Joseph Smith's Eternalism. Foundations for a System of Psychotherapy

Robert L. Millet
Charles H. Madsen Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp

Recommended Citation

This Article or Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
JOSEPH SMITH’S ETERNALISM.
FOUNDATIONS FOR A SYSTEM OF PSYCHOTHERAPY
Robert L. Millet, Ph.D.*
Charles H. Madsen, Jr., Ph.D.**

At the October, 1980 AMCAP convention the authors raised some questions about the Gospel and psychotherapy (see the April, 1981 issue of the Journal, pages 11-14). In this paper, which is based on a presentation made at the October, 1981 convention, they offer some possible answers.

Joseph Smith did not attempt to provide a comprehensive description of the human personality (to our knowledge), nor did he develop what would be called today a system of psychotherapy. There are, however, definite principles, corollaries of principles, and methods of intervention which may be derived from the doctrines of the Restoration, and which deserve at least minimal attention of serious Latter-day Saint students of human behavior. Joseph’s philosophy of life, based upon his intimate experience with the Infinite, has been called Eternalism. This term comprehends eternal universe, eternal intelligence, eternal gospel, eternal truths, eternal progression, and eternal relationships.¹ We propose that the teachings of the Mormon Prophet (and those who later followed in his footsteps and thus built upon what he had established) may be conceptualized as an inspired beginning, a foundation for the helping professions.

A great vision of the future must have filled the mind of Joseph Smith as he declared with boldness: “I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.”² The Kingdom of God in the latter days was to be far more than a church, but an entire way of life, in which every human need (social, economic, political, and spiritual) was to be met through a divine organization built upon correct principles. The “restitution of all things,” begun in the spring of 1820, would eventuate in an age wherein all things would be gathered together in Christ. (Epheians 1:10.) It was not intended that the people of God simply pull Christ into the secular disciplines, perhaps as an afterthought. Rather, Joseph Smith seemed to anticipate a people of sufficient mental and spiritual maturity to focus their minds upon foundational eternal verities, which verities would dictate the philosophical base and procedure for acquiring additional truth.

In the Prophet’s day, the theology of the Latter-day Saints undergirded social institutions (eternal marriage, for example), economic programs (consecration and stewardship), and political organizations (the theocracy or government of God). So it has been since the early nineteenth century. Elder Hartman Rector, Jr. has instructed: “The power or vitality is not in the programs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is in the theology. You cannot have the fruits of Mormonism without having the roots of Mormonism.”³ In the mind of Joseph Smith, any attempt on the part of a Latter-day Saint to come to a deeper understanding of God, man, or the universe without the magnifying and clarifying lenses of the doctrines of the Restoration would lead to a deficient world view at best. Parley P. Pratt wrote that theology “is the science of all other sciences and useful arts, being in fact the very fountain from which they emanate....All that is useful, great and good; all that is calculated to sustain, comfort, instruct, edify, purify, refine, or exalt intelligences; originated by this science (theology), and this science alone, all other sciences being but branches growing out of this—the root.”* ( Italics added.)

Eternalism points us toward the reality that man is an infinite being. He cannot be understood wholly in terms of unconscious motivation or reinforcement history or conditions of worth. Because much of his personality predates mortality, man brings with him pre-mortal dispositions which, though difficult to assess, ought to at least receive consideration. Attempts to change human beings might take into account the vital information that some of what we are is due to the fact that we once were. Could it be that permanent change in one’s nature is often prevented from taking place because of such an oversight? In the business of helping, in counseling and psychotherapy, we are working upon human souls. President John Taylor taught: “We are not connected with a something that will exist only for a few years, some of the peculiar ideas and dogmas of men, some nice theory of their forming. The principles that we believe in reach back into eternity. They originated with the Gods in the eternal worlds, and they reach forward to the eternities that are to come. We feel that we are operating with God in connection with those who were, with those who are, and with those who are to come.”³

2. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 366, cited hereafter as Teachings, followed by the appropriate page(s).
3. Conference Report, April 1975, p. 84.

*Brother Millet is Director, LDS Institute of religion at Florida State University.
**Brother Madsen is Professor of Psychology at Florida State University.
FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES

In this section we will consider five infinities: God, Man, Truth, Free Agency, and Love. After a brief discussion of the principle under consideration, the therapeutic orientation and application of the principle will follow.

I. GOD (Divine Design and Absolute Truth). Mormons affirm that God is, that He is an exalted man, a being who is infinite and eternal, in whose image man is created. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent: He has all power, all knowledge, and, by the power of His Holy Spirit, is in and through all things. Joseph Smith taught that with regard to the Lord, “the past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal ‘now.’” He is who He is because of His recognition of the obedience to self-existing and co-eternal laws. “He has passed the ordeals we are now passing through: He has received an experience, has suffered and enjoyed, and knows all that we know regarding the toils, sufferings, life and death of this mortality, for he has passed through the whole of it, and has received his crown and exaltation.” Further, “it must be that God knows something about temporal things, and has had a body and has been on an earth. Were it not so, He would not know how to judge men righteously, according to the temptations and sin they have had to content with.”

