A Historical Examination of the Views of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints on Four Distinctive Aspects of the Doctrine of Deity Taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith

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A Thesis
Presented to the
Graduate Studies in
Religious Instruction
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Joseph Fielding McConkie
May 1968
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose and Limitations of the Study

To the author's knowledge, there is not presently in existence a comprehensive study of the concept of Deity as held and taught by Joseph Smith. Further, there are two religious bodies of significant size in existence today that claim Joseph Smith as their founder and who claim to be the true stewards of the doctrines taught by him. There is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a membership of about 2,500,000, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri, and a membership of about 200,000.

Significantly, these two churches have little in common as far as their theologies are concerned. In fact, they disagree over what they regard to be the doctrines and ordinances that lead to salvation. In reference to these conflicting views, Elbert Smith, Presiding Evangelist in the Reorganized Church said: "Our whole religious thought and life and philosophy of conduct are shaped by our fundamental beliefs concerning God. Two such divergent views as those held by the two churches inevitably
result in two vastly different systems of theology."

Four Concepts

This study will consider four related concepts of Deity, each of which is accepted as doctrine by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which claims to have received these doctrines from Joseph Smith. On the other hand, each of these concepts is rejected as doctrine by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which claims that Joseph Smith did not teach them.

The four concepts dealt with are:

1. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are not three persons of one essence, but are rather three separate and distinct personages.
2. The Father and the Son are corporeal beings, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit.
3. Man can continue his progression until he becomes as God—that is, a god himself.
4. Of necessity then, there is a plurality of Gods.

This study assumes that Joseph Smith was a prophet, for he is accepted as such by both churches concerned. It will consider Joseph Smith's teachings on such things.

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1Elbert A. Smith, Differences that Persist Between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Utah Mormon Church (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1959), 11.
as Christ's pre-existence, his mortal ministry, and his second coming only as they directly relate to the four concepts under consideration.

The purpose of this thesis is to determine in proper historical context what Joseph Smith taught on the four stated concepts and to consider the historical validity of arguments put forth by both the LDS and the RLDS that he did, or did not teach them.

Sources Used For The Study

One of the primary sources for this study is the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period I, or perhaps more commonly known as the Documentary History of the Church. (It will be cited in this work as DHC.) The first of this narrative came from the press on March 15, 1842, at Nauvoo, Illinois. "It was published in the Times and Seasons, beginning in volume 3, number 10, page 726, and continued in succeeding issues until February 15, 1846. By the latter date, the events up to August, 1834, had been printed." The publication was then resumed in the Deseret News volume 2, number 1, November 15, 1851, which continued the narrative through the death of Joseph Smith. This history was also reproduced in the Millennial Star, a Latter-day Saint periodical begun in England in 1840.

It was from these sources and other journal accounts that Elder B.H. Roberts published in six volumes the Documentary History of the Church, which covers the period of Church history
from the birth of Joseph Smith up to the time of his martyrdom.  

The Doctrine and Covenants, which is in the main a collection of revelations given through Joseph Smith, is also a primary source for this study. Since the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have their own editions of the Doctrine and Covenants, the references to both will be cited. The LDS edition will be cited D&C, and the RLDS edition RD&C.

Also of importance are Joseph Smith's translations of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham; the restoration of writings of Moses, Enoch, and John the Baptist; and the work of revision on the King James Bible.

The King Follett discourse, delivered by Joseph Smith in April of 1844, is of considerable significance to this work. This sermon, which is accepted by the LDS and rejected by the RLDS is important because it deals directly with the concept of men becoming gods and the plurality of gods. If it can be proven that the Follett discourse is a correct representation of Joseph Smith's views, then many disagreements over his teachings about Deity will be authoritatively answered.

Supportive evidences are found in the writings and teachings of members of the Church during this period. In counseling the Twelve Apostles shortly after their organization

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2Milton R. Hunter, Pearl of Great Price Commentary (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, Inc. 1948), 225-226.
as a Quorum, Joseph Smith directed them to keep records of their proceedings every time they assembled. To neglect to do this, he said, may cause the Spirit to withdraw and God to be angered. On this occasion he also counseled them to keep a history of their lives. The statements and writings of this nature will be limited to those recorded or published during Joseph Smith's lifetime, or specifically referring thereto. Also, descriptions of Mormon theology by non-Mormon writers prior to the death of Joseph Smith will be considered.

Justification

The voice of God thundered from Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." For worshiping false gods the Lord imposed the death penalty in ancient Israel. During his mortal ministry, the Savior said, "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." If one takes literally the statement of the Savior that it means eternal life to know and understand the truth about God, then it becomes a


4Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 476-477.

5Deuteronomy 13:6-11.

6John 17:3.
question which is answered at the peril of salvation. For it naturally follows that there can be no salvation in worshiping false gods.

Joseph Smith's Concept of Deity

Joseph Smith's concept of Deity was unique, challenging, and comprehensive. To the writer's knowledge his teachings did not have, nor do they now have, any parallel in the theologies of the day. It is true that some of the individual concepts were held in common with other faiths, but the composite, the totality, of Joseph Smith's teachings are not found in any other theology.

During the lifetime of Joseph Smith the major creedal religions in America ascribed allegiance to the concept of the Trinity. Joseph Smith claimed that these creeds were "all wrong" that they were an abomination in the sight of the Lord, "having a form of godliness," but denying the power thereof.

In the King Follett discourse Joseph Smith is recorded as saying that eternal life, which he defined as God's life, can be had on no other principle than that of a true concept of Deity. And he declared that he would renounce all preten-

7See Chapter III.
8DHC, 1:6.
9D&C 19; RD&C 18.
sions to revelations and inspiration if he could not explain what kind of a being God was. 10 In this sermon and a sermon delivered on the 16th of June, 1844, Joseph Smith is recorded as having taught each of the concepts under consideration in this thesis and labeling those who reject these concepts as "apostates." 11 Of those who discarded these teachings he said, "I have reason to think that the Church is being purged." 12

For the millions who profess a belief in Joseph Smith as a prophet and restorer of divine and eternal truths, the writer suggests that no knowledge is of greater importance than to understand the concept of Deity that he taught. In this respect the King Follett and June 16th sermons bear careful examination.

Certainly the life and mission of Joseph Smith cannot be fully understood without a correct understanding of his concept of Deity.

10 *Times and Seasons*, 5:613.
12 *Times and Seasons*, 5:615.
CHAPTER II

JOSEPH SMITH AS AN AUTHORITY ON GOD

From the First Vision in the spring of 1820, when Joseph Smith claimed that he was told by Christ that he should join none of the churches of the day because they were "all wrong," and that their "creeds were an abomination" in God's eyes, and their professors "were all corrupt," until his tragic death in June of 1844, Joseph Smith was prepared to stand alone in the testimony that he bore. On one occasion he said "the object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do. It matters not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it."  

He made no attempt to reconcile what he taught with popularly held tenets. To say that Joseph Smith was iconoclastic is an understatement. He boldly set forth his position stating "the great designs of God in relation to the salvation of the human family, are very little understood by the professedly wise and intelligent generation in which we live."  In the preface to the Doctrine and

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1DHC, 6:223.
2DHC, 4:595.
Covenants, Joseph Smith recorded:

They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.\(^3\)

In relationship to his teachings about God, he offered this challenge, "I defy all the learning and wisdom and all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it."\(^4\) On another occasion he taught, "if any revelations are given of God, they are universally opposed by the priests and Christendom at large; for they reveal their wickedness and abominations."\(^5\) In one of his sermons about God, Joseph Smith said "the sectarian priests are blind, and they lead the blind, and they will all fall into the ditch together."\(^6\)

An Advocate of Religious Freedom

Despite his total opposition to the doctrine of the sectarians, Joseph Smith was a great advocate of religious freedom. He demanded the privilege be granted to all men to "worship what they may." He taught:

... all governments ought to permit every

\(^3\)D&C 1:6; RD&C 1:3e.
\(^4\)DHC, 6:306.
\(^5\)DHC, 4:588.
\(^6\)DHC, 5:426.
man to enjoy his religion unmolested. No man is authorized to take away life in consequence of difference of religion, which all laws and governments ought to tolerate and protect, right or wrong. Every man has a natural, and, in our country, a constitutional right to be a false prophet, as well as a true prophet. If I show, verily, that I have the truth of God, and show that ninety-nine out of every hundred professing religious ministers are false teachers, having no authority, while they pretend to hold the keys of God's kingdom on earth, and was to kill them because they are false teachers, it would deluge the whole world with blood. 7

"Our religion is between us and our God. Their religion is between them and their God," he proclaimed. 8

Prophet, Seer, and Revelator

John Taylor, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at the time of the death of Joseph Smith, penned these words: "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it." 9 Thus he expressed the reverence and devotion that Joseph Smith has held in the hearts of his followers since that time. The Latter-day Saint people look upon Joseph Smith as a prophet, as a seer, and as a revelator, and that as such his knowledge of God equaled and may well have far surpassed that of any prophet of past ages. It is

7 DHC, 6:304.
8 DHC, 3:304.
9 D&C 135:3; RD&C 113:3a.
their belief that he saw Deity on a number of occasions, and that on others he was instructed by the auditable voice of the Lord. Further, his followers claim that he had frequent association with ancient patriarchs who had personal association with the Lord. (See the chart on page 14.)

His Source of Knowledge

It is held by Joseph Smith's followers that his knowledge of the Supreme Being was not learned in schools or from the philosophies of men, but rather that it came by way of personal experience. He had read the injunction of James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." 10 He believed what he read. He asked in faith, nothing wavering, and in fulfillment of the divine edict he received. His disciples testify that his was not a hearsay knowledge, they claimed him to be an eye witness. It is believed that he did not testify and write of things read and studied, he wrote and spoke of that which he experienced. On one occasion he said "could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject." 11 On a later occasion he stated "one truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence." 12 Speaking of the source of his

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10 James 1:5.
11 DHC, 6:50.
12 DHC, 6:252.
knowledge, Joseph Smith told this interesting story:

I am going to take up this subject by virtue of the knowledge of God in me, which I have received from heaven. The opinions of me, so far as I am concerned, are to me as the crackling of thorns under the pot, or the whistling of the wind. I break the ground; I lead the way like Columbus when he was invited to a banquet, where he was assigned the most honorable place at the table, and served with the ceremonials which were observed towards sovereigns. A shallow courtier present, who was meanly jealous of him, abruptly asked him whether he thought that in case he had not discovered the Indies, there were not other men in Spain who would have been capable of the enterprise? Columbus made no reply, but took an egg and invited the company to make it stand on end. They all attempted it, but in vain; whereupon he struck it upon the table so as to break one end, and left it standing on the broken part, illustrating that when he had once shown the way to the new world nothing was easier than to follow it.¹³

On another occasion he concluded a sermon on Deity asking rhetorically: "Did I build on any other man's foundation?" Then he declared, "I have got all the truth which the Christian world possessed, and an independent revelation in the bargain, and God will make me off triumphant."¹⁴

The first paper published by the Church was the Evening and Morning Star. In one of its first issues it set forth the Mormon source for finding truth:

Search the Scriptures—search the revelations which we publish, and ask your Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, to manifest the truth unto you, and if you do it with an

¹³DHCP, 5:402.
¹⁴DHCP, 6:479.
eye single to His glory, nothing doubting, He will answer you by the power of His Holy Spirit. You will then know for yourselves and not for another. You will not then be dependent on man for the knowledge of God; nor will there be any room for speculation.  

Joseph Smith was not dependent on others for his knowledge of God, nor did he speculate. He spoke as one having authority.

15Evening and Morning Star, 1:22.
JOSEPH SMITH AS AN AUTHORITY ON GOD

HE PERSONALLY SAW GOD

Spring 1820
Saw God the Father
and God the Son
Palmyra, New York
Joseph Smith Story.

May 15, 1829
Oliver Cowdery wrote,
"we were wrapped in the
vision of the Almighty."
Near Harmony, Penn.

TBS, 2:201.

Spring 1830
Mary E. Rollins Lightner
relates how Joseph Smith
claimed Christ had appeared
to him during meeting.
Kirtland, Ohio
YWJ, 16:556-557.

June 6, 1831
Saw the Father and
the Son as did Lyman
Wight.
Kirtland, Ohio

Feb. 16, 1832
Saw the Father and
the Son as did Sidney
Rigdon.
Kirtland, Ohio
D&C 76:22.

Jan. 21, 1836
Saw the Father and
the Son
Kirtland Temple

April 3, 1836
Visited by the Savior
as was Oliver Cowdery
Kirtland Temple
D&C 110.

HE HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD FROM THE HEAVENS

June 1829
While in the presence of
Oliver Cowdery and David
Whitmer, as Moroni showed
them the gold plates
Fayette, New York
D&C, 1:54-55.

In or before June 1829
(D&C, 1:61.)
Home of Peter Whitmer Sr.
Fayette, New York

In or before April 1843
While praying to know the
time of the Second Coming
Emma, Illinois.
D&C 130:14-16.

HE WAS INSTRUCTED BY THOSE WHO PERSONALLY KNEW CHRIST

He was instructed by Adam
who walked and talked person-
ally with God.

He was instructed by John
the Baptist who ministered
with the Savior.
D&C 13.
J.S., 2:68-72.

He was visited by the Three
Nephites who were ordained by
the Savior.
JSWS, 95.

He was instructed by Peter,
James, and John who ministered
with the Savior.
D&C 27:12.
J.B., 18:326.

HE WAS INSTRUCTED BY OTHER ANCIENT PROPHETS WHO HAD SEEN CHRIST

SETH was seen by Joseph Smith
(D&C, 5:24.) Seth saw Christ.
(Moses 3:6.)

ENOC was seen by Joseph Smith
(J.B., 21:94.) Enoch saw Christ.
(Moses 7:4.)

NOAH was seen by Joseph Smith
(D&C, 3:386; D&C 128:21.) Noah
saw Christ. (Moses 8:27.)

ABRAHAM was seen by Joseph
Smith (J.B., 21:94.) Abraham saw
Christ. (Ab. 1-3.)

JACOB was seen by Joseph Smith
(Ibid.) Jacob saw Christ. (Gen.
32:30.)

MOSES was seen by Joseph Smith
(D&C 110.) Moses saw Christ.
(Moses 1: & Gen. 33:11.)

NEPHI was seen by Joseph
Smith (J.B., 21:161.) Nephew saw
Christ. (2 Ne. 11:2-3.)

PAUL was seen by Joseph Smith
(TEJS, 180.) Paul saw Christ.
(2 Cor. 12:1-4.)

MORMON was seen by Joseph
Smith (J.B., 17:374.) Mormon saw
Christ. (Norm. 1:15.)

MORMON was seen by Joseph
Smith (J.B., 2:33.) Moroni came
from the presence of God. (J.S., 2:33.)

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS*

D&C .................. Doctrine and Covenants
DHC .................. History of the Church
J.B. .................. Journal of Discourses
J.S. .................. "Joseph Smith Story"--Pearl of Great
Price
JSWS .................. Joseph Smith the Man & the Seer
TPJS .................. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith
TJS .................. Times and Seasons
YWJ .................. Young Women's Journal
* .................. See Bibliography
CHAPTER III
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT
OF JOSEPH SMITH'S TEACHINGS

The Doctrinal Beliefs

The purpose of this section is to briefly establish the prevailing religious beliefs about Deity and the religious climate during the twenty-four year period from the spring of 1820, to June of 1844. It was during this period that Joseph Smith unfolded his concept of God. It is hoped that this will enable the reader to contrast the teachings of Joseph Smith with the doctrines of the churches of the time, and hence to better understand and appreciate his unique contributions.

The Creedal Religions

An excellent article entitled, "Joseph Smith Popularizer or Restorer," summarized the existing religions beliefs in America during Joseph Smith's lifetime as follows:

The dominant beliefs of the Christians in America in the early nineteenth century were expressed in four Christian creeds. The Augsburg Confession (1530) was a creed embodying the beliefs of the Lutherans; the Westminster Confession (1647) was a guide expressing the theology of the Presbyterians; the Savoy Confession (1658) was the Congregational standard of faith; and the Thirty-nine
Articles (1563 and 1571) contained the doctrines held by the Anglicans and the American Episcopal Church. The definition of God recorded in all these creeds reiterated the orthodox Catholic view by declaring that God is a spirit, meaning an immaterial being. Expressing the definitions adopted at Nicaea in 325 A.D., they stipulate that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one in essence or substance. All major religions in America at the time of the Restoration, including the Baptist, Methodist, and German and Dutch Reformed churches, accepted this concept.¹

The following quotes from three of the major creeds illustrate this conclusion:

**Augsburg Confession.** The decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without and doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, and Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet that there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are co-eternal, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. And the term "person" is used... to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

**Westminster Confession.** There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions... In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

American Revision of the Thirty-nine Articles of
the Church of England. There is but one living
and true God, everlasting, without body, parts
or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and
goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things
both visible and invisible. And in the unity of
this Godhead there be three persons, of one
substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the
Son, and the Holy Ghost. . . . The Holy Ghost,
proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of
one substance, majesty, and glory, with the
Father and the Son, very and eternal God. 2

Deism

At this time, all major American religious denomina-
ations were creedal religions, and in each case they
ascribed allegiance to the concept of the Trinity. Never-
theless, the doctrine of the Trinity was not the sole norm
of religious thought in America. Among a limited few in
the revolutionary generation, a liberal philosophy, called
deism, which had received a rebirth in Europe, found its
way to the Colonies. In Europe, deism was a reaction
against the "Age of Faith," and an outgrowth of the "Age
of Reason," in which tradition and authority, were dethroned
by reason. There does not appear to be any evidence that
the deists attempted to organize into a society in America.
Among their numbers, however, were some powerful and out-
spoken men including Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and
Benjamin Franklin. The deists had a rather extensive list
of disagreements with the doctrines of the Christianity of

\[2\] Milton V. Backman Jr., American Religions and the
Rise of Mormonism (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1965),
447-448.
the day. They took very definite exception to the doctrine of the Trinity. This was illustrated in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to John Adams. Speaking of the Trinity Jefferson said, "three are one and one is three; and yet the one is not three, and the three are not one. . . . This constitutes the craft, the power and profit of the priests. Sweep away their gossamer fabrics of factious religion, and they would catch no more flies."³ Deism denied the virgin birth and the divinity of Jesus Christ. They adhered to a belief in one Supreme God.

Other Anti-Trinitarians

Less extreme liberals of this age associated themselves with the Unitarians. The Unitarians retained a belief in the divinity of Christ but rejected the traditional Trinitarian concept that God was three persons of one substance. Their belief was in the absolute unity of God. God, according to their theology, was of one mind and one person, thus being one undivided being. They taught that there was only one supreme God and he alone was entitled to supreme worship and love. They objected to the doctrine of the Trinity because it created a plurality of gods—a concept contrary to their belief in God's unity. The Unitarians accepted Christ as being subordinant to his Father, but they generally held

³Ibid., 197-207.
that the Holy Ghost was not an individual entity, but rather a divine influence. 4

It was also during this period that another religious school of thought—called Universalism, was transplanted from England to America. The tenet that precipitated the rise of Universalism was the belief in the final salvation of all men. Of particular interest to this study, is the fact that in 1830, there were about 150 Universalist societies residing in the state of New York. Although they did not originally do so, by 1820 the majority of the Universalists endorsed the generally accepted Unitarian view of Deity. That is that the Father and the Son were separate and distinct beings and that Christ was divine, being the Son of God. Christ, they believed, received the title of God from his Father, and possessed power and authority derived from his Father. 5

Contemporary Religious Views

In summation then, the traditional view of the Godhead in the United States during the lifetime of Joseph Smith was that of the Trinity as expressed by the creedal religions. The Methodists expressed it in this manner:

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead

4 Ibid., 207-216.
5 Ibid., 216-218.
there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.\textsuperscript{6}

The doctrine of the Trinity, however, was challenged by the deists, the Unitarians, and by most Universalists. All three of whom claimed a belief in one Supreme God. The Unitarians, and the Universalists believed that Christ was the Son of the Father, separate and distinct from the Father and subordinant to the Father in power. The deists claimed a belief in one Supreme Being, but denied the divinity of Christ.

The Religious Climate

Religious interest at this time was very keen. In fact, the author of a book entitled, \textit{A Century's Change in Religion}, refers to the first half of the 19th Century as the "theological age," a time when there was even more religious interest than that experienced in the colonial period.\textsuperscript{7}

Despite the great religious zeal and interest existing during this period, religious toleration was still in its infancy. In fact, this was an era of theological war—Trinitarism vs. Unitarianism. Public interest had become aroused to fever-heat over the issue. Harvard and other colleges, in addition to theological seminaries, were in

\textsuperscript{6}Daniel I. Rupp, \textit{History of Religious Denominations} (Philadelphia: J.Y. Humphrey Publisher, 1844), 442.

\textsuperscript{7}George Harris, \textit{A Century's Change in Religion} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914).
the midst of the controversy with professors and theologians lining up on both sides of the issue. The fever spread from there to the local congregations. Ministers were forced to declare whether they believed that God was composed of a Trinity in unity or whether they believed that God was one eternal power without division of substance or person.

The theological war became so violent that ministers were mobbed and police were called to restore order within church congregations. In many cases, the matter was finally taken to court. One faction of the congregation wanting to hire a Unitarian minister and the other faction desiring to hire a Trinitarian minister. Courts were called upon to determine which faction owned the meetinghouse and therefore had the right to employ the minister. 8

The Religious Reformers

It should also be mentioned that in the first decades of the nineteenth century the spirit of reform became popular. These reformers sought a restoration of New Testament Christianity. Among the well known reformers was the father and son team of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. Although the Campbells were opposed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, they were in harmony with the "religious views held by members of the major religions of early America." For instance, Alexander

Campbell condemned the use of the word "Trinity" because it was not found in the Bible, and he insisted that the God described in the popular creeds of the day was an unintelligible god. At the same time, however, he "failed to clarify the mystery of the Godhead." Campbell repudiated "the concept of God as a material being," and "agreed with most of his contemporaries that God was an invisible spirit." He did not do any better than the creeds which he rejected, however, in describing the union that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  

Revival Era

This was also an era of religious revivals, which had become wide-spread during the years 1740 through 1742. Jonathan Edwards was partly responsible for "igniting the spark" which caused "The Great Awakening" to burst into flames. In time, however, the fire burned low; but in the first part of the 19th Century the ashes were fanned into a full flame and the second "Great Awakening" began to spread across the country. "One of the regions of almost habitual revivalism was western New York." This area was so easily set aflame by revivalists that it has been referred to as the "burned-over-district."  

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10Ibid., 300-302.
On the surface, these Trinitarian revivalists seemed to be above the theological feuding, at least among themselves. They held what were called union services, in which different sects would unite for the conversion of those who had made no profession of Christianity, and to reinspire the backsliders.

Frequently, however, the good feelings engendered during the union service were "dissipated by jealousies and wranglings when the converts came to elect the religious body in which they desired to hold their fellowship." This, of course, was logically inconsistent because membership in any of the churches styled "orthodox" was considered all-sufficient. Nevertheless, a sharp rivalry and bitterness frequently erupted between these brothers in Christ.11

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CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST VISION

Joseph Smith was born on the 23rd of December, 1805, in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont. When he was ten years old, his family moved to the town of Palmyra, in western New York, where they lived two years and then moved a short distance into the township of Manchester. Hence, in the spring of 1820, Joseph Smith Sr. and his family were living in revivalism's "burnt-over-district." At this time, the ministers of several churches in and about Palmyra decided to hold a union revival. The Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists were the sects represented. Thus, the scene was set for the young Joseph Smith to begin his search for truth about God. He described the situation in this language:

Sometime in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, 'Lo, here!' and others, 'Lo, there!' Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist.

