

Presbyterians and Mormons:  
*A Study in Contrasts*



Theology and Worship Ministry Unit  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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*Capitalization of words and language concerning God that is not inclusive (Heavenly Father) reflect general Mormon usage.*

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## Preface

In 1988 an overture from the Presbytery of Grand Canyon requested that the 200th General Assembly (1988) provide "a definitive statement" of the beliefs of "the Church of the Latter-day Saints and the relationship of those beliefs to Christian faith and doctrine." The General Assembly's response was to "authorize the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit: to prepare a brief study guide that contrasts the teachings of the Latter-day Saints church with that of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition."

This study is another document in the ongoing history of the relationship between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Mormons. From its inception in 1830, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints encountered sustained opposition from American Protestants who viewed the new religion with a mixture of scorn, animosity, and fear. Mormons were criticized for, among other things, clannishness, secret and mysterious rituals, plural marriages, blending church and state, and aggressive (and surprisingly successful) proselytizing. During the period from 1870 to 1900, the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions dispatched teachers and missionaries to New Mexico and Utah to prevent further spread of reputed Latter-day Saints heresy and immorality. On several occasions the General Assembly condemned the "abominations of Mormonism." In 1899 Presbyterian women spearheaded a successful national campaign to deny duly-elected, Latter-day Saint congressman Brigham H. Roberts, who was termed a "defiant polygamist," a seat in the House of Representatives.

Meanwhile, the Latter-day Saints were changing. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, they were making certain concessions in order to practice their religion without interference from the United States government. For instance, they publicly affirmed support of the principle of separation of church and state and approved the establishment of a public school system in Utah. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Presbyterian anti-Mormonism showed signs of moderation. General Assemblies no longer castigated Mormons for either their behavior or teachings. Presbyterian/Latter-day Saints relationships improved significantly during World War I when Mormon/"Gentile" (the Mormon word for all non-Mormons) cooperation in support of the war reduced tensions between the two groups. Even so, the question "Is the Mormon religion Christian?" remained germane in Presbyterian circles.

Because the need for this study arose in a particular setting where Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints live side by side with some discomfort, the present study concentrates on the Salt Lake City based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This study will address the following questions:

1. **What do Mormons believe that is different from what we Presbyterians believe?**

The study will describe certain basic doctrines, noting significant differences between the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints and Reformed understanding. There is a special difficulty here. Many key words are shared by both groups, for example, God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, church, but each group ascribes quite different meaning to the same word. One must be alert to these differences.

2. **What is the history of the Mormons?**

A religious community is more than a set of beliefs and doctrines; it is also a history remembered and relived, a gathered people ordering its life in community, following certain practices and guided by authority accepted as divine. This is more true for Mormons than for other contemporary religious communities of comparable size in North America. On the following pages we will consider the history, religious practices, and accepted authorities of Mormons. There is much more to Mormonism, however, than we can communicate in this brief paper on beliefs, history, and practices. We encourage readers to pursue further study of Mormonism and the Reformed faith and, where possible, fruitful conversation with Mormons.

3. **What pastoral concerns do we have regarding Mormons and our relationships with them?**

This section discusses intermarriage, baptism, funerals, counseling, and interfaith dialogue.

The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit asked Dr. Allan Swan, pastor of the Covenant Presbyterian Church in Boise, Idaho, to write the paper. The associate for Faith and Order, Dr. Aurelia T. Fule, cooperated with Dr. Swan throughout the work. Readers of the first draft included Presbyterian pastors, seminary and university teachers, presbytery executives, persons living in Mormon areas, a historian of Mormonism, Mormon theologians, and other Mormon church members. The final draft has greatly benefited from their expert advice, and the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit is deeply indebted to each of them. Special thanks to Dr. Donald Baird who provided the "Lexicon of Latter-day Saints Terminology." Dr. Frank Hainer, associate for Adult Education in the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit, assisted in the editing of the paper and wrote the study guide.

The present study document reflects a sense of continuity with the history of Presbyterian/Latter-day Saints relationships. On the one hand, it accepts the Latter-day Saints church as part of the American religious landscape and eschews pejorative language. On the other hand, it raises serious questions regarding the Latter-day Saints' theological system, especially where it differs from traditional, "catholic" Christian doctrine. By clarifying some of these basic issues, this document attempts to provide a context for ongoing discussion. The paper begins with a brief introduction, laying out some overarching theological concerns (prepared by the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit staff). There follows the main body of the paper, written by Dr. Swan, providing greater detail on Mormon history, practices, and beliefs. The paper concludes with a brief section on pastoral concerns (also prepared by Theology and Worship Ministry Unit staff). The appendixes include selections from *The Book of Mormon* and *The Pearl of Great Price*, information about the Mormon belief concerning the plurality of God, a brief comparison of Presbyterian and Mormon beliefs, a lexicon, suggestions for further reading, and a study guide.

George Telford

## Introduction

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) enjoys ecumenical fellowship and "is in correspondence with . . . churches with which it has had historical relations outside the U.S. . . ." as well as with churches that are members of ecumenical bodies in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a member, such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ, U.S.A.

The Presbyterian church is committed nationally, regionally, and locally to interfaith dialogue. Ongoing conversations between Jews and Christians, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participation in the National Council of Churches' Committee on Christian-Muslim Relations, for example, indicate this. Similar organized conversations with Mormons, recognized at the formal church level, do not exist. A reason for this may seem both simple and contradictory: the Mormons are both nearer and more distant from us than most other religious communities in this country and the world at large.

On the one hand, Mormons are nearer. They are a religious community with a span of history that accepts the Old and New Testaments as containing God's revelation. They use the language of the Trinity, speak of Christ's death and resurrection, and have a well-developed soteriology. At first glance, they seem to be like us. But we will see in this study that they are not like us.

We often acknowledge some surprising teachings from a Muslim or Hindu believer. A Muslim or Hindu appears sufficiently far from us in religious perception to let us listen without quick value judgments. That is less the case with Mormons. Because of their nearness, and especially because of their acceptance of the Old and New Testaments and their trinitarian language, we cannot help but use a biblical measure to evaluate their teachings.

This study indicates three major doctrines on which Christians in the East and the West may take issue with Mormon believers: the nature of God, salvation, and revelation.

### The Nature of God

Monotheism asserts that there is one ultimate, divine being, God, before whom the whole universe stands. Mormons believe they are monotheists since they, too, worship one God, whom they call Heavenly Father, creator of this planet. In Heavenly Father humans see who they can become if they follow the path of obedience within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormon theologians reason that Mormons can talk about humans becoming, in the end, as God "because they come from the

same source in the beginning." That is, humans are preexistent spirit children of Heavenly Father. This leaves the question of monotheism unanswered. (See Appendix C.)

Because any understanding about God remains open to interpretation, it needs to be critically evaluated in light of the picture of God in the scriptures. The sacred scriptures of the Mormons speak of God as the One who brought descendants of the tribes of Israel to North America around 600 B.C., and sent Jesus, after his resurrection, to this continent to establish the church. (See Appendix A.) These are activities about which the Old and New Testaments witness to the history of Israel, and the life of Jesus Christ is silent. According to Mormon history, these revelatory events were recorded by only one person. The records, engraved on gold plates, were buried for hundreds of years until God elected a young man who was led to find the plates. Knowledge of an unknown language was imparted to the young man only, so that he was able to translate the text of the engraved plates that later disappeared. That God should act in secret in this fashion appears contrary to the actions of God disclosed in the Old and New Testaments. There we find God announcing divine intentions in order to call the community to repentance. What is troubling to Presbyterians, and many other Christians, is that the picture of God that emerges in Mormon scriptures is not the picture we find of God in the Old and New Testaments. Christians are aware that they see "in a glass darkly," (1 Corinthians 13:12) but what they see by reading the Bible makes them uneasy about the God who is claimed to be revealed in the Mormon scriptures.

### The Nature of Salvation

While the Mormon picture of God differs greatly from that which Christians throughout the ages have discovered in the face of Christ and in the scriptures, the Mormon understanding of salvation is familiar. We hear echoes of people and ideas that Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others argued against. We are reminded of many ancient theological views that the church defined as heresies.

Immortality and resurrection, according to Mormon teaching, are given to everyone through the unconditional atonement of Jesus Christ. But that is the bottom of the ladder of exaltation. The process of salvation is eternal progression from this first step to becoming "as God is." To progress is in the hand of each person, or, more correctly, in the hands of the family, hence the importance of marriage and sealing. Mormons not only work out their own salvation, they also may effect the salvation of those already dead. This is why baptism is undertaken on behalf of the dead.

According to a contemporary statement:

"Full salvation is attained by virtue of knowledge, truth, righteousness, and all true principles. . . . Without the atonement, the gospel,

the priesthood, and the sealing power . . . without continuous revelation, the ministering of angels . . . there would be no salvation. If it had not been for Joseph Smith and the restoration, there would be no salvation. There is no salvation outside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (McConkie, 670)

That salvation may be freely given is called, in an editorial of the *Deseret News*, a deception of "Satan's . . . of getting something for nothing. . . . That false doctrine is like a two-edged sword which destroys . . . whether in economics or in religion" (January 16, 1952, quoted by Gordon Frazer). That the "Lord puts a premium upon production" is part of the argument of the editorial.

The human capacity to earn salvation, nay divinity, is in contrast to the Reformed understanding of salvation by grace through faith. In Reformed thought, faith, grace, and salvation are all God's gifts freely given. The Christian accepts the gifts and lives a life of gratitude; salvation is not earned but received.

### Revelation and the Scriptures

Christian churches agree that God's self-revelation culminates in Jesus Christ, to whom the scriptures bear witness. Extra-biblical revelation—in nature, history, or reason—likewise bears witness to what is revealed in Christ and the scriptures. The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches disagree over the weight, if any, of the Apocrypha, but agree over the unique significance of the Old and New Testaments. They disagree over the role of tradition, but agree that tradition is not contrary to the content of revelation in the scriptures. Orthodox and Protestant Christians have varying concerns over certain more recent Roman Catholic doctrines: the infallibility of the pope and the Marian dogmas of immaculate conception and bodily assumption. These teachings are not present in the scriptures. However, Roman Catholics believe these teachings are not inventions or additions but doctrinal formulations of that which the church has always believed.

Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches believe the Bible is complete and the canon of scriptures is closed. This does not mean, however, that the church does not change, or that nothing new is ever taught by the Spirit to the church. A clear example may be slavery. While many Christians defended the institution of slavery, they found that some of their members, led by the Spirit, began to speak against it. In time, all churches agreed that it was wrong to practice slavery. They found not a new revelation but a new learning out of the one revelation. Christians discovered in the scriptures a teaching of radical human equality that does not allow a human being to own another human being. Believing that the Holy Spirit leads the church into deeper understanding of God's revelation, the church has modified its teachings on some matters and moved

off in new directions on others. But the new arises out of the already given revelation.

The Reformed tradition is rooted in this recognition. The reformers *re-formed* the church in the sixteenth century according to their understanding of the scriptures. The motto of this tradition is "reformed and always about to be reformed," under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the Bible is not complete. Three books: *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price* are added to the Old and New Testaments and are considered of equal value with the Bible. Moreover, revelation continues. Former permission may become prohibition, or what earlier was prohibited may be permitted.

Polygamy, for instance, was first practiced by Mormons soon after they moved to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. The Mormon general conference in 1835 voted on an "Article of Marriage" that forbade polygamy to be added to the *Doctrine and Covenants*. In 1840 Joseph Smith received a revelation supporting polygamy (*Doctrine and Covenants* 132:52-54). It required another revelation to President Woodruff, in 1890, to prohibit polygamy. The issue was not settled once and for all. "Gloriously the holy practice will commence again after the Second Coming of the Son of Adam and the ushering in of the millenium" (McConkie, 587).

In 1978 Spencer W. Kimball announced that God ". . . has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that . . . all worthy male members of the church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard to race and color." Admitting women to the priesthood would require a similar revelation.

It appears that for Mormons the "canon" is always open. Consequently, Mormons do not speak of developing their teaching in new ways but of receiving new revelations. The Christian churches, by contrast, speak of developing the already-given-but-not-fully-seen, or of applying the already-given to new situations. The main body of the study considers these concerns in more detail.

## A Study in Contrasts

Allan Swan

This section compares and contrasts certain teachings of the Mormon church with those of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition and presents briefly the history, practices, and beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The goal is clarification and understanding.

The primary sources of information on the Mormon church used in this paper are those that are published by representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. Given the Mormon reliance on "continuing revelation," it is recognized that theological positions and doctrines of the Latter-day Saints are subject to revision as circumstances change. The primary sources for the theological position of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and *The Book of Confessions*.

In this document, the terms *Latter-day Saints* and *Mormon* are used interchangeably. The word *Christian* assumes the definition of the World Council of Churches: "those (who) confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures." The thesis of this paper is that Mormon theology, biblical interpretation, and rewriting of scriptures separate that religious body from Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic expressions of the Christian faith. Theological differences are noted; conclusions, by and large, are left to the reader. Dialogue with the Latter-day Saints church is encouraged.

Although this study focuses on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, mention should be made of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), headquartered in Independence, Missouri. Organized in 1860 under the leadership of Joseph Smith III, this church has maintained its authority through lineal descendants of the prophet Joseph Smith. The Reorganized Latter Day Saints church did not embrace many of the practices of the Latter-day Saints church such as secret temple rituals, plural marriages, blood atonement, and the doctrine of eternal progression. Since 1984, the Reorganized Latter Day Saints church, which has a full-time ordained ministry as well as local self-sustained priesthood/ministries, has ordained women to the priesthood. The continuing development of this branch of the church appears to move it closer to mainstream Protestant beliefs and practices. Many of the practices and doctrines described in this paper do not apply to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

## A Brief History of Mormonism

The formal organization of the Mormon church took place April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York. Mormons, however, believe the church was established by Jesus Christ in North America among the people called Nephites and Lamanites, descendants of the tribes of Israel. Mormons believe that an account of this, along with a thousand-year history of peace and war, was recorded on golden plates by Mormon, one of the last of the Nephites. This abridged record, along with various other plates describing earlier civilizations originating with Adam, were buried, they believe, in the fifth century of the common era in a hill called Cumorah in what is now Upstate New York. Joseph Smith claimed that in September of 1827, after several visits by the once man, now angel, Moroni, he was guided to this burial place and given divine means for the translation of the plates, said to have been written in "Reformed Egyptian," into seventeenth-century English. This writing forms the basis for *The Book of Mormon*, the first of three documents accepted by Mormons as authoritative and divinely inspired, along with the King James Version of the Bible (as correctly translated). Later, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price* were added as inspired and authoritative documents. They will be described later in this paper.

Originally named simply "The Church of Christ," the church changed its name in 1838 to "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." According to their testimony, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received a restoration of the Aaronic priesthood from other heavenly messengers in May of 1829 and the Melchizedek priesthood shortly afterwards. These events, they claimed, restored the authority to act on behalf of God and under his direction that had been removed from the church following the death of the original apostles.

Under Smith's leadership, the church moved from Western New York State into Kirtland, Ohio, and built the first temple. Eventually the Mormons entered Jackson County, Missouri, and dedicated a temple site that they believed would be the location of the final temple of the New Jerusalem at the time of Christ's return. Following periods of serious conflict in Missouri and the dedication of the first temple in Kirtland, Smith and his followers moved to Commerce, Illinois, and founded the city of Nauvoo. Eventually Nauvoo became Illinois' largest city. Construction of a temple began. Based on claimed divine revelations, Smith began to shape Mormon temple ceremonies. Historians see a resemblance between many of these ceremonies and those in Freemasonry. At this time baptism for the dead, temple endowment ceremonies, and plural marriages were introduced. Such doctrines separated Joseph Smith from those who eventually formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.



Following Smith's murder on June 27, 1844, opinion on who should succeed him was divided between those loyal to Brigham Young, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the highest governing body serving as advisor to the Prophet/President), and those who thought the successor should be a blood descendant of Joseph Smith. In the summer of 1846, a group of those accepting Brigham Young's leadership left Nauvoo after severe persecution from the local inhabitants to seek out a place of safety. They spent the winter in Winter Quarters, Nebraska, not far from present-day Omaha. In the Spring of 1847, Young led an advance group of one hundred forty-eight Mormons to a location in the valley of the Great Salt Lake and later supervised the migration of thousands of other Mormons to the valley. Some of those remaining in Illinois eventually returned to Missouri and, as described earlier, became known as "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints."

In 1850 the provisional state of Deseret was made Utah territory with Brigham Young as governor. The question of plural marriage kept the territory from statehood. In September 1890 Latter-day Saints president Wilford Woodruff announced a revelation that declared plural marriages no longer sanctioned by the church, a change that paved the way for Utah to become a state in 1896. This position barring plural marriage was later strengthened to include excommunication of anyone who continued this practice. Despite this ban, fundamentalist Mormons, not associated with the Salt Lake City church, continue to practice plural marriage in isolated communities in Utah, Arizona, and elsewhere.

### **The Latter-day Saints Church Today**

In 1988 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported a world membership of 6,720,000, approximately two and one-half million of whom were outside the United States. At the time of the April conference in 1989, 36,132 male and female full-time missionaries were in the field in and outside the United States, serving eighteen to twenty-four months in their assigned area at their own expense. These missionaries were, in part, responsible for the 256,515 converts reported in 1988. Since 1985, the president and prophet of the church has been Ezra Taft Benson, who succeeded Spencer W. Kimball. He is advised by two counselors and by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The Mormon church has set three tasks for itself.

#### **1 . Carry its message to the nations.**

They believe that there is no salvation outside the Mormon church: hence, the strong emphasis on mission throughout the world.

#### **2. Perfect the saints.**

Since the doctrine of grace is secondary in Mormon theology, each Mormon must progress in his or her life toward the perfection required for entrance into the "celestial glory."

#### **3. Redeem the dead.**

Temple ordinances offer a means for vicarious interventions on behalf of the dead lest they be denied exaltation in the future life.

The Mormon church also believes that it alone has the authority and the means to fulfill these tasks. They believe that theirs is the only church with a living prophet through whom God continues to speak with authority.

## Mormon Practices

### **The Priesthood**

Induction into the priesthood is the first of several rites of passage for worthy males. Mormon males are ordained at age twelve and progress through the ranks of the priesthood in two-year steps. The priesthood is divided into lower and higher echelons, Aaronic and Melchizedek. The echelons are divided into ranks. The Aaronic priesthood officers are deacon, teacher, and priest. The office of bishop (congregational leader) is also an Aaronic rank. At age nineteen, adult males are candidates for the Melchizedek priesthood whose ranks include elder and high priest. Mormon apostles and prophets are high priests with additional *keys* (authority).

There is a desire among some women within the church, through the Mormon Women's Forum, to have qualified women admitted to the priesthoods and to the church's highest, full-time, ecclesiastical positions. Changes in the area of presiding leadership, Mormons believe, will be a result of divine revelation, not any "grass roots" or democratic process.

A major change in the position of the Latter-day Saints church regarding the place of blacks occurred in 1978 as a result of a revelation received by Spencer W. Kimball admitting "all worthy males" to the priesthood. As a result of this revelation, the priesthood was opened to persons of color.

The basic congregational unit of the Latter-day Saints organization is the *ward*, which embraces from 200 to 800 persons in a geographical area. The leadership of a ward is in a bishopric that is made up of three men, one bishop and two counselors. They are assisted by one or more clerks. The

Relief Society president is generally recognized as the number-two officer in carrying out the work of a ward and meets regularly with the bishop and counselors. Clergy in the local Latter-day Saints ward leadership are all unpaid volunteers, although occasionally the expenses of bishops are covered.