God is interested and personally involved in His creations. He has instituted and introduced laws, absolute truths, in order that man might order his life properly and thus progress ultimately to become even as God is. Justice and mercy and free agency and obedience are as timeless as the Gospel of God, and are actually independent of perception or acceptance of them. Man comes to discover, not create, absolute truths. Some laws are temporary; some are eventually superseded; some are situational. Absolute and eternal truths, however, stand firm and irrevocable. Killing may be commanded. Plural marriage may be revealed and comes to discover, not create, absolute truths.

Some are situational. Absolute and eternal truths, however, stand firm and irrevocable. Killing may be commanded. Plural marriage may be revealed and comes to discover, not create, absolute truths. Lawrence W. Widtsoe, in Theological Anthropology, distinguished between “God’s truth,” which is timeless and immutable, and “human truth,” which is subject to change and evolution. However, there are also truths that are timeless and unchangeable, such as the principles of justice, mercy, and obedience. This distinction is important in understanding the nature of law and morality.

It is not uncommon to encounter persons seeking counseling or psychotherapy (members and non-members) who have no knowledge of God and His ways or whose knowledge is at a very rudimentary level. Unfortunately, many in our world have a notion of the Ultimate, it becomes extremely difficult to talk seriously about overall standards or accountability or even values in life. Except for the practical problems associated with misconduct, why should one abstain from extra-marital relationships? Why should a couple seek to hold a marriage together? Why should a couple have children, teach them proper conduct, or help to shape their destinies? An infantile knowledge leads to a distorted view of what was, is, and is to be. Matters of right and wrong cannot be established on the basis of behaviors that are the most expedient or even utilitarian for the time being, but must ultimately be established according to eternal and self-existing laws.

Man is perhaps best understood only in relation to the Ground of all being—God Himself. It would seem that therapy which ignores or bypasses absolute truths or lasting values is at best “hacking away at the leaves,” when so very much could be done by getting at the roots of the problems; even if the client does not choose to recognize the place of God or His laws in his life, the Latter-day Saint therapist knows better: he knows that such ultimate realities hold out the only lasting hope of escape from an existential vacuum or an anomic world.

Counselors may actually do much with regard to the building of faith in the Lord and faith in one’s potential. Given, in so doing we may find ourselves engaged in a form of teaching (and we sincerely believe that therapy is a sub-case of teaching) and in certain specific techniques which have been shunned, benignly neglected, or ignored heretofore. A discussion of God (particularly with non-members of the Church) has not been considered to be a part of our professional activity.

Allen Bergin suggested in 1979 that “a correct understanding of both identity and relationships is fundamental to any theory of personality and psychotherapy, and that understanding has to begin with our knowledge of God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost.” We worship the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Holy Ghost. The separate but related roles of the members of the Godhead, as they pertain to man, were taught by Joseph Smith:

Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and related to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham’s record, are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the witness or Testator.

Therapeutic Orientation. It is not uncommon to encounter persons seeking counseling or psychotherapy (members and non-members) who have no knowledge of God and His ways or whose knowledge is at a very rudimentary level. Unfortunately, many in our world have a notion of the Ultimate, it becomes extremely difficult to talk seriously about overall standards or accountability or even values in life. Except for the practical problems associated with misconduct, why should one abstain from extra-marital relationships? Why should a couple seek to hold a marriage together? Why should a couple have children, teach them proper conduct, or help to shape their destinies? An infantile knowledge leads to a distorted view of what was, is, and is to be. Matters of right and wrong cannot be established on the basis of behaviors that are the most expedient or even utilitarian for the time being, but must ultimately be established according to eternal and self-existing laws.

Man is perhaps best understood only in relation to the Ground of all being—God Himself. It would seem that therapy which ignores or bypasses absolute truths or lasting values is at best “hacking away at the leaves,” when so very much could be done by getting at the roots of the problems; even if the client does not choose to recognize the place of God or His laws in his life, the Latter-day Saint therapist knows better: he knows that such ultimate realities hold out the only lasting hope of escape from an existential vacuum or an anomic world.

Counselors may actually do much with regard to the building of faith in the Lord and faith in one’s potential. Given, in so doing we may find ourselves engaged in a form of teaching (and we sincerely believe that therapy is a sub-case of teaching) and in certain specific techniques which have been shunned, benignly neglected, or ignored heretofore. A discussion of God (particularly with non-members of the Church) has not been considered to be a part of our professional activity.

