an absolute truth. He still lives. And Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Almighty, the Creator, the Master of the only true way of life—the gospel of Jesus Christ. The intellectual may rationalize him out of existence and the unbeliever may scoff, but Christ lives and guides the destinies of his people. That is an absolute truth; there is no gainsaying.

The watchmaker in Switzerland, with materials at hand, made the watch that was found in the sand in a California desert. The people who found the watch had never been to Switzerland, nor seen the watchmaker, nor seen the watch made. The watchmaker still existed, no matter the extent of their ignorance or experience. If the watch had a tongue, it might even lie and say, “There is no watchmaker.” That would not alter the truth.

President Kimball concluded, “If men are really humble, they will realize that they discover, but do not create, truth.” [7]

Unity within the Godhead

The Latter-day Saint refusal to accept the doctrine of the Trinity is considered by most traditional Christians as the single most compelling reason to exclude the Mormons from the category of Christianity. Let’s back up in time and reflect on why The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not subscribe to the theological formulations of post–New Testament councils.

Celsus, noted anti-Christian writer of the second century, stated:

The Christians say that God has hands, a mouth, and a voice; they are always proclaiming that ‘God said this’ or ‘God spoke.’ ‘The heavens declare the work of his hands,’ they say. I can only comment that such a God is no God at all, for *God has neither hands, mouth, nor voice, nor any characteristics of which we know*. And they say that God made man in his own image, failing to realize that God is not at all like a man, nor vice versa; *God resembles no form known to us. . . . [W]e know that God is without shape, without color*. They say that God moved above the waters he created—but *we know that it is contrary to the nature of God to move*. Their absurd doctrines even contain reference to God walking about in the garden he created for man; and they speak of him being angry, jealous, moved to repentance, sorry, sleepy—in short, as being in every respect more a man than a God. *They have not read Plato*, who teaches us in the *Republic* that God (the Good) does not even participate in being. [8]

Gregory Boyd explained that “the classical theological tradition became misguided when under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy, it defined God’s perfection in static, timeless terms. All change was considered an imperfection and thus not applicable to God.” [9] Further, “since Plato, Western philosophy has been infatuated with the idea of an unchanging, timeless reality. Time and all change were considered less real and less good than the unchanging timeless realm. . . . This infatuation with the ‘unchanging’ unfortunately crept into the church early on and has colored the way Christians look at the world, read their Bibles, and develop their theology.” [10]

Such Platonic concepts as the immutability (lack of change), impassibility (lack of feelings or passions), and timelessness of God made their way into Christian theology. As one group of evangelical scholars has stated:

Many Christians experience an inconsistency between their beliefs about the nature of God and their religious practice. For example, people who believe that God cannot change his mind sometimes pray in ways that would require God to do exactly that. And Christians who make use of the free will defense for the problem of evil sometimes ask God to get them a job or a spouse, or keep them from being harmed, implying that God should override the free will of others in order to achieve these ends. . . .

These inharmonious elements are the result of the coupling of biblical ideas about God with notions of the divine nature drawn from Greek thought. The inevitable encounter between biblical and classical thought in the early church generated many significant insights and helped Christianity evangelize pagan thought and culture. Along with the good, however, came a certain theological virus that infected the Christian doctrine of God, making it ill and creating the sorts of problems mentioned above. The virus so permeates Christian theology that some have come to take the illness for granted, attributing it to divine mystery, while others remain unaware of the infection altogether. [11]

We believe the doctrine of the Trinity represents a superimposition of Hellenistic philosophy on the Bible and that the simplest and clearest reading of the four Gospels sets forth a Godhead of three distinct beings and three Gods—not three coequal persons in one substance or essence. As Millard

Erickson has observed, “If God is infinite and we are finite, we will never be fully able to understand him. The fulness of what he is will exceed our powers to grasp. Thus, we cannot expect ever to resolve fully this great mystery.” [12] Erickson goes on to acknowledge that while the Trinity is at the heart of most Christian theology, “this does not mean that complete and absolutely accurate understanding of the Trinity is essential for one to be a true Christian. We are saved by our trust in Jesus Christ and in the Triune God, not by our subscription to correct theology.” [13] As Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has pointed out, “We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.” Further, “the Christian’s idea of the incarnation [Jehovah taking a physical body] would not have to change at all if there were no trinity.” [14] In other words, what difference would it make in our worship or our daily walk with God if the doctrine of the Trinity were to cease to exist?