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For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased; yet when the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.¹

The "cry and tumult" were "so great and incessant" that Joseph's mind became greatly excited. Joseph Smith was determined to investigate the subject more fully. He believed "that if God had a Church it would not be split up into factions, and that if He taught one society to worship one way, and administer in one set of ordinances, He would not teach another, principles which were diametrically opposed." While laboring under this complexity, one day he read in the first chapter, fifth verse of James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Appearance of the Father and the Son

At length Joseph Smith came to the conclusion that he must either "remain in darkness and confusion," or do as James directed. So on a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of 1820, he went to a grove of trees near his Father's farm. No

¹DHC, 1:1-6.
sooner had he commenced to pray, than he "was seized upon by some power" which entirely overcame him. Thick darkness gathered around him and he felt as if he were doomed to destruction. Exerting all of his powers to call upon God, he saw a pillar of light exactly over his head, "above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon" him. As the light appeared, his enemy fled. He was relieved when he saw that the pillar of light did not consume everything before it, as it "encouraged him with hopes of being able to endure its presence." Immediately he was caught away from the natural objects with which he was surrounded, and was enwrapped in a heavenly vision.

As the light rested upon him, he "was filled with the Spirit of God" and saw two Personages, "who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness," and who's "brightness and glory defy all description," standing above him in the air. One of the glorious Personages, calling him by name, pointed to the other and said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"

2 Note: The above description is a blending of four accounts of this event. They are: Joseph Smith's own story, as recorded in DHC, 1:1-6; the Wentworth letter, another account written by Joseph Smith which is found in DHC, 4:536; an account written by Joseph Smith and recently found in the LDS Church Historian's Office by Paul R. Cheesman: "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Vision," (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965), 129; and an account related by Orson Pratt, a personal colleague of Joseph Smith's, found in J.D., 12:354.
His Question Answered

Joseph Smith's object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know "which of all the sects was right," in order that he might join it. He addressed this question to the Lord, and in response was told "that all the religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines," and that he should join none of them. He stated that he received the promise that "the fullness of the Gospel should at some future time be made known" to him. Concluding his account of this experience, Joseph Smith said, "many other things did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time."³

What Joseph Smith Learned About Deity

All that Joseph Smith learned about Deity on this occasion is not known. The following summarizes some of the things he probably would have understood from this experience:

1. that the Father and the Son were separate and distinct personages,
2. that the Father and the Son appeared in form and stature as men and that they exactly resembled each other,
3. that the Father introduced the Son and then the Son acted as the spokesman,
4. that the heavens were not sealed and hence, that revelation had not ceased, for the Father and the Son had both appeared to him, addressed him, and promised him future direction,
5. that he could not have endured the presence of these two personages unaided, for their glory was above the brightness of the Sun.

³DHCB, 1:6.
His Account As Related By Others

Those that heard Joseph Smith relate the account of this experience consistently affirm that he taught each of the above. For instance, Wilford Woodruff quoted Joseph Smith as saying, "Any person who has seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens holding the keys of power." 3 George Q. Cannon, an associate of Joseph Smith's made the following remarks:

The first that we knew concerning God, was through the testimony of the Prophet Joseph... The traditions of men were so false respecting God, that the idea of a personal Deity had faded from the so called Christian mind... The common sectarian idea was that His center was nowhere, and His circumference was everywhere. There was no man scarcely upon the earth that had a true concept of God; the densest ignorance prevailed;... there was mystery associated with what is called the Trinity.... But all this was swept away in one moment by the appearance of the... Father, and His Son Jesus Christ... thus showing that there were two personages of the Godhead.... Joseph saw that the Father had a form; that He had a head;... arms... limbs... feet... face... tongue. 4

Continuing on another occasion he said:

Here is the testimony of one who actually saw the Father and the Son. They were as described by all who have seen them--literal personages, personages with tabernacles, the Son being the express image of the Father. John the Revelator, also saw one that was like unto the Son of Man. He describes his person. You remember that he fell down and worshiped an angel upon one occasion, thinking it was the Lord, and the angel forbade him doing so, telling him that he was one of his fellow-servants, the prophets. John, however, had a correct conception of the great truth that the Son was in the exact image of His Father. 5

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3 Cowley, 180.
4 George Q. Cannon, Journal of Discourses (26 vols.)  
Hereafter cited as J.D.
RLDS Views

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints do not accept as doctrine the concept that God the Father and Jesus Christ are separate personages. For instance, Elbert Smith, in a publication entitled *What Latter-Day Saints Believe About God*, explains that the Lord's rejection of all the creeds of Christendom in Joseph Smith's First Vision is an evidence that "every effort to bind the Infinite within the terms of a definition has been a miserable failure." He continued by explaining that the RLDS Church has never sought to bind God to a definition and emphasized the importance of accepting the "mystery of godliness."\(^6\)

Some within the RLDS Church subscribe to the belief that there is but one God and look upon the concept of two or more Gods as a spiritual retrogression. Others, however, maintain that the Father and the Son are separate personages.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) Elbert Smith, 49.

\(^7\) See Chapter XVI.
CHAPTER V

THE BOOK OF MORMON

After the events recounted in the previous chapter, Joseph Smith continued to follow his common vocations in life "all the time suffering severe persecutions at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious," because he continued to affirm that he had seen a vision.  

In September of 1823 Joseph Smith received further directions from the Lord. On this occasion, he was in the act of praying before retiring for the night when he noticed a light appearing in his room. The light increased "until the room was lighter than noonday." A personage, standing in the midst of the light, clothed in a robe of "exquisite whiteness," introduced himself as Moroni. He said that he had been sent by God who had a work for Joseph Smith to do. Joseph Smith was then told of some ancient records which at the proper time were to be delivered to him along with the means of translating them. Moroni explained that these records contained an account of the former inhabitants of the American continent and the "fulness of the everlasting Gospel."  

\[1\text{DHC, 1:9.}\]
\[2\text{DHC, 1:12.}\]
Joseph Smith spent the next four years preparing for the responsibility of translating these records. In September of 1827, they were finally entrusted to him and he kept them until 1829, when the translation was completed. Then the gold plates, upon which the records were recorded, were reclaimed by the angel. The translated record was named the Book of Mormon, after one of the ancient prophets who had aided in writing and compiling it.

Rules For Scriptural Interpretation

Before commencing a study of what Joseph Smith learned about Deity from the translation of the Book of Mormon, there are certain essential understandings the reader must have. The Book of Mormon is a history of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of America. Since the book is not a formal theological treatise, the concepts of Deity which it teaches come in a rather piecemeal fashion which creates the danger of taking individual passages out of their proper context and perverting their meaning. The first rule of interpretation, then, is that each individual passage must be interpreted in light of the message of the entire book, for it is all regarded as scripture. Accepting the premise that the Book of Mormon is scripture, it is then proper to proceed on the assumption that all scriptures are in harmony, that they do

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3Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 81.
not contradict each other. Hence, the second rule of interpretation is that passages which appear to be in conflict should be read so that they harmonize.

There Is But One God

The testimony given by the three witnesses: Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, regarding the divinity of the Book of Mormon, concludes with this declaration: "And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen." This statement is a very appropriate one, for it emphasizes an important Book of Mormon teaching—that there is but one God. The teaching was affirmed by the Savior himself, who during his personal visit among these ancient people said, "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." Mormon, the prophet after whom the record was named, spoke of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as one God, "in a state of happiness which hath no end."

A good example of this teaching is found in the Book of Alma where a prophet named Amulek entered into debate with an antagonist named Zeezrom. Zeezrom asked Amulek if there was "a true and living God," to which Amulek responded that there was. Zeezrom asked, "Is there more than one God?"

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4 Book of Mormon, preface.
5 3 Nephi 11:27; RLDS 3 Nephi 5:27.
6 Mormon 7:7; RLDS Mormon 3:29.
Amulek said that there was not. Then Zeezrom asked if it was the "Son of God" that was to come to the earth. He was told that it was. He then wanted to know if the Son of God would save his people in their sins. Amulek responded that it would be impossible for him to do so because it would cause the Son of God "to deny his word." Zeezrom then turned to the people and told them to remember that Amulek said that there was "but one God," and that he was the "Son of God" who was to come, but that he would not save his people. Zeezrom then accused Amulek of trying to "command God," because he said that God could not save his people. Amulek responded by saying that Zeezrom had lied, for what he said was not that God could not save his people, but that he could not save "them in their sins; for... he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven."

Finally, Zeezrom asked, "Is the son of God the very Eternal Father?" Amulek said yes, he is the "very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth... and he shall come to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name." Amulek then went on to explain the principle of redemption, concluding his remarks by reference to the judgment bar where all men will be brought before "Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works."

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7Alma 11; RLDS Alma 8:79-100.
How The Godhead Are One

In the previous section, it was seen that the Book of Mormon emphatically teaches that there is but one God. In this section, it will be shown that the Book of Mormon also teaches that there are three Gods, each separate from the other, and that the two concepts are in complete harmony.

The Book of Mormon records the visit of the Savior to the Nephites. The Nephites were descendants of Nephi, a prophet who lived upon the American continent 600 years before the birth of Christ. The account begins with the introduction of the Savior by the voice of his Father from the heavens saying: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him." The people, then, saw a "Man descending out of heaven," who introduced himself as Jesus Christ, who having drunk the bitter cup had glorified the Father, and done the will of the Father from the beginning.  

Upon seeing this man descend from heaven, the multitude fell to the earth. He invited them to come forth and thrust their hands into the wounds in his hands and feet that they might know that he was the "God of the whole earth." This the multitude did. After they had all done so, they cried out with one accord, "Hosanna! Blessed be the Most High God!" The Savior then gave unto certain of their number the authority to baptize, and instructed them to baptize  

83 Nephi 11:7-12; RLDS 3 Nephi 5:8-12.
the others when he had ascended again into Heaven. After giving them these instructions, he told them "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." He then told them that there should be no contention among them for he would explain his doctrine to them, which had been given to him by his Father. He explained it in this manner: "I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me," and the Father commands all men to repent and believe in him. Those that believe and are baptized, shall be saved and those that believe not and are not baptized, shall be damned. This, he said, was his doctrine, and anyone who believed in him would believe in his Father also, and because of that belief, they would receive the Holy Ghost. In this sense, then, the Godhead are "one," for they all bear the same record of each other. Christ explained that the twelve whom he had chosen, were to lead the people and the people would be blessed if they would give heed to the twelve. Further, they were to be baptized by the twelve, and receive the Holy Ghost. Christ then explained, "I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father."12 He went on to say, "Behold, ye have heard the things which I taught before I ascended to my Father," therefore, remember these sayings and do them.13 He told his

12 3 Nephi 12:19; RLDS 3 Nephi 5:60-67.
13 3 Nephi 15:1; RLDS 3 Nephi 7:1.
chosen disciples, that this was the land of their inheritance and that the Father had never directed him to tell the people of Jerusalem about them except that he had other sheep which he should also bring into the fold. It was explained that they were the other sheep of whom he spoke in Jerusalem, and that he was yet to visit the lost tribes of Israel. Continuing, he said, "I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time," therefore go home, ponder what has been said and "ask the Father, in my name" for understanding. Following this, he blessed the sick and afflicted, partook of the Sacrament with them, taught them to pray and then said:

"Now I go unto the Father, because it is expedient that I should go unto the Father for your sakes."  

When the Savior came again among this people, they had been baptized by his disciples. He prayed, thanking his Father for giving the Holy Ghost to those whom he had chosen and asked that the same blessing be given to those who would believe in the words of the disciples. "I pray," he said, "also for those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, are in me, that we may be one."  

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14 3 Nephi 17:3; RLDS 3 Nephi 8:3.  
15 3 Nephi 18:35; RLDS 3 Nephi 8:69.  
16 3 Nephi 19:23 & 29; RLDS 3 Nephi 9:23; [underlining added].
The entire context of the Savior's appearance to the Nephites is one of subordinance to his Father. Thus the separate nature of the Father and the Son is repeatedly emphasized.

The reader will notice carefully what the Savior has prayed for. He has prayed that he might be "in" his disciples as the Father is "in" him. This is the sense that they are to be one. In later writings and sermons Joseph Smith carefully defined the sense in which the Father is "in" the Son. In a revelation given May 6, 1833, Joseph Smith quoted the Savior as saying: "I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one-The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men."

It is explained, however, that Christ did not receive "the fulness at the first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness." When Christ did receive the fulness of the glory of his father "he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him." This revelation stated that this knowledge is given in order that men "may understand and know how to worship," that they "in due time" might receive of the same fulness. The essential idea being that

17D&C 93; BD&C 90.
Christ received from his Father what one scholar on the teachings of Joseph Smith calls the divine element of glory\(^1^8\) and with this was able to inherit all that his Father hath. In the same sense men have the capacity to advance from grace to grace until they too receive the fulness of his glory and become one with the Father and the Son in glory, power, wisdom, and all attributes of godliness.

**The Disciples To Become Gods**

This explanation of how the Father and Son are one is very meaningful in light of the charge given by the Savior to his disciples prior to his final ascention from them. He told his New World apostles that they would be the judges of their own people. In order to emphasize their need to live worthy of this responsibility, he asked this retorical question:

"What manner of men ought ye to be?" His answer was, "Verily I say unto you, even as I am." Continuing this charge of responsibility he said, "And ye shall sit down in the Kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fullness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one."\(^1^9\)

If, then, the disciples were to become as Christ, and Christ, the record assured us is as the Father, then these men were to become as God—that is, gods. This is a doctrine that


\(^1^9\)Nephi 17:27; 28:10; RLDS 3 Nephi 13:4-5. Underlining added.
Joseph Smith was to expand upon and to teach repeatedly throughout his life.

Perfection Through Resurrection

In preaching to the Nephite people Christ gave them much of the same instruction he had given in the Old World in his Sermon on the Mount. It is of interest to note that in the Biblical account of this sermon, Matthew records the Savior as saying: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The Book of Mormon account records the Savior as saying: "Therefore, I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect." The Old World account of this sermon was given prior to the Savior's resurrection. It commanded that all men become perfect like their Father in Heaven, but it did not assume that Christ had reached that perfection himself. The New World account, however, which was given after the resurrection, attributes Christ with a new status—that of being perfect with his Father. Apparently Christ gained a perfection as a resurrection "man" that he did not have prior to his resurrection. It will be shown that this concept was affirmed in a later revelation recorded by Joseph Smith.

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20 Matthew 5:48.

21 3 Nephi 12:48; RLDS & Nephi 5:92.
Christ As The Eternal Father

The Book of Mormon frequently refers to Christ by the name-title, Eternal Father. There are three different contexts in which this expression is used. He is referred to as the Father in relationship to his role as the Creator "of heaven and of earth," and "all things from the beginning."[22] He is also referred to as the Father because of the relationship between himself and those who accept his gospel and thereby become heirs of eternal life. King Benjamin,—in the Book of Mosiah, explained this principle saying, "because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and daughters."[23] A third sense being that he had been given the right to speak and minister in the Father's name. Having received the fulness of his Father's glory he could act in the first person for his Father.

Man Created Literally In The Image Of God

Chronologically, the first book in the Book of Mormon is the Book of Ether. The third chapter of Ether contains an interesting account of a prophet who is referred to as the brother of Jared. He was in need of a method to provide light

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for the barges he was constructing under divine command. He prepared sixteen small stones which he carried up on top of a mountain, and there requested the Lord to touch them with his finger so that they could be used as a source of light for his vessels. In response to his prayer, he saw "the finger of the Lord;" which reached forward and touched each of the sixteen stones. When the Lord did this, the brother of Jared discovered that the finger of the Lord was like the finger of a mortal man. This caused him to be struck down with fear. The Lord asked him why he had fallen. He responded, "I knew not that the Lord had flesh and blood." The Lord did not affirm that he had flesh and blood, but rather stated, "Because of thy faith thou hast seen that I shall take upon me flesh and blood." Then, because of his great faith, the Lord showed himself to the brother of Jared saying: "Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? ... all men were created in the beginning after mine own image."24 The Lord explained that his spirit looked exactly like his physical body would look.

This same principle was taught by Nephi, who was "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord." He said of this experience, "for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that he was in the form of a man; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto

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24 Ether 3:15; RLDS Ether 1:79-80.
me as a man speaketh with another. 25

Perfect Unity

One of the most important messages of the Book of Mormon in relationship to Deity is that of the perfect unity of purpose that exists between the members of the Godhead. This unity is repeatedly emphasized by references to "one God." Yet Christ carefully taught in 3 Nephi that the Godhead was comprised of separate personages. An account of the birth of Christ is also given in which it is shown that Christ is the "Son of God" after the "manner of the flesh." That is to say that he is literally the Son of his Father in the same manner that men are the sons of their fathers. 26

The God Of The Book Of Mormon A Corporeal Being

The Book of Mormon also teaches that prior to his birth into mortality, Christ was a personage of spirit and that his mortal body exactly resembled his spiritual body. Further, the Book of Mormon teaches that the resurrection consists of a restoration of body and spirit so that not so much as "a hair of the head" shall be lost. 27 This was born out in the appearance of the resurrected Christ who was

26 I Nephi 11; RLDS I Nephi 3.
described as a man who had a tangible body which all were invited to handle. Following Christ's resurrection, the God of the Book of Mormon was a corporeal being.

Christ commanded the Book of Mormon people to become perfect even as he and his Father were perfect. The findings of this chapter indicate that he did not gain this perfection until after his resurrection. Also, if perfection includes a glorified physical body, and Christ is perfect as his Father is perfect, then his Father must also be a corporeal being. In one account of the First Vision, Joseph Smith said that the Father and Son exactly resembled each other which bears this conclusion out. The promise that all men will be resurrected and the commandment to become perfect holds out to all men the hope of becoming glorified men like the Father and the Son.

A Summary And A Preview

This chapter has briefly summarized the concepts about Deity translated by Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon that have a direct bearing on this study. Each of the conclusions drawn is a preview of concepts which Joseph Smith expanded and elaborated upon in later writings and sermons.

LDS And RLDS Views

The doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

\[28\text{DHC, 4:536.}\]
day Saints on the relationship between the Father and the Son was set forth in an epistle to the Church on June 30, 1916. It is entitled "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition By The First Presidency And The Twelve."

This treatise gives four different meanings to the term "father" as it is used in the scriptures. Briefly they are as follows. The first definition is that of a literal parent. God the Eternal Father is designated by the name-title "Elohim" and is called the literal parent of Jesus Christ, and of the spirits of the human race. Elohim, it is explained, is the literal Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of his earthly body. The second definition is that of Father in the sense of a creator. This sense makes reference to Christ as the Creator, the Maker, the Organizer of the heavens and of the earth. The third definition is that Christ is the Father of all those who are born again. That is, all who are "begotten sons and daughters unto God" through his atoning sacrifice. And finally, Christ is the Father by divine investiture of authority. That is, since he is one with the Father in all attributes of perfection, and since he exercises the power and authority of Elohim, it follows that everything he says or does is exactly and precisely what Elohim would have said or done under the same circumstances. 29

29 James E. Talmage, A Study Of The Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), 465-473.
The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have not as a Church committed themselves to any official doctrinal position on the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. There are those within the Church that hold to the position that there is but one God. To those holding to this concept, the Book of Mormon is a major source of reference. A number of the references commonly cited by them have been quoted in this chapter under the heading "There Is But One God."\(^{30}\)

\(^{30}\)See Chapter XV.
CHAPTER VI

EXTRACTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF MOSES

Following the organization of the Church on the 6th of April, 1830, Joseph Smith commenced holding public meetings to preach the gospel. This resulted in considerable opposition by those opposed to his message. In these early weeks, following the Church's organization, Joseph Smith was arrested on two occasions and charged with being a disorderly person. In both instances, he was subjected to considerable abuse before being acquitted because no fault could be found with him. Mobbers were constantly harassing him, they interrupted meetings, tore down a dam constructed to form a baptismal fount, and twice forced him to flee for his safety.¹

It was under these circumstances that the first part of the writings of Moses were revealed to Joseph Smith. Commenting on this he said that it was "amid all the trials and tribulations" through which they had to wade that the Lord "who well knew" their "infatile and delicate situation, vouchsafed" to them "a supply of strength." He said that

¹DHC, 1:81-98.
the Lord granted "line upon line of knowledge--here a little and there a little," of which Joseph Smith called the writings of Moses a "precious morsel."\(^2\) After recording the part of this revelation that he received in June of 1830, Joseph Smith said that "notwithstanding all the rages of our enemies, we had much consolation, and many things occurred to strengthen our faith and cheer our hearts."\(^3\) Joseph Smith undoubtedly would have found consolation in the similarity between his own experience and those of Moses.

**Withstanding The Glory Of God**

In these writings, Moses explained how he "saw God face to face," and talked with him. In describing this experience, Moses said that the "glory of God" came upon him in order that he could endure the presence of the Lord. He further explained that he saw God with his own eyes, but not his natural eyes. He said, "my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence, but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him... being filled with the Holy Ghost."\(^4\) This sounds much like Joseph Smith's description of his First Vision in which he claimed that he

\(^2\) *DHC*, 1:98.

\(^3\) *DHC*, 1:101.

\(^4\) *Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952)*, Moses 1:1-2, 11, 14. \(\text{hereafter cited as PGP}\)
"was filled with the spirit of god"\textsuperscript{5} and was able to withstand a glory above that of the brightness of the sun. In a revelation given in November of 1831, Joseph Smith stated: "For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind." Here is an important key to Joseph Smith's concept of Deity. According to his understanding the glory of God, later referred to by him as light and truth, or intelligence, is of such magnitude and brilliance that it is above the brightness of the sun. This glory is manifested by his Spirit.

\textbf{Judging Between Satan And God}

Prior to obtaining the gold plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith received some very impressive and dramatic lessons from the Lord. On one occasion, while approaching the Lord in prayer, the heavens were opened to him and while enjoying the glory of the Lord, he was instructed by an angel to view a completely contrasting scene. He did so and saw "the prince of darkness" surrounded by his innumerable train of associates. As this vision passed before him, he was told, "all this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and the impure, the glory of God, the power of darkness, that ye may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced

\textsuperscript{5}Cheesman, 129.
or overcome by the wicked one."6

The first chapter of the writings of Moses relates how Moses also experienced the glory of the Lord and then was shown a vision of the kingdom of Satan. As a result of his experience, Moses spoke to Satan saying, "I can judge between thee and God."7 In this manner, the Lord schooled these two prophets that they might never be in doubt as to the source of inspiration, whether it be from him or from the Prince of Darkness. It seems a natural conclusion that much consolation would come to Joseph Smith from this revelation so similar to the experience of his First Vision, his experience with Satan, the knowledge he gained from the translation of the Book of Mormon, and which expanded his concept of the work of Deity.

An Expanded Concept Of The Works Of Deity

As far as can be determined, Joseph Smith had no knowledge of the activities of Deity at this time except as they applied to this earth. This revelation, however, expanded that concept. The Lord told Moses that he would show him some of the workmanship of his hands. Moses then saw in vision the earth and "there was not a particle of it which he did not behold, discerning it by the spirit of God." And he saw the inhabitants of the earth "and there

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6 *Messenger and Advocate*, 2:198.
7 *PGP*, Moses 1:15.
was not a soul" which he did not see. Further, he was informed that Christ, acting under the direction of the Father, had created "worlds without number," but that he would only be given an account of this earth and its inhabitants. The Lord also stated that: "there are many worlds that have passed away by the word of my power. And there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them."

Then in a concise and yet profound statement, Christ explained the labor with which God is employed. He said, "For behold--this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." Immortality came upon all men through the atonement of Christ. Eternal life is God's life, for so it had been revealed to Joseph Smith three months earlier. That is to say, then, that the work of God is to prepare man for a life like his. Simple deduction reveals that in order to enjoy "God's life," one must be like God.\(^8\)

**A Division Of Responsibility**

This revelation emphasized the division of responsibility that exists in the Godhead. It states that the work of creation was done by Christ acting under his Father's direction. It teaches that in prayer men are to call upon

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\(^8\)PGP, Moses 1:27-39.
God in the name of Christ. And it repeatedly points out that in order for a man to be able to endure the presence of God, he must be filled with the Holy Ghost. These teachings illustrate the division of responsibility that exists among the members of the Godhead.