7. See John A. Widtsoe, A Rational Theology, P. 25.
We have found, however, that such practices may be terribly helpful in working with individuals who are struggling to “find themselves,” or who seek for greater “value clarification.” Faith may be taught by helping clients to remove fears and doubts about themselves, which doubts are almost always related to their feelings toward God. Since Joseph Smith instructed us that in order to have faith in God it is necessary to have “an actual knowledge that the course of life which [the person] is pursuing is according to [the Lord’s] will,” appropriate sessions dealing with the areas of life-planning, commitment to one’s plans, and self-confidence will do much to build faith in God and in oneself. (The matter of self-love will be discussed under the next principle.) Clients both within and without the Church may be counseled to seek to establish or re-establish relationships with the Divine through regular prayer, fasting, church attendance, and scripture reading. We have dealt with over 115 individuals where it became apparent that therapy could not successfully proceed without teaching such fundamental concepts as faith, truth, and obedience.

Application. Case Example: 32-year old male non-member (Presbyterian), with occasional church attendance; some financial contributions to the church; married for 10 years, but questioning his sexual orientation, and his life with his wife; expressed a belief in God and love for the Bible, though he felt that God was not answering his prayers.

Intervention. Client was assigned to (1) abstract from the Bible all references to the intimate relationship (including marriage and unnatural sexual acts); (2) read the scriptures 30 minutes each morning; (3) read daily from a Presbyterian book on gaining faith; (4) pay tithing as evidence of faith, and as a means of receiving answers to prayer (Note: it is interesting that in process of time this man’s minister approached him over the fact that he was paying far too much into the funds of the church!); (5) rate his feelings of closeness to what he felt to be the Spirit of the Lord on a -5 to +5 scale; (6) fast occasionally before coming in for the regular session; (7) attend his church every Sunday; (8) have daily individual prayer and pray with his wife about specific marital difficulties (following in-session discussions of how to pray and receive answers).

Application. Case Example: 12-year old female, non-member (Lutheran); inability to form lasting relationships with peers; father was killed when she was five years old, and she had blamed herself and God for the unexpected death; she had been obsessed for seven years about her part in the death and her anger toward God.

Intervention. (1) Use of systematic relaxation with interspersed comments about the love of the Lord for her and her father; comments about the possibility of a reunion with her father in the life to come; statements of love toward self, and an assurance that she was not responsible for the death of her father; comments as to the importance of her relationship with her mother; (2) Client enrolled in a catechism class for a deeper understanding of her own religious faith; (3) Assigned to attend church with her mother; (4) Direct teaching about repentance (for attitudes toward God), death, and man’s free agency.

II. MAN (Eternal Intelligence). Man is of the same race as the Gods. He is of the same species. Joseph the Prophet shocked the religious world (within and without the Church, both then and now) when he declared:

We say that God Himself is a self-existent being....Who told you that man did not exist in a like manner upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles.... The mind or intelligence which man possesses is co-equal (co-eternal) with God himself.... The intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end.... Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle.15

A modern revelation states that “intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” (D&C 93:29.) The mind or intelligence or ego16 of man is thus uncreated. “From the beginning [man] has possessed distinct individuality among the hosts of intelligent beings.... From the beginning, the ego of man has been a conscious being, saying to itself, ‘This is I; that is not I. My life is apart from the life of all the rest of the universe.’ This primeval personality possessed from ‘the beginning’ [is] the distinguishing characteristic of every intelligent, conscious, thinking being—an independent and individual will. No one attribute so clearly distinguishes man as does the intelligent will or the will to act intelligently.”17 (Italics added.) A further insight into man’s cognitive powers in that pristine existence is given by President Brigham Young: “The origin of thought was planted in our organization at the beginning of our being. This is not telling you how it came there, or who put it there. Thought originated with our individual being, which is organized to be as independent as any being in eternity.... The origin of thought and reflection is in ourselves. We think, because we are, and are made susceptible of external influences and to feel our relationship to external objects.”18 (Italics added.)

This central, primal intelligence or ego of man was united with other powers of life and organized through a literal birth process. The spirit or organized intelligence (Abraham 3:22-23) became literally the offspring of the Man of Holiness and His exalted companion. Thus the spirit of man received via conception the qualities and attributes of God, which qualities lie dormant until, over time, circumstances and experiences allow their possible emergence and realization in the mature human personality. President Lorenzo Snow said:

We believe that we are the offspring of our Father in Heaven, and that we possess in our spiritual organizations the same capabilities, powers and faculties that our Father possesses, although in an infantile state, requiring to pass through a

16. It is interesting to note that the term ego had reference to the mind or intelligence of man among the Brethren earlier in this century, and that it seemed to have no reference whatsoever to Psychodynamic dimensions of the personality.
Man’s relationship to the Almighty is therefore a personal, familial one. "As man now is, our God once was; As now God is, so man may be.--Which both unfold man’s destiny." 