A cluster of wards (five to ten) in a geographical area constitutes a *stake*, presided over by a Stake Presidency made up of a president and two counselors, also unpaid volunteers. The term *stake* comes from the imagery of the "stakes of the tent of Zion." Assisting these three men is the High Council, twelve men who serve as directed by the Stake Presidency, primarily in an advisory and training capacity. The Stake Patriarch, a special office, provides conditional prophecies for pious Mormons.

The next higher division is the area Presidency that is made up of men from either the First or Second Quorums of Seventy described below. The First and Second Quorums have international jurisdiction in the Latter-day Saints church and, together with the First Presidency, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric, constitute the "General Authorities" of the Latter-day Saints church or, more commonly, "The Brethren." Mormons believe that the president of the First Presidency, known as "President of the High Priesthood of the Church," is a living prophet, "a seer, a revelator, a translator and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church." Accepted as the "mouthpiece of God" in the tradition of Moses, he acts in Mormon matters as the spokesman for the Lord.

### Temple Ordinances

The temples of the Mormon church occupy a central place in the beliefs and practices of members who are deemed worthy to participate in the three basic ordinances: baptism for the dead, endowment, and celestial marriage. These ordinances are primarily undertaken in the context of redeeming the dead. Only those with a *temple recommend* are allowed entrance to a temple once that temple has been dedicated. Temple recommends are issued only by a bishop in consultation with the applicant and at the bishop's discretion. Only 8 to 10 percent of the Mormon membership participate in these ordinances. Virtually all Mormon leadership is drawn from this minority.

### Baptism

Baptism by immersion is required of any person becoming a member of the Latter-day Saints church, whether a convert or a person born into the church. Mormons do not accept a prior baptism by any other religious body as valid, believing that theirs is the only true church and true priesthood. Initial baptisms performed by a Latter-day Saints official take place in a stake or ward building; baptism on behalf of others takes place only in a temple. First Corinthians 15:29 (which most Protestant scholars

have taken as a single reference to a practice of vicarious baptism not found in the early church) and the revelation to Joseph Smith recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 124, are the bases for this extensively practiced temple ceremony. Since, in Mormon theology, baptism by immersion and under the authority of the priesthood is essential for *exaltation*, Mormons are baptized on behalf of the dead in order to make exaltation possible, should that deceased person choose to accept the Mormon way after his or her death. The extensive genealogical research and record facilities are a product of this concern for the dead. All of the baptisms performed in the temple are for the dead and this is the principal *temple work* of Mormon youth, both men and women, twelve years old and older.

### Endowment

The presentational ritual called the *endowment ceremony* is a means whereby a person, through a succession of acts and observances, is introduced to special knowledge believed necessary for continued progression in this life and the life to come. Originally presented as a series of live-action dramas, endowment ceremonies are now presented on film. As those participating in this ceremony move from location to location in the temple, they are washed and anointed to receive vitality, fertility, and power, and are given a special temple garment as a reminder of their commitments and promises and as a means of protection. A portion of the endowment ceremony is a conversation between Lucifer (Satan) and a Protestant minister in which the minister is portrayed as an instrument and dupe of Satan. An earlier scene specifically targets the Roman Catholic church as an agency of Satan. The endowment ceremony includes the taking of several oaths of secrecy and the learning of special signs and handclaps similar to those found in Masonic rites. During the endowment ceremony, a participant receives a new name that likewise remains secret. All these signs and tokens are symbols of covenants made and are used to pass by the angels who guard the entrance into eternal life. Endowment ceremonies, like baptism and celestial marriage, may be performed on behalf of the dead.

### Celestial Marriage or Sealing

As baptism is required to begin the Mormon journey toward exaltation, a temple marriage is required to achieve the highest degree of celestial glory. In a temple marriage, two persons are *sealed* to each other for time and eternity in the belief that the relationship will continue after death. Those so sealed, if all the requirements for exaltation are completed, may become supreme beings over a world into which their spirit children will be born. Because the family unit is essential to the Mormon understanding of eternal progression, children are sealed to parents as a part of celestial marriage. Children born to parents not yet temple-endowed may be sealed to those parents should those parents eventually be sealed to one another. Marriage ceremonies in the temple are witnessed only by those persons

who have a temple recommend. It is not unusual for "unworthy" family members who lack temple recommends, including parents, to be excluded from the marriage ceremony. The actual exchange of vows within the veil of the temple is done in the presence of a temple worker who represents Heavenly Father. Mormons are not required to be married in the temple; non-temple marriages are for the mortal lives of the couple (for "time" rather than for "time and eternity") and are conducted by a bishop or stake president in the ward or stake building. Mormons accept, as do Protestants, the reality of divorce and have provided a means whereby those who have been sealed in a temple marriage may have that relationship dissolved through a *temple divorce*.

### Temples and Christianity

The concept of a temple as a place where secret ordinances and ceremonies are conducted, primarily on behalf of the dead, is characteristic of mystery religions and foreign to Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity. In Old Testament times, and in the time of Jesus, the temple was the place of daily sacrifice and yearly ceremonies of corporate atonement, administered by those designated as priests of the lineage of Aaron or Levi. Early Christian theology, however, considered the temple unnecessary. The function of the temple is fulfilled by Jesus Christ who, as the high priest after the order of Melchizedek, offers himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God. His death once and for all opens the way for all persons to enter into the presence of God and obviates the need for a temple (Hebrews 7:15-28). This free access is symbolized by the rending of the veil of the temple on the day of Christ's crucifixion, thus opening the way between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Classical Christianity resisted the idea of giving secret information to selected persons and withholding it from others. Such privileged knowledge resembles an ancient heresy, Gnosticism, and contradicts the openness with which Jesus announced the kingdom of God.

## Mormon Beliefs

### The Nature of God

The God of the **Mormon tradition** stands in marked contrast to the God of the Christian tradition. The Mormon doctrine of "eternal progression" describes the origin of God. Lorenzo Snow, president of the Latter-day Saints church at the close of the nineteenth century, stated it succinctly:

"As man is now, God once was;  
As God now is, man may become."

Mormons believe that all persons live a premortal life as spirit children of Heavenly Father. In order to learn to distinguish between good and evil,

spirit children are born into an earthly life where they grow and make the choice that will effect their destiny. The Mormon belief that Mormon families are the best settings for that growth is the major reason behind the large families that are encouraged by the Latter-day Saints church. After death, those persons who have fulfilled all of the requirements for exaltation may eventually become gods themselves. Although they commonly speak of God as Heavenly Father, Mormons believe in a Heavenly Mother, coequal with the Father, who literally bears spirit children who, in turn, are born into the world over which Heavenly Father and Mother have dominion.

Joseph Smith taught that God is "an exalted, glorified man, enthroned in the heavens." (*The Teachings of the Prophet*, p. 345). In this sense, Mormonism is literally anthropomorphic, God in the form of man. For Mormons, believing that humans may become gods, there are many gods in many worlds, which may sound, to some at least, like polytheism. Mormons, however, give allegiance only to Heavenly Father, creator and ruler of this world; therefore, they think of themselves as monotheistic. God's glorified, resurrected body does not limit him in time or space, but he chooses to establish his contact with this world through Jesus Christ.

In contrast to the concept of God as an exalted man, the **classical Christian view** has always emphasized God as "Spirit (John 4:24) infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth" ("The Shorter Catechism" Question 4, *Book of Confessions* 7.004). There is one God and only one God (Isaiah 45:15, 18, 21) whose authority and power is over all persons and all worlds. The person of God is invisible and "without body, parts, or passions" ("The Westminster Confession of Faith," *Book of Confessions* 6.011). God is the source of all goodness and is sovereign over all that God has created. Although the male pronoun is used by biblical writers in speaking of God, God is not considered male or female, but, in the parent imagery of the scriptures, carries aspects of both.

Christians believe that God is known through three "Persons" who are of one *substance*, classically referred to as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ancient formulations of the classic Christian creeds may sound strange to modern ears, for example, "We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God . . . being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made" ("The Nicene Creed," *Book of Confessions*, 1.1-2). However, they provide important safeguards, and remind us how difficult it is to speak at all of the ineffable God. The creeds invite theological reflection and serve to protect us from theological mistakes. In Christian tradition the otherness of the awesome God is overcome only through the incarnation in Jesus Christ. God accommodates the divine self to our human ability to know; Jesus Christ is the window into the heart of God. In Christian tradition, humans are made in the image of God, not the other way around.

## The Nature of Jesus Christ

In **Mormon theology**, Jesus is the firstborn of many children of Elohim (Heavenly Father). In his preexistent state, he is referred to as Jehovah (Moroni 10:34, *Book of Mormon*). In the heavenly council before creation, Jesus/Jehovah volunteered to accomplish Heavenly Father's plan for the redemption of the world. Jesus' brother, Satan/Lucifer, offered an opposing plan that would eliminate free will and force total obedience with Satan/Lucifer receiving the credit for not losing anyone. Jesus' plan was accepted and Satan's rejected. Jesus was then sent to earth to become God's only begotten in the flesh. In his anger, Satan rebelled and was cast out of heaven along with one-third of the Father's spirit children. They came to earth to tempt and destroy the obedient children. Their penalty was that they would never receive a mortal body and thereby were denied the ability to progress.

Mormon thought on the atoning death of Jesus Christ distinguishes two outcomes. The first is unconditional: the effects of Adam's sin (physical and spiritual death to all humankind and separation from God) are removed, guaranteeing resurrection and immortality to all. The second is conditional: Christ's atonement must be appropriated for one to receive forgiveness. According to Mormon belief, the path that God expects individuals to follow is clearly set forth and includes

1. faith in Jesus Christ;
2. repentance for one's sins;
3. baptism by immersion administered by one having the authority to act on God's behalf;
4. receiving the Holy Spirit from one holding the Melchizedek priesthood;
5. living an obedient life.