And Yet There Is But One God

This revelation also contains the statement "there is no God beside me." The statement harmonizes quite simply as one reflects upon the principle of oneness taught in the Book of Mormon. It also takes upon added significance in the context of a vision of worlds without number, to remind man that his attention is to remain here on this earth and is to be centered upon Christ, his Savior, and mediator with the Father.

Emphasizing this principle in one of his last public sermons prior to his death, Joseph Smith said: "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. . . but to us there is but one God—pertaining to us; and he is in all and through all." 9

Name-Titles Of Deity

The parts of the revelation just considered were

9DHC, 6:474.
revealed in June of 1830. Six months later, in December of that year, the Lord continued this revelation because of conjecture among the saints concerning books mentioned in various places in the Old and New Testaments which had been lost. At this time the Lord revealed more of the writings of Moses which included records of Adam and Enoch. Many interesting things were learned from these writings, but of particular interest to this study is an increased understanding of some of the name-titles of Deity and the concepts they are intended to teach.

The restoration of the writings of Moses include an account of God's dealings with Adam from which it is learned that Adam used and taught his children a language which was "pure and undefiled." Certainly a "pure and undefiled" language would be far superior to any tongue which is presently in existence.

From the Adamic language, one of the names of God the Father was translated, "Man of Holiness."\(^{10}\) This name-title has as it's purpose to teach God's position as an exalted man and his status as the embodiment of holiness and perfection.\(^{11}\) Hence, it logically follows that one of the name-titles of his Son is that of "Son of Man, even


\(^{11}\)Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (2nd ed. rev.; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 467.
Jesus Christ." The name "Son of Man" has as its purpose to emphasize that Christ is the Son of a man, that is, "Man of Holiness." This writing continues: "Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name also." In a like manner, the name-title "Man of Counsel" has as it's purpose to teach man that God is an exalted man, and a God of Counsel. The meanings of "Endless" and "Eternal" had been revealed to Joseph Smith three months prior to this.

Endless And Eternal

A revelation given in March of 1830 unfolded a new concept in relationship to the name-titles of Deity and the meaning of the punishments spoken of in the scriptures. It begins, "I am Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord; these words, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are used figuratively to teach the timelessness and eternal nature of the Savior's existence, yea, even I am he, the beginning and the end, the Redeemer of the world. I, having accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father, concerning me--having done this that I might subdue all things unto myself." The revelation states that Christ has the power to destroy Satan, judge every man according to his

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12 PGP, Moses 6:57 and I.V. Genesis 6:60.
13 PGP, Moses 7:35 and I.V. Genesis 7:42.
14 D&C 19:1; RD&C 18:1a-b.
works, and that those who do not repent will suffer endless and eternal torment. It goes on to teach that the torment is not without end, but rather that it is "endless torment." In the same manner, the revelation states, "I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name." In other words, "Eternal" and "Endless" are name-titles of the Savior, which have as their purpose to teach with specific accurateness a great principle of revealed truth. Eternal life means—God's life; and Endless punishment is a description of the type of punishment, not the duration of the punishment, that comes from God. The reason the name eternal and endless are used in this sense is to make them "more express than other scriptures," that they might "work upon the hearts of the children of men," to bring them to repentance.  

Ahman And Son Ahman

Although the Adamic language is presently lost to man, certain words and their meanings have been preserved. Speaking of this, Orson Pratt made this interesting statement:

There is one revelation that this people are not generally acquainted with. I think it has never been published, but probably will be in the Church History. It is given in questions and answers. The first question is, 'What is the name of God in the pure language?' The answer says, 'Ahman,' 'What is the name of the Son of God?' Answer, 'Son Ahman—the greatest of all the parts of God excepting Ahman,' 'What is the name of men?' 'Sons of Ahman,' is the

15D&C 19; RD&C 18.
answer. 'What is the name of angels in the pure language?' 'Angloman.'

This revelation goes on to say that Sons Ahman are the greatest of all the parts of God excepting Son Ahman and Ahman, and that Angloman are the greatest of all the parts of God excepting Sons Ahman, Son Ahman and Ahman, showing that the angels are a little lower than man. 16

From this statement it is learned that "Ahman" is the name of God the Father in the pure Adamic language. "Son Ahman" is the name of the Father's Only Begotten Son. Twice Christ is so designated in the Doctrine and Covenants. The first occasion was in a revelation given in March 1832, where the "Redeemer" is called "Son Ahman." 17 The second occasion was in June of 1833, where the name was used as a synonym for the name Alphus and Omegus. 18

The name "sons Ahman" is the name given to men, Orson Pratt explained. This name hints at a doctrine that Joseph Smith was shortly to reveal. The Father has been identified as a Holy Man, it has been specified that he has a Son who is like him, and it points "to the ultimate goal which righteous men may attain, that of becoming joint-heirs with Christ. Men and God are of the same race, and those men who overcome all things, being joint-heirs with Son Ahman, become eventually as he has become, like their Eternal Father. 19

16 J. D., 2:342.
17 D&C 78:20; RD&C 77:4d.
18 D&C 95:17; RD&C 92:3f.
19 McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 744 [see also Appendix One]
CHAPTER VII

THE INSPIRED VERSION OF THE BIBLE

In 1830, Joseph Smith, acting in response to a command of the Lord, began a revision of the Bible. This work consisted of revisions, alterations, additions, and deletions from the King James Version. Important changes were made in several thousand verses, most of which were made in Genesis, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the first six chapters of John. It is the position of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints that the work of translation was completed by Joseph Smith on July 2, 1833.¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, do not believe that Joseph Smith ever completed the work of translation, holding that in the "not too distant future," thousands of other verses will be revised, clarified, and perfected, under the direction of their Prophet.² Both bodies, however, are in complete agreement that the flood of light and knowledge restored through the Inspired Version, is one of the great evidences of the divine mission of Joseph Smith.

²McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 383-5.
This work was not published in the lifetime of Joseph Smith. The original manuscript came into the hands of the RLDS, who published the work for the first time in 1867. Commenting on the fact that it was not published in Joseph Smith's lifetime, George Q. Cannon said, "the labor was its own reward, bringing in the performance a special blessing of broadened comprehension to the Prophet and a general blessing of enlightenment to the people through his subsequent teachings." The Inspired Version contains a number of important corrections made by Joseph Smith which emphasize the principles about Deity he was attempting to teach. Some of the more significant ones will be considered in this chapter.

Man Can See God

In the King James Version, John 1:18 it reads, "no man has seen God at anytime." This passage does not harmonize with the accounts of Stephen, Moses, and other Bible characters who saw God. Joseph Smith corrected this passage to read: "And no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son; for except it is through him no man can be saved."

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5Acts 7:55-56; Genesis 33:11.

6I.V. John 1:19.
The King James passage has often been quoted in an attempt to refute the claim made by Joseph Smith that he saw the Father and the Son, because it is argued that no man can see God. The correction not only reconciles Bible accounts, but harmonizes with Joseph Smith's experience in the First Vision. The corrected passage also emphasizes the separate nature of the Father and the Son. A similar passage, in I John 4:12, which reads, "No man hath seen God at any time," was corrected to read, "No man hath seen God at any time, except them who believe."  

God Is A Spirit

Another important doctrinal change from the writings of John was made in relationship to the passage which states, "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."  

This is perhaps the most often quoted passage by those who argue that Deity is not a corporeal being, or that he is not bound by a physical form. Joseph Smith changed this passage to read, "For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth."  

True it is, that, "God is a spirit," but in the same sense, "man is a spirit," Joseph Smith taught. And only when body and spirit are

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7I.V. I John 4:12.

8John 4:24.

"inseparably connected," can they receive a "fulness of joy." This change removes doubt that God cannot have a glorified physical body.

One God Or Many

It is argued by the RLDS that Joseph Smith emphasized in the Inspired Version, through changes that he made, that there could not be a plurality of gods. RLDS author Russell F. Ralston sets forth their argument in this manner:

The King James edition of the Bible reads:
And the Lord said unto Moses, See I have made thee a god to Pharaoh. [Exodus 7:1]

God very carefully corrected this erroneous statement as he caused Joseph Smith, Jr., to write in the Inspired Version of the Bible:

And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a prophet to Pharaoh.

The Reorganized Church has always accepted the Scriptures as God has corrected them.

In another place the King James version of the Bible reads:

Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people. [Exodus 22:28]

However, God also corrected this statement which might lead people to believe that there were many Gods. The Inspired Version reads:

Thou shalt not revile against God, nor curse the ruler of thy people.

The King James version also records the following:

And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. [I Samuel 28:13]

Once again by the divine direction of our heavenly Father, the prophet corrected a Scripture that otherwise could have been deceiving in its inference. As corrected
it states:

And the woman said unto Saul, I saw the words of Samuel ascending out of the earth.

In the same category as those just quoted it is to be noted that the King James version also records:

... unto God and his father... [Rev. 1:6]

As corrected by God in the Inspired Version this reads:

... unto God, his Father... 12

The apparent meaning conveyed by the King James translation of this passage is that Christ has ordained some to be kings and priests unto his Father and also his Father's Father, that is Christ's grandfather in the hierarchy of Gods. John Bernhisel made a copy of Joseph Smith's changes in the Inspired Version which is in the possession of the LDS Church today. The writer examined the Bernhisel manuscript and found that Revelation Chapter six, verse six, was marked "correct" as it reads in the King James Bible. In a sermon delivered on the 16th of June in 1844, Joseph Smith took this passage for a text. On that occasion he quoted this passage and stated: "It is altogether correct in the translation."

As has been stated, the RLDS believe that Joseph Smith made all of the necessary corrections in the Inspired Version and completed his work on the 2nd of July, 1833. If this is accepted as the case, then it follows that if Joseph Smith was attempting to correct statements "which might lead people to

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believe that there were many Gods," in order that they might avoid this "deceiving... inference," he would have done so consistently throughout the entire work. However, he left a number of other references to a plurality of Gods, untouched. Some examples are as follows:

For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. (Deut. 10:17)

The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know. (Josh. 22:22)

Oh give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good; for his mercy endureth forever. Oh give thanks unto the God of gods; for His mercy endureth forever. Oh give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His mercy endureth forever. (Psalm 136:1-3)

I will praise Thee with my whole heart; before the gods, will sing praise unto Thee. (Psalm 138)

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. ... I have said ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High. (Psalm 82:1&6)

It is argued that these passages make reference to heathen gods, but it is not consistant to say that heathen gods are the children of the "Most High." It is also argued that the term "gods" in these passages, makes reference to "judges," and leading Bible commentaries are cited to substantiate this point. However, if this explanation is to be accepted, again it becomes necessary to be consistant and assume that the passages that said gods which Joseph Smith changed, also meant judges. It is evident that in making these changes, Joseph Smith was not attempting to correct the idea that there could be a plurality of gods.
In June of 1844, Joseph Smith gave one of his greatest sermons on Deity. On that occasion he said:

The scriptures are a mixture of very strange doctrines to the Christian world, who are blindly led by the blind. I will refer to another scripture. 'Now,' says God, when He visited Moses in the bush, (Moses was a stammering sort of a boy like me) God said, 'Thou shalt be a God unto the children of Israel.' God said, 'Thou shalt be a God unto Aaron, and he shall be thy spokesman.' I believe those Gods that God reveals as Gods to be sons of God, and all can cry, 'Abba, Father!' Sons of God who exalt themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world, and are the only Gods I have a reverence for.13

Separate Personages

Joseph Smith made a number of changes in the Inspired Version emphasizing that the Godhead was comprised of three separate and distinct personages, which is a plurality of Gods. Twice, in reference to Christ's ascension, Joseph Smith added the expression, "to dwell on the right hand of the Father."14 It is obvious that the Father does not dwell on his own right hand, so the personages of the Godhead of necessity must be separate. He also made an interesting addition to Matthew's account of the childhood of Christ. It reads: "And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come."15 It is obvious that Jesus

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13DHC, VI, 478.
Christ was not waiting upon himself—he was waiting upon his Father, who had sent him.

Other examples of the same principle are as follows:

**King James Version**

**MATTHEW 23:8-11**

8. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

9. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one in your Father, which is in heaven.

10. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

**JOHN 6:44**

44. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

**Inspired Version—additions noted by underlining.**

**MATTHEW 23:5-7**

5. But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your master, which is Christ; and all ye are brethren.

6. And call no one your creator upon the earth, or your heavenly Father; for one is your creator and heavenly Father; even he who is in heaven.

7. Neither be ye called Master; for one is your master, even he whom your heavenly Father sent, which is Christ; for he hath sent him among you that ye might have life.

**JOHN 6:44**

44. No man can come unto me, except he doeth the will of my Father who hath sent me. And this is the will of him who hath sent me, that ye receive the Son for the Father beareth record of him; and he who receiveth the testimony, and doeth the will of him who sent me, I will raise up in the resurrection of the just.
Each of the examples given illustrate the separate nature of the Father and the Son and that the Son does all things under the direction of the Father.

Summary

Changes made by Joseph Smith in the Inspired Version of the Bible indicate that he believed mortal man, when filled with the Holy Ghost, can see God, and that the Father and the Son are separate personages. The passage which reads, "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" was changed to read: "For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth." The writer suggests that this change implies that Joseph Smith believed Deity to be a personage of tabernacle. The changes made in the Inspired Version do not provide sufficient evidence to determine whether Joseph Smith believed in a plurality of gods or not.
CHAPTER VIII
THE VISION

Sidney Rigdon, a convert to Mormonism in the latter part of 1830, was called by revelation to act as a scribe for Joseph Smith. As these two men worked on the revision of the Bible, they desired to gain an understanding of the passage John 5:29, which deals with the resurrection of the dead. As they meditated on this matter, "the eyes of their understanding were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about" them.

Among others who were also present was Philo Dibble, who said that he, "saw the glory and felt the power," but that he did not see the vision. Dibble said that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon conversed with each other for over an hour about what they were seeing, and that the others present did not make a sound or motion during the entire time, even to the moving of a joint or limb. "Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag, observing which, Joseph remarked, smilingly,

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1D&C 35:20; RD&C 34:5a.
2D&C 76:15; RD&C 3e.
Sidney is not used to it as I am." 3

Grandeur Of "The Vision"

This revelation is believed to be of such magnitude by those who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet, that it is considered sufficient evidence to prove the divinity of his calling. It is regarded as a revelation of such greatness that it is honored with the title, "The Vision." It should be understood that the recorded account is by no means a complete description of what these two men saw. They saw things that were only "to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Ghost." 4 Years later Joseph Smith made the statement "I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the Kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them." 5

Joseph Smith also stated that if the Bible had not been perverted by the folly of men, it would contain, "every law, every commandment, every promise, every truth, and every point touching the destiny of man," and that they would show the perfection of this vision. He referred to "The Vision as a "transcript from the eternal world," and stated:

3 Juvenile Instructor, 27:303-304.
4 D&C 76:116; RD&C 8a-b.
5 DHC, 5:402.
The sublimity of the ideas; the purity of the language; the scope for action; the continued duration for completion, in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sin, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every honest man is constrained to explain: It came from God."

This revelation contains three areas of particular interest to this study: (1) that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw the Father and the Son; (2) the promise that men who attain the highest degree of glory will become gods; and (3) a promise to all those who make themselves worthy that they can see Deity "while in the flesh."

The Father And The Son

Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon explained that by "the power of the Spirit" their eyes were opened and their understanding enlightened so that they could comprehend the things of God. They testified that they saw the Savior and conversed with him. They also attested that the Father and the Son are separate personages. Their testimony is as follows:

And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

\[6\textit{DHC}, 1:252-253.\]
For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—
That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.\(^7\)

The above description is in harmony with Joseph Smith's account of his First Vision in which he described the Father and Son as separate personages.

**Similar Experiences**

Other instances where Joseph Smith or his colleagues claimed to have had the heavens opened to them so that they could see Deity also support the conclusion that the Father and Son are separate personages.

On the 9th of June, 1830, the first conference of the Church was held. This conference was attended by many spiritual manifestations, not the least of which was the fact that Newel Knight saw the heavens opened, "and beheld the Lord Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, and had it made plain to his understanding that the time would come when he would be admitted into His presence to enjoy His society for ever and ever."\(^8\)

Three days less than a year later, while in Kirtland, Ohio, at a Conference of the Church, Joseph Smith and Lyman Wight had an experience similar to the one just described.

\(^7\)D&C 76:20-24; RD&C 3f-1.

\(^8\)DHC, 1:85.
Levi Hancock, an eye-witness, reported that Joseph Smith laid his hands on Lyman Wight's head and "blessed him with the visions of heaven and promised him that by faith he could see the Lord." Elder Hancock then said:

The Spirit then rested upon Brother Wight until his countenance was a brilliant, transparent white. He testified that he then saw the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for the Saints. Next Joseph, filled with the visions of heaven, stepped out before the group there assembled and said: 'I now see God, and Jesus Christ at his right hand. Let them kill me: I should not feel death as I now am.'

The testimony of Joseph Smith that the Father and the Son are separate personages was affirmed then by Sidney Rigdon, Newel Knight, and Lyman Wight. All three of whom claimed to have seen them.

Joseph Smith also recorded another experience similar to those just described. On the 21st of January, 1836, while in the Kirtland Temple, immediately after having received a blessing under the hands of his Father the Patriarch, and under the hands of the Twelve Apostles, the heavens were opened to him and he described this experience.

I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire; also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son. I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold.9

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9Lyman Wight's Journal, In Possession of Hyrum L. Andrus, Department of Religion, Brigham Young University.
10DHC, 2:380.
Men To Become Gods

"The Vision" unfolded the concept of three separate degrees of glory in the worlds to come. The highest of these degrees is called the celestial kingdom. Of lesser glory is the terrestrial kingdom, and the lowest kingdom of glory is named the telestial kingdom. In a sermon given in the last year of his life, Joseph Smith, in making reference to this vision and paraphrasing the words of the Apostle Paul's description of the three kingdoms of glory said:

"There is clearly illustrated glory upon glory— one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and a glory of the stars; and as one star differeth from another star in glory, even so do they of the telestial world differ in glory, and every man who reigns in celestial glory is a God to his dominions."¹¹

In "The Vision" Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon described this status of Godhood as follows:

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;
And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son.
Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—
Wherefore, all things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's and Christ is God's.
And they shall overcome all things.

¹¹DHC, 6:477.
Wherefore, let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God, who shall subdue all enemies under his feet. These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever. These are they whom he shall bring with him, when he shall come in the clouds of heaven to reign on earth over his people. These are they who shall have part in the first resurrection. These are they who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just. These are they who are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly place, the holiest of all. These are they who have come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn. These are they whose names are written in heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all. These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood. These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all, whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical.

And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things--where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever;
Before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever.
They who dwell in his presence are the church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace;
And he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.
And the glory of the celestial is one, even as the glory of the sun is one. 12

It should be understood that these promises are made only to those who are exalted. In summation, the promises

12D&C 76:55-70; 92-96; RD&C 5:f-r; 7:i-k.
of this glory include: (1) to these the Father shall give all things; (2) they shall receive of the fulness and glory of the Father; they shall be priests and kings; (3) all things shall be theirs, both things present and things to come; (4) they shall be Christ's and Christ is God's; (5) they shall overcome all things; (6) they shall dwell in the presence of God and Christ forever; (7) when Christ comes again, they shall be with him; (8) they shall come forth in the first resurrection; (9) they shall have celestial bodies, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God; (10) they shall receive of the fulness; (11) they shall be equal with the Father in power, might, and dominion; (12) they shall be gods, even the sons of God.

It would be difficult to conceive of greater promises. Here men are promised that they will be able to overcome all things, and then receive all things, past, present, or future, and as hinted at previously in the Book of Mormon Chapter, they will receive of the fulness of God and be equal with him— that is, that they, too, will be gods.

**RLDS Objection**

It is taught by the Reorganized Church that this revelation, in stating that men can become gods, "does not have the divine meaning" and "does not infer any such concept" as does the word 'God' when spelled with a capital 'G'."\(^{13}\)

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\(^{13}\)Ralston, *Fundamental Differences*, 105-106.
This is not a valid argument, for it is commonly held by both Churches that punctuation is not revealed. In fact, the RLDS have recently completed a grammatical revision of the Book of Mormon. Nor does the context of the statement bear this conclusion out; for as noted in the summary, there are a number of statements which imply a full equality with God.

Joseph Smith wrote a poem entitled, "The Vision," in which he expressed the truths of this revelation in verse form. It read:

They're priests of the order of Melchizedek,  
Like Jesus (from whom is the highest reward,)  
Receiving a fulness of glory and light;  
As written: They're Gods' even Sons of the Lord.

So all things are theirs; yea, of life or of death;  
Yea, whether things now, or to come, all are theirs,  
And they are the Savior's, and he is the Lord's,  
Having overcome all, as eternity's heirs.  

The writer examined the original manuscript of this poem as written by Joseph Smith and found the word "God" written with a capital "G". It was published with a capital "G" in both the Times and Seasons, and the Millennial Star during this period.  

14 Joseph Smith, Letter on file in Church Historian's Office, 47 East South Temple, Salt Lake City.  
15 Times and Seasons 4:84; and Millennial Star 2:19.
CHAPTER IX

JOINT-HEIRS WITH JESUS CHRIST

The revelation considered in the previous chapter included the promise to those who gain exaltation in the celestial kingdom that they will inherit the fulness of that glory. "All things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come." They are to be equal with the Father in power, might, and dominion.

All That The Father Hath

Three other revelations given in 1832 contained this same assurance. A revelation dealing with the means of providing for the poor concluded with the vow that Christ would "appoint every man his portion," and that the faithful and wise steward would "inherit all things."¹ In another revelation the Lord was represented as taking an oath with those who would receive and magnify his Higher Priesthood. In this revelation, the Lord was quoted as saying that those who received the priesthood holders, had received him, and those who received him, received his Father. Then he covenanted that those who received his Father would receive his Father's Kingdom; therefore, all that his Father had,

¹D&C 78:21-22; RD&C 4:d-e.
would be given to them. A revelation called the "Olive Leaf" was also given that year which promised the saints that they might eventually "receive their inheritance and be made equal" with God.

How Christ Gained The Fulness Of His Father

One of the most significant revelations on this subject came on the 6th of May, 1833. This revelation included the restoration of part of the writings of John the Baptist, and the stipulation that the balance would be revealed when men become sufficiently faithful to warrant receiving them. It commenced with the promise by the Savior that everyone who overcomes their sins, obeys his voice, and keeps his commandments, shall see him face to face. Like the Book of Mormon and the writings of Moses, this revelation expressed the perfect unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Jesus Christ is quoted as saying, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one." The explanation is then given that Christ is the Father because he shares the fulness of the Father. And that he is the Son because he came into the world, received a mortal body, and lived with the children of men.

\[D&C\] 84:35-38; \[RD&C\] 83:6.

\[D&C\] 88:106-107; \[RD&C\] 85:33b.

\[D&C\] 93:6-35; \[D&C\] 901-6; and Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary Vol I. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, 70.)
It is at this point in the revelation that the writings of John the Baptist were restored. They taught that the Redeemer did not receive the fulness of his Father at first, but advanced from grace to grace until he finally arrived at the point where he received this fulness. Explaining this further, John said that Christ was called the Son because he did not receive of the fulness at first. Finally, when Christ did receive the fulness of his Father, he was given "all power both in heaven and on earth."