Therapeutic Orientation. Many problems called by a variety of diagnostic labels are related to a misunderstanding of one’s place in the eternal universe. Such a misunderstanding may be, in fact, at the heart of all relationship maladies. The tragedy in this regard is that no one system of psychotherapy extant gives to man a correct and complete interpretation of his place in life. Psychodynamic interpretations picture man as a passive agent of unconscious forces beyond his immediate control, a being torn between personal and societal demands. Behavioristic views of man reveal a situation in which contingencies of reinforcement shape whatever behaviors are desired by the experiment. Humanistic theories of personality place man and his needs at the center of existence, but subtly upstage all else that ought to be considered in the matter of human functioning and achievement, particularly divine forces. Nihilistic notions so prevalent in a value-free and violence-filled world point man toward the awful possibilities of Nothingness or Nonbeing, when in reality such pitiful perceptions are ludicrous understandings over a world and a society which strayed from its original moorings. Hamlet’s question of “to be or not to be” is not really the question after all. Man is. 

Truman Madsen has suggested that the real question is whether man is becoming what he is intended to become. Any description of the human personality which ignores or avoids the pre-mortal or post-mortal aspects of the infinite ego will not give a thorough perspective to man as to his place, his responsibility, or his possibilities. Perspective is like vision: without it a person may perish from perverted priorities. Even non-members may be taught that they are greater than the sum of what they do or what they have. All persons can be worked with so as to come to “acknowledge, in those moments of wonderment about our mattering, that if we were to die today, we would be genuinely and deeply missed. Perhaps parliaments would not praise us, but no human circle is so small that it does not touch another circle and another and another.” The matter of developing self-love will be discussed in more detail in the section on relationships.

Application. Case Example: 45-year old LDS male; dentist; former bishop and high councilor; client questioned his competence in numerous areas; had a physical impairment, and did not like his own body; had substantial musical talents; relationship problems with wife and children; severe depression, lowest self-concept therapists had ever encountered.

Intervention. (1) Client assigned to study scriptures and write essays on his relationship with God; (2) Direct teaching of specific methods of prayer; (3) Client assigned to list positive self-attributes on daily basis; these were to be carried with him on a 3 x 5 card; (4) Therapist taught interception of negative thoughts promptly; (5) Taught rational interception of fear of rejection and ridicule; (6) Client assigned to rate himself at least 20 times per day on an emotional meter (−5 to +5) and keep a record of his ratings; (7) Direct teaching from the scriptures that his envying and coveting of other persons’ bodies represented idol worship; (8) Use of systematic relaxation with suggestions about God, Christ, and celestial relationships (including use of images within the temple); (9) In-session prayer and periodic Priesthood blessings; (10) Bi-monthly involvement with (and reports to) ecclesiastical leaders, both by client and therapist; (11) Client assigned to compose songs which emphasized his personal worth as a son of God; (12) Decrease in irrational guilt about family and Church assignments through planning and follow-up; (13) Involvement of entire family (six children at home—youngest 11 years, oldest 24 years) in group treatment and analysis of family interactional patterns; (14) Client assigned to rate himself weekly with respect to his level of improvement in self-concept, decrease in idol worship, decrease in irrational thoughts, and relationship improvement with wife and children.

III. TRUTH (Revelation as an Epistemological Extension). In the mind of Joseph Smith, Truth was not an abstraction, something that existed independently of intelligent beings. “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” (D&C 93:24. Italics added.) Note that truth is not simply the stuff, the “things” of the universe, but a knowledge of “things as they really are,” and “things as they really will be.” (Jacob 4:13.)

There were many lessons learned and acquaintances formed in the pre-mortal state which have since been blocked from conscious awareness or memory by a divinely placed veil of forgetfulness. As man learns to attend more to things as they really are, matters from a forgotten past are occasionally retrieved from that portion of the personality. “All these salient truths,” explained President Joseph F. Smith, “which come home so forcibly to the head and heart seem but the awakening of the memories of the spirit. Can we know anything here that we did not know before we came?...By the power of the Spirit...we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul.”

There were some things, however, which [pre-mortal spirits] could not learn while they remained in their first estate:

23. Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine, pp. 13, 14; Cf. also p. 311.
they could not learn the feelings and sensations of spirits
embodied in tabernacles of flesh and bones. An idea of
these feelings and sensations could not be imparted to
them by teaching, nor by any other means whatsoever.
No power of language or signs could give them the most
distant idea of them. An idea of those feelings and
sensations can only be obtained by actual experience.”