Edmund Fortman, a scholar not of the Latter-day Saint faith, observed, “There is no formal doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament writers, if this means an explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons.” [15] Further, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* states: “The word [Trinity] itself does not occur in the Bible. It is generally acknowledged that the church father Tertullian (ca. AD 145–220) either coined the term or was the first to use it with reference to God. . . . The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries is not to be found in the New Testament.” [16]

Again, for the Latter-day Saints, the plainest reading of the scriptures sets forth a Godhead of three distinct persons with separate and severable functions. In the Council of Nicaea, the Greek word used to describe the oneness of the three members was *homoousios*, meaning “of one substance” or, as some have translated it, “of one essence.” The Latin word was *consubstantial*. Thus Christians since then have come to speak of the ontological (pertaining to being) oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the Nicene theologians meant to convey that the Father and Son are possessed of the “same substance” or “same essence” in the sense that they are both possessed of divinity, of an equal divinity, of a divine nature, then Latter-day Saints would agree. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ is God the Son. He was fully human and fully divine. While the following scriptural references might be squeezed and adapted to convey that God and Christ are the same being, the law of parsimony suggests to me that the New Testament is intended to be understood first by the man on the street and the woman in the pew, and then by the philosophers and theologians. In that light, consider scriptural passages that teach the following: [17]

1. The will of the Son is somehow different from or subject to the will of the Father (see Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38–40).
2. The Father has power, knowledge, glory, and dominion that the Son does not have and to which the Son is in subjection (see Matthew 24:36; Luke 18:18–19; 22:29; 23:34; John 5:19–27, 37; 8:42; 10:17–18; 11:41–42; 14:28; 15:9–10, 15; Acts 10:38, 40; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28; Philippians 2:5–9; Hebrews 1:1–4). Why did Jesus need counsel from the Father if they are the same being?
3. Jesus needed help and a sustaining power from the Father to perform his mission on earth (Matthew 14:23; 26:37–44; 27:46; Luke 6:12).

4. Christ's doctrine is not his but the Father's (John 7: 16–17). How could his doctrine not be his if he is the same being as the Father? Further, why does Paul consistently open his letters with a statement emphasizing the separateness of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ—particularly since all of these letters were written after the resurrection? (See Romans 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2–3; Galatians 1:1–4; Ephesians 1:2–3; Philippians 1:1–2; Colossians 1:2–3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1–2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; Hebrews 1:1–2, 5.)

5. The Holy Spirit is a being separate from the Father and Son. This is evidenced in Matthew 12:31–32 (here it seems that a certain type of sin against Christ is forgivable, but against the Holy Ghost is not); John 14:26 (see also Luke 11:13; John 16:7); Acts 10:38 (if they are the same being, how can God anoint himself with himself?).

In short, Latter-day Saints believe that the simplest reading of the New Testament text produces the simplest conclusion—that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are separate and distinct personages, that they are one in purpose, one in mind, one in glory, one in qualities and attributes, but separate in person and being. I am persuaded that the sheer preponderance of references in the Bible would lead an uninformed reader—one unaffected by either the conclusions of the creeds (Protestant and Catholic positions) or insights from latter-day revelation (the Latter-day Saint position)—to the understanding that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are separate beings. That is, one must look to the third- and fourth-century Christian church, not to the New Testament itself, to make a strong case for the Trinity.

Well then, are the Mormons monotheistic, believers in one God? We believe the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in that they constitute one Godhead. We believe they are one in that they possess all of the attributes of godliness in perfection. We believe they have the same mind, the same objective for humanity, the same purpose. We believe they are one in the sense that theirs is a covenantal relationship, a relationship established before the world was. Joseph Smith explained that this “everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages . . . are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the witness or Testator.” [18] Finally, they are one in the scriptural sense that the love and unity among the three distinct personages is of such a magnitude that they are occasionally referred to simply as “God.” Note the following from the Book of Mormon:

- “And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this [the gospel] is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine *of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end*” (2 Nephi 31:21; emphasis added).

- In the resurrection, “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” (Alma 11:44; emphasis added).

· “And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name; for behold, verily I say unto you, that *the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one*; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one” (3 Nephi 11:27; emphasis added; see also 36).

· “And he [Jesus] hath brought to pass the redemption of the world, whereby he that is found guiltless before him at the judgment day hath it given unto him to dwell in the presence of God in his kingdom, to sing ceaseless praises with the choirs above, unto the Father, and unto the Son, and unto the Holy Ghost, which are one God, in a state of happiness which hath no end” (Mormon 7:7; emphasis added).

“This unity is a type of completeness,” Elder James E. Talmage has written. “The mind of any one member of the Trinity is the mind of the others; seeing as each of them does with the eye of perfection, they see and understand alike. Under any given conditions each would act in the same way, guided by the same principles of unerring justice and equity. The one-ness of the Godhead, to which the scriptures so abundantly testify, implies no mystical union of substance, nor any unnatural and therefore impossible blending of personality. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as distinct in their persons and individualities as are any three personages in mortality. Yet their unity of purpose and operation is such as to make their edicts one, and their will the will of God.” [19]