**How Men Become Joint-Heirs**

This knowledge, John said, was revealed so that men might be able to worship God correctly, and, in due time also receive of his fulness. John explained that men are to go from grace to grace, as Christ did, until they have received of his fulness and are glorified in him as he is glorified in the Father. The promise being that if men will keep the commandments, and will receive truth and light, they, too, will "know all things" and, like Christ, gain "all power in heaven and earth." That is to say that they become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. A joint-heir is one who inherits equally with all others including Christ himself. Each joint-heir has an equal and an undivided portion of the whole of everything. If one knows all things, so do all others who inherit jointly with him. If one heir possesses all things, then each heir possesses all things and so on.
Full Obedience Leads to Joint-Heirship

Joseph Smith taught that: "All men who become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ will have to receive the fulness of the ordinances of his kingdom; and those who will not receive all the ordinances will come short of the fulness of that glory if they do not lose the whole." For "to become a joint heir of the heirship of the Son, one must put away all his false traditions." Joseph Smith also taught that if a man was to gain this high station he must keep the whole law, that is, he must be obedient to all the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

Joint-Heirs Are Gods

In his "Lectures On Faith", which will be considered in the next chapter, Joseph Smith explained again that Christ gained the fulness of his Father, meaning "the same mind, the same wisdom, glory, power, and fullness... possessing all knowledge and glory" by going from grace to grace. He also stated that "all who believe on his name and keep his commandments... shall grow up from grace to grace, and become heirs of the heavenly kingdom, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." As joint-heirs he said they would be "filled with the fullness" of glory. For he said as "the Son partakes

5 DHC, 5:424.
6 DHC, 5:554.
of the fullness of the Father through the Spirit, so the saints are by the same Spirit, to be partakers of the same fullness, 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." As already stated, the Father and Son are not one in personages so it is not the personage of God that the saints would join. They are one in wisdom, glory, power, and in short, all the attributes of godliness.

In a sermon delivered on the 16th of June, in 1844, Joseph Smith quoted the Apostle Paul saying:

'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.' They who obtain a glorious resurrection from the dead, are exalted far above principalities, powers, thrones, dominions and angels, and are expressly declared to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, all having eternal power.

Such a joint-heir, he said, was "a God to his dominions."7

In the King Follett discourse, he received these principles explaining that to be a joint-heir with Jesus Christ meant "to inherit the same glory, the same power and the same exaltation, until you ascend the throne of eternal power the same as those who are gone before." He explained that this is what Jesus Christ did in order to gain his fulness and that men are to do the same.8

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7DHC, 6:477.
8Times & Seasons 5:614.
Men Are Eternal

This revelation stated that "man was also in the beginning with God," and that he was first "intelligence" and then a "spirit." "The mind of man," according to Joseph Smith, "Is as immortal as God himself." And the elements comprizing his body and spirit always existed and always will exist.

In an editorial written for the Times and Seasons, the Church newspaper published in Nauvoo, Illinois, Joseph Smith explained that there was a very material difference between the body and the spirit. The body, he wrote, was composed of organized matter. Continuing he said that the spirit, which was thought by many to be immaterial and without substance, was in fact both substance and material, but "it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body." Further, "it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection, be again united with it."  

On another occasion he taught, "there is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes." This, he said, "we cannot see. . . but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter."  

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9 Times and Seasons, 5:615.
10 DHC, 4:575.
A Fulness of Joy

Joseph Smith also recorded in the May 6th revelation that only when "spirit and element" are "inseparably connected" can man receive a fulness of joy. This inseparable connection takes place in the resurrection, and harmonized with the statement of Christ to the Nephites in the Book of Mormon that they should be perfect even as he and his Father were perfect. Whereas he did not make reference to himself having the same perfection as the Father prior to his resurrection when he told the New Testament people to be perfect as his Father was perfect.

If men are to follow the example of Christ by going from grace to grace, they can in the resurrection gain the fulness of God, being joint-heirs with him and gods themselves, according to Joseph Smith.

The Elements Are Eternal

The May 6, 1833 revelation also made the declaration that elements are eternal. Elements are the matter which singly or in combination, compose all substances. The assumption here is that matter in its elementary form can be neither created nor destroyed. Joseph Smith wrote on another occasion that the translation "without form and void" in the Bible account of the creation should have read "empty and desolate." And that the word "created" if translated properly
from the Hebrew would read "formed, or organized." He pointed out that despite the fact that learned men were teaching "that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing," the word create means "to organize; the same as a man would organize" or build a ship. Element, he taught, existed co-eternally with God. That is to say, that elements have a similar relationship to time in that they had no beginning and can have no end.

Supporting this idea, an article published in 1845 in the *Times and Seasons* declared:

God, the Father, is material.  
Jesus Christ is material.  
Angels are material.  
Spirits are material.  
Men are material.  
The Universe is material.  
Space is full of materiality.  
Nothing exists which is not material.

This article defined immateriality as another name for nonentity or "the negative of all things," and equated a belief in an immaterial God as a form of atheism, for it is a belief in nothing.

**Materialism and Eternal Life**

One of the valiant defenders of the doctrines of Joseph Smith was Parley P. Pratt. Building on the concepts

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12 Joseph Smith's papers 1839-1841, located in Church Historian's Office, 47 E. South Temple St., Salt Lake City. Also found in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. by Joseph Fielding Smith. (Deseret Book Co., 1965), 181.

13 *Times and Seasons*, 5:615.

14 *Times and Seasons*, 6:1039.
of this revelation, Pratt made some interesting conclusions in an article entitled, "Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body."\textsuperscript{15} In this work, Pratt reasoned that matter did not come from nonentity, that such a conclusion is contrary to revelation, reason, and science. Nothing added to nothing, is still nothing, he said, and "ten thousand nothings multiplied together cannot increase the amount."

From those who would still make such an argument, he would inquire, "how many solid feet of nonentity would it require to make one solid foot of material substance?" "The very idea," he said, "is the climax of absurdity."

Since the elements are eternal they are co-existent with God. From here, Pratt proceeds to his second fact, that no material substance can be annihilated. He stated that one "of the foundation errors of modern times is the belief in a Deity without body or part, whose center is everywhere, and circumference nowhere." This leads to the idea that if men are to become like God, they, too, must become immaterial beings, and hence, the annihilation of all material things. "What then could exist?" he asks, and answers, "Nothing."

The globe would "dissolve, and disappear," the stars in the heavens would cease to be, man, like God, would be without body or parts, and would go to dwell on the top of a topless throne. Of this arrangement Pratt says, "Ten thousand such

\textsuperscript{15}Parker P. Robinson, (ed.) \textit{Writings of Parley Parker Pratt} (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1952), 25-47. [This article was first published in 1844.]
Gods, and thrones, and places, and beings, all taken together, would be of less consequences than the smallest part of an atom."

Elder Pratt illustrated that "the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is everywhere in the scriptures revealed as a being possessing a bodily organization in all its parts." And that Jesus Christ was created in His express image, that man was made in his image and likeness, and that the Savior and all men will be inseparably reunited with their bodies throughout eternity.

**How Christ Is Unchangeable**

The question could well be asked, if Christ progressed from grace to grace before he received of the fulness, then how can the scriptures proclaim him to be "unchangeable" and "the same God yesterday, today, and forever." The writer sees two possible answers to this question: (1) to reject this concept as uninspired; or (2) that the expressions "unchangeable" and the same "yesterday, today and forever," do not make reference to the personage of Christ, but rather are name-titles, having as their purpose to teach that the truths which Christ proclaimed have been from past eternity and will be throughout eternity, the same. This explanation finds support in the context in which these titles are used.

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16 D&C 20:17; RD&C 17:4a.

17 D&C 20:12; RD&C 17:2.
For instance, the Doctrine and Covenants teaches that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is cited as proof to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that men are inspired in this generation in the same manner as they were in past generations. This is given as an evidence that Christ "is the same God yesterday, today and forever." In other words, because Christ taught the same principles and truths to past generations as he teaches today, and will teach in future generations, he can claim to be "unchangeable," and at the same time he can advance from grace to grace. In another revelation his "course" is referred to as "one eternal round, the same today as yesterday and forever." 18 This statement does not necessitate that we compound the "personage" of Christ with his "course" or the principles that he teaches. This is commonly done. For instance, the Bible says that Christ is "love." This was not meant to mean that love was the only attribute that he possesses, but rather that he personified this particular attribute. In the same manner the scriptures say that he is "light" or that he is the "Morning Star." In each case inanimate objects are chosen as his names. This is done to emphasize certain of his attributes and thereby expand out knowledge and understanding of him.

18D&C 35:1; RLDS D&C 34:1.
Calling And Election

In an article written in June of 1839, Joseph Smith quoted Peter's exhortion for men to make their calling and election sure. He said that this was "the sealing power" spoken of by Peter on other occasions. Explaining how a person made their calling and election sure, he said that there were two comforters, the first is the Holy Ghost, and the second "is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself." When a man receives the second Comforter, "he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time," and Christ will also manifest the Father unto him. He also said that the visions of the heavens will be opened to them and that the Lord will teach them face to face. This was described as the state arrived at by the ancient saints when they had their glorious visions. "Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens" were all sighted as examples.

The More Sure Word

In order to receive this great experience, Joseph Smith said that one must have faith in Christ, repent of his sins, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, "which is the first Comforter," and then continue to humble himself before God, "hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every work of God." Then the Lord would say to him, "Son, thou shalt be exalted." And with that promise he would have made his calling and election sure. Joseph
Smith said that when the Lord had thoroughly proved a man and found that he would serve him at "all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter." He taught that the 14th Chapter of St. John, verses 12-17 made reference to this doctrine. On another occasion, speaking of John 14:23, he said "the appearing of the Father and Son, in that verse, is a personal appearance; and the idea that the Father and the Son dwell in a man's heart is an old sectarian notion, and is false." He also said that when the Savior should appear that men would see that he was a man like themselves.

In a sermon delivered May 14, 1843, Joseph Smith declared that even though a man had heard a voice from heaven bearing witness that Jesus is the Christ, he could receive a still greater witness. This greater witness he called the "more sure word of prophecy" for it was the knowledge that they had a part with Christ, that they were joint-heirs with him. It would be a manifestation to them that they were sealed in the heavens having the sure promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God. He said that this knowledge would be "an anchor to the soul" and "though the thunders might roll and lightnings flash, and

19 DHC, 3:379-381.
20 D&C 130:1-3.
earthquakes bellow, and war gather thick around, yet this hope and knowledge would support the soul in every hour of trial, trouble and tribulation."

Joseph Smith then suggested that they compare this principle with the doctrines of Christendom. He said, "with all their boasted religion, piety, and sacredness," they are "crying out against prophets, apostles, angels, revelations, prophesying and visions." He said, "they are ripening for the damnation of hell," and they will be damned, for they reject the most glorious principle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and treat with disdain and trample under foot the key that unlocks the heavens and puts in our possession the glories of the celestial world."\(^{21}\)

On Wednesday, the 17th of May, Joseph Smith preached from "2nd Peter, 1st Chapter, and showed that knowledge is power; and the man who has the most knowledge has the greatest power." At this time he said: "The more sure word of prophecy means a man's knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood."\(^{22}\)

The following Sunday, Joseph Smith spoke on this subject again. He taught that there were "three grand secrets" in II Peter Chapter one, which could be understood only by revelation. He said that this chapter only hinted at things

\(^{21}\)DHC, 5:387-388.

\(^{22}\)D&C 131:5-6; DHC, 5:392.
which were in Peter's mind. The first key is that knowledge is the power of salvation. The second key is to make one's calling and election sure. The third key is that "it is one thing to be on the mount and hear the excellent voice and "another to hear the voice declare to you, you, have a part and lot in that kingdom."23

RLDS Position

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints are emphatic in their denial that Joseph Smith ever taught that men could attain to the status of gods. As explained to the writer by RLDS ministers, they do not believe that such expressions as "receiving of his fulness," being made "equal in power, and in might, and in dominion," or becoming "heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ," can be properly interpreted according to their literal reading. Nor do they ascribe to the concept that God the Father, or his Son Jesus Christ (following his resurrection) are personages of tabernacle. This they believe, would limit or bind Deity. The Father and the Son can, however, assume the form of men for the purpose of revealing themselves to men on earth.

They also reject the doctrine that men can have their calling and election made sure in the sense that they are sealed to eternal life. The RLDS position is that God's promises are always conditioned upon righteousness. Therefore, no such unconditional promise could be made according to their theology.

23DH C, 5:400-403.
CHAPTER X

THE LECTURES ON FAITH

On the 27th of December, 1832, Joseph Smith was directed by the Lord to organize a school for the instruction of the Saints. This school, which became known as the School of the Prophets, was organized in Kirtland, Ohio, in February of 1833, and continued until April of the same year. Apparently the expulsion of the Saints from Jackson County, Missouri, in the fall of 1833, prevented the continuation of the school during that winter. However, the school was reopened in the winter of 1834-35. For the most part, the classes were comprised of elders who were instructed in theology in order to prepare them to be more effective missionaries.

At this school, during the winter of 1834-35, a series of lectures on theology were prepared and presented by Joseph Smith. It should be noted that these lectures were not to be considered as scripture, but they were regarded to be of

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1D&C 88:127; 136-141; RD&C 39a; 44-46.
2DHC, 2:175-176.
great doctrinal value. They were published with Joseph Smith's sanction and approval in the Messenger and Advocate, the Church publication at the time. These lectures were added to the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in August of 1835, and were included in all LDS editions until 1921. Because they are not considered as being of the same doctrinal value as the scriptures, they have not been published in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants since that time. They are not published in the RLDS edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and it is not known to the writer if they ever were.

The lectures, seven in number, dealt with the subject of faith. They considered what faith is, upon what objects it rests, and the effects that flow from it. Since they deal with faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, they contain important insights into Joseph Smith's concept of Deity.

**What Is Faith**

The first lecture answered the question, "what is faith?" In it, Joseph Smith explained that faith is the "first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld," or by it they can be changed. Without faith, he said, "there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence!"

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4 DHC, 2:176.

5 *Messenger and Advocate*, 1:122.
The purpose of the second lecture was to show the object upon which faith rests. It established that God is a being who has faith independently in himself, because he "is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient."

A Rational Faith

It was stated in the third lecture that three things are necessary in order for "any rational and intelligent being" to "exercise faith in God unto life and salvation." The first concept is that Deity actually exists; second, a correct understanding "of his character, perfections, and attributes," is needed; third, an actual knowledge that the course of life which one is pursuing is in accordance to the will of Deity. The specific knowledge necessary is considered in the sixth lecture. Joseph Smith explained that without the knowledge of these three facts, one's faith is "imperfect and unproductive." He then proceeded to examine the character, perfections and attributes of Deity in order that just grounds for exercising faith in him might be understood. He said that the only way one can receive truth is by revelation. He then established six things about the character of Deity from revelation. They were: (1) God existed before the world was created; (2) "he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and that he was the same from everlasting, and will be so to everlasting;" (3) he does not change or vary, for his course is one eternal round; (4) "he is a God of truth, and cannot lie;" (5) he is no respector
of persons; and (6) that he is love.

The necessity of having correct concepts of Deity in order to be able to exercise faith sufficient to lead to eternal life was the subject of the fourth lecture. Here Joseph Smith made the observation that God's purpose in making known his attributes to the human family, was to make it possible for them to exercise faith in him. These attributes are: (1) that God knows all things; (2) that he has all faith; (3) that his justice is perfect; (4) that his judgment is perfect; (5) that he has the quality of mercy in perfection; and (6) that he possesses all truth.

Two Anthropomorphic Gods

The fifth lecture deals with the Godhead, which Joseph Smith defines as "the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." It begins by stating that there are "two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing, and supreme power over all things, by whom all things were created and made, . . . throughout the immensity of space." These two personages are described as follows:

. . . They are the Father and the Son—the Father being a personage of spirit, glory, and power, possessing all perfection and fullness, the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or rather man was formed after his likeness and in his image; he is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father, possessing all the fullness of the Father, or the same fullness with the Father; being begotten of him. . . .

Again it is seen that Joseph Smith believed the Father and Son to be "personages," that were separate and distinct from each other. He believed the Son to be a personage of "tabernacle" created in the "express image and likeness" of his Father; hence, his Father would also be a personage of tabernacle. In other words, the Godhead included two corporeal, anthropomorphic beings. In fact, on one occasion Joseph Smith said, "that which is without body, parts and passions is nothing. There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones."  

On the 3rd of April, 1836, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, the associate President of the Church, had an experience which also supports the conclusion of this lecture. On that occasion they were in the Kirtland Temple when the Savior appeared to accept the dedication of the Temple as his house.

We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber.

His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah.

Though the description given by these two men is in a very vivid language, it is plain that they were speaking of a personal God—with body, parts, and passions.

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7Joseph Smith, Letter on file, located in LDS Church Historian's Office, 47 E. South Temple St., Salt Lake City.

8D&C 110:2-3.
Supportive Evidence

This concept found frequent and forceful mention in both contemporary Mormon and anti-Mormon sources. Daniel D. Tyler related an amusing story of how Joshua Holman, a former Methodist exhorter, was called on by Joseph Smith to offer grace over the food and commenced to pray with all his soul to "the great and mighty God who sat upon the top of a topless throne." When he finished, Joseph Smith said, "Brother, Joshua, don't let me ever hear you ask another such blessing." Brother Joshua was somewhat taken back until Joseph Smith explained how inconsistent such a prayer was when one understood the true concept of God.9

In 1840, John Taylor published a comparison between the Mormon and Methodist God. In doing so, he quoted an article written two years earlier by Parley P. Pratt. In this article the concept of a God without body or parts and three Gods in one essence was referred to as "a bundle of nonsense, contradiction, and absurdity." Pratt wrote: "Here then is the Methodist God, without either eyes, ears, or mouth! And yet man was created after the image of God; but this could not apply to the Methodist God, for he has no image or likeness!" These two apostles boldly declared, "we worship a God who has both body and parts."10

9Daniel Tyler, "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," Juvenile Instructor, Vol. 27 (February 15, 1892), 127.
In 1841, Orson Hyde, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in a letter describing his missionary experiences, mentioned a minister in the Church of England whom he had met. Of this man he said, "but he like all others who worship a God 'without body or parts', said that miracles, visions, and prophecy had ceased." Joseph Smith included this letter in his journal.  

11 Elder Orson Spencer, made this comment in a letter written in Nauvoo, November 17, 1842: "In some, and indeed many respects do we differ from sectarian denominations. We believe that God is a being that has both body and parts, and also passions."12

In the April, 1842 edition of the Millennial Star, the Latter-day Saint publication in England, contained an article entitled, "The True God and His Worship Contrasted With Idolatry." This article commenced by stating that because the sectarian world was engaged "in the worship of almost innumerable imaginary Gods," that it was of utmost importance that men come to the knowledge of the true God. This article referred to the belief that God was without body, parts, or passions, as a "species of idolatry" invented by "superstition and priestcraft." Further, it stated:

Indeed it can hardly be said to be idolatry, for strictly speaking it amounts to Atheism. It is as much as to say, there is a God, and yet he does not exist; or there is a being, and there is no being; for

11 DHC, 2:497.

12 Orson Spencer, Millennial Star, 4:37.
reason teaches us that that being or thing which has a whole must have parts, for the whole must have parts, for the whole is made up of parts. Therefore, to speak of a being, or thing, and assert that it is, and that it has neither body or parts, is as much as to say that it has no whole, and if it has no whole it does not exist, and therefore it is not.

A number of scriptures were then cited to show that both the Father and the Son have bodies of flesh and bone.¹³

**Anti-Mormon Criticism**

As mentioned, anti-Mormon writers were free with their criticism on this doctrine. For instance, Henry Mayhew wrote, "according to the 'Lectures on Faith,' and in accordance with the high tone assumed by the Mormons in their Materialism, they invariably give a literal interpretation to the Hebrew Scriptures. That is their cardinal point,—no mysticism;—the plain meaning of plain words."

He continued, "God, by the Mormons, is described through his personal attributes, and these, again, are resolved into corporeal characteristics."¹⁴ Professor J.B. Turner, in an anti-Mormon book¹⁵ published in 1842, condemned Joseph Smith and the Mormons for this "blasphemous" doctrine. Henry Caswall, a professor of divinity, in a book published in 1843, repeated the charges made by Professor Turner stating:

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¹⁴Henry Mayhew, **The Mormons: or Latter-Day Saints** (London: Office of the National Illustrated Library, 1856), 303.

¹⁵J.B. Turner, **Mormonism In All Ages: or the Rise, Progress, and Cause of Mormonism** (New York: Patt and Peters, 1842), 242.
"The Mormons deny that 'God is a spirit without body, parts, or passions,' and assign him a human form, with human feelings and instruments of human enterprise." 16

Three Separate Personages

In the fifth lecture, Joseph Smith described the Holy Ghost as the "mind" of Christ and the Father. He also stated that the Godhead was comprised of two personages. These statements convey the impression that Joseph Smith did not believe the Holy Ghost to be a personage of spirit, but rather some kind of spiritual essence. However, this conclusion does not harmonize with Joseph Smith's introductory statement in this lecture where he defined the Godhead as the Father, Son and Holy Ghost and his summary statement in which he said the same thing. Other statements made by Joseph Smith about the Godhead make this clear. For instance, Joseph Smith said: "Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this 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." 17 In a sermon given in the Nauvoo Temple, January 29, 1843, Joseph Smith explained the descension of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove at the Savior's baptism in this manner:


17 Joseph Smith, Letter on file in Church Historian's Office, 47 E. South Temple, Salt Lake City.
The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the form of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence. ¹⁸

In April of 1843, while visiting Ramus, Illinois, Joseph Smith made this statement: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us." ¹⁹ In stating that there were two personages in the Godhead, Joseph Smith apparently had reference to corporeal personages, for on a number of occasions he made reference to the Holy Ghost as a personage of spirit. ²⁰

Men To Become As God

Joseph Smith also taught in the fifth lecture that Christ had received the fulness of his Father and therefore possessed the same mind, spirit, wisdom, knowledge, glory, power and kingdom that the Father possessed. He further taught that all those who kept the commandments would "grow up from grace to grace, and become heirs of the heavenly

¹⁸ *DHC*, 5:261 (with the exception of the words "form" and "sign" the underlining is the writer's).

¹⁹ *D&C 130:22.*

²⁰ See also the summary to this chapter & the June 16th Sermon.
kingdom, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ," possessing a fulness of glory, and becoming one in Christ "even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one." The three personages of the Godhead and righteous men, according to Joseph Smith, were eventually to become one. This, he said, was a oneness of purpose, glory, and power, not a oneness of essence.

In other words, Jesus Christ is the prototype after which men are to pattern their lives. They, like Christ, are to go from grace to grace until they gain the fulness of the Father. And like Christ, they can receive this fulness only in the resurrection.21 Joseph Smith taught that the resurrected Christ was a personage of tabernacle and stated: "No person can have salvation except through a tabernacle."22 From this knowledge Joseph Smith said the saints have a "sure foundation laid for the exercise of faith unto life and salvation." On a later occasion, in relationship to the concept of three Gods in one essence, he said, "it would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God--he would be a giant or a monster."23

In the seventh lecture, Joseph Smith pointed out that if either the Father or the Son were lacking in any attribute or perfection, they could not enjoy the glory which they have "for it requires them to be precisely what

21See the preceding chapter.
22DHC, 5:388.
23DHC, 6:476.
they are in order to enjoy it, and if the Savior gives this glory to any others, he must do it in the very way set forth in his prayer to his Father—by making them one with him as he and the Father are one." In so doing, he would give them the glory which the Father has given him. Joseph Smith said that this is what the Savior meant when he said, "the works which I do, shall they do; and greater works than these shall they do, because I go to my Father."

**Joseph Smith Accused Of Blaspemey**

Joseph Smith was severely criticized by anti-Mormon writers for teaching that men were to progress from grace to grace until they arrived at a status of godhood. Professor Turner referred to this doctrine as a "choice specimen of 'Mormon logic and literal interpretation of the scriptures,'" which climaxed the "Mormon Babel." He called it a "hideous and blasphemous abortion of all scripture, all reason, all decency, and all sense!" "Every Mormon," he said, "is not only to be a God hereafter; he has, in his own belief, been a demigod from all eternity, or at least an angel heretofore." Then Turner told his readers to "remember that when you meet a full-blooded Mormon, you meet an angel that was, a Mormon that is, and a God that IS TO BE."

The Mormon Apostate John C. Bennett in his Expose!'