Most truth that is to be had in this life is gained
through the senses or through reflection and reason.
Man learns through daily experience to what degree he
may trust his sense modalities, as well as the limits of his
own rational powers. The Prophet spoke of a hierarchy
of knowledge or truths, however, and stressed that it is
“impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C
131:6), particularly of that knowledge which leads unto
life and salvation. Much that is contained in scripture
teaches man of himself, of God, and how to bridge the
spiritual gap between mortal and immortal, between
imperfect and perfect.

Some spiritual realities are not to be acquired through
study or the hearing of the spoken word alone. These
come by revelation, and represent knowledge that is
gained through faith. (D&C 88:118.) Such infinite
insights, which come from God, “are revealed to us in
the abstract, and independent of affinity of this mortal
trabacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as
though we had no bodies at all.”25 President Harold B.
Lee explained: “The acquiring of knowledge by faith is
no easy road to learning. It will demand strenuous effort
and continual striving by faith.” Then, quoting Elder B. H.
Roberts, President Lee continued:

Such a process requires the bending of the whole soul, the
calling up of the depths of the human mind and linking
the person with God. The right connection must be formed; then
only comes knowledge by faith, a kind of knowledge that goes
beyond secular learning, that reaches into the realms of the
unknown and makes those who follow that course great in the
sight of God.26

It appears that one who brings himself to a given level
of preparation will be capable of receiving many levels of
truth more effectively. One Latter-day Saint writer
stated:

Knowledge, then, is to be obtained by study and by faith, and
where faith is strong enough, knowledge may be more easily
acquired. The Lord has declared that nothing may be obtained
unless a person strives for it; yet to him who obeys the
commandments of God, the Holy Spirit may be given in such
great abundance that knowledge may come easily. Therefore...a
righteous man may acquire knowledge more rapidly than an
unrighteous man. It is through the Comforter or the Spirit of
God that the Latter-day Saints are to receive the gift of
knowledge.27

This concept seems to be consistent with Joseph Smith’s
statement that man’s views and enjoyments are purified
and expanded through opening the mind to “the light
communicated from heaven to the intellect.”28

A knowledge of good and evil is given to every man
born into the world through the Spirit of Christ.
(Moroni 7:16, 18.) Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:
“The recognizable operation of this Spirit in
enlightening the mind and striving to lead men to do
right is called conscience. It is an inborn consciousness or
sense of moral goodness or blameworthiness of one’s
conduct, intentions, and character, together with an
instinctive feeling or obligation to do right or be good.”29
This conscience, or moral monitoring device, is
reinforced and strengthened through parental teachings
and societal standards. It does not originate in society or
in the home; it is in many ways proverbial and has its
source in Christ. If followed and obeyed, members of the
true Church are given even greater insights and come to
have educated desires. Those without the Church who
follow the Light of Christ, obey their consciences, and
live consistent with the laws of the Judeo-Christian
tradition, for example, will be led to the Covenant
Gospel. (D&C 84:46-48.)30 Disobedience may lead to a
“searing” of the conscience (1 Timothy 4:2), a weak or
defiled conscience (1 Corin. 8:7; Titus 1:15), but never to
a total dissolution of conscience. President Joseph F.
Smith explained: “I do not know whether it is possible
for any soul to become so debased as to lose all regard for
that which is pure and chaste, good and true and godlike.
I believe that there still lingers in the heart of the most
vicious and wicked, at times at least, a spark of that
divinity that has been planted in the souls of all the sons
of God.”31 Another President of the Church pointed out
that “the full influence of the light which emanates from
this Spirit is diminished though it is not entirely
withdrawn, for if this should be the case their spiritual
existence would come to an end, for it is written, ‘He
that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son
of God hath not life.’”32

Therapeutic Orientation. God desires our happiness, and
when we violate divine precept we are committing
crimes against ourselves and God. The matter of dealing
with sin and the attendant negative feelings (guilt) is
very often simply a matter of personal repentance. These
problems could be dealt with (albeit in a superficial
manner) through attempting to eliminate values; the
client could be taught to rise above such irrational
emotions. The Prophet Joseph and his successors,
however, have been very clear about the need for
dealing with sin in God’s way. This process (true
repentance) may be more difficult at the outset, but is
certainly more lasting than drugs or quick therapy based
upon value elimination. Repentance is therapy for the
soul, and does more than alter behavioral patterns.
Repentance will never allow or assist one to be at peace
with his misconduct, since restitution of the soul is just
as critical as restitution of the situation. One who
continues in sin is one who is “without God in the