Thus, although immortality and the opportunity for resurrection have been obtained for all persons everywhere by Jesus Christ, salvation or exaltation is limited to those who follow the prescribed path available only in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Latter-day Saints church recognizes the historical presence of Jesus in Palestine, but attributes his birth to a physical union between the virgin Mary and Heavenly Father, making Jesus the biological Son of God. Although the New Testament is silent on the matter, Mormons have speculated that Jesus was married, perhaps at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, to Mary, Martha, and/or Mary Magdalene.

The church also holds that, following his ascension, Jesus appeared on the North American continent to the Nephites and Lamanites, heirs of the tribes of Israel that, according to *The Book of Mormon*, had come to this country 600 years earlier, prior to the Babylonian exile. In this appearance,

Mormons believe Jesus established the church and the Melchizedek priesthood along the lines presently found in The Latter-day Saints church today. They also hold that, at the beginning of the millennium when Christ returns to establish his kingdom on earth, the New Jerusalem temple will be built on a preselected site in Jackson County, Missouri, with a companion temple to be built in present-day Jerusalem (Ether 13:5, *Book of Mormon*).

Following scripture, the **Reformed tradition** calls Jesus Christ "the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14) who exists from the beginning with God. Christ is:

the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For in Christ all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through Christ and for Christ. . . . For in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Christ to reconcile for Christ all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross. (Colossians 1:15-16, 19-20, *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary, Year C*)

As the Son of God, Christ is the redeemer who has died for the sins of the world and in whose resurrection death has been defeated and victory over the grave won. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). One accepts the atonement through faith. Faith itself is a gift of God's grace, not dependent on the worth and works of the recipient (Ephesians 2:8-9). In this sense, the atoning death of Jesus Christ is a completed act that opens the way of eternal life to those who accept this unconditional act of grace. To be adopted into the household of God's people is the supreme sign of God's saving grace in Christ (Romans 5:18-21; 6:20-23).

Christians have interpreted the virgin birth recorded in Matthew and Luke in a variety of ways. Whatever disagreements about the biology of it exist, the theology is clear: Jesus is a genuinely human being, but also a new creation, not in line with Adam, since the genealogical chain is broken by the virgin birth. Thus, Jesus is the second Adam, "the second man from heaven," (1 Corinthians 15:47, see Romans 5:14-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 45-50) the progenitor of a new, redeemed race, engrafted into him by grace. His teachings and acts of mercy were signs of the presence of the kingdom of God. His willingness to offer himself as both the Lamb of God and High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15, 23-28) demonstrates the profound love of God for creation and provides the model for faith and witness in the world: Christians are the body of Christ, receiving the benefits of Christ's cross and bearing their own cross in love and gratitude. Christ intercedes for us with God and will return again to the earth.

### The Nature of the Holy Spirit

In **Mormon theology**, the Holy Ghost is referred to as the Comforter or Sanctifier through whose influence wicked desires are purged, and worthy saints move toward peace and perfection. He is a personage of spirit with a body of "refined matter" who is also the source of miracles, gifts, and godly powers by which enemies are defeated and the people of God blessed. The Holy Ghost dwells permanently only with those who desire him and are worthy of him, having received him through the laying on of hands by one holding the Melchizedek priesthood.

Some Mormons differentiate between the Holy Ghost (above) and the Holy Spirit who is the "Spirit of God" or the "Spirit of Truth" and operates in the lives of those other than Latter-day Saints "striving to bring men to the knowledge of the truth" (Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 66-68). It may be that Smith, having access primarily to the King James Version of the Bible, followed the style of the KJV which uses two terms, "Spirit" and "Ghost," to translate the Greek word *pneuma*.

In **Christian theology**, the Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of God available to everyone as Comforter, Advocate, Sanctifier, and Empowerer, fulfilling the work of reconciliation. The Holy Spirit is the agent through whom the church is created and renewed, and in whose power forgiveness is offered and accepted. Through the Holy Spirit, men and women know and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and receive the gifts of salvation and justification. The Holy Spirit is not other than God but the very presence of God with us.

### The Nature of Revelation

For **Mormons**, revelation is a continuing process. New teachings about God's will and purpose are periodically communicated through the written and the spoken word. From time to time persons chosen by God speak the truth to those who will listen to them. Joseph Smith is an example: a prophet through whom God made known new insights and information regarding his will.

In keeping with this belief in God's continuing revelation through inspired writers and prophets, the Latter-day Saints accept *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price* as scriptures of worth and value equal to the Old and New Testaments as correctly translated. *The Book of Mormon*, as mentioned above, records a thousand-year civilization established in North and Central America by persons related to the tribes of Israel who fled before the Babylonian captivity. Following a war between the Lamanites and the Nephites, record of this civilization, written on gold plates, Mormons believe, was buried in the fifth century A.D. and unearthed in the nineteenth century by Joseph Smith, under the direction of the angel Moroni. The plates became *The Book of Mormon*.

Several matters puzzle non-Mormons about the origin and development of *The Book of Mormon*. How the "plates" were translated, for instance, raises questions. Smith claimed he used the "Urim and Thummim" as a "seer stone" that he put in a hat for the translation of the plates. The alleged language of the plates, "Reformed Egyptian," remains unknown. The disappearance of the "plates" only intensified the puzzlement.

The major theological differences, however, are not found in *The Book of Mormon* but in *Doctrine and Covenants*. This, Mormons claim, is a record of a number of visions or revelations experienced primarily by Joseph Smith, but also revelations to Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff (1890), Joseph Smith (1918) and Spencer W. Kimball (1978). *Doctrine and Covenants* describes the writing of *The Book of Mormon* (sections 6-10); the conferring of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods (section 18); church organization (section 20); the mission to the Indians (section 32); the levels of heaven (section 76); Word of Wisdom (section 89); the naming of the church (section 115); the baptism of the dead (section 124); God as person of flesh and bones (section 130); plural marriages approved (section 132) and disapproved (Declaration 1).

The third book regarded as scripture by Mormons is *The Pearl of Great Price*. This small volume contains "The Book of Moses," "The Book of Abraham" (believed by Mormons to be a translation by Joseph Smith from an Egyptian papyrus), Writings of Joseph Smith titled "Matthew" and "History," and "The Articles of Faith."

Unquestioning Mormon confidence in the absolute validity and authenticity of these documents has been once again shaken by the forgeries of Mark Hoffman and the subsequent exposure of the so-called "Salamander letter" as spurious. (See the *Mormon Murders* by Steve Naifeh and Gregory W. Smith, New American Library, 1989.) Although many of the basic documents of the Mormon church are available for study, a number of documents remain locked in the archives of the church and are unavailable to Mormon and non-Mormon alike.

In **Reformed theology**, Jesus Christ is central to God's self-disclosure. Christ is "The one sufficient revelation of God . . . the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written" ("The Confession of 1967," *Book of Confessions*, 9.27). The scriptures contain the prophetic and apostolic testimony in which the word of God is heard, and by which faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. Since Christ continues to be heard by the power of the Holy Spirit as the living Word of God, the word continues to be contemporary and sufficient, speaking with relevance and directness to the present human condition. Therefore, since the fullness of the gospel is contained within the Old and New Testaments as they are read and

understood in the power of the Holy Spirit, there are no additional revelations by inspired writers or prophetic oracles.

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. ("The Westminster Confession of Faith," *Book of Confessions*, 6.006)

### The Nature of the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not see itself as a part of the continuous witness of Christ from the time of the apostles to the present. **The Mormon church** is a *restored church*, not a *re-formed church*. Their conviction is that, following the time of the apostles, the authority of the priesthood was lost and along with it certain important practices and doctrines. However, Mormons are now willing to state that the Lord continued to work through Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions, preserving the essentials of the gospel, particularly the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It was not until a climate of tolerance and pluralism was established in the United States in the nineteenth century that a restoration was possible. Mormons see their mission as converting others to what they believe is Christ's restored gospel. Their theology does not encourage ecumenical cooperation, but Mormons do cooperate in certain ecumenical enterprises (for example, the new VISN interfaith cable television network).

Mormons, basing their beliefs on the first vision of Joseph Smith, do not acknowledge the legitimacy of other Christian churches. Apparently, Smith sought guidance at age fourteen in the selection of a church. He reported the vision he received, attributed to Jesus Christ, as follows:

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that 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.' (Joseph Smith—History 1:19, *The Pearl of Great Price*)

This vision of Joseph Smith has colored relationships with other churches. In recent years, the Latter-day Saints church has indicated that conditions in the present may be different than those in Joseph Smith's day. Mormons retain, however, the conviction that Christian churches today continue to "teach for doctrines the commandments of men," and that complete sanctification and exaltation are not possible outside of the restored priesthood and ordinances of the Mormon church. The degree, on the other hand, to which Christian churches are willing to recognize

the Mormon church as a valid expression of the Christian faith, remains to be seen. Many persons continue to find the tenets of the Latter-day Saints church incompatible with the good news of Jesus Christ set forth in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

**Presbyterians**, together with other Christians, understand the church to be the body of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Church is an assembly of the faithful called or gathered out of the world; a communion, I say, of all saints, namely, of those who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God in Christ the Savior, by the Word and Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of all benefits which are freely offered through Christ. ("The Second Helvetic Confession," *Book of Confessions*, 5.125)

The church universal is always present in some degree in the world as a continuing witness to Jesus Christ, entrusted with the good news of salvation by God's grace. A continuity exists between the church of the apostles and the present Christian church. The church is present in a visible form wherever the gospel is preached and heard, the sacraments administered, and Jesus Christ served. The Head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ, and no other person can claim that place.

Christians recognize the scandalous nature of the divisions within Christendom. Many try to transcend the differences and realize the unity that draws people together in Christ into one catholic church:

We, therefore, call this Church catholic because it is universal, scattered through all parts of the world, and extended unto all times, and is not limited to any times or places. ("The Second Helvetic Confession," *Book of Confessions*, 5.126)

In this light, Christians reach out to all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord, in accordance with the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. While maintaining our convictions as to the truth of the gospel, we accept and celebrate those other ways of expressing faith that are demonstrated by our sisters and brothers in Christ. We believe that the church is reformed and always about to be reformed as the Holy Spirit works in our midst to do "a marvelous work and a wonder" (Isaiah 29:14, KJV).