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of Joe Smith and Mormonism, published the same year and Reverend Caswall in his *Prophet of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1843, both sustained Turner in his criticism and quoted from him in their works. Caswall stated it in this manner:

Professing to believe in the literal interpretation of Scriptures, the Mormons say, that when Christ prayed that all the saints might be one with him and the Father, and declared that they should sit with him on his throne, he intended to teach that all the saints are to become equal with God himself. And since Christ assured his disciples that they should do 'greater things than these,' 'therefore the Mormons shall do greater things than Christ did; they shall create, uphold, redeem, save, and reign for ever, over greater worlds than this for which Christ has died. Nor is this all. Every true Mormon is not only to be a God and a Christ hereafter, but in his own belief he has been a demigod, or at least an angel, from all eternity. He is taught that his actions and destiny here are the result, and can only be explained upon the admission, of his existence and actions before inhabiting his present body.  

Summary

On the 11th of June, 1843, while in Nauvoo, Illinois, Joseph Smith gave a discourse on the gathering of Israel. At the conclusion of his remarks, he bore this testimony in which he summarized three of the concepts of Deity discussed in this chapter. First he distinctly stated that there are three separate and distinct personages in the Godhead in this manner:

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25John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or An Expose' of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 171-172.

26Caswall, 94-95.
There is much said about God and the Godhead. The scriptures say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us there is but one living and true God, and the heaven of heavens could not contain him; for he took the liberty to go into other heavens. The teachers of the day say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and they are all in one body and one God. Jesus prayed that those that the Father had given him out of the world might be made one in them, as they were one. If I were to testify that the Christian world were wrong on this point, my testimony would be true.

Peter and Stephen testify that they saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Any person that had seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and one presides over all.

Secondly he pointed out that two of the personages of the Godhead have glorified physical bodies.

If any man attempts to refute what I am about to say, after I have made it plain, let him beware. As the Father hath power in Himself, so hath the Son power in Himself, to lay down His life and take it again, so He has a body of His own. The Son doeth what He hath seen the Father do; then the Father hath some day laid down His life and taken it again; so He has a body of His own; each one will be in His own body; and yet the sectarian world believe the body of the Son is identical with the Father's.

And finally, he pointed out that in the resurrection men can become gods. He said: "Gods have an ascendancy over angels, who are ministering servants. In the resurrection, some are raised to be angels; others are raised to become Gods." 27

Summary Of RLDS Beliefs

The "Lectures on Faith" are one of the most commonly quoted sources by members of the Reorganized Church for an

27 DHC, 5:426-427.
expression of their concept of Deity. Joseph Smith III, the first president of the Reorganization, in an article published in the Saint's Herald in answer to the request to set forth "the faith of the church on the Godhead" referred to the "Lectures on Faith" for the majority of his answer. He stated that there "are in the Godhead proper, two personages" and noted that the Holy Ghost is sometimes called the third personage. However, he pointed out that the Holy Ghost "is in reality the mind, will, and element of power of both the Father and the Son" and would not, therefore, properly be considered a personage. 28

Joseph Smith III was careful to point out that to his knowledge the church had taken no official stand on this doctrine by way of conference action. And he stated that "every devout believer" is at liberty to enlarge upon these principles as given direction by the Spirit. 29

28Saint's Herald, 45:162.

29Ibid.
CHAPTER XI

THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM AND THE PLURALITY OF GODS

On the 3rd of July, 1835, Michael H. Chandler came to Kirtland, Ohio, to exhibit some Egyptian mummies. Chandler also had in his possession, two or more rolls of papyrus which were covered with hieroglyphic figures. Some of the saints in Kirtland purchased the mummies and the papyrus and gave them to Joseph Smith, who immediately commences to translate the scrolls. In doing so, he claimed that one of the rolls contained the writings of the ancient patriarch Abraham, and the other, the writings of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. During the next few months, he continued to devote considerable time to this work of translation. Because of his many pressing duties, however, it was not until the winter of 1842, that he was exerting his last efforts upon the Book of Abraham and its preparation for publication. 1

In March of 1842, Joseph Smith assumed the editorship of the Times and Seasons, stating in that issue: "This paper commences my editorial career; I alone stand responsible for it, and shall so for all papers having my signature henceforth." Significantly, it was in this issue that he started

1Milton R. Hunter, Pearl of Great Price Commentary (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, Inc., 1948), 29.
the publication of the Book of Abraham.  

One Book of Abraham scholar said that it seemed quite certain that Joseph Smith took over the Times and Seasons and assumed full responsibility for its contents at this strategic time so that it could never be said later that the Book of Abraham was published without his approval.

The Gods

The Book of Abraham contains five chapters. In the first two, Abraham tells his own history. In the third chapter, he recounts his visions of the heavens, and in the fourth and fifth chapters he gives an account of the blueprint of the creation of the earth.

Chapters three through five are of particular interest to this study. The fourth chapter, which commences the creative account states: "And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth." According to this account, a plurality of Gods were involved in the creative act. The expression, "the Gods" is used four dozen times in the fourth and fifth chapters of Abraham. In publishing his translation of the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith was boldly announcing the concept of a plurality of gods and doing so in a manner

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Times and Seasons, (Mar 1, 1842), 3:710.

James R. Clark, The Story of the Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc. 1955), 171.

Hunter, 74.
in which he assumed full responsibility for the doctrine.

Abraham was shown in vision the spirits that were organized "before this world was," and that "among all those there were many of the noble and great ones." From these great spirits came those called "Gods," who were invited to take of existant materials and make an earth upon which all the pre-existant spirits would dwell.\(^5\) Abraham's account makes it plain that Christ was one of these spirits. On another occasion, Joseph Smith referred to Moses as one of the great spirits who had exalted "themselves to be Gods, even from before the foundation of the world."\(^6\)

It should also be remembered that Joseph Smith spoke of a patriarchal order of gods. According to this usage, Joseph Smith explained that our Father in Heaven had a Father, and since there has been a condition of this kind through all eternity, each Father had a Father until we come to a point where we cannot go further because of our limited capacity to understand.\(^7\)

In the third chapter, Abraham was told that the planet nearest to that upon which God resides is named Kolob. It was also explained to Abraham that where two things exist, "and there be one above the other, there shall be greater

\(^6\)DHC, 6:478.
\(^7\)See Chapter XIII.
things above them."

Joseph Smith cites three variations of this basic assumption. First in the area of the orderly cosmos there is a "continual ascendancy in time schedule and in government, one sphere above another, upward to Kolob, whose measurement of time is the same as the sphere upon which God resides." Second, where there are two spirits organized by the Father, one more intelligent than the other, "there shall be another more intelligent than they." The Lord being more intelligent than all others. A third variation of this basic truth was expressed a little over two years later when Joseph Smith stated:

I learned a testimony concerning Abraham, and he reasoned concerning the God of heaven. 'In order to do that,' said he, 'suppose we have two facts: that supposed another fact may exist--two men on the earth, one wiser than the other, would logically show that another who is wiser than the wisest may exist. Intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them.'

If Abraham reasoned thus--If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly. Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also? I despise the idea of being scared to death at such a doctrine, for the Bible is full of it.

I want you to pay particular attention to what I am saying. Jesus said that the Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before Him. As

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the Father had done before? He laid down His life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before. He did as He was sent, to lay down His life and take it up again; and then was committed unto Him the keys. I know it is good reasoning.9

From this explanation several ideas are apparent, one of which is that there is one God above another without end in the patriarchal order of eternity. And that the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, and apparently sometime in the distant past the Father of Christ went through an earthly experience which was necessary for him to obtain a physical body and raise to his exalted status.

The Doctrine Proclaimed

Quite obviously as a result of his experience as a scribe for Joseph Smith in the translation of the Book of Abraham, W.W. Phelps wrote a poem called, "If You Could Hie to Kolob."

If you could hie to Kolob, In the twinkling of an eye, And then continue onward, With that same speed to fly, D'ye think that you could ever, Through all eternity, Find out the generation Where Gods began to be?

Or see the grand beginning, Where space did not extend? Or view the last creation, Where Gods and matter end? Me thinks the Spirit whispers, "No man has found 'pure space;' Nor seen the outside curtains, Where nothing has a place.

The works of God continue, And worlds and lives abound; Improvement and progression Have one eternal round. There is no end to matter, There is no end to space, There is no end to spirit, There is no end to race.10

9DHC, 6:476.
10William W. Phelps, Hymns, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Published by LDS Church), 257.
In August of 1842, Parley P. Pratt and T. Ward, editors of the Millennial Star, commenting on the concept of a plurality of Gods from the Book of Abraham wrote:

No doubt, many will startle at the term 'Gods,' or deity in the plural number; yet it is a fact that the Bible calls them Gods to whom the word of God came. And in the beginning of Genesis, and throughout the Bible, the Hebrew word Elohim (Gods), is actually in the plural, though the translators have rendered it (God) in the singular. 11

A Historical Evaluation Of The Book Of Abraham

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints deny that the Book of Abraham is a legitimate expression of the views of Joseph Smith. Their denial is based on the fact that it sustains the doctrine of a plurality of Gods. By reviewing a number of RLDS publications, the writer found a total of seven different objections to the Book of Abraham. Each of these objections will be stated and evaluated in this chapter.

First Objection

The first objection is that the doctrine of a plurality of gods contradicts the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. 12 In Chapter VII, "The Inspired Version," a sufficient number of Bible passages speaking of a plurality of gods have been cited to dispell

12Koury, 23.
the idea that this doctrine is not found in the Bible. In fact, Joseph Smith is quoted in a sermon given on the 16th of June, 1844, as saying, "the doctrine of a plurality of gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy. A wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein."¹³ Joseph Smith then continued at length to prove this very thing from the Bible. This sermon is considered in full in chapters XIV and XV.

As to the Book of Mormon, the only reference to a plurality of gods is where Alma, in explaining the plan of redemption, said that Adam and Eve became as "Gods, knowing good from evil," when they partook of the forbidden fruit.¹⁴ It will be recalled from Chapter V, however, that the Savior instructed his disciples to become as he was—that is as a god. This statement harmonizes completely with the Doctrine and Covenants revelations. The LDS edition of the Doctrine and Covenants emphatically states this in Section 132. Numerous other accounts are common to the Doctrine and Covenants of both Churches, which speak of a man gaining a state of complete equality with God. The account of "The Vision," for instance, which is accepted by both Churches, contains the promise that righteous men can become "gods."

¹³DHC, 6:474.
¹⁴Alma 12:31; RLDS Alma 9:51.
In summation, it has already been shown in this work that the doctrine of a plurality of gods is not only in harmony with the Book of Mormon, Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants, but that each of these works supports this doctrine, and the latter two teach it.

A Second Objection

A second argument is that Joseph Smith "never once represented the Book of Abraham as divine, nor did he ever suggest that it be considered, much less accepted, as scripture and doctrine for the church."\(^{15}\)

Joseph Smith made the following statement in his journal:

I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc., --a more full account which will appear in its place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them. Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth.\(^{16}\) (underlining added)

Here, Joseph Smith refers to the Book of Abraham as being truth revealed by the Lord. Certainly truth revealed by the Lord is scripture.

Oliver Cowdery, who acted as a scribe for Joseph Smith in the translation of the Book of Abraham, in a letter to William Frye, which was published in the *Messenger and Advocate*

\(^{15}\)Halston, 109.

\(^{16}\)DHC, 2:236 (underlining added).
in 1835, referred to this record as being an "inestimable acquisition to our present scriptures, fulfilling, in a small degree, the word of the prophet: 'For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'" He also wrote, "if providence permits, I will, err long, write you again upon the propriety of looking for additions to our present scriptures, according to their own literal reading."^{17}

Wilford Woodruff printed the edition of the Times and Seasons which contained the latter portion of the Book of Abraham. Speaking of this labor, he recorded this statement in his journal: "The truths of the Book of Abraham are truly edifying, great and glorious which are among the rich treasures that are revealed unto us, in the last days."^{18}

As already mentioned, shortly after the Book of Abraham was published in the Times and Seasons at Nauvoo, Illinois, it was published in the Millennial Star in England under the editorship of Parley P. Pratt and T. Ward. In the August issues of the Millennial Star, Elders Pratt and Ward referred to it as a light that had burst upon the world, and said that they were "lost in astonishment and admiration at its truths." They likened the Book of Abraham to the Key

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^{17}Oliver Cowdery to William Fry, Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate, Vol. 2 (December, 1835), 235-237.

^{18}Hunter, 33.
of knowledge and to the opening seal announcing the day long
foretold by ancient prophets when all truth would be restored
to earth.

The writer finds no evidence that Joseph Smith or
his associates in the leadership of the Church had any
reservations about the scriptural value or the divine origin
of the Book of Abraham. They all appeared to agree with
Oliver Cowdery that it was an "inestimable acquisition"
to their "present scriptures."

A Third Objection

A third RLDS objection to the Book of Abraham is
that "Joseph Smith was told in the Doctrine and Covenants
that he was commissioned to translate the Book of Mormon,
but there is not a word to indicate that he was to translate
other books or documents by the power of God." 19

In April of 1829, while Oliver Cowdery was acting as
a scribe for Joseph Smith on the translation of the Book of
Mormon, he asked the Lord to allow him the privilege of doing
the actual translation. He was granted this privilege, but
because he failed to prepare himself properly to do this work,
the privilege was taken from him. A revelation was given
regarding this matter in which the Lord was quoted as saying
to Oliver Cowdery:

19 Russell F. Ralston, Fundamental Differences (rev.
Behold I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me, and did commence again to write for my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., even so I would that ye should continue until you have finished this record, which I have entrusted unto him.

And then, behold, other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate.20

It is apparent from this revelation that Oliver Cowdery was to assist Joseph Smith in the translation of other records.

There is, then, scriptural evidence that Joseph Smith was commissioned to translate other records or books. It should also be understood that Joseph Smith was sustained by the Church from the time of its organization as a "seer" and a "translator."21 Just a little over three months before the papyrus rolls were delivered to him, he was referred to in a revelation as "a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the Church."22 The right to these gifts was his as long as he presided over the Church.

Milton R. Hunter, speaking of the translation of the Book of Abraham said, "it is quite certain that the translation of these ancient records was not a mere mechanical process. The prophet had to be living an almost perfect life in order to retain communion with God."23 His "source of inspiration

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22D&C 107:92; RD&C 104:42b.
23Hunter, p.31.
and information was more potent than all the human scholarship on the ancient Egyptian language which existed in the world at that time." It is of interest here to note that the greatest paleographer in the world at the time had spent over twenty years translating only one page of Egyptian hieroglyphics and demotic symbols. The Egyptian language was extremely difficult to decipher. It was, in fact, a dead language. Elder Hunter stated that the only way Joseph Smith could have translated these ancient documents was to depend entirely upon the same source of help which he used in translating the Book of Mormon. Without a commission from God, he could not have translated them.

A Fourth Objection

A fourth RLDS objection to the Book of Abraham is that Joseph Smith "did not say that the manuscript was an authentic document of Abraham, but rather said that it was 'a translation of some ancient records that have fallen into our hands, from the Catacombs of Egypt, purporting to be writings of Abraham...'."

An article published in the Quincy Whig, in October of 1840, quoted an interview with Joseph Smith in which he is reported as saying, "these ancient records throw great

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\[24\] Ibid., 28
\[25\] Ibid., 31.
\[26\] Ralston, 109.
light on the subject of Christianity. ... I will show you how I interpret certain parts." Then, pointing to a particular character, he said, "that is the signature of the patriarch Abraham." 27

Joseph Smith repeatedly stated that the translation was of records written by Abraham. Shortly after receiving these records, he said, "I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt." 28 In October of that year, speaking of the work on the translation, he said, "during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding." 29 Numerous similar statements could be quoted.

It is correct that the record "purported" to be written by Abraham, for it reads, "Thus, I Abraham. ..." 30 Joseph Smith consistantly stated that it was exactly what it "purported" to be. In the Manuscript History, which was prepared under his direction, Joseph Smith declared absolutely

27 Hunter, 16.
28 DHC, 2:236.
29 DHC, 2:286.
30 "Book of Abraham," Pearl of Great Price, (Salt Lake City: pub. by LDS Church, 1949), 36.
that the writings were Abraham's.  

A Fifth Objection

A fifth RLDS objection is that the Book of Abraham contradicts the story of the creation as found in the Bible. "Where the Bible says 'I God' created the earth, the Book of Abraham says it was 'the Gods.'" It is also claimed that the Book of Abraham contradicts the Inspired Version of the Bible.  

Book of Abraham scholars generally agree that the account of the creation given in the Book of Abraham, is not an account of the physical creation as is the account in the Inspired Version. Abraham's record is an account of the blueprint of the creation. It tells of the Council in the heavens at which the plans for creation were made. Since Abraham's account and the Inspired Version are of two separate events, no contradiction can exist.  

However, even if both accounts were considered to be of the physical creation, there would be no contradiction because the Inspired Version reads, "I Am the Beginning and the End; the Almighty God. By mine Only Begotten I created these things." The account then continues to use the singular "I God" until it comes to the creation of man where it reads:

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32 Ralston, 110.

33 Hunter, 74-80.
"And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us, make man in our image, after our likeness." The Inspired Version account tells of the work of two Gods, which is plural.

A Sixth Objection

A sixth argument produced by the RLDS that the Book of Abraham could not be inspired, is that in the very same issue of the Times and Seasons in which the first installment of the Book of Abraham appeared, and immediately following it, Joseph Smith reproduced his letter to John Wentworth, Editor and Proprietor of the Chicago Democrat, in which he set forth the doctrines and beliefs of the Church. In this letter Joseph Smith made the statement, "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." This is claimed to be an evidence of "the eternal truth that there is only one God." This conclusion is openly at odds with the evidence. The Wentworth letter begins with Joseph Smith's account of the First Vision, in which he saw God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. In it Joseph Smith states, "I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages." In view of this statement, the writer concludes that the only

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34 Genesis, Inspired Version, 1:2; 27.
35 Ralston, 111.
36 DHC, 4:536.
meaning that can, with consistency, be applied to the statement: "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost," is that it makes reference to a plurality of Gods.

A Seventh Objection

A seventh RLDS objection to the Book of Abraham is that it was not accepted by the church as scripture during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. Further, it has never been accepted officially by the Reorganized Church. 37

The writer fails to see any consistency or logic in this objection. None of the Gospels were accepted as scripture during the lifetime of the Savior. Certainly this does not make the principles contained in them less valuable or untrue.

This objection overlooks the fact that the Book of Abraham was published under Joseph Smith's direction and with his complete sanction and approval. At the same time the RLDS make this objection, they claim to accept the Inspired Version of the Bible as scripture, although it was never formally accepted during Joseph Smith's lifetime. In fact, it was not published until 23 years after his death.

In reviewing early RLDS publications, the writer noticed that the Book of Abraham was quoted to support RLDS beliefs. It appears that the decision to reject its

37Ralston, 110-111.
scriptural value is of more recent origin.\textsuperscript{38}

The Liberty Jail Letter

During the years that Joseph Smith was working on the translation of the Book of Abraham he also made another reference to the doctrine of a plurality of gods in his writings. This took place between the 20th and 25th of March, 1839, while he was incarcerated in the Liberty Jail, in Clay County, Missouri. On that occasion, he and his companions Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, and Alexander McRae wrote and appended their signatures to a letter addressed to the Church.\textsuperscript{39} About a year later, a synopsis of this letter was published in the \textit{Times and Seasons}. In January of 1855, which was about ten years after the death of Joseph Smith, this letter was published in full in the \textit{Millennial Star}. Of interest to this study is the fact that the complete edition of this letter as published in the \textit{Millennial Star}, contained references to a plurality of gods which were not present in the \textit{Times and Seasons} account.

The \textit{Times and Seasons} account read: ". . . was ordained in the midst of the council of heaven in the presence of the eternal God, before the world was."\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38}True Latter-Day Saint's Herald, Vol. 5, (Mar. 15, 1864), 132-137.
\textsuperscript{39}\textit{DHC}, 3:289 (Footnote).
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Times and Seasons}, Vol 1, (May, 1840), 99-104, continued in Vol. 1, (July, 1840), 131-134.
The **Millennial Star** counter part of this letter read:

"... was ordained in the midst of the Council of the
Eternal God of all other gods before this world was..."

And this statement was also added: "A time to come in which
nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many
gods, they shall be manifest."  

In 1876, sections of this letter including the
references to a plurality of gods were included in the LDS
Doctrine and Covenants.

The RLDS refer to these additions made in the
**Millennial Star** and now contained in the LDS Doctrine and
Covenants as a "misrepresentation to implicate Joseph Smith
in the promulgation of an unscriptural doctrine of a plurality
of gods foreign to the teachings of the original church."  

**The Original Document**

The LDS claim to have the original copy of this
letter in their Church Historians Office. Garland E.
Tickemeyer, a leader in the RLDS Church, viewed this letter
which is purported to be the original. After having made a
"fairly careful examination" of this letter he explained
it was not in the handwriting of Joseph Smith. This, however,
was not unusual because Joseph Smith almost always used a

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41 Millennial Star, 17:52-56.
42 Aleah G. Koury, *The Truth and The Evidence*,
scribe. Mr. Tickemyer said that the letter bore the signatures of all five of the previously mentioned men, and that although he was not a handwriting expert, he had examined a number of original letters in the archives of his own Church, and that "in every respect this letter in the Utah files appears to be as genuine as any he has examined." In a letter to the writer he stated, "I feel certain that it was genuine." He testified that the disputed statements had been copied correctly from the letter by the Latter-day Saints and he refers to it as the first evidence written during Joseph Smith's lifetime that he believed in a plurality of gods. Mr. Tickemyer was careful to point out, however, that the authenticity of the letter will remain in question until examined by experts. He also stated:

We must also take into account the fact that when the letter was published the wording was changed, undoubtedly with the consent and probably by its writers. We are still left to wonder which represented Joseph Smith's true view; the one written under the stress of prison life, or the more carefully considered version that he released to the world as representing the belief of the church. One gains the impression that he or his companions may have been speculating on the possibility of eternal progression but were not sufficiently certain of their position to make it official.

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43Tickemyer, 49-50.

44Letter from Garland E. Tickemyer, President RLDS High Priests Quorum and Professor at Central Missouri State College, Sept. 2, 1967.

45Tickemyer, 51.
The writer takes exception with this conclusion for three reasons: 1) Joseph Smith was accepted by his followers as a "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," to them he spoke as one having authority. He did not commonly speculate on any doctrinal matters. 2) His teachings on the matter of eternal progression were well established by this time in his life and this statement was in complete harmony with those teachings as has been seen in this work. 46 3) It will also be shown in this work that this concept was in harmony with that which he continued to teach.

A Synopsis

As Mr. Tickemyer has stated, "The letter originally published in the Times and Seasons is evidently a synopsis of this letter [the original in LDS archives]." 47 The writer sees no historical problem in the fact that the complete context of a letter contains statements which are not contained in a synopsis of the same letter. This is particularly true in view of the fact that the additions in question have no direct bearing on the main theme of the letter.

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46 See Chapters IX and X.

47 Tickemyer, 50.
CHAPTER XII
GODHEAD AND ETERNAL MARRIAGE

Another important source of doctrinal and historical disagreement between the Latter-day Saints and the Reorganized Church is the 132nd Section of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants. This Section is of importance to this study because it contains references to both men and women becoming gods. LDS historians maintain that its contents were revealed to Joseph Smith as early as 1831, but that they were not committed to writing until the 12th of July, 1843. The RLDS, however, deny that Joseph Smith is responsible for the doctrines of this revelation. It is their claim that it is a perversion authored by Brigham Young and his cohorts. In this chapter a brief examination will be made of (1) the contents of the revelations and (2) evidences as to its authorship.

Three Degrees In Celestial Kingdom

In Chapter Seven, entitled "The Vision", it was pointed out that what Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon said about the Celestial Kingdom applied only to exalted beings, that is those who inherit the greatest of God's blessings. On the 16th of May in 1843, Joseph Smith revealed that in the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees, and in
order for a man to obtain the highest of these degrees he must enter into a certain order of the Priesthood—the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. In other words, before a man can be exalted in the Celestial Kingdom, which means to obtain the highest degree in that kingdom, he must have had a wife sealed to him by priesthood authority. Joseph Smith is also quoted as saying that unless a man and his wife entered into this everlasting covenant and were married for eternity, while they are in this life, they would cease to bear children after the resurrection.¹

**Sealing Power Of The Priesthood**

Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants elaborates upon the principles contained in the revelation given May 16, 1843. It taught that the power of the Priesthood must be operative in any ordinance that is to be effective beyond the grave. These ordinances, according to Section 132, become valid throughout eternity by what is called the sealing power of the priesthood. So, then, persons who enter into marriage and have that covenant sealed by the priesthood, will (if they continue in righteousness) have a binding marriage in the resurrection. While persons whose marriage is not solemnized by the authority of the priesthood but who have been married by secular authority will not be married in the resurrection.