26. BYU Devotional Address, September 11, 1973; in 1973 BYU Speeches
of the Year, p. 91.
27 Joel Richards, “Education Among the Latter-day Saints,” Liaisons--
The Elder’s Journal, Vol. 8, No. 9, August 16, 1910, p. 131.
30. See also a statement by President Joseph F. Smith in Gospel Doctrine,
pp. 67-68.
32. Joseph Fielding Smith, Man: His Origin and Destiny, p. 204, citing 1
John 5:11-12.
of these principles has tremendous therapeutic value. Plans may be prepared in the counseling sessions. Each Sunday School class or necessarily doctrinal dialogue system of behaviors or tasks. Let us remind ourselves once again that the power of our presentation as a people is not in the programs, but in the Person of Jesus Christ. For Latter-day Saints and serious Christians, there is more than good, and therefore to a condition or state of choice is tantamount to robbing man of his humanness. Man was created to act. To take from him the right to choose is to make of him a thing to be acted upon (2 Nephi 2: 11-14), since “all truth is independent also; otherwise there is no existence.” (D&C 93:30. Italics added.) “Next to the bestowal of life itself,” declared President David O. McKay, “the right to direct our lives is God’s greatest gift to man. Freedom of choice is more to be treasured than any possession earth can give. It is inherent in the spirit of man.”

Because Satan rebelled and was cast out of heaven, he and his hosts provide a substantial source of opposition to man and God. Satan tempts man to yield continually to those desires which are wholly physical, and to ignore the quiet inner voice of the spirit of man. He seeks to bring man to the point where man comes to love evil more than good, and therefore to a condition or state characterized as being carnal, sensual, and devilish. (Moses 5:12-13; Cf. D&C 20:20.) In a carnal state, man becomes an enemy to God and to all righteousness. He has also become an enemy to himself, having succumbed to sin and “gone contrary to the nature of happiness.” (Alma 41:11.) Through overcoming Satan and putting off the natural man through the Atonement, on the other hand, man becomes worthy of membership in the Royal Family of God.

Opposition is also manifest in mortality in the form of trials, pain, struggles, or human weaknesses. Reference is made here, not to struggles brought on through man’s poor choices (i.e., consequences of an improper use of free agency), but rather to those incidents or circumstances which serve divine purposes, in that they assist in the development of a noble character. Joseph Smith was instructed by the Lord in plainness: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee...”

---

experience, and shall be for thy good.” (D&C 122:7.) President Spencer W. Kimball gave the following counsel:

Being human, we would expel from our lives physical pain and mental anguish and assure ourselves of continual ease and comfort, but if we were to close the doors upon sorrow and distress, we might be excluding our greatest friends and benefactors. Suffering can make saints of people as they learn patience, long-suffering, and self-mastery.34

Without opposition (either Satanic or divine) man could not be proven in his second estate (Abraham 3:24–26), nor could he gain the confidence and personal power that derives from overcoming obstacles.

Independence and agency produce variety. Therefore from time immemorial men and women have been different: in their dispositions, in their desires, and ultimately in their destinies. Parley P. Pratt observed: “It may be inquired, why God made one [person] unequal to another, or inferior in intellect or capacity. To which I reply, that he did not create their intelligence at all. It never was created, being an inherent attribute of the eternal element called spirit.”35 There is thus a gradation of intelligence and an infinitude of differences from the least to the greatest, who is Jesus Christ. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written:

Being subject to law, and having their agency, all the spirits of men, while yet in the Eternal Presence, developed aptitudes, talents, capacities, and abilities of every sort, kind, and degree. During the long expanse of life that then was, an infinite variety of talents and abilities came into being. As the ages rolled, no two spirits remained alike. Mozart became a musician; Einstein centered his interests in mathematics; Michaelangelo turned his attention to painting. Cain was a liar, a schemer, a rebel who maintained a close affinity to Lucifer. Abraham and Moses and all of the prophets sought and obtained the talent for spiritual things. Mary and Eve were two of the greatest of all the spirit daughters of the Father. The whole house of Israel, known and segregated out from their fellows, was inclined toward spiritual things. And so it went through all the hosts of heaven, each individual developing such talents and abilities as his soul desired.36

Therapeutic Orientation. Man’s choices may be his servants or his taskmasters, depending upon the course in life he pursues. The person who continues in sin is the servant of sin (John 8:34), and is binding himself to a style of life which allows little variance or spontaneity, spiritual and emotional bondage are the results of improper use of free agency. On the other hand, man may, through having an “eye single to the glory of God,” allow himself to be “free indeed.” (D&C 98:8.) The infinite irony of the matter is that he who gives up his will to that which is higher than self is strengthening and expanding self. Freedom comes from the wise use of free agency.

As a teacher, the therapist may take the initiative to instruct the client that opposition is perfectly normal, that sometimes it simply does not seem to be “my day,” and that overcoming difficulties is indeed a labor. Some individuals need to understand the message of Peter: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (1 Peter 4:12.) Perspective is critical in an appreciation of why one is encountering troubles; counselors may render a great service in assisting persons to gain the proper perspective.