The Master desires that his followers be one—that there be no schisms, no factions, no divisions in the body of Christ. Indeed, the unity that exists in the Godhead is but a pattern of what ought to exist in every congregation, in every family, and in every heart that professes Jesus as the Christ. It would be difficult to argue the ontological oneness of the Father and the Son from John 17, the Savior’s great High Priestly Intercessory Prayer. Jesus pleaded with the Father in behalf of those “which shall believe on me through their word; *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us*: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20–21; emphasis added). Surely Jesus was not pleading for the Father to somehow make of the Apostles one essence, one being, but rather that the Apostles and those who hearkened to their words might be united in heart and mind by the power of the Spirit. “How marvelous it is,” President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “that we can belong to a Church whose foundation lies in this great and significant doctrine, that God is our Father, that Jesus Christ is our Savior, and that the Holy Ghost is our companion. Think of it. Reflect on it. Pray about it. Live up to that great part of divinity that is within you.” [20]

Becoming like God

“It is becoming less necessary in the English-speaking world to apologize for the doctrine of deification.” This is the opening line of the preface in an important book by Norman Russell entitled *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, published in 2004 by Oxford University Press. Russell continues:

At one time it was regarded as highly esoteric, if it was admitted to be Christian at all. But since the appearance in 1957 of the English version of Lossky's brilliant book on the Eastern Church's mystical theology, steady progress in the translation of modern Greek theologians . . . have brought the importance of deification (or theosis) in Orthodox soteriology to the attention of a wide readership. In recent years a succession of works on deification in individual Fathers from Irenaeus to Maximus the Confessor has confirmed the patristic basis of the doctrine. Since the 1950s several studies have shown how deification, in a more muted way, is also at home in the Western tradition. [21]

Consider the implications of the following scriptural passages:

“Be ye therefore *perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48; emphasis added).

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the [children] of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and *if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:14–17; emphasis added).

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image [of Christ] from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:17–18).

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these *ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*” (2 Peter 1:2–4; emphasis added).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the [children] of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the [children] of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, *when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:1–2; emphasis added).

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen at Fuller Theological Seminary has described this doctrine as “the most profound question of human life, namely, what is the way back to God, to live with God, to live in God and share in the divine? Christian theology, from the beginning, has offered an answer to the world and its followers in the form of the doctrine of deification and/or union with God.” [22]

Note the following from early Christian leaders:

Irenaeus (ca. AD 130–200): “Do we cast blame on [God] because we were not made gods from the beginning, but were at first created merely as men, and then later as gods?” Also: “But man receives progression and increase towards God. For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always progress toward God.”

Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 150–215): “If one knows himself, he will know God and knowing God will become like God.”

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (ca. AD 296–373): “The word was made flesh in order that we might be enabled to be made gods. . . . Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life.”

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430): “But he himself that justifies also deifies, for by justifying he makes sons of God. ‘For he has given them power to become the sons of God’ (John 1:12). If then we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods.”

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. AD 335–94), a Catholic bishop and one of the Cappadocian Fathers, contributed to this theological discussion by taking a much more optimistic approach to the natural world. Nicholas of Cusa, a German cardinal whose Latin name was Cusanus (1401–64), built upon this foundation in the fifteenth century. His teachings might be distilled as follows: “The ultimate destiny of humanity is *theosis*, rather than merely *redemption*, because it is directed by an original divine intentionality instead of the retrieval of a fallen spiritual universe. Humankind is not just restored to an original condition but is exalted to a point of deification.” [23] Or as Nancy Hudson has pointed out, “Just as theology is defined by *relationship* with God, deification is defined by *union* with God.” [24]

Further, *theosis*, or deification, has remained a significant doctrine within Eastern Orthodoxy. Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos observed: “There is hardly a person alive who has not asked himself, ‘Why do we live upon this earth?’ In the last analysis there is only one answer. We live on earth in order to live in heaven, in order to be ‘divinized,’ in order to become one with God. This is the end and the fulfillment of our earthly destiny.” And then, after quoting Psalm 82:6 (“Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High”), he says, “Do you hear that voice? Do you understand the meaning of this calling? Do we accept that we should in fact be on a journey, a road which leads to Theosis? As human beings we each have this one, unique calling, to achieve Theosis. In other words, *we are each destined to become a god, to be like God Himself*, to be united with Him. . . . This is the purpose of your life; that you be a participant, a sharer in the nature of God and in the life of Christ, a communicant of divine grace and energy—*to become just like God, a true god.*” [25] In short, “man’s growth to full stature coincides for Paul with his Christification.” [26] This is no “external imitation or a simple ethical improvement but a real Christification.” [27]

One scholar has written: “In the Orthodox understanding Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but direct union with the living God, *the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory*—what the Greek Fathers termed ‘deification’ or ‘divinization. . . . In the words of St. Basil the Great, man is nothing less than a creature that has received the order to *become god.*” [28] Indeed, *theosis* “is like a continuous golden thread running throughout the centuries of Orthodoxy’s ancient theological

tapestry.” [29] We “become gods by adoption by grace.” [30] In other words, “Although Jesus Christ alone is by nature God, all people are called to become God ‘by participation.’” [31] As Vladimir Lossky profoundly concluded, “The redeeming work of Christ is an indispensable pre-condition of the deifying work of the Holy Spirit.” [32]