¹D&C 131:1-4.
Godhood Through Eternal Marriage

Those that are married by the sealing power of the priesthood are promised that they will "inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths." And that they will be able to have a "continuation of seed forever and ever." Then they will become gods because "all things will be subject unto them" and they will have "all power." Men will become Heavenly Fathers and women will become Heavenly Mothers. While those who were not married by the sealing power of the priesthood may be ministering angels, they can never become gods because of their unmarried state. This revelation also states that the Old Testament Patriarchs, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, have already entered into their exaltation, and have become gods.

Mother In Heaven

Less than a year after Section 132 was recorded, Joseph Smith, in a conference address known as the King Follett discourse, stated: "I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea." He then announced that God "is a man like unto one of yourselves," and that he "dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did." Since Joseph Smith taught that God was once a man who advanced to his exalted position, and that he gave his children a plan

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"Times and Seasons, 6:613-614."
whereby they too could become gods, it is logical to assume that he gave his children the same plan he followed. The plan given to his children necessitates eternal marriage. If he followed the same plan, he, too, is married. If this reasoning is correct, it would be proper to say that Joseph Smith believed that mankind have both a Father and Mother in Heaven.

RLDS Objection

The Latter-day Saints believe that the concept that there is a Mother in Heaven was taught by Joseph Smith. The Reorganized Church takes strong objection to this claim. One RLDS writer, for instance, states that it was speculation on the part of Brigham Young in 1865, that men had a spiritual creation which eventually evolved into the idea that mankind had a Mother in Heaven.³

Other RLDS criticism of the origin of this doctrine moves it closer, if not to the lifetime of Joseph Smith. In March of 1864, an article criticizing this doctrine was published in the Saint's Herald. This article stated that Brigham Young and Orson Pratt were primarily responsible for the idea that men had a Mother in Heaven and that they had been teaching it for nearly 20 years. To go back 20 years from March of 1864, would place this teaching in the lifetime

³Koury, 29.
of Joseph Smith.

Supportive Evidence

Other evidences also place this concept close to the lifetime of Joseph Smith and indicate that he may have been the author of it. For instance, in January of 1843, W.W. Phelps presented Joseph Smith with a hymn entitled "Vade Mecum" or "Go With Me." In a tribute to Joseph Smith following his martyrdom, Phelps changed the phraseology and the title of the hymn and added four stanzas to it. Under the new title "Come to me, will ye come," Phelps indicated his understanding that men have a Heavenly Mother in these words: "Come to me; here's the mysteries man hath not seen; Here's our Father in heaven, and Mother, the Queen."\(^5\)

It would have been a natural thing for Phelps, in a tribute to Joseph Smith, to make reference to concepts that he had learned from him.

In October of 1845, a poem entitled, "My Father in Heaven" was published in the *Times and Seasons*. It was written by Eliza R. Snow and in it she declared her belief in a Mother in Heaven. The third verse reads:

> I had learned to call Thee Father
> Through Thy spirit from on high;
> But until the key of knowledge
> Was restored, I knew not why.


\(^5\)*DHC*, 7:331-335.
In the heavens are parents single?
   No; the thought makes reason stare!
   Truth is reason, Truth eternal
   Tells me I've a Mother there.

The fourth verse continues:

   When I leave this frail existence,
   When I lay this mortal by,
   Father, Mother, may I meet you
   In our royal courts on high?

Today this poem is a popular LDS hymn entitled, "O My Father." George D. Pyper, in his book _Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns_ gives the date 1843 as the time Eliza R. Snow penned these words. This would have been during the lifetime of Joseph Smith and at the time she claimed to be one of his plural wives. The writer, however, has been unable to find any documentation indicating that the poem was written in Joseph Smith's lifetime, and some RLDS would raise strong objection to the idea that Eliza R. Snow was a plural wife of Joseph Smith's. She did, however, labor as a governess in the Smith home, and would have had many opportunities to have gained this concept from him. Of her experience she said, "I resided in the family of Joseph Smith, and taught his family school, and had ample opportunity to mark his daily walk and conversation."

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8Nicholas G. Morgan, Sr., _Eliza R. Snow An Immortal_ (Salt Lake City: Nicholas G. Morgan Sr. Foundation, 1957), 7.
Plural Marriage

The primary RLDS reason for rejecting this revelation is its teachings about plural marriage. This is a point of considerable contention between the two bodies. Some RLDS deny that Joseph Smith ever taught such a doctrine, while others admit that he did and apologize for his actions as uninspired. For instance, RLDS author and Apostle, Aleah Koury, attributes this "so-called revelation" to Brigham Young. While RLDS scholar, G.E. Tickemyer, admits that Joseph Smith taught the doctrine but refers to it as "a sociological throwback for which we must be apologetic in our efforts to support the enlightened views which he held in so many areas of human thought."

Internal Evidences

In addition to the literary efforts of W.W. Phelps and Eliza R. Snow, much else could be cited by way of internal evidence that Joseph Smith was the author of this revelation. In the introduction to volume five of the Documentary History of the Church, B.H. Roberts presents what he feels is "more certain and convincing evidence on this subject than the testimony of any affidavit." His reference is to the internal evidence that Joseph Smith was its author. He suggests seven different areas which are characteristic of Joseph Smith's

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8Koury, 36.

style, they are as follows:

1. The revelation was given in answer to Joseph Smith's inquiry—a characteristic of nearly all his revelations. This was true of his first vision, his first meeting with the Angel Moroni, and the 13 revelations given during the period the Book of Mormon was being translated. In fact, it was true of "all the great revelations of the Church," i.e. the one authorizing the organization of the Church, (D&C 20; RD&C 17) the one making known the moral law of the Church (D&C 42; RD&C 42), and the great revelations on priesthood (D&C 84; and 107; RD&C 83; 104).

2. It possesses the characteristic frankness in reproving Joseph Smith that is manifested in at least eight revelations common to the D&C of both Churches.

3. The evidence of the largeness of range in Section 132, which was typical of many of the revelations received by Joseph Smith. That is to say that the Lord's answer went far beyond Joseph Smith's inquiry. His question was why God justified the ancient patriarchs in having many wives. The answer went far beyond this, explaining that the marriage covenant must be an eternal one, so that it can continue in heaven and so that the power of pro-
creation can also be eternal.

4. The evidence of identical phraseology in this and other revelations. Here B.H. Roberts takes a dozen expressions peculiar to Joseph Smith from Section 132 and shows how they are common to other revelations given through him. For example, his peculiar use of "mine" instead of "my" or "none other" instead "no other." And the use of such phrases as "Gods," "as touching," "my house is a house of order," and "new and everlasting covenant."

5. The evidence of recurrence of principles in Section 132 that are found in other revelations given by Joseph Smith. For example, Section 132 states, "for all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world." This can be compared to this statement contained in the D&C of both Churches: "All kingdoms have a law given: and there are many kingdoms; and unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also conditions. All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified." (D&C 88: 36-38; RLDS 85:9).
6. The evidence of the particularization of ideas in which B.H. Roberts makes reference to a singularity of expression in which Joseph Smith lists extensive synonyms to emphasize and clarify a thought. For example, Section 132 reads: "All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations of expectations, that are not made, and entered into, and sealed, by the Holy Spirit of promise... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force, in and after the resurrection..." This passage is compared with the following:

All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ.
And also, if there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars---
All the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months, and years, and all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times---

7. The evidence of identity in grandeur of style is also considered. Joseph Smith's style is seen in the grandeur of statement by means of repetitions that make a paragraph "scentillate with prismatic hues" and give to it a "crescendo of emphasis". For example, Section 132 reads:

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed,
unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that he shall commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, and if ye abide in my covenant, and commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be 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.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.

This is compared with the following:

And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. (D&C 122:7)
CHAPTER XIII

KING FOLLETT AND JUNE 16th DISCOURSES

Before commencing a consideration of the King Follett discourse, it should be understood that the Latter-day Saints and the Reorganized Latter-Day Saints, take completely opposing views as to its authenticity. The LDS regard this sermon as the apex or climax of Joseph Smith's preaching career. They view it as his greatest sermon and consider its doctrinal content to be a summation of his life and mission. On the other hand, the RLDS challenge the historicity of this sermon, claiming that the accounts preserved of it are not reliable and that they do not accurately represent the teachings of Joseph Smith.

On the 16th of June, 1844, Joseph Smith delivered a sermon, the contents of which were very similar to that of the King Follett discourse. The writer has not found any statements in the writings of the RLDS to indicate that they doubt the origin of this sermon. It is rejected, however, because of its doctrinal content. These two sermons will be considered together in order to avoid a repetition of similar ideas.
Chapter XIV will make an examination of both internal and external evidences to determine if it can be shown beyond reasonable question that Joseph Smith was the author of these sermons and responsible for the introduction of the doctrines contained in them. Before making such an examination, there relevant parts must be set forth, which is the purpose of this chapter.

The Historical Setting

King Follett was a faithful elder in the Church who lost his life in an accident. Joseph Smith delivered his funeral sermon at the April Conference in 1844 before 20,000 assembled saints. The sermon was recorded by Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton and was published by them in the Times and Seasons, August 15, 1844.

The June 16th Sermon was also preached in Nauvoo. It was given only eleven days before Joseph Smith's death, and was recorded by Thomas Bullock, one of the four who collaborated on the published account of the Follett sermon.  

The remainder of this chapter will set forth the views of Joseph Smith as they are recorded in the Follett and June 16th Sermons.

The Character Of God

Joseph Smith stated that "there are a very few beings

\[1^\text{DHC. 6:473.}\]
in the world who understood rightly the character of God." And that the great majority of mankind knew little more about Deity than the "brute beast." He quoted John 17:3 which states that it means our eternal lives to know the truth about Deity. He stated that if a man does not know God and has to inquire what kind of a being he is, he does not have eternal life, for it is had only upon the principle of knowledge. He then promised to renounce all pretensions of being a prophet if he could not show the true character of God.2

God An Exalted Man

Taking the Bible as a text, he said that he would prove the world wrong. Referring back to the pre-existence, he repudiated the idea that God had been God from all eternity and explaining how God came to be God he said:

First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves, that is the great secret. If the vail was rent to-day, and the great God, who holds this world in its orbit, and upholds all things by his power; if you were to see him to-day, you would see him in all the person, image and very form as a man; and Adam was created in the very fashion and image of God; Adam received instruction, walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talk#s and communes with another. . . .

Further, he explained:

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are the simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another, and that God himself; the Father of us all dwell on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I

2Times and Seasons, 5:613.
will show it from the Bible.  

The Power Of The Father And The Son  

Joseph Smith argued that Christ had power in himself to do what his Father did. That is, to lay down his life, and to take it up again, just as he had seen his Father lay down his life and take it up again. The Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling and Christ did the same, treading in the tracks of his Father in order that he might inherit what his Father had inherited before him. "Do you believe it?" he challenged, "if you do not believe it you do not believe the Bible; the scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom, all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it." It was to be understood, however, that it would be "a great while" after men had passed through the veil before they would arrive at this point. He further declared: "You have got to learn to be Gods yourselves; and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, and from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation."  

The Plurality Of Gods  

Joseph Smith also preached on the plurality of Gods stating, "I wish to declare I have always and in all congrega- 

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3 Times and Seasons, 5:613-614.
4 Times and Seasons, 5:614.
tions when I preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years."

He continued:

I have always declared God to be a distinct personage. Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit; and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural: and who can contradict it?  

He referred to the concept of three Gods of one essence as a "strange God" and a "curious organization." In reference to the Savior's prayer that all men be one as he and the Father were one, Joseph Smith said that after all men were crammed into one God, it would make the biggest God in all the world. "He would be a wonderfully big God--he would be a giant or a monster." He then proceeded to show that in Greek text it reads, "I am agreed with the Father and the Father is agreed with me, and we are agreed as one." Thus emphasizing that the oneness spoken of by the Savior meant a oneness of purpose. Joseph Smith continued saying that:

Mankind verily say that the scriptures are with them. Search the scriptures, for they testify of things that these apostates would gravely pronounce blasphemy. Paul, if Joseph Smith is a blasphemer, you are. I say there are Gods many and Lords many, but to us only one, and we are to be in subjection to that one, and no man can limit the bounds or the eternal existence of eternal time. Hath he beheld

5DHC: 6:474
the eternal world, and is he authorized to say that there is only one God?  

A Patriarchal Hierarchy

In the June 16th Sermon, Joseph Smith took the sixth chapter, first verse of Revelations for a text. It reads: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." He said that he had selected this text for the "express purpose" of preaching on the plurality of gods. He claimed the text to be evidence that the Apostles had discovered that there was a hierarchy of gods. He interpreted the text as a declaration by the Apostle John that some had been made kings and priests unto God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, John had learned "that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father." Joseph Smith also quoted the statement of the Apostle Paul that there were " Gods many and Lords many," saying that "some say I do not interpret the Scripture the same as they do. They say it means the heathen's gods. Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many; and that makes a plurality of Gods, in spite of the whims of all men." Joseph Smith continued saying: "I testify that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods. I have it from God, and get over it if you can. I have a witness of the Holy Ghost, and a testimony that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods in the text."
The Book Of Abraham

In the June 16th Sermon, Joseph Smith claimed that he got this knowledge of Deity from the translation of the Book of Abraham.

I want to reason a little on this subject. I learned it by translating the papyrus which is now in my house. I learned a testimony concerning Abraham, and he reasoned concerning the God of heaven. "In order to do that," said he, "suppose we have two facts: that supposes another fact may exist--two men on the earth, one wiser than the other, would logically show that another who is wiser than the wisest may exist. Intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them."

If Abraham reasoned thus—if Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly, Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also? I despise the idea of being scared to death at such a doctrine, for the Bible is full of it.

I want you to pay particular attention to what I am saying. Jesus said that the Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before Him. As the Father had done before? He laid down His life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before. He did as He was sent, to lay down His life and take it up again; and then was committed unto Him the keys. I know it is good reasoning."

This quotation was considered in the chapter on the Book of Abraham. Three basic ideas of relevance to this study are expressed: (1) That there is a patriarchal line of deities, one generation above another. (2) That

7DHC 6:476-477.
Man of Holiness, the Father of Jesus Christ has a father.
(3) And that Man of Holiness went through an earth life as Christ had done.

The Meaning Of The Scriptures

He also made an examination of the Hebrew translation of the Bible and showed that the very first word, "Berosheit" proves that there is a plurality of Gods.

The Hebrew reads, "Berosheit baurau Eloheim ait aushamayeen vehau aurait", which has been rendered by the King James translators as "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." 8 But he stated, it first read, "The head of the Gods brought forth the Gods." Or others translated it to read, "The head of the Gods called the Gods together." Thus, "The head God called together the Gods, and sat in grand council. The grand counsellors sat in yonder heavens, and contemplated the creation of the worlds that were created at the time." 9

If we pursue the Hebrew further, it reads, "Berosheit baurau Eloheim ait aashamayeen vehau aurait."--"The head one of the Gods said, Let us make a man in our own image." I once asked a learned Jew, "If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in heim in the plural, why not render the first Eloheims plural?" He replied, "That is the rule with few exceptions; but in this case it would ruin the Bible." He acknowledged I was right.

"In the very beginning," Joseph Smith concluded, "the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of

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8 *DHC*, 6:475.
9 *Times and Seasons*, 5:614.
refutation." The word "Eloheim" ought to be in the plural all the way through the Bible. "The heads of the Gods appointed one God for us."10

Without Beginning Or End

LDS Section 93, and RLDS Section 90 of the Doctrine and Covenants contain the statement, "Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be." In the King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith elaborated on this principle. As evidence, he sighted the Hebrew word "baurau" which meant "to organize" not to create something out of nothing. In other words, God had materials out of which he organized the earth. Joseph Smith said that even God could not make something out of nothing. "The pure principle of elements are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning and can have no end."

In answer to the question, where did the immortal spirit of man come from, he said, "all learned men say God created it in the beginning. The very idea lessens man in my estimation; I do not believe the doctrine; I know better." He taught that man, like God, is a self-existant being. Man exists upon the same principles as God does.

Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? (refers to the old Bible,) how does it read in the Hebrew? It don't say so in the

10DHC, 6:475-476.
Hebrew, it says God made man out of the earth, and put into him Adam's spirit, and so became a living body.

The mind of man is as immortal as God himself. . . . I want to reason more on the spirit of man, for I am dwelling on the body of man, on the subject of the dead. I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man, the immortal spirit, because it has no beginning. 11

Concluding this idea, he declared that anything that has a beginning has an end. To say that something had a beginning is to prove that it must have an end; and if that is true, then "the doctrine of annihilation would be true."

**Joint-Heirship Promised**

Joseph Smith pointed out that those who had lost loved ones should be consoled by the knowledge that they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory to be "heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." Which he defined as inheriting "the same glory, the same power and the same exaltation, until you ascend the throne of eternal power the same as those who are gone before." 12

It should be recalled that in the LDS D&C Section 132 it states that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had "entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods." 13

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11 *Times and Seasons*, 5:615.
12 *Times and Seasons*, 5:614.
13 *D&C* 132:37.
CHAPTER XIV
THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE KING FOLLETT AND
JUNE 16TH DISCOURSES

External Historical Evidences

Too Meager An Extract

In the Reorganized Church History, Joseph Smith III, and Heman C. Smith, give two external reasons for questioning the accuracy of the Follett discourse. The first reason is that the extract printed in the Times and Seasons can be leisurely read in about 25 minutes. Since the discourse lasted from two to three hours, it is argued that "one cannot get the true sense of a discourse from so meager an extract." 1

The writer is led to wonder what the result would be if one were to apply the same logic to the Sermon on the Mount, for it is merely a 20 minute abridgement of a longer discourse. How ridiculous one might say, the Sermon on the Mount was recorded by an Apostle. But then both Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards, who recorded the Follett

1Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Lamoni, Iowa: Board of publications; Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1908), 2:735-736.
discourse, were also accepted by the followers of Joseph Smith as Apostles.

Not Printed Until After His Death

The second objection is that the Follett sermon was not printed until after Joseph Smith's death, and hence was not subjected to his inspection as published. In response to this objection, one RLDS author has stated:

It has been charged that Utah Mormons took liberties with early writings of Joseph Smith in attempts to make textual content consistent with later teachings of the Utah Mormons. It seems unlikely, however, that there could have been a deliberate design or plan to foist upon the prophet a doctrine that was entirely foreign to his thinking within six weeks after his death by a group of four men, one of whom was even then recovering from wounds received in the mob action that took the life of the prophet. If the sermon was actually heard by twenty-thousand Saints, as was reported, it is even less likely that the four men would have fabricated a sermon which was wholly foreign to the Prophet's actual statements and would have published it in the official church paper. There is no evidence that it was challenged at the time.

Heard Only Once

Mr. Koury makes two other external objections to the Follett discourse. He says that it was heard only once and was reported "in a most inaccurate manner." How accurately the sermon was recorded only those present could say. Mr. Koury cannot. The idea that the contents

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2 Tickemyer, 41-42.
of the sermon were delivered once, is refuted by the June 16th Sermon.

Testimony Of James Whitehead

The other objection is that James Whitehead, who it is claimed was a private secretary to Joseph Smith from June 1842, until Joseph Smith's death, swore under oath in the Circuit Court of the United States: "I heard what is known as the King Follett sermon preached. That sermon was published. Joseph Smith did not in that sermon teach the plurality of gods."\(^4\)

It should be noted that this statement is worded so as to deny that Joseph Smith taught the plurality of gods on the occasion of the Follett sermon. It leaves the door open for his having taught this doctrine at other times. The writer has been unable to find any evidence that James Whitehead was, in fact, a private secretary to Joseph Smith. The following entry in Joseph Smith's journal on Wednesday, June 29, 1842, contradicts this claim: "My clerk, Willard Richards, being about to leave me for a season, committed the business of my office to Elder William Clayton, who had been engaged with him for a few weeks past."\(^5\)

As to James Whitehead's testimony, it should be pointed

\(^4\)Ibid.
\(^5\)DHC, 5:49.
out that this trial took place from 1891 to 1894. That is 47 to 50 years after the King Follett discourse was given. So, here one is asked to accept the testimony of a witness who is quoting from memory somewhere between 47 to 50 years after the event, while the testimony of four men, all of whom made notes while the sermon was being given, all of whom agreed on the contents of the sermon and then together compiled their notes for publication, is rejected. Further, there is no evidence that any of the 20,000 persons who heard this sermon delivered, objected to the published account at the time James Whitehead included.

An Examination Of Witnesses

Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith conclude their objections to the Follett discourse stating: "We have no evidence that a *verbatim* report was made when delivered, and hence it must have been written from memory, or at best from notes. So without endorsing or condemning we decline to present it as historically correct."\(^6\)

The account of this discourse was not a stenographic report, it was, however, "a carefully and skillfully prepared one made by" Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff. All of these men "were trained in reporting and taking notes."\(^7\) All of them

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\(^6\)Joseph Smith III, 2:736.

\(^7\)DHC, 6:302.
had served Joseph Smith as secretaries or clerks, and all of
them were experienced in recording sermons given by Joseph
Smith. Willard Richards was the Church Historian at the
time.

Wilford Woodruff kept a detailed diary for which
modern historians are indebted, for much that is known about
Joseph Smith and early Church history. On one occasion
when he was speaking about his journal, he said that Joseph
Smith had directed each of the members of the quorum of the
Twelve to keep a history of their lives. He said:

I have had this spirit and calling upon me since I
first entered this Church. I made a record from the
first sermon I heard, and from that day until now I
have kept a daily journal. Whenever I heard Joseph
Smith preach, teach, or prophesy, I always felt it
my duty to write it; I felt uneasy and could not eat,
drink, or sleep until I did write; and my mind has
been so exercised upon this subject that when I heard
Joseph Smith teach and had no pencil or paper, I would
go home and sit down and write the whole sermon, almost
word for word and sentence by sentence, as it was
delivered, and when I had written it it was taken from
me, I remembered it no more. This was the gift of
God to me.8

Joseph Smith's Approval

Because these two sermons are so similar in both
style and contents, if it can be shown that one of them is
an accurate account of Joseph Smith's teachings, then it could
be assumed that they are both correctly reported. In this

8Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff, History of His
Life and Labors As Recorded In His Daily Journals (Salt Lake
relationship, a statement made by Joseph Smith in his journal accompanying Thomas Bullock's account of his June 16th sermon, is very significant. He wrote: "The following synopsis was reported by Elder Thomas Bullock, whom I had transferred from the duties of clerk of the Maid of Iowa to my office." This statement indicates both Joseph Smith's confidence in Thomas Bullock's clerking abilities and his approval of his account of the June 16th sermon.

RLDS author, G.E. Tickemyer, suggests that some of the expressions in this sermon are so nearly the same as the Follett discourse that one must conclude that "Joseph Smith expressed the thought so often that his expression had taken a set form or that Bullock may have referred to his notes in his efforts to reconstruct the King Follett sermon." In any event, the writer has been unable to find any historical objection to this sermon and so concludes that it is rejected for doctrinal reasons only.

Other Witnesses

Others of those who were present have left written testimonies that sustain the account compiled by the four men already considered. For instance, George Q. Cannon, in his diary described this event saying that Joseph Smith

9DHC, 6:473.