### The Nature of Salvation

Many **Mormons** believe they are Christians in that they share a belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, the Mormon understanding of Christ's atoning death, as noted above, differs greatly from the classical expression of the Christian faith. The unconditional atonement that removes the effect of Adam's transgression, bringing immortality and resurrection to all, is yoked with a conditional atonement that must be appropriated. For the Latter-day Saints, salvation is only the first step

toward sanctification and exaltation. By virtue of the atonement and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Mormons move on toward perfection through adherence to the path that Mormons believe will lead into the presence of Heavenly Father. That path includes repentance, baptism by immersion, reception of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by one holding the Melchizedek priesthood, and the living of an obedient life.

At death worthy Mormons believe they will be in paradise until the time of judgment while non-Mormons will be in spirit prison during this time. Mormons from paradise will visit those in spirit prison to offer them the gospel. The vicarious temple ceremonies are performed on their behalf so that, if they accept the restored gospel, they will be able to progress to higher places of glory following the judgment.

At judgment all persons will benefit from Christ's atoning death and will live out their immortal lives in places appropriate to the level of their spiritual attainments. Outer darkness is reserved for Satan and Satan's angels, and those few persons who chose to follow his ways. Those who have broken the law, for example, adulterers, thieves, murderers, and others who have all committed similar transgressions without repentance will occupy the lowest or "telestial" glory. They will have spent an extended period of time suffering for their sins in spirit prison. The telestial kingdom will be visited and ministered to by the Holy Spirit, but not by either the Son or Heavenly Father.

The middle degree of glory, called the "terrestrial," is inhabited by those good and honest persons who have been blinded by human traditions or have rejected the fullness of the gospel when it was presented. This kingdom will be visited by the Son and the Holy Spirit, but not by Heavenly Father.

The highest degree of glory, known as the "celestial," is reserved for those who have humbled themselves, fulfilled all ordinances and covenants, and lived in harmony with others and with God. Like the other degrees of glory, the celestial is also graded. Individuals continue to progress until made perfect. They then create a world or worlds of their own as God, and populate that world with their spirit children. As Elohim did for this world, so they will devise a plan of salvation whereby their children can begin their own progression toward godhood.

**Classical Christian theology** affirms that central to the biblical record of God's plan of salvation is the grace of God as expressed in Jesus Christ. Humans have turned away from God and toward themselves. In the paradigm of rebellion expressed in the account of Adam and Eve, the human desire to become like God is dramatically portrayed with the tragic results of estrangement and death. Yet, though humans have turned away from God, God does not turn away from us, but continues to extend grace

and compassion to us. As the God who loves, God extends covenant and asks for faithful response. God's mercy toward Adam, protection of Cain, and covenants with Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel, reveal God as a faithful parent. God's mercy finds response in faithful persons who experience forgiveness, practice compassion, and anticipate the fullness of God's mercy in confidence and trust.

In the fullness of time, God's faithfulness is shown in the Word made flesh. In Jesus Christ, God's will is demonstrated and God's way lived. In his life and teaching, Jesus illustrates the reign of God; in his death and resurrection, Christ claims victory over sin and death, and offers eternal life to all who receive him as Lord and Savior. In the Reformed understanding of God's plan of salvation, both the initiative for and the completion of the plan rest in the grace of God. There is nothing required of those whom God calls to be God's own except the acceptance of God in Christ that results in a life of gratitude.

Because we are offered salvation as a gift, it is not necessary for us to do anything more than receive the gift by faith. Consequently, there is no purpose in attempting to earn a higher place in the kingdom. There can be no higher place than the place where God is. Good works proceed from the Christian, not out of servile fear of eternal punishment nor as a calculating way to salvation, but out of gratitude for being accepted as a child of God by faith. Christians, therefore, do not know or need to know about the furnishings of heaven or the temperature of hell, being content to trust God's grace for their eternal life.

## Pastoral Concerns

The social cohesion of Mormons that arose in a particular historical context and experience, maintained by Mormon example and expectation, is beyond any system of doctrine. Mormons normally form close-knit communities that tend to treat non-Mormons living in the same area as outsiders. Thus, Presbyterian pastors and sessions in areas of significant Mormon concentration face a different set of issues than churches in areas where there are fewer Mormons. Wherever religions meet, or conflict, Christians are called to bear witness to their faith. The Presbyterian way is not to speak *against* another faith but for our own Christian faith.

### Intermarriage

Pastoral concerns around the issue of intermarriage are not easy to address. Bridging the distance between any two faith communities brought into the marriage relationship is always a matter of deep concern. The couple decides whether they want to seek counsel of one or both communities. If they go to the Presbyterian church, what is the appropriate ministry of the pastor? Presbyterian pastors counseling with couples

often outline the differences between Presbyterian and Mormon faith and ethos. Unlike what happens in many mixed marriages, when one spouse is Mormon the couple often chooses to move into one or the other faith community. When asked, Presbyterian pastors and congregations need to assist affected partners, to understand the implications of these shifts for personal piety and practice. Partners may feel isolated both from the previous and the new faith community.

If parents remain members in the two churches the *religious education* of children needs special attention. Since Mormonism and Reformed Christianity are, essentially, quite different, a Presbyterian pastor and session would naturally want a clear and accurate presentation of Reformed tradition and piety given in the church. This would call for special attention on what a lived-faith entails, since this is such a prominent feature of Mormonism. A church should take special pains to avoid belittling the Mormon faith while still clarifying differences. Pastors need to assist marriage partners in avoiding struggles over religious issues that focus on their children and make them pawns in a larger conflict.

### **Baptism**

The question of baptism is often an issue when a Mormon chooses to become a Presbyterian either because of marriage or for some other reason. Pastors and sessions must make necessary decisions. Guided by the statement: "Baptism is received only once," Presbyterians do not rebaptize. We accept any Christian baptism in the name of the Trinity performed by a minister or priest with recognized ordination, whether or not the baptism occurs in a church with which we are "in correspondence." However, baptism by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is *not* recognized. Mormon beliefs about the Trinity do not correspond to the classical expression of trinitarian faith; the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has not recognized the ordination of the Latter-day Saints priesthood. Before the ordination of a minister from another denomination can be recognized by a presbytery, the ordaining denomination must be "judged by the presbytery to hold the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity" (*Book of Order*, G-11.0404).

### **Funerals**

Funerals are occasions when a family with Mormon and Presbyterian members may turn to both communities for pastoral care. Presbyterians do not ordinarily conduct joint services with Mormons. Some pastors are willing to speak at a funeral conducted by Mormons and speak according to their own faith. At times children arrange for a Mormon funeral of a Presbyterian parent to follow a Presbyterian service. This is based on the hope that the parent may yet be converted beyond the grave, according to Mormon understanding. Pastoral decisions may be problematic, but it is important to remember that funerals are occasions for ministering and comforting, not for adversarial point making.

### **Counseling**

Counseling is sought on a variety of occasions and for various reasons. Presbyterian pastors seek to bind wounds when families are divided or friendships destroyed when a person moves from the Presbyterian church to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Presbyterian ministers and church members often empathize with Mormon people who seek more justice in the Mormon community: women asking for greater participation in the direction of the Mormon church; women wanting greater freedom in the choice of family size or vocation; persons of color or diverse national origins seeking their places in leadership. Presbyterians counsel those with wounds and needs. This can be an occasion for witness to the faith as Presbyterians proclaim it. To be avoided is any manipulative use of conflict that would encourage changes in the faith community simply on the basis of negative feelings.

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

There are many ways in which individuals live together in a spirit of dialogue. This spirit mixes firm conviction and commitment to one's own faith, with an openness and respect for the other person that allows for authentic sharing. Dialogue can also occur at a more organized level, in which groups join with one another intentionally for conversation and joint action. Presbyterians have not yet found many ways to engage in organized group relationships of dialogue with Latter-day Saints. If we expect one day to sit down and talk more formally with the Latter-day Saints, it is necessary to think about what our particular dialogue concerns would be. On both sides we would need to be sure that we were ready both to speak and to listen. We would need to agree that we are to love our neighbors, and that we are to speak the truth in love.

For Presbyterians living in areas where the Mormons are a sizeable or even a majority community, the Mormon cohesion is often experienced by non-Mormons as exclusion. In such settings particular questions arise. First, Presbyterians may need to express clearly their sense of nonacceptance experienced where they are a minority. Second, Presbyterians would perhaps want to raise the question of the civil rights of minorities, the socio-legal expression in a democratic society of the gospel's emphasis on love and justice. For that reason, on principle, most Presbyterians support civil rights. In practice, of course, we are often not sensitive enough to the civil rights of others when we belong to the majority. Third, Presbyterians may wish to speak of the economic and social pressure placed on people living in predominantly Mormon areas. Dialogue would mean sharing our concerns and listening to those of the Mormons. It is hard to discuss these and similar concerns in the abstract, since acceptability and interfaith experience varies so from place to place. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a denomination could learn much from these local dialogues.



Presbyterians also will almost certainly raise the issue of proselytizing. Since Mormon missionaries visit our homes in Salt Lake City, Omaha, and Atlanta alike, Presbyterians will be helped by guidance available nationally. In every situation, watching our language will be useful. While Presbyterians speak of Mormons proselytizing (which, in certain places, is both aggressive and successful), Mormons consider this activity evangelizing. That is the term we Presbyterians also use for our work of proclaiming the gospel to people who, we think, have not yet responded to Christ's call. A central issue here is the meaning of evangelism. How can we ourselves joyfully share the gospel in ways that neither play judgmentally on the weaknesses of others nor manipulate human responses? Can we share with Mormons this understanding of evangelism in the hope that we can someday agree together on what is appropriate? How can we evangelize and nurture within our own Presbyterian family in ways that sustain people spiritually, so that those for whom we are most responsible feel no need to search for religious commitments outside the traditional Christian community? How can we support Presbyterian churches that feel the weight of Mormon advances? What can we learn from them about the importance of the wider Christian community standing together in proclamation and in daily life?