One grand manifestation of the fact that people are being divinized is the extent to which they begin to grow in love and more especially in godly love, or charity. “The natural human capacity for reason, itself a divine gift, is used to approach God as far as it is able. Eventually, however, the mind is stilled when it is struck by the ‘blazing light’ of God. Deification is a result of the engulfing fire of divine love, not of philosophical discipline. God, ‘because of his love for humanity, . . . has deigned to come down to us and . . . , like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinized.’ Only because of this is the human being able to grow into divine likeness.” [33] Stavropoulos has written:

The God who is totally unknowable in the sphere of human knowledge, He who is unapproachable in His essence, is revealed to the heart which loves Him. . . . Love is the door through which human beings pass in order to find themselves in the holy of holies. . . . The perfect work of God is the union of God with humanity, to that point, on the one hand that God becomes human, and human beings—who were created in the image of God—become gods. . . . Other than love, there is nothing more divine-like, or more mystical, which leads toward Theosis. Love is the *telos* of all good things, the first and unique good, since it binds God with human beings. It is inseparably bound with the other two theological virtues, faith and hope, which it completes, overshadows and supercedes so as to reach the Kingdom of God. [34]

This will no doubt have a familiar ring to those acquainted with Nephi’s words: “My God hath been my support; . . . he hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh” (2 Nephi 4:20–21). Further, it was Mormon who encouraged his listeners and readers to “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love [charity], which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48).

The idea of the ultimate deification of man has not been completely lost from modern Christian thinking. “The Son of God became a man,” C. S. Lewis pointed out, “to enable men to become sons of God.” [35] Further, Lewis explained: “[God] said (in the Bible) that we were ‘gods’ and He is going to make good his words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.” [36]

Lewis wrote elsewhere: “It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. . . . It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest



Christ invites all men everywhere to come unto him that they may be like him. (Del Parson, Jesus Knocking at the Door, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.)

and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . There are no ordinary people.” [37]

From *Miracles*: “Christ, reascending from his great dive, is bringing up Human Nature with Him. Where He goes, it goes too. It will be made ‘like him’ (Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:1–2).” Lewis went on to say that eventually those who are redeemed in Christ will have the power to perform miracles, just as Christ did. “Christ’s isolation,” he continued, “is not that of a prodigy but of a pioneer. He is the first of His kind; He will not be the last.” [38]

From *A Grief Observed*: “Sometimes, Lord, one is tempted to say that if you wanted us to behave like the lilies of the field you might have given us an organization more like theirs. But that, I suppose, is just your grand experiment. Or no; not an experiment, for you have no need to find things out. Rather your grand enterprise. To make an organism which is also a spirit; to make that terrible oxymoron, a ‘spiritual animal.’ To take a poor primate, a beast with nerve-endings all over it, a creature with a stomach that wants to be filled, a breeding animal that wants its mate, and say, ‘Now get on with it. Become a god.’” [39]

I honestly do not fully know what Lewis meant by these statements. The doctrine of the deification of man did not originate with Lewis nor with the Latter-day Saints; it is to be found throughout Christian history and within Orthodox Christian theology today. Whether Lewis would have agreed fully with the teachings of early Christian leaders on deification—or, for that matter, with what the Latter-day Saints teach—I cannot tell.

In writing of the concept of men and women gaining immortality in the resurrection, N. T. Wright has noted: “In particular, this new body will be immortal. That is, it will have passed *beyond* death not just in the *temporal* sense (that it happens to have gone through a particular moment and event) but also in the *ontological* sense of no longer being subject to sickness, injury, decay, and death itself.” [40] Ontology pertains to being. Wright appears to be suggesting that the resurrected body has indeed undergone a major ontological change, from corruptible to incorruptible, from natural to spiritual, from mortal to immortal. Could it be that the resurrected being, having been perfected in Christ (see Moroni 10:32; D&C 76:69), having become a joint heir with Christ (see Romans 8:17), having become a partaker of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4), having become like God and being in a position to see him as he is (see 1 John 3:1–2)—could it be that he or she has undergone the kind of spiritual metamorphosis that transforms a human into a divine being?

Restored Doctrine

It appears that the first revelation of the doctrine of deification to the restored Church came in the Vision of the Glories on February 16, 1832, at Father John Johnson’s home. Those who attain unto the highest heaven are described as people who “overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of

promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true. They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; . . . wherefore, as it is written [presumably in Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34], *they are gods, even the sons [and daughters] of God*” (D&C 76:53–56, 58; emphasis added).

I say that the Vision appears to be the first revelation of this doctrine, but I do so cautiously. We know that many parts of the revelation on eternal marriage, known to us as section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants, were made known to the Prophet during his inspired translation of the Bible in 1831 (see explanatory note to D&C 132). In that revelation we are told that those whose marriages and lives are sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, who receive the two major blessings of eternal life—the fulness of the Father and the eternal continuation of the family, eternal lives—are “gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (D&C 132:20; see vv. 19, 24).