Tickemyer, 45.
"uplifted the souls of the congregation to a higher comprehension of the glory which comes after death to the faithful." He said that Joseph Smith's address was not a "mere eulogy of an individual," but that it "became a revelation of eternal truths concerning the glories of immortality." He testified that:

... The address occupied three and a half hours in delivery, and the multitude were held spellbound by its power. The Prophet seemed to rise above the world. It was as if the light of Heaven encircled his physical being... Those who heard that sermon never forgot its power. Those who survive think of it, today, as an exhibition of superhuman power and eloquence.11

John Taylor testifies that he was present when Joseph Smith taught the doctrines contained in the Follett and June 16th sermons. He said:

I have heard the Prophet Joseph quote from the German Bible in support of our method of baptism by immersion, showing that the German Translation of the New Testament favored this idea, and that the word 'Taufen' in that language means 'to dip;' the same as our term immersion does; and that when John the Baptist was spoken of as John the Baptist it was 'Johannes der Tauer,' or John the Dipper, which is correct.

I have heard him quote from the Hebrew Bible in support of a plurality of Gods, showing that the suffix 'mem' in the word Eloheim or God, ought to be rendered in the plural and to read if literally translated, 'and the Gods said let us, etc.' Certain it is that in our present translation the word 'us' or 'let us' indicates that idea; for 'us' is certainly in the plural and means more than one; and while our translation makes it say: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,' we are also told that 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. * * * And the Word was

11 Preston Nibley, Joseph Smith the Prophet (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1944), 503.
made flesh and dwelt among us,' and further, that 'all things were made by him' visible and invisible. We are further told that 'There be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there be gods many, and lords many). But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things.'

If, as stated, Jesus was with the Father in the beginning, there certainly was more than one God--God the Father, and God the Son. Joseph Smith was reasoning upon this doctrine at the time that he made this quotation from the Hebrew Bible.  

The last sentence of this quote is of particular interest. Elder Taylor says, "Joseph Smith was reasoning upon this doctrine at the time that he made this quotation from the Hebrew Bible." Joseph Smith made that quotation in both the Follett and the June 16th discourses. In either case, John Taylor testifies, "I heard the Prophet," give that sermon.

There can be no historical question about the fact that John Taylor sustained Joseph Smith in teaching the Follett discourse because he included a copy of it in a book named Voice of Truth, which he published in 1844 as a tribute to Joseph Smith.  

Brigham Young

RLDS authors commonly attribute the doctrines of the Follett discourse to Brigham Young. Brigham Young and his followers, however, always maintained that Joseph Smith

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was the man through whom these doctrines were revealed. In this regard, the question could well be asked why Brigham Young, if he were the author of these doctrines, would not take the credit, or assume the responsibility for them. His bold and forthright manner in all things evidences no lack of courage to claim authorship of unpopular doctrines. He was sustained and upheld by his followers as a prophet, seer, and revelator, so certainly in their minds he had every right to reveal new doctrines. His followers were repeatedly accused of blind loyalty and obedience to him, and he was accused of being both king and demigod. The writer finds no reason for Brigham Young, who headed a Church which claimed to be founded upon the principle of continued revelation, would show any hesitation to announce himself the recipient of these doctrines were that the case.

Brigham Young always declared that it was through Joseph Smith that he gained his concept of Deity. On one occasion he said:

Who of the Christian divines know anything about the God we serve? I never saw anyone, until I met Joseph Smith, who could tell me anything about the character, personality and dwelling-place of God, or anything satisfactory about angels, or the relationship of man to his Maker. Yet I was as dilligent as any man need to be to try and find out these things. We know more about God and the heavens than we care to tell.14

14 J.D., 16:46.
After an interesting missionary experience which occurred some time before February of 1840, Brigham Young made this entry in his journal:

I told them that Baptism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, Quakerism, Shakerism, and every other ism I had studied and learned, for I desired to know the truth, and found I could put all their doctrines, when simmered down to truth, into a snuff box of smallest class, put it away in my vest pocket and go on my way; but when I found 'Mormonism', I found that it was higher than I could reach with my researches, deeper than I was capable of comprehending, and calculated to expand the mind, and lead mankind from truth to truth, from light to light, from grace to grace, and exalt him in the Celestial Kingdom, to be associated with the gods and angels.15

This statement not only attributes his understanding of Deity to Mormonism, it indicates an understanding and acceptance of a plurality of gods, more than four years before the Follett discourse was given.

Along with the testimonies of the four men who collaborated to preserve the contents of the Follett discourse, and those of George Q. Cannon, John Taylor, and Brigham Young, supportive evidence from a number of other sources will also be considered.

Parley P. Pratt

In 1838, Elder Parley P. Pratt published a response to a pamphlet by L.R. Sunderland entitled, Mormonism Unveiled; Zion's Watchman Unmasked. In his writing, Sunderland accused the Saints of blasphemy on a number of accounts, one of which was the doctrine taught in the Doctrine and Covenants that

15S. Dilworth Young, Here Is Brigham The Years to 1844 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 242.
men could become equal with God. To this, Elder Pratt made the following response:

But another specimen of Mormon nonsense and blasphemy is quoted by him. "And the saints shall be filled with glory, and be EQUAL with Him." (Christ)---"Doctrinal and Covenants." This nonsense and blasphemy becomes truth when found in the Bible. As to this equality of Christ and his people, see the prayer of Christ, recorded by John, concerning his saints becoming ONE with him and the Father, as they are ONE---and certainly they are EQUAL. And again, the saints are joint heirs with Him. And again, "he that overcometh, shall sit down with Christ in his throne, as he has overcome and sat down with the Father in his throne." And again, the spirit should guide his saints into all truth, and if it does guide his saints into all truth. God is in possession of all truth, and no more: and it is an acknowledged principle, that "knowledge is power," consequently, if they have the same knowledge that God has, they will have the same power. And this will fulfill the scripture, which saith, "Unto him that believeth ALL THINGS are POSSIBLE." And I am sure God can do no more than all things; consequently, there must be equality. That is, the redeemed to return to the fountain, and become part of the great all from which they emanated. Hence, the propriety of calling them "GODS, even the sons of God." In fact it was this doctrine of equality that constituted blasphemy in the minds of the Jews, and brought down their malice and vengeance upon the head of our dear Savior.

This response makes it quite clear that as early as 1838 Elder Pratt understood that men could progress to the status of gods.

Lorenzo Snow

A young man by the name of Lorenzo Snow was in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836, investigating the gospel. After a meeting in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith Sr., the

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Patriarch, approached him and prophesied that he would soon be convinced of the truth of the gospel and be baptized. Continuing, the Patriarch said, "you will become as great as you can possibly wish—even as great as God, and you cannot wish to be greater."\(^{17}\) Shortly thereafter, Lorenzo Snow was baptized.

Early in the spring of 1840, he was called on a mission to England. Elder Snow recorded that on or about the twentieth of May, he started on that mission. Shortly before that time, however, he had the experience which he records in this manner:

I here record a circumstance which occurred a short time previous—one which has been riveted on my memory, never to be erased, so extraordinary was the manifestation . . . . the Spirit of the Lord rested mightily upon me—the eyes of my understanding were opened, and I saw as clear as the sun at noonday, with wonder and astonishment, the pathway of God and man. I formed the following couplet which expressed the revelation, as it was shown me, and explains Father Smith's dark saying to me at a blessing meeting in the Kirtland Temple, prior to my baptism, as previously mentioned in my first interview with the Patriarch.

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\text{As man now is, God once was;}
\text{As God now is, man may be.}\(^{18}\)
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Lorenzo Snow records that he felt this communication to be so sacred that he related it to no one except his sister Eliza R. Snow, until he arrived in England when in

\(^{17}\) Thomas C. Romney, *The Life of Lorenzo Snow, Fifth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Sugarhouse Press, 1955), 35.

\(^{18}\) Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 45.
a confidential conversation with Brigham Young, he related the experience to him.\textsuperscript{19}

Dr. Thomas C. Romney, in his book, \textit{The Life of Lorenzo Snow}, said that Lorenzo Snow was startled by the magnitude of the doctrine involved because he had not heard it advanced by others. Yet, as he reasoned on the matter, it seemed logical, and true. He reasoned that since God is the literal Father of the spirits of men, "it is within the realm of probability that man in the process of time may ultimately achieve Godhood." And following the same line of reasoning, it is not inconsistent to believe that if man, formed in the image of God and endowed with God-like attributes, can ascend to the plane of Deity, God should have ascended the scale in a similar manner.\textsuperscript{20}

Soon after his return from England, in January, 1843, Lorenzo Snow related this experience to Joseph Smith in a confidential interview in Nauvoo. Joseph Smith's reply is reported to have been, "Brother Snow, that is true gospel doctrine, and it is a revelation from God to you."\textsuperscript{21} This is the same doctrine contained in the Follett discourse, to which most of the objections are directed.

\textbf{Anti-Mormon Critics}

Chapter 10, "Lectures on Faith", quoted J.B. Turner's

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, 46.

\textsuperscript{20}Romney, 34-35.

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Improvement Era}, 22:656.
Mormonism In All Ages, Henry Caswall's, The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century, and John C. Bennett's Expose' of Joe Smith and Mormonism. Each of these books were published before 1843, and each of them criticized both Joseph Smith and Mormonism for what they called the "blasphemous" doctrine that men could become gods.

The Nauvoo Expositor

On the 7th of June, 1844, the first and only issue of the Nauvoo Expositor came off the press. This paper, which was declared a public nuisance by the City council and abated three days later, contained all manner of charges against Joseph Smith. One article apparently written by William Law stated:

Among the many items of false doctrine that are taught the Church, is the doctrine of many Gods, one of the most direful in its effects that has characterized the world for many centuries. We know not what to call it other than blasphemy, for it is most unquestionably, speaking of God in an empious & irreverent manner.--It is contended that there are innumerable Gods as much above the God that presides over this universe, as he is above us, and if he varies from the law unto which he is subjected, he, with all his creatures, will be cast down as was Lucifer; thus holding forth a doctrine which is effectually calculated to sap the very foundation of our faith: and now, O Lord! shall we sit still and be silent, while thy name is thus blasphemed, and thine honor, power and glory, brought into disrepute.

Under a section called Resolutions, the following was written:

Resolved 2nd, Inasmuch as we have for years borne with the individual follies and iniquities of Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and many other official characters in the Church of Jesus Christ, . . . and doctrines into the Church, such as a plurality of Gods above the God of this universe. . . .
Resolved 14th, that we hereby notify all those holding licenses to preach the gospel, who know they are guilty of teaching the doctrine of other Gods above the God of this creation. . . to cease preaching, and to come and make satisfaction, and have their license renewed. 22

It is of interest to note that this article states that Hyrum Smith and "many others" were also teaching this doctrine along with Joseph Smith. The statement clearly indicates that this doctrine was commonly preached. In the June 16th sermon (given just nine days after the publication of the Expositor) Joseph Smith said:

Now, you know that of late some malicious and corrupt men have sprung up and apostatized from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and they declare that the Prophet believes in a plurality of Gods, and, lo, and behold! we have discovered a very great secret, they cry--"The Prophet says there are many Gods, and this proves that he has fallen;" 23

Joseph Smith was undoubtedly making reference to the Law's, Foster's and Hegbee's who were associated with the Nauvoo Expositor and who had been excommunicated from the Church May 18, 1844. 24

Hymns

For the Latter-day Saints, hymns were an important part of worship, and expression of religious truths. Two hymns have already been considered which make reference to

22 Nauvoo Expositor, Located in Church Historian's Office, 47 E. South Temple St., Salt Lake City.
23 DHC, 6:473.
24 Smith, Essentials In Church History, 364.
mankind having a Mother in Heaven. 25 A number of hymns were written in tribute to Joseph Smith which make reference to a plurality of gods. For example, four days after Joseph Smith was killed, Eliza R. Snow wrote a hymn of praise which included the words, "Let Gods and seraphs, men and angels hear." 26 And not long after that, she wrote a poem of tribute to Brigham Young which read in part: "To the Gods, thy integrity, faith and love." 27 In September of that year, Parley P. Pratt wrote a poem entitled, "Cry to the Martyers" which included the phrase, "The hearts of the Gods..." 28

While still in Nauvoo, though the exact date is not known, John Taylor wrote a song entitled, "The Seer, Joseph, the Seer," as a tribute to Joseph Smith. The first verse reads: "With Gods he soared in realms of day." In the last verse he wrote: "His home's in the sky, he dwells with the Gods." 29

In a like manner, shortly after the martyrdom, W.W. Phelps wrote a hymn as a tribute to Joseph Smith entitled, "Praise to the Man." This hymn also affirms that Joseph Smith taught a plurality of gods, as it contains these lines:

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25 Chapter XXXII, "Godhood and Eternal Marriage." p. 128.
26 Times and Seasons, 5:575.
27 Ibid., 6:815.
28 Ibid., 5:639.
29 DHC, 7:331-335.
"Hail to the Prophet, ascended to heaven! Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain; mingling with Gods, he can plan for his brethren." This hymn and the one written by John Taylor were sung at the dedication of the Seventies Hall in Nauvoo on the 26th of December, 1844. 30

Common Reference

The concept of a plurality of gods was not confined to hymns alone. It was commonly referred to in many different sources. Orson Pratt, the younger brother of Parley P. Pratt, made such a reference in the Times and Seasons, March 1, 1843, as follows:

A plan was formed in the councils of heaven, it was contemplated by the great author of our existence Eloheim, Jehovah, to redeem the earth from the curse. Hence when the Gods deliberated about the formation of man, it was known that he would fall and the Savior was provided who was to redeem and to restore, who was indeed the "lamb slain from the foundation of the earth." 31

Joseph Smith's Mother concluded her history of the Prophet with a testimony which also indicates a belief in a plurality of gods:

Here ends the history of my life, as well as that of my family, as far as I intend carrying it for the present. And I shall leave the world to judge, as seemeth them good, concerning what I have written. But this much I will say, that the testimony which I have given is true, and will stand forever; and the same will be my testimony in the day of God Almighty,

30 Ibid.
31 Times and Seasons, 4:121.
when I shall meet them, concerning whom I have testified, before angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect, before archangels and seraphims, cherubims and gods; where the brief authority of the unjust man will shrink to nothingness before him who is the Lord of lords, and God of gods; and where the righteousness of the just shall exalt them in the scale, wherein God weigheth the hearts of men.  

John Taylor, in an article published in the *Times and Seasons*, in February 1845, quotes parts of the Follett discourse to prove that there is a plurality of gods. He then made reference to another teaching of Joseph Smith's about men becoming saviors. In a sermon given on the 12th of May, 1844, Joseph Smith said, "There will be 144,000 saviors on Mount Zion, and with them an innumerable host that no man can number." Elder Taylor continued by quoting Revelations 14:1, which reads: "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Commenting on this, he said "their Father's name, bless me! that is GOD! Well done for Mormonism; one hundred and forty-four thousand Gods, among the tribes of Israel, and two living Gods and the Holy Ghost, for this world! Such knowledge is too wonderful for men, unless they possess the spirit of Gods."

Once Accepted by RLDS

It will be shown in the final chapter that the doctrine

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33DHC, 6:365.
of a plurality of gods was accepted by the RLDS during the early years of their organization.

INTERNAL HISTORICAL EVIDENCES

Style, Diction and Doctrinal Teachings

It is the claim of Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith that the "style and diction", as well as the "doctrinal teachings," of the Follett discourse, "differ so widely from the production of Joseph Smith as found elsewhere that it suggests suspicion as to its genuineness."34

This work has traced line upon line how Joseph Smith unfolded his concept of Deity. It has established that each of the four concepts with which this thesis deals had been taught by Joseph Smith prior to the Follett and June 16th sermons, and that these discourses were merely summaries of his concept of Deity.

In response to the objection by Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, the writer presents the following comparison between statements reported in the Follett discourse and statements made at other times by Joseph Smith.

King Follett Discourse--Religious Freedom

All laws and governments ought to tolerate [religion freedom], right or wrong.

34 Question Time, 13.
March 1, 1842 (DHC 4:541.)

We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

King Follett Discourse—Truth About God

There are a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God.

April 15, 1842 (DHC 4:595.)

The great designs of God in relation to the salvation of the human family, are very little understood by the professedly wise and intelligent generation in which we live.

Spring 1820 (Joseph Smith Story 2:19)

All their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt, that: "'they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.'"

King Follett Discourse—The Character Of God

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are the simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another.

Winter Of 1834-1835—(Lectures On Faith.)

Let us here observe, that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation. First, the idea that he actually exists. Secondly, a correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes. Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to his will. . . . Could these things be found out by any other means than by revelation? They could not.

King Follett Discourse—Jesus Has Power In Himself

Jesus said, as the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power; to do what? why what the Father did, that answer is obvious; in a manner to lay down his body
and take it up again. Jesus what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again.

June 11, 1843 (DHC 5:427.)

The Son doeth what He hath seen the Father do; then the Father hath some day laid down his life and taken it again; so He has a body of His own; each one will be in His own body; . . . .

King Follett Discourse--God, A Corporal Being

God reveals them to us in view of no eternal dissolution of the body.

April 2, 1843--(D&C 130:22.)

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's the Son also.

King Follett Discourse--Spirits Are Eternal

All fools and learned and wise men, from the beginning of creation, who say that man had a beginning, prove that he must have an end, and then the doctrine of annihilation would be true.

May 6, 1833 (D&C 93; RD&C 90.)

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

March, 1842 (Abraham 3:18-19.)

Spirits. . . have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal.

King Follett Discourse--Man To Become As God

God himself finds himself in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was greater, and because he saw proper to institute laws, whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.

March 1842 (Abraham 3:19.)

. . . I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they [spirits in the pre-existence] all . . . I dwell in the midst of them all . . .
December 27, 1832 (D&C 88 and RD&C 85.)

And unto kingdom is given a law. . . he hath given a law unto all things, by which they move in their times and their seasons.

May 6, 1833 (D&C 93, RD&C 90.)

For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness. . . you shall receive grace for grace.

King Follett Discourse--Eternal Life--God's Life

Here then, is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn to be Gods yourselves, to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace. . . until you attain you are able to set in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.

July 12, 1843 (D&C 132:24, 29, 37.)

This is eternal lives--to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. . . . Abraham received all things, whatsoever he received, by revelation and commandment, by my word, saith the Lord, and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon this throne. . . . and because they Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.

February 16, 1832 (D&C 76; RD&C 76.)

That by keeping the commandments. . . they are they who 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 this glory; . . . Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God--.

May 6, 1833 (D&C 93; RD&C 90.)

For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. . . until you . . . knoweth all things.
April 2, 1842 (DHC 4:495.)

If you wish to go where God is you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses. . . .

June 18, 1844 (DHC 6:500.)

Hold out to the end, we shall be resurrected and become like Gods, and reign in celestial kingdoms, principalities, and eternal dominions.

King Follett Discourse--God An Exalted Man

God himself, . . . is a man like unto one of yourselves . . . if you were to see him today, you would see him in all the person, image and very form as a man.

April 2, 1843 (D&C 130:1.)

When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves.

May 6, 1833 (D&C 93; RD&C 90.)

And I, John, saw that he [Christ] received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace until he received a fulness. . . of the glory of the Father; And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth.

King Follett Discourse--Council Of The Gods

Thus the head God brought forth the Gods in the grand council. . . . The grand counsellors sat in yonder heavens, and contemplated the creation of the worlds that were created at that time.

March 25, 1839 (D&C 121:32.)

According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was . . .

March, 1842 (Abraham 4:1.)

And they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.

March 1, 1842 (DHC 4:536.)

I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness.
The June 16th Sermon And The Inspired Version

In Thomas Bullock's account of the June 16th sermon, he has Joseph Smith quoting Exodus 7:1 and Revelations 1:6 from the King James Bible as evidence that there is a plurality of gods. Apparently these passages had been changed by Joseph Smith in the Inspired Version so it is argued that this is an internal evidence that he did not give this sermon. Exodus 7:1, as quoted in the June 16th sermon reads: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh." As changed in the Inspired Version it reads: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a prophet to Pharaoh." Revelations 1:6 in the June 16th sermon is quoted: "... unto God, and his Father..." In the Inspired Version it reads: "... unto God, his Father..."

Since it has already been shown that Bullock's account of this sermon had Joseph Smith's approval, it must be assumed that it was recorded correctly.

The fact that Joseph Smith quoted these two passages of scripture differently than they appeared in the Inspired Version is not at all inconsistent with the pattern he followed elsewhere. For instance, in a letter written to the Church, September 6, 1842, he quoted 1 Corinthians 15:46, and Hebrews 11:40 as they appear in the King James translation, although he had made significant changes in both of these.

35 DHC, 6:478.
passages in the Inspired Version. He quoted the King James version because it better suited his purposes. Thus indicating that these passages, like many others, can be used quite properly to convey more than one meaning. This is apparently what Moroni was doing when he quoted Malachi 4:5-6 differently to Joseph Smith than it reads in the King James Bible. Yet the King James translation must be correct because Joseph Smith made no change in it in either the Book of Mormon or the Inspired Version.

It should be understood that Joseph Smith did not regard the Inspired Version as the ultimate in truth. There were a number of occasions in later sermons where statements made by him did not coincide with changes made in the Inspired Version. It was not Joseph Smith's intention that the Inspired Version be accepted as the final word in Bible translation. If that were the case, one would be lead to wonder why he and his colleagues went to such pains in the School of the Prophets to learn Hebrew. Joseph Smith commonly referred to the Hebrew Bible to find support for his teachings.

It is also apparent from his teachings and consistent with the principle of continued revelation that his knowledge during the latter part of his life exceeded that which he had

37 D&C 2; III Nephi 25:5-6; RLDS III Nephi 11:26-27
38 Robert J. Matthews, Personal Correspondence, Sept. 1, 196.
during the period 1830-1833, in which he worked upon the
Inspired Version.

The Follett Discourse Revised

In 1855, Jonathan Grimshaw was directed to compile
the existing reports of the Follett discourse. They were then "carefully revised and compared by George A. Smith," the Church Historian, with the aid of Thomas Bullock, one of the original scribes who had recorded the sermon. Then on Sunday, the 18th of November, 1855, the sermon was read in "Council" and carefully revised by Brigham Young. 40

This revised and enlarged version was first published in the Journal of Discourses Volume VI, in 1859, and in the Millennial Star in 1861, and is the edition most commonly in print today. 41

A comparison of important sections of the sermon has been included in the appendix to show that the changes made were purely for clarification and that no attempt was made to change the meaning of the original report published in the Times and Seasons.

The original edition of the Follett discourse is found in the following sources:

41 Millennial Star, (April 13, 1861), 262.
Mistake In The Original Sermon

A statement made by B.H. Roberts is commonly cited by RLDS authors to indicate serious question as to the validity of the Follett discourse. B.H. Roberts stated that since the sermon was reported "in long hand and from memory," it was "very likely to contain inaccuracies and contain wrong impressions." The context of Roberts' statement, however, is in relationship to the resurrection of children, and has nothing to do with Joseph Smith's concept of Deity. The original manuscript of this discourse read: "As the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead and be forever living in the learning of God, it shall be the child, the same as it was before it died out of your arms. Children dwell and exercise power in the same form as they laid them down."

Children In The Resurrection

Joseph Smith was recorded in the Follett discourse and also in a discourse delivered on the 20th of March, 1842, as having said that those who die before reaching their full

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\[^{42}\text{DHC, 4:556.}\]
\[^{43}\text{Times and Seasons, 6:617.}\]
stature would retain their stature at death throughout
eternity.

Of this, B.H. Roberts states that he "distinctly
remembers hearing Wilford Woodruff, who reported both sermons,
say 'that the Prophet corrected the impression that had been
made by his King Follett sermon, and children and infants
would remain fixed in the stature of their infancy and
childhood in and after the resurrection.'" President Woodruff
"very emphatically" taught subsequent to the Follett sermon
that children while resurrected in the stature at which they
died would develop to the full stature of men and women after
the resurrection. Further, President Woodruff, one of the
four collaborators on the original account of the sermon,
said that "the contrary impression created by the report of
the Prophet's King Follett sermon was due to a misunderstanding
of his remarks and erroneous reporting."