In the case of the Presbyterian and Latter-day Saints churches, each believes it preaches a more faithful gospel than the other. Dialogue is not based on easy similarities nor on acceptance of the beliefs and lifestyle of the other.

### A Concluding Word

The teaching and practice of Mormons have been outlined in this study and some practical problems touched on. What have we found? For the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches dialogue about the Christian faith with Mormons faces particular difficulties. Mormon teaching is never complete; Mormons may receive a new revelation. God, in their view, continues to speak to Mormons alone. The problem is not fear that God is favoring Mormons, but rather, the conviction that, according to scripture, God does not operate this way.

Are Mormons Christian? Mormons, with some exceptions, believe they are. In her excellent study, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, Professor Jan Shipps concludes, and so may we: In Mormonism

. . . salvation itself depends on knowing Christ, knowledge that can only be gained with the legitimation of the LDS priesthood and within the corporate structure of the LDS Church. In addition, although the gospel is available to all, the 'unit of exaltation' is the family rather than the individual. Consequently, the ultimate goal of the Latter-day Saints is not eternity somehow spent in the presence

of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. Mormonism holds up a different goal: 'eternal progression' toward godhood. When this theological conception is added to the peculiar understanding that Saints have of themselves and their Hebraic-Christianity, which grew out of their past as peculiar people, it becomes as clear as can be that, nomenclature notwithstanding, Mormonism is a new religious tradition. (p. 149)

A variety of religions engender spirituality; this is primarily for their adherents to know. The ability of the Mormon religion to do so is not debated. At this time, however, it appears that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not recognizably embrace the "catholic" tradition of the Christian church. Nevertheless, this Presbyterian study of Mormon faith and practice affirms the viability of further discussion in the spirit of interfaith dialogue.

Hope is forever bestowed on the church. We believe in "impossible possibilities" because God has made them possible time and again. Relationships between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Presbyterians have changed throughout this century; by God's grace they may change further.

## Selections from *The Book of Mormon*

### 3 Nephi, Chapter 10:18—Chapter 11:41

#### Chapter 10

18 And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who have been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—

19 Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them; and an account of his ministry shall be given hereafter. Therefore for this time I make an end of my sayings.

*Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful and did minister unto them; and on this wise did he show himself unto them. Comprising chapters 11 to 26 inclusive.*

#### Chapter 11

*The Father testifies of his Beloved Son—Christ appears and proclaims his atonement—The people feel the wound marks in his hands and feet and side—They cry Hosanna—He sets forth the mode and manner of baptism—The spirit of contention is of the devil—Christ's doctrine is that men should believe and be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost.*

And now it came to pass that there were a great multitude gathered together, of the people of Nephi, round about the temple which was in the land Bountiful; and they were marvelling and wondering one with another, and were showing one to another the great and marvelous change which had taken place.

2 And they were also conversing about this Jesus Christ, of whom the sign had been given concerning his death.

3 And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and not withstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

4 And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.

5 And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were toward the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sounds came.

6 And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

7 Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him.

8 And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

9 And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

10 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

11 And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

12 And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them after his ascension into heaven.

13 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto them saying:

14 Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.

15 And it came to pass that the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth, and did see with their eyes and did feel with their hands, and did know of a surety and did bear record, that it was he, of whom it was written by the prophets, that should come.

16 And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord saying:

17 Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.

18 And it came to pass that he spake unto Nephi (for Nephi was among the multitude) and he commanded him that he should come forth.

19 And Nephi arose and went forth, and bowed himself before the Lord and did kiss his feet.

20 And the Lord commanded him that he should arise. And he arose and stood before him.

21 And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that he shall baptize these people when I am again ascended into heaven.

22 And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. And he said unto them: On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you.

23 Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

24 And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

25 Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

26 And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.

27 And after this manner shall ye baptize in my name: for behold, verily I say unto you, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one; and I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one.

28 And according as I have commanded you thus shall ye baptize. And there shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

29 For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

30 Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.

31 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you my doctrine.

32 And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and 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 I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

33 And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

34 And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

35 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

36 And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

37 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

38 And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

39 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

40 And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

41 Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth.

Selections from *The Pearl of Great Price*  
*Accounts of the Creation from Moses and Abraham*

**The First Day of Creation**

**Moses 2**

1 And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: Behold, I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth; write the words which I speak. I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven and the earth upon which thou standest.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and I caused darkness to come up upon the face of the deep; and my Spirit moved upon the face of the water; for I am God.

3 And I, God, said: Let there be light; and there was light.

4 And I, God, saw the light; and that light was good. And I, God, divided the light from the darkness.

5 And I, God, called the light Day; and the darkness, I called Night; and this I did by the word of my power, and it was done as I spake; and the evening and the morning were the first day.

**Abraham 4**

1 And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.

2 And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth; and darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters.

3 And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light.

4 And they (the Gods) comprehended the light, for it was bright; and they divided the light, or caused it to be divided, from the darkness.

5 And the Gods called the light Day, and the darkness they called Night. And it came to pass that from the evening until morning they called night; and from the morning until the evening they called day; and this was the first, or the beginning, of that which they called day and night.

**The Sixth Day of Creation**

**Moses 2**

24 And I, God, said: Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind, and it was so;

25 And I, God, made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything which creepeth upon the earth after his kind; and I, God, saw that all these things were good.

26 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; and it was so. And I, God, said: Let them have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them.

28 And I, God, blessed them and said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And I, God, said unto man: Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in the (sic) which shall be the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein I grant life, there shall be given every clean herb for meat; and it was so, even as I spake.

31 And I, God, saw everything that I had made, and, behold, all things which I had made were very good; and the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

**Abraham 4**

24 And the Gods prepared the earth to bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind; and it was so, as they had said.

25 And the Gods organized the earth to bring forth the beasts after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and everything that creepeth upon the earth after its kind; and the Gods saw they would obey.

26 And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness; and we will give them dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them.

28 And the Gods said: We will bless them. And the Gods said: We will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And the Gods said: Behold, we will give them every herb bearing seed that shall come upon the face of all the earth, and every tree which shall have fruit upon it; yea, the fruit of the tree yielding seed to them we will give it; it shall be for their meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, behold, we will give them life, and also we will give to them every green herb for meat, and all these things shall be thus organized.

31 And the Gods said: We will do everything that we have said, and organize them; and, behold, they shall be very obedient. And it came to pass that it was from evening until morning they called night; and it came to pass that it was from morning until evening that they called day; and they numbered the sixth time.

## Plurality of Gods

"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 . . . three constitute distinct personages and three Gods."

" 'In the beginning God created the heaven and earth. . . . It read first, 'In the beginning the head of the Gods brought forth the Gods.' "

"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 of anything spring into existence without a progenitor? . . . If Jesus had a father, can we not believe that *He* had a Father also?" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, "Sermon by the Prophet—The Christian Godhead—Plurality of Gods" [Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Company, 1976] 370-373)

"[The] doctrine that there is a *Mother in Heaven* was affirmed in plainness by the First Presidency of the Church . . . they said that 'man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of *heavenly parents*,' . . . man is the 'offspring of *celestial parentage*,' and that 'all men and women are in the similitude of the *universal Father and Mother*, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.'" (McConkie, 516)

## A Brief Comparison of Presbyterian and Mormon Beliefs

### Presbyterian

**God** as Spirit; eternal and unchanging; known by self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

**Jesus Christ** as only Son of God, begotten before the worlds; co-creator with the Father; one in whom the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

**Holy Spirit** as continuing presence of God as Comforter, Advocate and Sanctifier. Source of the power of forgiveness and new life in the church.

**Revelation** is God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and in the scriptures as they bear witness to Christ. The scriptures contain the full gospel and are sufficient for salvation. Canon of scripture closed.

**Church** is the continuing body of Christ in the world maintaining the integrity of the gospel. Presbyterians are among *many* expressions of the church of Jesus Christ.

**Salvation** is not a reward for works, but God's gracious gift to all persons through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and requires no further works by those who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

### Mormon

**God** as exalted man who has evolved into Heavenly Father. Has Physical parts and passions. One of many gods.

**Jesus Christ** as one of many sons of God. Known as Jehovah. Brother of Satan/Lucifer. Born of physical union of Heavenly Father and Virgin Mary.

**Holy Spirit** as personage of "refined matter" dwelling only with those who are worthy of him. Mediated through the laying on of hands by one holding the Melchizedek priesthood.

**Revelation** is accomplished through persons chosen by God to be prophets. King James Version of Bible, *Doctrine and Covenants*, *Pearl of Great Price*, and *Book of Mormon* all received as scripture.

**Church** after the time of the apostles lapsed into error; restored in 1830 through special revelation to Joseph Smith. Latter-day Saints church is the *only* true church.

**Salvation** is the gift of God for all persons redeeming them from Adam's sin. *Exaltation* is a necessary next step to achieve the highest heaven and Godhood, and this requires work.

## A Lexicon of Latter-day Saints Terminology

### I. God

There are many gods. Gods have physical bodies, one or more wives, and an endless progeny of children. Each man holds the potential of being god of his own world. Our world (earth) relates to and worships "Heavenly Father." The "Godhead" consists of three separate gods: Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, his son, and the Holy Ghost.

#### A. Heavenly Father

Heavenly Father has a body of flesh and bones and once was mortal. He is a resurrected human being from another earth system and now lives above the earth.

#### B. Jesus Christ

We are all spirit children of Heavenly Father. Jesus is Heavenly Father's eldest spirit child (see Pre-Mortal/First Estate). He came to earth in spirit as Jehovah in the Old Testament. In this state he organized earth. He came to earth in a body that came from intercourse between Heavenly Father and Mary who was a virgin until that experience. Jesus' death secured immortality (life after death) for all people and opportunity for spiritual advancement. The quality of life achieved in immortality is the individual's responsibility.

#### C. Holy Ghost

Holy Ghost is a separate God from Heavenly Father and Jesus, and different from Holy Spirit. Holy Ghost is a spirit person (no flesh and bones), can only be in one place at a time but can influence the world, and is revealer and testifier of truth.