Between the time of the Vision of the Glories in 1832 and the King Follett sermon on April 7, 1844, Joseph Smith and the early brethren took part in a training program known as the School of the Elders. In the winter of 1834–35 in Kirtland, Ohio, the Lectures on Faith were delivered. In lecture 5 we have not only a deep and profoundly significant discussion of the Godhead but also a specific reference to men and women becoming like God through being graced and endowed with the power and might and glory and mind of Deity. [41]

“Man is made an agent to himself before his God,” President Brigham Young declared; “he is organized for the express purpose, that he may become like his master. You recollect one of the Apostle’s sayings, that when we see Him, we shall be like him [1 John 3:1–2]; and again, we shall become gods, even the sons of God [see D&C 76:58]. . . . We are created, we are born for the express purpose of growing up from the low state of manhood, to become gods, like unto our Father in heaven.” [42]

God’s infinity does not preclude either his immediacy or his intimacy. “In the day that God created man,” the Prophet’s inspired translation of Genesis attests, “in the likeness of God made he him; in the image of his own body, male and female, created he them” (Moses 6:8–9). We believe that God is not simply a spirit influence, a force in the universe, or the Great First Cause; when we pray, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9), we mean what we say. We believe God is comprehensible, knowable, approachable, and, like his Beloved Son, touched with the feeling of our infirmities (see Hebrews 4:15). At the same time, our God is God. There is no knowledge of which he is ignorant and no power he does not possess. Scriptural passages that speak of him being the same yesterday, today, and forever clearly have reference to his divine attributes—his love, justice, constancy, and willingness to bless his children.

Eternal life consists in being *with* God; in addition, it entails being *like* God. God is our Heavenly Father, the Father of our spirits (see Numbers 16:22; 27:16; Hebrews 12:9). He is a glorified, exalted man, a Man of Holiness (see Moses 6:57), possessing a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s

(see D&C 130:22). We are created in his image and likeness. God is in every way a divine being. He possesses in perfection every godly attribute. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and, by the power of his Holy Spirit, omnipresent.

Joseph Smith taught in the King Follett sermon that God was once a man and lived on an earth. [43] Other than the Prophet's statement in that particular address, this is all we know. When and how and in what manner he became God is unknown. We do know that he is infinite and eternal. God has the power and the desire to extend his grace, including the gifts, fruit, and blessings of the Spirit, to his children. He does not hesitate to do so. The scriptures do not speak of a barrier beyond which men and women may progress spiritually. Followers of the Christ are not told by the writers and speakers in either ancient or modern scripture that they can progress and grow and mature and develop "thus far and no more." Eternal life, exaltation, salvation—all are equivalent terms. In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "To be saved, to gain exaltation, to inherit eternal life, all mean to be one with God, to live as he lives, to think as he thinks, to act as he acts, to possess the same glory." [44] To gain eternal life or exaltation is to gain godhood.

Brother Joseph explained that as men and women live in such a way as to cultivate the gifts of the Spirit, they eventually receive the assurance of eternal life—they make their calling and election sure. [45] That is, the Lord seals an exaltation upon them, seals them up unto eternal life. In receiving the promise of salvation, the individual has thereby passed the tests of mortality and qualified for exaltation and godhood hereafter. King Benjamin closed his magnificent sermon with this invitation: "Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, *that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life*" (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added).

While laboring tirelessly with the people of the Church, particularly those in transgression, Alma the Elder received the following commendation and promise from God: "Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi. . . . And blessed art thou because thou hast established a church among this people; and they shall be established, and they shall be my people. . . . And because thou hast inquired of me concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed. Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that *thou shalt have eternal life*" (Mosiah 26:15, 17, 19–20; emphasis added.) In our dispensation, the Lord made a like promise to the latter-day seer: "I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily *I seal upon you your exaltation*, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father" (D&C 132:49; emphasis added).

Those who grow up in the Lord (see Helaman 3:21) and receive "a fulness of the Holy Ghost" (D&C 109:15) prepare themselves for association with holy beings. The role of the Holy Spirit is to lead men and women to the point of illumination and inspiration at which they are ready to be ushered into the presence of the Father and the Son. That is, the Spirit "shall bring all things to remembrance, whatsoever things I [the Lord] have said unto you; he shall teach you until ye come to me and my Father." [46] Joseph thus taught the brethren in the School of the Prophets that "after any portion of the human family are made acquainted with the important fact that there is a God, who has created

and does uphold all things, the extent of their knowledge respecting his character and glory will depend upon their diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him, until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face.” [47]

The scriptures speak of those who qualify for exaltation and godhood as being the Church of the Firstborn (see D&C 76:54, 67, 102). The Church of the Firstborn is the “inner circle” of faithful Saints who have proven true and faithful to their covenants. As baptism is the gate to membership in the Church of Jesus Christ on earth, so celestial marriage opens the door to membership in the heavenly church. [48] The Church of the Firstborn is the Church beyond the veil, the organized body of Saints who qualify for exaltation. It is made up of those who qualify for the blessings of the Firstborn. Jesus is the Firstborn of the Father and, as such, is entitled to the birthright. As an act of consummate mercy and grace, our blessed Savior makes it possible for us to inherit, receive, and possess the same blessings he receives, as though we were the Firstborn. We become heirs of God, joint heirs, or coinheritors with Christ to all the Father has, including eternal life. “Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God” (D&C 76:58). President Young therefore stated that “the ordinances of the house of God are expressly for the Church of the Firstborn.” [49]