Joseph F. Smith, who became the sixth President of
the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, stated he
did not believe this particular part of the Follett discourse
to have been correctly reported. He related how he conversed
with the mother of the little girl that Joseph Smith was
speaking about when he said that she would have the privilege
of rearing the child after the resurrection until it reached

\[44\] DHC, 4:556.

\[45\] Ibid.
the full stature of its spirit. Joseph F. Smith also talked with others who testified they heard Joseph Smith teach the same thing. 46

Benjamin F. Johnson, another colleague of Joseph Smith's, testified that President Woodruff acted properly in correcting his error. 47 In any event, the context of the statements that there were imperfections in reporting this discourse all make reference to the doctrine of the resurrection of children, with the exception of course, of RLDS objections.


47 Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs. Located in Church Historian's Office, 47 East So. Temple, Salt Lake City.
CHAPTER XV

THE CONCEPT OF DEITY HELD BY
THE REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND COMMENTS ON ITS ORIGIN

Statement Of Purpose

It is the purpose of this chapter:
1. To state the RLDS position on the four concepts that this thesis has shown were taught by Joseph Smith. They are:
   a. That the Godhead is comprised of three separate and distinct personages,
   b. The Father and the Son are corporeal beings,
   c. Men can progress to the station of Godhood, and
   d. There is a plurality of Gods.

The RLDS Believe In But One God

RLDS Apostle, Aleah Koury, in a book entitled The Truth and The Evidence, states that the RLDS believe in but one God. He said that whenever a society evolves from polytheism to monotheism, it is an evidence of spiritual growth and maturity. "To do otherwise" he says, "is to retrogress." He declares that the God of Israel was one,
and not many, and that a polytheistic concept of God is not to be tolerated. Monotheism in the New Testament, according to Mr. Koury, is a concept beyond dispute. He concludes, "The concept of monotheism is a point of differentiation between paganism and Christianity. To pagans or idol worshipers, there are many gods, but to those who believe in Christ, there is only one God." ¹

There Are Two Gods

As a result of the authoritative and straightforward statements of Apostle Koury, it would be a simple matter at this point to compare the RLDS teachings with those of Joseph Smith. However, further research into the doctrines of the Reorganized Church make such a summary impossible.

A pamphlet entitled, We Believe in Jesus Christ, written by RLDS author, Charles R. Hield, states that the Father and the Son are separate personages. Under the heading, "In the Beginning, he states:

John (I John 1:1-3) speaks of the "Word of Life" which was from the "beginning." Doctrine and Covenants 90:4 repeats this same truth: (Christ speaking) "I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn." Christ says that our intelligences also were with God: "Ye were also in the beginning with the Father" (Doctrine and Covenants 90:4).

Some have thought because Christ was in the beginning with the Father, that he is in fact God the Father. It would just be as logical to say that we, too, would be the same as God the Father. Satan also would be God, for in the Inspired Version, Genesis 3:1, we read, "And

¹Koury, 16-19.
I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying, That Satan whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning."

Some of the outstanding characteristics of the Son, Jesus Christ, are his humility, his teachableness, and the fact that he always recognized his Father as the source of all power and the presiding authority in the Godhead. In the Bible Christ clearly recognized his Father as the "greater." Christ came down to do his Father's will, not his own.  

Each of the following sub-headings deals with the divisions of responsibility that exists between the Father and the Son.

**An Immaterial Question**

The two authors quoted are in complete disagreement on the nature of the personages of the Godhead. The writer, while visiting the Temple in Kirtland, Ohio, asked his guide if the Reorganized Church accepted the doctrine of the Trinity as taught in the creeds of the Catholic and the majority of Protestant Churches. The guide's response was in the affirmative. Later, the writer asked the same question to a guide at the RLDS Church headquarters in Independence, Missouri. The answer given on this occasion was an emphatic no. This guide explained that the RLDS believed that the Father and the Son were distinct personages, and that the Holy Ghost was the mind of Christ.

Confused by these differing answers and the publications already cited, the writer then wrote to the Reorganized Church headquarters requesting an authoritative answer to this question.

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2Charles R. Hield, *We Believe In Jesus Christ*, 2.
In response, the author was sent a copy of an article written by the late Charles A. Davies, Church Historian from 1959 to 1965. In this article Mr. Davies is answering the following question for a member of the RLDS Church.

Question: Does the church take the official position that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are one God? Should there not be an official statement on this?

In response, Mr. Davies pointed out that the difficulty in answering this question "lies in the capacity for human comprehension of Divinity." He pointed out that there are many aspects of truth that cannot be expressed in terms of black and white, or to which a "Yes" or "No" answer cannot be given. He said that when Joseph Smith III, was asked this question, he merely gave the "consensus of opinion" among the elders. In conclusion, Mr. Davies stated, "The church has never 'pronounced' on this point to my knowledge . . . . When the last word has been said it remains a great mystery, of undoubted theological interest, but most likely unsolvable in this life." This article continues:

President Israel A. Smith wrote an article on "The Godhead Dogma and the Iron Bedstead" (Saints' Herald, February 1, 1954) because there was "a desire on the part of some members to secure from the First Presidency ex cathedra opinions as to controverted matters, apparently with the idea of getting the church committed on immaterial questions. . . ."

Then the late president of the church went on to say, "We must admit that the question of the Godhead is a difficult one. However, there is no doctrine of salvation involved. I am sure nobody is going to be disciplined by Divinity or denied salvation for resolving it wrongly. It is one among possibly hundreds of theological questions wherein one will not become a heretic however wrong he may be."
On this question G.E. Tickemyer said: "Fortunately for the Reorganized Church, its leaders have not developed any systematic metaphysical position. They therefore have nothing to uproot should they desire to re-evaluate Joseph Smith's germinal ideas in the light of modern physics."

Then Mr. Tickemyer made this interesting admission: "We are not satisfied with the oversimplified trinitarian concept set forth in some of our own literature, nor in the one-god theory advocated by others."

God Does Not Have A Body

The RLDS do not believe that God has a resurrected and glorified body. Joseph Smith III expressed his concept of God stating, "The Father is a personage of spirit and power, in whom all perfection and fullness of attributes dwell." Presiding Evangelist Elbert A. Smith explained that men are accustomed in all of their experiences to limitations,

... to measurements—things are so high, or so long, to such and such voltage, and last so many years or centuries. But God comes to us as infinite, no limitations in time or space or power or wisdom. Endeavoring to grasp and fix him in mind primitive people, as usual, had recourse to physical symbols; they made idols and images to look at while they thought of the unseen. These were obnoxious to the

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3 Tickemyer, Personal Correspondence, July 28, 1967.
4 Wilbur K. Sartwell, RLDS Public Relations Counselor, Personal Correspondence, July 12, 1967.
Lord, . . . their very grotesqueness represented the minds out of which they came.

Further, he claims, "Every effort to bind the Infinite within the terms of a definition has been a miserable failure."

On this matter G.E. Tickemyer states the following:

I certainly do not believe that God, in the sense in which I have just described him, has a resurrected and glorified physical body. This is anthropomorphism from which Mormonism needs to free itself. God, as I see him, is the whole of intelligence. Any manifestation of God in a physical form, with the possible exception of Christ, is an imperfect and fragmentary representation. If the whole of the God we worship was ever tabernacled in physical form then he could not have been the ultimate God and we must therefore look beyond any such representation of deity for the true God. The God worthy to be worshiped could never have been a man for the part could never become the whole.

Men Cannot Become Gods

The RLDS people reject the idea that man can ever arrive at the level of godhood. In A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants, the quotation in "The Vision" "they are gods, even the sons of God," stated: "No interpretation of this passage must be accepted which ranks the children of God equally with the Father. The idea is that through receiving a fullness of Divinity they become akin to Divinity itself." In explanation of RLDS D&C 90,

6 Ibid.
7 Tickemyer, Personal Correspondence, July 27, 1967.
which contains the promise that men can grow from grace to grace until they gain the fulness of the Father, the commentary stated, "we, too, can grow from grace to grace, as God wills us to do." 9

No Plurality Of Gods

Mr. Koury concludes his chapter on concepts of Deity by stating, "It, therefore, becomes unreasonable to suggest that he [Joseph Smith] would ever attempt to promulgate a doctrine of plural gods in complete opposition to this divinely revealed concept received for the Church. And yet some were to do violence to this revelation by proposing such a theory." 10 RLDS objections to this concept have already been considered in the chapters on the Liberty Jail letter, the Book of Abraham, and the Follett and June 16th sermons.

Summary Of RLDS Position

It has been shown that the RLDS take no official position on the question as to whether the Godhead is comprised of separate personages or if there is but one God. This is considered to be an immaterial question which does not involve a doctrine of salvation. On the other three matters of particular interest to the study, they do, however, take a very positive stand. In response to the following questions the writer received these answers in a letter from the RLDS

\[9\text{Ibid., 292.}\]

\[10\text{Koury, 21.}\]
Church headquarters:

Q. Do you believe that God has a resurrected and glorified physical body?
A. "No!"

Q. Do you believe that God was once a man?
A. "No!"

Q. Do you believe that men and women can progress in righteousness until they arrive at a state of godhood?
A. "No!" 11

A Change in Doctrinal Beliefs

In chapter two, "Joseph Smith As An Authority On God," it was shown that Joseph Smith stood alone in his concept of Deity. It was shown that he had no toleration or respect for the teachings, philosophies, or creeds of the Sectarian world. In reference to the teachings of Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt asserted that they were "at war with every creed and craft in Christendom." 12 Joseph Smith's position was definite and unique on each of the four concepts under consideration in this thesis. These concepts are not presently accepted as RLDS theology.

It appears to the writer that there is a close similarity between the two popular concepts of Deity presently held by members of the Reorganized Church and the

11 Sartwell, Personal Correspondence, July 12, 1967.

12 Parley P. Pratt, A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People (New York: W. Sandford, 1837), iii-x.
popular creeds of Joseph Smith's time, which he claimed the Lord declared to be all wrong. The one God theory appears very similar to the concept of the Trinity as taught by the major creedal religions. The concept that the Father and Son are separate personages, though not corporeal beings, and that the Holy Ghost is the mind of Christ, is very similar to the theological position of the Unitarians and the Universalists during the same period. 13 Yet Joseph Smith rejected the Unitarian concept of Deity.

RLDS Once Believed In A Corporeal God

A book entitled *Synopsis of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* was published by the RLDS at Plano, Illinois in 1865.

Among the classified lists, the work contains a chapter captioned "Godhead." In this section, passages of scripture are cited that could be used to prove that God does not have a body or parts. Then this note of explanation is included:

*Note to the Reader--The following quotations are nearly, if not all the texts that can be, even by the aid of sophistry or with any show of honesty, applied to sustain the idea that God has neither body nor parts; and it will be apparent to every candid and impartial person, that these passages will bear no such application; but wishing to be impartial in the composition of this work, therefore I insert them.* 14

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In 1864, the *Saints Herald* declared: "It is a fact, that there are as many imaginary gods worshipped as there are sects, for instance... the Methodists worship a god whom they imagine is without body or parts."15 It is evident that some RLDS, at one time, sustained this belief.

In 1867, the *Saints Herald* referred to the belief that God is without body or parts as "Damnable heresies!"

The Comparison between the inspired and the uninspired ministry, is as the light of midday compared with midnight, when every star is beclouded. "Damnable heresies" now pass for orthodoxy, and a God without body or parts is exalted against him whose "back parts" the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob revealed to Moses, many centuries before He sent His first begotten Son into the world. This *idol god*, without body or parts, is a creature of the imagination, and so strange a god is he, that no Jew or Gentile ever heard of him till since the days of inspiration had gone by, and the "canon of scripture was full."16

This article continued by pointing out that those who teach that God is not a corporeal being, are "impostors who persuade men to worship nothing," and that to deny the Son by saying that he has no body is also to deny the Father. Further, the article ascerted that: "This *man* Christ Jesus, who has a body and parts, the Catholics and Methodists have disowned."

The book *Synopsis of the Faith* also contains a section which cites scriptures to prove that the unity of the Godhead is one of knowledge, power, wisdom, and intelligence, instead of a unity of essence.

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15*Saints Herald*, 5:86.
A Plurality Of Gods

There also exists abundant evidence to show that some RLDS originally believed in a plurality of gods. It has already been seen that the RLDS objected to both the Book of Abraham and the King Follett discourse because of their references to this doctrine. And yet both of these sources were quoted in defense of RLDS positions in early editions of the Saints Herald.

Zenas H. Gurley, one of the two men most responsible for the organization of the Reorganized Church, wrote the following for the Saints Herald in 1864.

LETTER FROM BRO. Z.H. GURLEY.
Bro. Sheen:--I have noticed several passages of scripture that satisfy me that many of the ancient prophets believed in a plurality of Gods, and thinking that the readers of the HERALD would like to see them, I have copied a part of them for publication.17 Following which, he cited over twenty scriptural references.

A section is also contained in the book, Synopsis of Faith, listing scriptures that made reference to a plurality of gods. Mr. Davies suggested that these scriptures were listed to aid in the refutation of the fallacious idea that there is a plurality of gods and quotes the following statement from the preface to the book to support this idea:

It is not designed to prevent, but to facilitate the study of the scriptures. Passages which are often used to support conflicting religious tenets are also inserted in this work that they and their contexts may be easily found, so that our readers may be able to show the fallacy of incorrect applications.

However, no commentary indicates that to be the case. It will be recalled that a note was included with the section listing scriptures that are used to prove that God does not have body and parts. This was the only such note in all the sections dealing with the concept of God. The preface of this book begins:

Preface: The chief design in the publication of this work is to supply the saints with a more complete arrangements of scriptural and other evidences which demonstrate the truth of the doctrines of the Latter-day Saints.

RLDS writer, G.E. Tickemyer, in a thesis in which he considered Joseph Smith's concept of Deity, concluded, "the evidence thus far considered rather clearly indicates that the Prophet Joseph Smith did hold a belief in a hierarchy of Gods." Mr. Tickemyer, however, preferred to limit Joseph Smith's definition of god to a being who has dominion over lesser spirits. The writer finds no justification in the evidence for this limitation. Also under the heading "Plural God Views Among Early Reorganized Church Members," he wrote as follows:

There is evidence that some of the first leaders of the Reorganization movement endorsed the finite God concept. This is reported on good authority to be contained in early minutes and resolutions of official bodies of the church. It is also evident in church publications themselves though there is no evidence that Joseph Smith III, son of the Prophet, ever held such views and in all probability he was responsible for rooting out the belief.

Tickemyer, 52.
The True Latter Day Saints Herald, the first official publication of the Reorganized church, contains a lengthy article under the title "A Plurality of Gods." In this article the principle of eternal progression is stoutly defended. Again on page 284 of the same issue the Herald quotes from the Pearl of Great Price: "and the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground."19

Conclusion

The evidence considered leads the writer to the conclusion that the four concepts this work has shown were taught by Joseph Smith are not presently accepted as doctrine by the Reorganized Church. Although sources examined indicate that in their early history the Reorganized Church did believe God to be a corporeal being, and that the concept of a plurality of Gods was acceptable to some.

The fact that their theology on the concept of Deity has changed quite markedly from that taught by Joseph Smith, is not considered, however, to make an important difference on their claim to be the Church possessing the priesthood and the authority claimed to have been restored by Joseph Smith. For example, RLDS President Israel A. Smith wrote:

A profession or admission by Joseph Smith, whether merely speculative or however explicit, of a belief in any theological doctrine, does not impute to his church or to its members any belief in the same, for the reason that the tenets of the church were always fixed by legislation of a general assembly of its priesthood or by a properly constituted general conference of delegates and priesthood, the only bodies having under church law legislative functions. No doctrine of this church was ever created by Joseph Smith's fiat or by dogma.20

19Ibid., 53.

20Tickemyer, xi.
CHAPTER XVI
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the findings of this thesis, the writer concludes that Joseph Smith taught: (1) the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were separate and distinct personages, (2) the Father and the Son are corporeal beings, and that the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit, (3) men can progress to the status of Godhood—becoming gods themselves, and (4) that there is a plurality of gods. It has been shown in this work that in teaching these four concepts Joseph Smith stood in opposition to the concepts of Deity taught by the rest of the so-called Christian world.

It has also been a finding of this thesis that with the exception of the doctrine that God himself was once a mortal man, there is no doctrine contained in either the King Follett or the June 16th sermons in relationship to Deity that Joseph Smith had not taught prior to his giving those discourses. Evidence has been compiled from newspapers, books, letters, sermons, hymns, and journals, written at the time of which give that period as their context, which support this finding. Anti-Mormon sources have also been included. From these findings the writer concludes that the King Follett and June 16th sermons were accurately recorded and that they correctly
represent the views of Joseph Smith in relationship to Deity. Further, that in these sermons Joseph Smith was merely emphasizing, clarifying, and expanding, upon doctrines that he had previously taught about God.

The findings of this thesis have also shown that the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does not claim as official dogma or doctrine, any of the four concepts this thesis has shown that Joseph Smith taught. Although their present position is one that allows such freedom of thought that it cannot be authoritatively stated what the members of the Reorganized Church believe concerning Deity, the findings of this study indicate that they do not accept as doctrine any of the four concepts this study has shown were taught by Joseph Smith. This leads the writer to the conclusion that the RLDS are not the stewards of the concept of Deity taught by Joseph Smith. Since the majority of sources used to determine Joseph Smith's teachings on the concepts considered are recognized as historically and doctrinally correct by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the writer concludes that this Church has preserved a belief in these doctrines. For example, President Joseph Fielding Smith, senior Apostle in the Quorum of the Twelve and member of the First Presidency in the LDS Church stated:

We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. We accept these three personages as the supreme governing council in the heavens. The Father and the Son have tabernacles of flesh and bones, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit.
Some people are troubled over the statements of the Prophet Joseph Smith as found in the King Follett sermon delivered in Nauvoo in 1844. The matter that seems such a mystery is the statement that our Father in heaven at one time passed through a life and death and is an exalted man.

Let me ask, are we not taught that we as sons of God may become like him? Is not this a glorious thought? Yet we have to pass through mortality and receive the resurrection and then go on to perfection just as our Father did before us. The Prophet taught that our Father had a Father and so on. Is not this a reasonable thought, especially when we remember that the promises are made to us that we may become like him?

Original findings in this work include evidence that the RLDS in the early part of their history, did teach that God was a corporeal being and that the concept of a plurality of gods was acceptable by some of their members.

An original document examined by the writer in relationship to the statement in "The Vision" that men can become "gods" which contains the word god spelled with a capital "G", coupled with the other evidence in that chapter, leads the writer to the conclusion that the meaning of this passage cannot be interpreted to meaning less than godhood in the same sense that the God of Heaven enjoys.

Examination of original documents also leads to the finding of the date and circumstances surrounding the changes made in the King Follett discourse before its publication in the Journal of Discourses in 1859 and the Millennial Star in 1861. This is the edition that is in common use today.

1Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. I: 1, 10, 12.
APPENDIX

Since God revealed himself to Adam by certain names, we might suppose that those names, or variants of them, would be preserved among succeeding generations, even though people coming later developed false religions. It is, also, not uncommon for important names to be carried from one language to another by transliteration rather than translation. Hence, it is of more than passing interest to note that the Egyptians worshiped a Deity, considered by them to be supreme, whose name bears a striking resemblance to that of the true God, as his name was recorded in the Adamic language. The Egyptian deity Ammon, or Amon, or Amen (who corresponds to Zeus of the Greeks and Jupiter of the Romans) was first worshiped as the local deity of Thebes; he was shown as a ramheaded god of life and reproduction. Later, united with the sun-god to become a supreme deity, he was known as Amen-Ra, with the other gods as the members or parts.

It is also interesting to note that Amen, a transliterated word which is the same in Egyptian, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Anglo-Saxon, and English, is one of the names of Christ. Speaking to John on the Isle of Patmos, our Lord said: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." (Rev. 3:14.)

The following is a comparison of the two accounts of the King Follett discourse as they appeared in the Times and Seasons, August 15, 1844, and the Millennial Star, 1861.

1McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 29-30.
Times and Seasons,
Aug. 15, 1844.
First, God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves, that is the great secret. If the vail was rent today, and the great God, who holds this world in its orbit, and upholds all things by his power; if you were to see him today, you would see him in all the person, image and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion and image of God; Adam received instruction, walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are the simple and first principles of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, that we may converse with him as one man with another, and that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.

Here then is eternal life, to know the only wise and true God. You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves; to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power;

Millennial Star, 1861

God himself was once as we are now. And is an exalted Man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the vail were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, (was to make himself visible, --I say,) if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form--like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, (and to know) that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible.

Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another,
and I want you to know that God in the last days, while certain individuals are proclaiming his name, is not trifling with you or me; it is the first principles of consolation.

What is it? to inherit the same glory, the same power and the same exaltation, until you ascend the throne of eternal power the same as those who are gone before.

What did Jesus do? Why I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. I saw my Father work out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom I shall present it to my Father, so that he obtains kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt his glory, so that Jesus treads in his tracks to inherit what God did before; it is plain beyond disputation, and you thus learn some of the first principles of the gospel, about which so much hath been said.

I know more than all the world put together, and the Holy Ghost within me comprehends more than all the world, and I will associate with it.

But, if I am right I might with boldness proclaim from the house tops, that God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself; intelligence exists upon a self existent principle, it is a spirit 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 enthroned in everlasting power. And I want you to know that God, in the last days, while certain individuals are proclaiming His name, is not trifling with you or me. These are the first principles of consolation.

What is it? To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a god, and ascend the throne of eternal power, the same as those who have gone before.

What did Jesus do? Why I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. My Father worked out His kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that He may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt Him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take His place, and thereby become exalted myself. So that Jesus treads in the tracks of His Father; and inherits what God did before; (and God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all His children.) It is plain beyond disputation, and you thus learn some of the first principles of the gospel, about which so much hath been said.
from age to age, and there is no creation about it. All the spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.

But I am learned, and know more than all the world put together. The Holy Ghost does, anyhow, and he is within me, and comprehends more than all the world; and I will associate myself with him.

But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself.

Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age and there is no creation about it. All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.
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ABSTRACT

This study makes a consideration of four related concepts of Deity, each of which is accepted as doctrine by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which claims to have received these doctrines from Joseph Smith. On the other hand, each of these concepts is rejected as doctrine by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which claims that Joseph Smith did not teach them.

The four concepts dealt with are:

(1) God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are not three persons of one essence, but are instead, three separate and distinct personages;

(2) The Father and the Son are corporeal personages, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit;

(3) Man can continue his progression until he becomes as God—that is, a god himself;

(4) There is a plurality of gods.
Of considerable importance to this study is a discourse delivered by Joseph Smith in April of 1844, called the King Follett sermon. In this discourse Joseph Smith is recorded as having taught that men can become gods and that there is a plurality of gods. The Latter-day Saints regard this sermon as the apex or climax of Joseph Smith's preaching career. They view it as his greatest sermon and consider it's doctrinal content to be a summation of his life and mission. On the other hand, the Reorganized Church challenges the historicity of this sermon, claiming that the accounts preserved of it are not reliable and that they do not accurately represent the teachings of Joseph Smith. This thesis examines historical evidence in order to evaluate the accuracy of the preserved accounts of this sermon.

The primary source for this work is Joseph Smith's journal which is a six-volume work known as the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period I. Other sources will include the Doctrine and Covenants, which is a collection of revelations given through Joseph Smith, and other records also believed to be revelations given by him. Much by way of supportive evidence is also considered from contemporary Mormon and anti-Mormon sources—including newspapers, books, letters, sermons, hymns, and journals.

The findings of this study are that Joseph Smith did teach the four concepts under consideration, and that he had
taught all of these concepts before the King Follett discourse was given. The writer concluded from the evidence considered that the King Follett discourse is an accurate representation of the views of Joseph Smith in relationship to Deity.

From a study of the present beliefs of the Reorganized Church, the writer also concluded that they do not now accept as doctrine any of the four concepts this work has shown were taught by Joseph Smith. Their early Church publications, however, indicate a belief in some of these concepts. For instance, strong statements were common in support of a corporeal God, and there is sufficient evidence to indicate that some at least believed in a plurality of Gods.

Since the original sources used in this thesis are recognized as historically and doctrinally correct by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the writer concluded that this Church has preserved a belief in these four concepts.