#### D. Holy Spirit

Heavenly Father's spirit and extended power. Holy Spirit is Heavenly Father's influence in the world.

#### E. Adam

Led righteous angels in victorious battle, casting out Lucifer and his rebels. Spirit name of Adam was Michael the Archangel. For this service Adam was placed on earth as an immortal (no blood) and could not have children. Eve succumbed to the serpent and ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam had to choose whether to become mortal (disobeying God and eating of the fruit) or remain immortal (disobeying God by not being fruitful). Adam wisely chose the better of these two sins and introduced mortality for the whole world. This blessing makes it *possible* for all people to inherit eternal life. Adam fell up.

#### F. Lucifer

Younger brother of Jesus who led a rebellion against Heavenly Father. Tempted Eve knowing that her eternal progress depended upon her becoming mortal. Unwittingly helped God accomplish his purposes. For his rebellion Lucifer and his followers will never have mortal bodies.

#### G. Creation

A re-forming of eternally existent matter, energy, and spirit. There is no "creation," the making of something from nothing. Taking these eternal elements Jehovah/Jesus formed all worlds (including earth) under the direction of Heavenly Father.

### II. Holy Books

#### A. Bible

The Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the first revelation from God, but only one of many. In itself the Bible does not contain sufficient information for salvation. It is to be understood only as correctly interpreted by proper Latter-day Saints authority, as the Bible is believed to have been corrupted through the centuries. The King James Version is the only acceptable and complete English version of the Bible. To understand the King James Version from a Mormon perspective, Joseph Smith revealed the *Inspired Version* of the Bible (Joseph Smith's own translation).

#### B. Scriptures

Mormon scriptures include the Bible, only the King James Version "in so far as it is correctly translated," *The Book of Mormon* (ancient American history as revealed to Joseph Smith in hidden golden tablets), *Doctrine and Covenants* primarily Joseph Smith's revelations on a variety of subjects mostly in chronological order from 1823 to 1901, and *The Pearl of Great Price* a selection of revelations, translations, and narrations from Joseph Smith.

#### C. Gospel/Restored Gospel

Atonement as realized in Latter-day Saints practice and doctrines (tithing, temple work, celestial marriage, rites, authorities, word of wisdom, and moral purity). By obedience to the gospel the male achieves godhood with a female. Latter-day Saints believe that theirs is the restored gospel containing the necessary ordinances for salvation.

### III. Eternal Progression

There is a pre-mortality and a post-mortality. Between these two is our earthly existence. Together they constitute Heavenly Father's program through which our eternal destiny will be decided.

#### A. Pre-Mortal/First Estate

God father(s) and god mother(s) beget spirit children. Spirit children are humans without bodies of flesh and bone, yet with intelligence, free will, and experience. Spirit children born to Heavenly Parents advance to earth (the Second Estate) through righteous pre-earth existence.

#### B. Mortal/Second Estate

Human bodies are provided for worthy spirit children by human sexual intercourse. Life on this earth is a testing time that requires all to be separated from Heavenly Father and to prove ability to obey (gospel) Heavenly Father's commands. Obtaining a human body is essential for spiritual advancement.

#### C. Post Mortal/Third Estate

##### 1. First Judgment:

Immediately after physical death all human beings go to either paradise or spirit prison where they are held until post-judgment.

a. **Paradise** A place righteous Latter-day Saints go immediately following death until judgment, when they will be invited into the celestial kingdom.

##### b. Spirit Prison

The place where all non-Latter-day Saints people go immediately following death. Latter-day Saints missionaries come from paradise and preach the gospel. Those who positively progress toward the celestial kingdom aided by Latter-day Saints temple work done on their behalf by people of the church still living on this earth.

##### c. Hell

That part of the spirit world where wicked spirits go following

death to suffer for their sins while awaiting their eventual resurrection. After their resurrection the great majority of these persons will pass into the telestial kingdom. Thus, for those who are heirs of some degree of salvation, hell has an end. However, those who have given themselves over wholly to satanic purposes will be cast into outer darkness following their judgment.

**2. Final Judgment**

The time when God assigns all people to their eternal destiny. This occurs at the end of earth history.

**3. Post-Judgment**

Post-judgment consists of heaven and hell. Heaven is divided into three descending parts: celestial kingdom, terrestrial kingdom and telestial kingdom. These are permanent assignments.

**a. Celestial Kingdom**

The celestial kingdom is populated only by those who have accepted Latter-day Saints doctrines and ordinances. It is divided into three levels in descending order. The highest is for those who have been obedient to the gospel and must have been married in an Latter-day Saints temple. No one goes into the celestial kingdom single. Males at this level become gods of their own worlds and are worshiped. The celestial kingdom is the only place where Heavenly Father resides and governs. The second level is for Latter-day Saints who are more active in church positions, but not involved in temple rituals. The lowest level is for those who have received Latter-day Saints baptism. Both the second and third levels serve those in the highest level.

**b. Terrestrial Kingdom**

The terrestrial kingdom is only for those who have not heard the restored gospel as taught by the Latter-day Saints, or who have been "good and honorable but blinded by the craftiness of men." Jesus will visit the terrestrial kingdom to converse, but not Heavenly Father.

**c. Telestial Kingdom**

The telestial kingdom is for the "dishonest, liars, sorcerers, adulterers, and whoremongers." It is also for all those who have heard but rejected the restored gospel as taught by the Latter-day Saints, including former members of the church. Neither Jesus nor Heavenly Father will ever visit the telestial kingdom.

**d. Outer Darkness/(Second Death)**

Second Death is the place to which Satan, unrighteous spirits, and extreme cases of apostasy such as Cain and Judas are sent following judgment.

**IV. Temple Works**

**A. Baptism for the Dead**

Such a baptism is essential for all "worthy children" to become heirs of salvation in God's kingdom. Many people have not been given the opportunity to be baptized in their own lifetime due to the accident of time or geography.

Therefore, to provide the opportunity for eternal life, the Latter-day Saints church accepts such responsibility and hopes to perform such a sacrament for "every living soul entitled to receive it." All worthy baptized Mormons twelve years and over may be baptized for deceased non-Mormons. This is done by proxy and necessitates an extensive genealogical library.

**B. Marriage**

Marriages performed in the temples are for the present and forever if the vows are kept. The highest level of the celestial kingdom is for only those who have been so "sealed." Baptism is the gate to the celestial kingdom. Celestial marriage is the gate to exaltation in the celestial kingdom.

**C. Other Temple Works**

Other temple works are washings, anointings, endowments, and sealings.

**V. Priesthood**

There are two priesthoods: Melchizedek and Aaronic. Both are reserved for male members of the Latter-day Saints church and hold the only authority for ordination, baptism, and other essential ordinances.

**A. Aaronic Priesthood**

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were conferred the Aaronic Priesthood, May 15, 1829, by John the Baptist. This priesthood is for males twelve years and over. It includes, in ascending order, deacons (twelve-year-old boys), teachers (fourteen-year-old boys) and priests (sixteen-year-old boys).

**B. Melchizedek Priesthood**

Peter, James, and John restored the ancient Melchizedek Priesthood in June 1829 upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. This priesthood includes, according to function, the offices of elder, men eighteen years and over who usually subsequently serve two years as a missionary for the Latter-day Saints church, bishop, one in charge of a ward, Seventy, high priest, patriarch or evangelist, and apostle.

**VI. Church Structure**

**A. Temple**

Holy sanctuaries wherein sacred ordinances, rites, and ceremonies are performed which pertain to salvation and required activities to enter into the kingdom of God. They are "the most sacred places of worship on the earth." They are "a house of the Lord" where God and his Spirit may dwell. Only worthy Mormons are eligible to enter.

**B. General Authority**

The leaders who have highest authority, including the First Presidency, Quorum or Council of the Twelve Apostles, First Council of the Seventy, and presiding bishop.

**C. Tabernacle**

A large historic meeting hall. The best known of which is on Temple Square.

**D. Stake**

A geographical collection of wards.

**E. Wards**

The smallest ecclesiastical unit of the Latter-day Saints church, equivalent to the local congregation. A developing ward is called a branch.

**F. Bishop**

The presiding ward officer.

**G. Elder**

Ordained men at least eighteen years of age or older, and includes most active male Latter-day Saints church members.

## Other Terms

### Atonement

When Adam sinned he brought about temporal death and spiritual death. Temporal death is the separation of the spirit and the physical body. Spiritual death is separation from God. Because Jesus Christ died and rose, the body and spirit are reunited in immortality. Immortality then comes as a free gift but does not refer to where eternity will be spent, for example, heaven or hell. Eternal life is life spent with God and is achieved only by obeying "the fullness of the Gospel law."

### Baptism

The only recognized baptism must be performed by an authorized member of the priesthood, by immersion of those eight years old or older. Baptism is one of the requirements for the celestial kingdom.

### Brother

A common term of greeting to a male member of the Latter-day Saints church.

### Christian

Mormons believe that anyone who believes in Jesus or claims to be a Christian is a Christian. This would include Protestants, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses and any other who would believe something about Jesus.

### Deseret

A Reformed Egyptian word (a language known only by Joseph Smith) from *The Book of Mormon* meaning "honey bee." It was the original name given to the western territory into which the early Latter-day Saints came.

### Exaltation

The kind of life God lives, the culmination of "eternal progression." The highest level in the celestial kingdom, which is achieved through the gate of celestial marriage and consists of the continuation of the family unity in eternity.

### Gentile

A term often used for those who are not Mormon.

### Grace

All God's acts are acts of grace. Grace is appropriated by men proportionately as they conform to the standards of personal righteousness.

### Mormon

A nickname for those who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### Salvation

Christ's death brought release from the grave and gives universal immortality. The kingdom (celestial, terrestrial, or telestial) to which one is resurrected depends upon one's spiritual and temporal activities on earth.

### Sister

A common term of greeting to a female member of the Latter-day Saints church.