These blessings do not come to the sign seeker, the curious, or the man or woman possessed of excessive zeal. Those who have come unto Christ by covenants and saving ordinances seek for the certain assurance of salvation before the end of their mortal lives. But should one not formally receive the glorious promise in this life, the scriptures attest that faithfully enduring to the end eventuates in eternal life, whether that assurance be received here or hereafter (see 2 Nephi 31:20; D&C 14:7; 50:5; 53:7). Truly, “if we die in the faith, that is the same thing as saying that our calling and election has been made sure and that we will go on to eternal reward hereafter.” [50]

The gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), the power to renew and revitalize men and women. God is our Father and wants all of his children to become as he is. Thus the plan of salvation is a developmental process whereby we learn to exercise faith in God and Christ unto life and salvation. “By a union of . . . three elements,” Elder B. H. Roberts summarized, “that is, a belief in the existence of God, a correct conception of his character, and a knowledge that the course of life pursued is approved of him—will render faith perfect, will constitute it a principle of power, the incentive to all action . . . leading from one degree of knowledge or excellence to another, from righteousness to righteousness, until the heavens will be opened to them and they will hold communion with the Church of the First Born, with Jesus Christ, and with God the Father, and thus will they make their calling and election sure—through faith ripening into knowledge.” [51]

Traditional Christian Responses

Many Christians find the Latter-day Saint concept of deification to be problematic at best and perverse at worst. Interestingly, they do not seem to be too put off by the Eastern Orthodox teachings on the matter. When it comes to the Latter-day Saints, however, it is a different story. Why? Simply because of our belief that God is not the “Wholly Other” or the distant Deity but rather our literal Father in Heaven. Our belief that finite human beings may relate to and come to be like an infinite and eternal being borders on blasphemy, they contend, for it shortens the otherwise infinite chasm

between Creator and creation. Yes, I think we would have to agree that one of Joseph Smith's most significant efforts was to make the Father of the universe more accessible to his family members within that universe, to retrieve the unreachable, unknowable, timeless, and impassible Deity that had been pushed to the grand beyond by traditional Christians. As Richard J. Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary observed:

While Joseph Smith and Mary Baker Eddy espoused very different, indeed opposing, metaphysical systems, with Joseph arguing for a thorough-going physicalism and the founder of Christian Science insisting on a thorough-going mentalism—they each were motivated by a desire to reduce the distance between God and human beings. . . .

These two reduce-the-distance theologies emerged in an environment shaped significantly by the high Calvinism of New England Puritanism. I think it can be plausibly—and rightly, from an orthodox perspective—argued that New England theology, which stressed the legitimate *metaphysical* distance between God and his human creatures, nonetheless at the same time fostered an unhealthy *spiritual* distance between the Calvinist deity and his human subjects. [52]

While we believe that becoming like God is entailed in eternal life (see D&C 132:19–20), we do not believe we will ever unseat or oust God the Eternal Father or his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ; those holy beings are and forever will be the Gods we worship. Even though we believe in the ultimate deification of man, I am unaware of any authoritative statement in Latter-day Saint literature that suggests that men and women will ever worship any being other than the ones within the Godhead. Elder Parley P. Pratt wrote one of the first theological treatises within Mormonism, *Key to the Science of Theology*. In describing those who are glorified and attain eternal life, Elder Pratt stated: “The difference between Jesus Christ and another immortal and celestial man is this—the man is subordinate to Jesus Christ, does nothing in and of himself, but does all things in the name of Christ, and by his authority, being of the same mind, and ascribing all the glory to him and his Father.” [53] We believe in “one God” in the sense that we love and serve one Godhead, one divine presidency, each of whom possesses all of the attributes of Godhood (see Alma 11:44; D&C 20:28).

A common expression in Latter-day Saint circles is that God and man are “of the same species.” What does this mean? To be sure, the chasm between a fallen, mortal being and an immortal, resurrected, and glorified being is immense (see D&C 20:17; 109:77). But we are of the same species in the sense that God has a form, and were he to appear, he could be seen. We are of the same species in that he is a real person, a man, an exalted man, not merely a sovereign and governing force or a congeries of laws.

Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjödahl offered the following commentary on Doctrine and Covenants 132:20, “Then shall they be gods”:

What a wonderful revelation this is when compared with the narrow ideas held in the world! Children of kings are princes and princesses, associating on terms of equality with their royal parents, and having a good chance of becoming kings and queens themselves. But when we say that the privilege of God's children is to associate with Him in the eternal mansions, and that they may become gods, then the world does not understand us, and many deem us guilty of blasphemy. *They seem to think that they honor God by supposing that His children are infinitely inferior to Him. What kind of father is He, then, that He should feel it an honor to be the progenitor of an inferior offspring?* Is there a king in earth that would feel honored by having degenerates and beggars for children? Do not fathers and mothers rejoice in the progress of their children? Is it not their ambition to educate and train their loved ones, until these shall reach the highest possible degree of intelligence and efficiency? Surely, we can do no greater honor to God, our Father, than to admit the divine possibilities which He has planted in His offspring, and which will be developed under His tuition in this life and hereafter, until His children are perfect as He is perfect. [54]

Men and women cannot work themselves into glory or godhood, cannot gain eternal life through human effort alone. One does not become more and more Christlike through sheer grit and willpower. Central to any and all spiritual progress is the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and it is only by and through his righteousness that we may be declared righteous. It is only by the power of his precious blood that we may be cleansed and sanctified from the taint and tyranny of sin. And it is only by and through the power of his everlasting life that we receive life—energy, strength, vitality, renewal, enabling power—to accomplish what we could never, worlds without end, accomplish on our own.

Just how strange, then, is the Latter-day Saint doctrine of deification? How unscriptural is it? It's fascinating to read two statements made by the great reformer, Martin Luther. The first, written in his Christmas sermon of 1514, affirms: "Just as the word of God becomes flesh [Jesus becomes man], so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become word [that man become like Christ]. For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God becomes man so that man may become God. Thus power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful." [55] In 1519 Luther wrote: "For it is true that a man helped by grace is more than a man; indeed, the grace of God gives him the form of God and deifies him, so that even the Scriptures call him 'God' and 'God's son.'" [56]

Vladimir Lossky taught, "Redemption has our salvation from sin as an immediate aim, but that salvation will be, in its ultimate realization in the age to come, our union with God, the *deification* of the created beings whom Christ ransomed." [57] Similarly, Nicolas Kavalas pointed out "how wonderful will that sight be: to see a countless multitude of luminaries upon the clouds, to be led up as chosen people to a festive celebration beyond any comparison, to be a *company of gods surrounding God*, of the beautiful surrounding Him who is perfect Beauty, or servants surrounding the Master." That is, "the saints in the age to come will be 'gods surrounding God, fellow-heirs with Him of the same inheritance, co-rulers with Him of the same Kingdom.'" [58]

In the fifteenth century, Cusanus taught: “Every creature is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god, so that it exists in the way in which this could best be. It is as if the Creator had spoken: ‘Let it be made,’ and because God, who is eternity itself, could not be made, that was made which could be made, which would be as much like God as possible. The inference, therefore, is that every created thing as such is perfect, even if by comparison to others it seems less perfect.” [59] In the twentieth century, Panayiotis Nellas has written that the precise meaning of being created in the image of God is “to transcend the limited boundaries of creation and *to become infinite*. This relates to all the elements of his being from the most peripheral to the very core of his existence.” [60]

To summarize, Latter-day Saints teach that through the cleansing and transforming power of the blood of Jesus Christ, and through the sanctifying and divinizing power of the Holy Spirit, men and women may over time mature spiritually, a process that is referred to variously as participation, transformation, union, intermingling, partaking, elevation, kingship, interpenetration, joint-heirship, son- and daughterhood, adoption, re-creation, and realization. [61] And so I ask again: Just how odd, how unusual, how unorthodox, how unfathomable, how un-Christian are the words of Joseph Smith and the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints? How strange is it to believe that eternal life consists of knowing “the only wise and true God”? Joseph Smith said that to know God we must “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.” [62]

Conclusion

We worship an infinite and eternal God. Indeed, as Joseph Smith taught the School of the Elders, if we did not believe that the Almighty possesses all of the divine attributes in perfection, we could not exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. [63] Further, we gladly acknowledge that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are infinitely more one than they are separate, but boldly proclaim that they are separate and distinct beings. Finally, whether the Latter-day Saint doctrines of exaltation and deification are the same as those delivered by the Church Fathers, by Eastern Orthodox thinkers of the past and present, or by modern Christians is absolutely immaterial. Joseph Smith did not organize The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by drawing upon ideas that consisted of “doctrinal debris left over from another age.” [64] Nor did the Mormon leader become a prophetic pack rat and collect practices and beliefs of his day in order to gain legitimacy. Nor do we in the twenty-first century: we do not seek nor require a theological imprimatur from Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant Christians. Rather, I wish not to suggest that others ought to accept Mormonism because bright and inspired minds of other faiths have used language or ideas similar to our own, but instead to point out what should be more obvious than it is to many—that the doctrine of deification, divinization, theosis has been around for a long, long time and that it should require more than a tiny bit of cognitive and spiritual dissonance to dismiss or ignore it outright.