In some cases, the therapist may utilize the principle of opposition in the other direction, that is, to build character and emotional strength. Teaching the value of risk-taking and personal vulnerability (and making appropriate assignments) will often do much toward preparing one to face a world in which the rain falls upon the just and the unjust. Life requires a certain degree of risk (in fact, we entered into mortality with an understanding that we might not live worthy of returning to the Divine presence), and a proper philosophical background will provide the substance upon which assertiveness training or the like may prove to be successful. Anxiety, in perspective, becomes not a debilitating emotional state, but rather an impetus to action.

Application. Case Example: 16-year old LDS female; problems with substance abuse (alcohol, amphetamines, tranquilizers at different times); failing in school; alienated from parents; problems with sexual control.

Intervention. (1) Arrangements made for a complete confession to ecclesiastical leaders; (2) Assigned to avoid all previous friends, and to develop relationships with active Church members; (3) Involvement in Seminary; (4) Assisted in obtaining employment (part-time) to absorb extra time; (5) Daily reporting system to monitor progress; (6) Weekly reporting to Bishop; (7) In-session training on social and communicative skills; (8) In-session role-playing and modeling on changing suggestive behaviors (stare, walk, dress, voice tone, eye contact); (9) Developed cognitive aversion for abused substances; (10) Consulted with ecclesiastical leaders concerning the advisability of Church judicial procedures as an aid to repentance.

Application. Case Example: Husband and wife (he 31, she 28), LDS, married in temple; lost 2-year old daughter in Church-related accident; anxiety and constant depression; isolation from other familial relationships (including two older children and each other).

Intervention. (1) Therapist assisted in the grieving process, and in the expression of deep emotion; (2) Extensive, direct teaching concerning the Plan of Salvation, the exaltation of little children who die in infancy, and an eventual reunion; (3) Couple assigned family interactions and activities; (4) Couple assigned service projects to other families with young children.

V. LOVE (The Essence of Relationships). In the Edenic paradise, the Man of Holiness declared that it was not good for man to be alone. (Genesis 2:18.) Man is a social being, and does not properly mature until he learns to relate and interact properly with himself and others.

The relationship between God and man has already been considered; it is established and maintained through prayer, scripture study, and service. Man’s true relationship with himself is closely tied to his relationship with God. “If men do not comprehend the character of God,” taught Joseph Smith in 1844, “they do

34. From “Tragedy or Destiny,” in Faith Precedes the Miracle, p. 98.
not comprehend themselves." 37 It would appear that man draws near unto the personally divine only as he comes to know the source of divinity. Truman Madsen has written: "One begins mortality with the veil drawn, but slowly he is moved to penetrate the veil within himself. He is, in time, led to seek the holy of holies within the temple of his own being." 38 That this dual unveiling (of self and God) represents a gradual but concurrent process is evident from the suggestion of President Brigham Young that "to know and understand ourselves and our own being is to know and understand God and his being." 39

Man's ability to love others is closely related to his ability to keep the commandments of God and love himself. Alma instructed his son, Shiblon: "See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love." (Alma 38:12.) Personal worthiness leads to self-confidence, self-respect, and self-love. This confidence allows one to love and serve others freely and spontaneously, without concurrent inner wonderings as to appearance or outcome. The Master taught that the second great commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39. Italics added.)

Marriage is an "institution of heaven," and was established by God in the Garden of Eden. 40 It is given as a religious ordinance: (1) so that man will not be alone; (2) for the perpetuation of the race through the sexual union; and (3) for the establishment of, and joys which flow from, family living. "The object of the union of the sexes," wrote Parley P. Pratt, "is the propagation of their race, or procreation; also for mutual affection, and mutual duties towards their offspring." (Alma 7:12. Italics added.) Why do mothers love their babies so much? Why is it so much more loving to serve others freely and spontaneously, without concurrent inner wonderings as to appearance or outcome. The Master taught that the second great commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39. Italics added.)

Marriage is an "institution of heaven," and was established by God in the Garden of Eden. 40 It is given as a religious ordinance: (1) so that man will not be alone; (2) for the perpetuation of the race through the sexual union; and (3) for the establishment of, and joys which flow from, family living. "The object of the union of the sexes," wrote Parley P. Pratt, "is the propagation of their race, or procreation; also for mutual affection, and mutual duties towards their offspring." (Alma 7:12. Italics added.) Why do mothers love their babies so much? Why is it so much more loving to serve others freely and spontaneously, without concurrent inner wonderings as to appearance or outcome. The Master taught that the second great commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39. Italics added.)