“The whole design of the gospel,” President Gordon B. Hinckley declared, “is to lead us onward and upward to greater achievement, even, eventually, to godhood. This great possibility was enunciated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the King Follett sermon and emphasized by President Lorenzo Snow. . . . Our enemies have criticized us for believing in this. Our reply is that this lofty concept in no way diminishes God the Eternal Father. He is the Almighty. He is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He is the greatest of all and will always be so. But just as any earthly father wishes for his sons and daughters every success in life, so I believe our Father in Heaven wishes for his children that they might approach him in stature and stand beside him resplendent in godly strength and wisdom.” [65]

We might well ask, Does God want his children to be like him? Or is this something that is repulsive to him? Is it something that is inappropriate? Does God possess the power to re-create men and women in his own image? What parts of the divine nature or being like him are out of bounds or off base, and what scriptural injunctions preclude the children of God from aspiring to be like him in every way possible?

Joseph Smith taught in lecture 5 of the *Lectures on Faith* that all those who keep God’s commandments “shall grow up from grace to grace, and become heirs of the heavenly kingdom, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ; possessing the same mind, being transformed into the same image or likeness.” [66] N. T. Wright writes of “two golden rules at the heart of spirituality.” First of all, “you become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship.” The second golden rule is as follows: “Because you were made in God’s image, worship makes you more truly human. When you gaze in love and gratitude at the God in whose image you were made, you do indeed grow. You discover more of what it means to be fully alive.” [67]

We glory in the reality that through the Savior’s blood, we “have a forgiveness of sins, and also a sure reward laid up for [us] in heaven, even that of partaking of the fulness of the Father and the Son through the Spirit. As the Son partakes of the fulness of the Father through the Spirit, so the saints are, by the same Spirit, to be partakers of the same fulness, to enjoy the same glory; for as the Father and the Son are one, so, in like manner, the saints are to be one in them. Through the love of the Father, the mediation of Jesus Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they are to be heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.” [68]

Notes

[1] Joseph Smith, comp. *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 10.

[2] *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 4:78–79.

[3] See David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990): 105–16; “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996): 7–94.

- [4] James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003), xi–xii, 5–6, 61, 195; see also 81, 104–6, 134–35.
- [5] Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 33–34.
- [6] *History of the Church*, 6:312.
- [7] Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” *1977 BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: BYU Publications, 1978), 138.
- [8] Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 103; cited in Joseph F. McConkie, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 108–9; emphasis added.
- [9] Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 17.
- [10] Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 130; see also Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 65–111.
- [11] Clark H. Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 8–9.
- [12] Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 44.
- [13] Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, 46.
- [14] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 10–11.
- [15] Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 32.
- [16] Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), “Trinity.”
- [17] I am indebted to my colleague Thomas Sherry from the Church Educational System for pointing out these verses and concepts.
- [18] Extracts from the Journal of Elder William Clayton, 10–11, L. John Nuttall Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
- [19] James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), 41.
- [20] Gordon B. Hinckley, member meeting, Madrid, May 29, 2004; cited in *Church News*, December 3, 2005, 2.
- [21] Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), vii.
- [22] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 1.

- [23] Nancy J. Hudson, voicing the sentiments of Nicholas of Cusa, in *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 15; emphasis in original; see also Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 103.
- [24] Hudson, *Becoming God*, 29; emphasis in original.
- [25] Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature* (Minneapolis: Life and Light Publishing, 1976), 11, 17–18; emphasis added.
- [26] Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 34.
- [27] Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 39.
- [28] Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, in Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 17; emphasis added.
- [29] Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 120.
- [30] Peter of Damascus, commenting on “John the Theologian,” cited by Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 126.
- [31] Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 128.
- [32] Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 109.
- [33] Hudson, quoting Cusanus in *Becoming God*, 41.
- [34] Stavropoulos, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 83–84.
- [35] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 155.
- [36] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.
- [37] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 39.
- [38] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 178.
- [39] C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 84–85.
- [40] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 160; emphasis in original.
- [41] Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 61.
- [42] Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards & Sons, 1851–86), 3:93.
- [43] *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844.
- [44] See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 129–30.
- [45] *History of the Church*, 3:380.
- [46] *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 14–15; spelling and punctuation corrected.

[47] Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 24.

[48] See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:42; *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 272; *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 208; McConkie, *Promised Messiah*, 47; Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 337.

[49] Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:154.

[50] Bruce R. McConkie, address delivered at the funeral of Elder S. Dilworth Young, July 13, 1981, typescript, 5.

[51] B. H. Roberts, *The Gospel and Man's Relationship to Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 111.

[52] Richard J. Mouw, "The Possibility of Joseph Smith: Some Evangelical Probing," in *Joseph Smith: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 195.

[53] Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 21–22.

[54] Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjödahl, *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 826–27; emphasis added.

[55] Martin Luther, in Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 47.

[56] Luther, in Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 47.

[57] Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 103; emphasis added.

[58] Nicolas Kavalas, *The Life in Christ*, in Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 158–59; emphasis added.

[59] Cusanus, in Hudson, *Becoming God*, 70.

[60] Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 28; emphasis added.

[61] See, for example, Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 131.

[62] *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844.

[63] Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 51–54.

[64] Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 46.

[65] Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1994, 64.

[66] Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 59–60.

[67] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 148.

[68] Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 61.