Marriage is an "institution of heaven," and was established by God in the Garden of Eden. 40 It is given as a religious ordinance: (1) so that man will not be alone; (2) for the perpetuation of the race through the sexual union; and (3) for the establishment of, and joys which flow from, family living. "The object of the union of the sexes," wrote Parley P. Pratt, "is the propagation of their race, or procreation; also for mutual affection, and mutual duties towards their offspring." (Alma 7:12. Italics added.) Why do mothers love their babies so much? Why is it so much more loving to serve others freely and spontaneously, without concurrent inner wonderings as to appearance or outcome. The Master taught that the second great commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39. Italics added.)

Marriage is an "institution of heaven," and was established by God in the Garden of Eden. 40 It is given as a religious ordinance: (1) so that man will not be alone; (2) for the perpetuation of the race through the sexual union; and (3) for the establishment of, and joys which flow from, family living. "The object of the union of the sexes," wrote Parley P. Pratt, "is the propagation of their race, or procreation; also for mutual affection, and mutual duties towards their offspring." (Alma 7:12. Italics added.) Why do mothers love their babies so much? Why is it so much more loving to serve others freely and spontaneously, without concurrent inner wonderings as to appearance or outcome. The Master taught that the second great commandment is to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39. Italics added.)
Assigned daily “love tasks” toward husband and children; (3) Assigned appropriate assertive behaviors in the face of criticism; (4) Taught the immediate interception of “put-down” thoughts; (5) In-and-out-of-session development of personal positive attributes and plans; (7) Assigned graded communication activities on a daily basis; (8) Assigned weekly problem-solving sessions with husband, periodic sessions with family; (9) Weekly dates and structured activities with husband; (10) Had the client’s mother come in to one particular session. The client felt the need to ask her mother’s forgiveness for harboring feelings of bitterness over the years.

QUO VADIS?

When Joseph Smith was asked how he governed a growing church, he responded: “It is very easy, for I teach the people correct principles and they govern themselves.”44 (Italics added.) President Brigham Young asked: “Is there any particular art in making this people obedient? There is just one. If you elders of Israel can get the art of preaching the Holy Ghost into the hearts of the people, you will have an obedient people. This is the only art required. Teach the people truth, teach them correct principles; show them what is for their greatest good and don’t you think they will follow in that path? They will...”45 “On another occasion President Young said simply: “Teach the people true knowledge and they will govern themselves.”46 (Italics added.)

We must never lose sight of the power contained in the simplicity of the word of truth, of correct principles, in assisting people to gain control of their lives. The message of the Restoration reaches into all phases of human endeavor. It is critical that we, of all people, realize that the word of God, foundational truth, has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people” than we sometimes realize. Perhaps it is expedient that we too, like Alma, should “try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5) more regularly. To place the doctrines of Eternalism at the center of all we say and do is not to surrender ourselves to a second-class status in the world of counseling and psychotherapy; rather, it is to do as Paul said would be done--to gather all things together in Christ, all things--knowing that valid and thorough empirical research will confirm spiritual realities in time. Indeed, like Ford Motors, “We have a better idea” and we need to be enthusiastic about empirically demonstrating to the world many of the matters we already know spiritually. Our task is to become bilingual: to be conversant in the language of the academy and the language of faith; to know when it is appropriate to speak which tongue; and to communicate our findings clearly and honestly, so as not to be misunderstood in matters pertaining to either content or intent.

The enormity of the task before us is apparent. However, if we can build our lives, our personal philosophies, and our methods upon true principles, we are assured of glorious results. The Lord explained in 1831: “Behold, I, the Lord, have made my Church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations. For it shall come to pass that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion.” (D&C 64:37-38. Italics added.) In prophetic fashion, President John Taylor spoke of a day yet future:

We believe that there will be a temporal kingdom of God organized that will be under the direction and auspices of the Lord of Hosts and that in all our affairs, whether they relate to things temporal or things spiritual, as we have been in the habit of calling them, we shall be under the direction of the Lord.... We believe that we shall rear splendid edifices, magnificent temples and beautiful cities that shall become the pride and glory of the whole earth. We believe that this people will excel in literature, in science and the arts and in manufactures. In fact, there will be a concentration of wisdom, not only of the combined wisdom of the world as it now exists, but men will be inspired with regard to all these matters in a manner and to an extent that they never have been before. and we shall...be the most healthy and the most intellectual people that will reside upon the earth. This is part and parcel of our faith; in fact, Zion will become the praise of the whole earth; and as the Queen of Sheba said anciently, touching the glory of Solomon, the half of it had not been told her, so it will be in regard to Israel in their dwelling places. In fact, if there is anything great, noble, dignified, exalted, anything pure, or holy, or virtuous, or lovely, anything calculated to exalt or ennoble the human mind, to dignify and elevate the people, it will be found among the people of the Saints of the most high God.47

We hope that that marvelous day may be hastened and that each of us will demonstrate the wisdom and perspective to do our part in realizing the fruits of Joseph Smith’s Eternalism.