### Word of Wisdom/Code of Health

A list of substances to indulge in or abstain from in order to be protected from the advances of evil (Destroying Angel). Abstain from wine, strong drink, tobacco, meats in the summertime, and all hot drinks. Indulge in all herbs, fruits in season, and wheat products (wheat for man, corn for ox, oats for horses, rye for fowls and swine).

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A translation by Smith of plates believed to be originally written by a prophet-historian named Mormon and recovered by Smith in 1827. A record of Jaredites, Nephites, and Lamanites, the latter of whom are the principal ancestors of the American Indians. Includes a visit by Jesus Christ to North America in A.D. 34 and to ancient Semitic civilizations in North and Central America.

———. *Doctrine and Covenants*. (orig. ed. 1835) Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989.

A series of revelations given primarily to Joseph Smith and covering major doctrinal positions of the Latter-day Saints church, including levels of the priesthood, nature of God, church organization, baptism of the dead, and the approval and disapproval of plural marriages.

———. *The Pearl of Great Price*. (orig. ed. 1878). Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1951.

Contains the "Book of Moses" and the "Book of Abraham" (rewritings of creation accounts), a revision of Matthew 24, an "official" history of Joseph Smith (the Prophet), and "The Articles of Faith."

Van Wagoner, Richard S. *Mormon Polygamy: A History*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1989.

A readable, well-documented historical account of the practice, "revelation," denial, and denouncement of polygamy by the Mormons.

## Presbyterians and Mormons: A Study in Contrasts

### Introduction

Strictly speaking, studying another person's faith is extremely difficult and problematic. A person's faith is vital, dynamic, changing. Faith has been (and will continue to be) described in a variety of ways. Writers speak of "styles" and "stages" of faith, and of faith as a verb. Most agree that faith is not static, something obtained and held onto, but, is a relationship between a person and God. In this sense faith is a way of relating to the world. As such, faith occurs in a person and affects the way the person acts. It cannot be measured or quantified, but people do speak of faith as strong or weak. This study is not about the faith of individual Mormons or about the ability of Mormonism to generate faith in its members but about something else.

One can distinguish among faith, theology, history, and religious practices. To talk about someone's faith is to talk about something very near and, perhaps, dear to them. Such speaking should not be taken lightly. On the other hand, if we accept the idea that one's faith ought to be rooted in what is ultimate, legitimate questions can be raised about the source, object, and expression of one's faith. Thus, theology, history, and religious practices are legitimate topics for interfaith discussions and evaluations. Each of these comes second, so to speak, as an expression and implication of faith. It is fair to ask someone what their theology and religious practices are and to inquire into the history of their faith community. This is especially true if someone claims to be a part of your own faith tradition.

The relationship between faith and theology (and between faith and history and religious practices, too, for that matter) is not incidental, but it is not strict, either. That is, people are not always clear about the theology they hold or the theology that is implied by their faith. This means examination of someone's faith and theology involves two separate acts. Raising questions about the latter does not entail questioning the former.

A further distinction is worth noting. This discussion of Mormon theology, history, and practice must be kept separate from the question of why someone might become a Mormon in the first place or choose to remain a Mormon. This is true of Presbyterians, as well. If you asked someone why he or she became a Mormon (or Presbyterian) or why he or she joined a

particular congregation, distinctive theology (Mormon or Presbyterian) might be far down the list. Other values may make a particular religion (or congregation) appealing, for example, moral uprightness; friendly, family-centered people; strong schools; and so on.

In this study we will be looking at Mormon theology, history, and practice, and comparing Mormon theology and practice with reformed theology and practice. We do this remembering that not every Presbyterian accepts or affirms everything in Presbyterian, traditionally Christian, theology and practice either, so we cannot expect the same of Mormons. Nevertheless, distinctions do exist between Mormon and traditional Christian theology and practice. What we are trying to do is draw comparisons, parallels, where they exist, and differences, without evaluating the faith of others.

The burden in this introduction, not to belabor the obvious, is that in this study we must find a way to be suitably sympathetic yet discerning in our consideration of Mormonism. It is not our place to evaluate, let alone question, the faith of others. It is legitimate, however, to examine the theology, history, and religious practices of another faith community for the purpose of dialogue and comparison.

The study guide offers material for four sessions of about one hour each. The sessions could easily go longer. The sessions could also be adapted for use at a weekend retreat. The bibliography offers suggestions for further study. A number of videos are available, but care should be exercised when choosing videos (and other materials). Some of the extant videos, for example, tend to be excessively negative, more exposé than educational. The writings of former Mormons, certainly useful and informative, should be balanced by what present Mormons say about themselves. (See, for example, the video produced by the Mormons "Meet the Mormons," available from the Latter-day Saints information office in Salt Lake City.) Study of this paper can serve but the barest beginning to a sympathetic understanding of Mormons and the Latter-day Saints church.

## Session One

1. Opening. You might begin by describing the study ahead, calling attention to the study paper, including the appendixes. If people have the paper ahead of time, ask them to read the Preface and Introduction and the Introduction to the Study Guide in preparation for this session. Discuss the point of view proposed for this study in the above introduction.
2. Invite people to introduce themselves (if the group is not too large) and share any experiences and/or impressions each has of Mormons or the Latter-day Saints church. Encourage people to tell stories of human involvement with Mormons as persons. (In areas of high Mormon concentration where experience with Mormons is great, some restraint will have to be exercised, but sharing experiences and impressions should still be done.)
3. Invite people to list whatever ideas they may have about Mormons, Joseph Smith, *The Book of Mormon*, the Latter-day Saints church, and so on. Encourage people to contribute whatever comes to mind, however outrageous. The goal here is to get out the ideas and myths that people have about Mormons to see if the ideas hold up. List these ideas on newsprint, if possible, and keep them for reference. As you go along, note when an idea is confirmed or refuted.
4. The Introduction states that Mormonism is both nearer and farther away than any other religion Presbyterians usually encounter. Why, do you suppose, can this be said? What would lead one to agree or disagree with this assessment? Ask: What is it about Mormonism that a) Puzzles you the most? b) Concerns you the most? c) You most respect?
5. The Introduction states that Presbyterians and Mormons disagree about the nature of God, salvation, and scripture. Divide the class into three groups. Let each group look at one of these sections in the Introduction: "The Nature of God," "The Nature of Salvation," "Revelation and the Scriptures." Then have each group answer the following questions:
  - a) What is at stake here?
  - b) What are the key differences between Latter-day Saints and Presbyterian thought?
  - c) What did you find most surprising?
  - d) What questions do you have?
6. Closure. Let each group report briefly on its discussion. Assign pages 12-30 for next time.

## Session Two

1. Opening. Ask people to respond to the section entitled "Brief History of Mormonism." What was most striking about this section? What caused the greatest sympathy? The greatest concern? What questions does the Mormon story raise for you?
2. Consider the material on priesthood, temple ordinances, baptism, endowment, and celestial marriage. In what ways are these practices similar to, or different from, Presbyterian practices? What questions do such practices raise for you? What questions do certain practices in your own church raise for you? To what extent can Mormon and Presbyterian practices be reconciled?
3. Theology. Consider the following sections: "The Nature of God," "The Nature of Jesus Christ," and "The Nature of the Holy Spirit." Divide the class into three groups, each one taking one of the above sections. Let each group answer the following questions:
  - a) What is the Latter-day Saints position on the topic?
  - b) What is the classical Christian tradition?
  - c) From your own understanding, how would you state the differences?
  - d) What questions remain? What more information or study would you recommend for understanding either position?After a suitable time working in groups, each group should make a brief report to the total class on its findings.
4. Closure. Ask: What conclusions can we draw from this about interfaith dialogue and understanding? Assign page 30-39 and Appendix A for the next session.

## Session Three

1. Beginning. Begin this session with the selection from *The Book of Mormon*, Nephi 3, in Appendix A. If people have not read it, give them a few minutes to do so. *The Book of Mormon* records the alleged histories of three groups of people who migrated from the Holy Land to North America, covering a time period from 2200 B.C. to A.D. 421. One migration—approximately 600 B.C.—brought Lehi and his family from Jerusalem to North America. A rift

developed between two factions, each led by a different Lehi son, the evil Lamanites and the righteous Nephites. The bulk of *The Book of Mormon* recounts these struggles. The passage from 3 Nephi tells how Jesus, after the crucifixion and resurrection, appeared to the Nephites and Lamanites and gave Nephi (and others) the power to baptize. Ask for general responses from the class to this selection. How much confidence do people have in the historical accuracy or plausibility of this "history" of the Nephites and Lamanites? What evidence would help alleviate any doubts?

2. Now turn to the three sections of "A Study in Contrasts" entitled "The Nature of Revelation," "The Nature of the Church," and "The Nature of Salvation." Divide the class into three groups, having each group work on a separate section, answering the following questions:
  - a) What is the Latter-day Saints position on this topic?
  - b) How does this compare with the stated position of classical Christianity as represented in the Reformed tradition? What are the main points of difference?
  - c) What clues does this provide for the prospects for Latter-day Saints dialogue and/or cooperation?
3. Closure. The paper points out that in order to accept Mormonism, one must accept the idea that the Bible is not complete (it has major gaps that must be filled by other, later writings) and that new revelations of truth and doctrine can come to church leaders (not to ordinary members) at any moment. To what extent would you agree with this assessment? What problems does this present to you? How great a barrier is this to Latter-day Saints/Presbyterian relationships? Assign the last sections of the paper, "Pastoral Concerns" and "A Concluding Word."

## Session Four

1. Beginning. Divide the class into two groups. Let group A be the session of your church. Let two people from group B be a couple seeking marriage, one person a Presbyterian, the other a Mormon. The Mormon insists upon being married in the Mormon temple; the Presbyterian wants the ceremony in the Presbyterian church. They have come to the session for advice. What do you say to

them? Let the rest of group B be the Presbyterian congregation. How do you respond to the session's advice? Role-play this situation.

2. Now let group B be the session. Group A is a group of Mormons who have come to your town and begun visiting your members trying to get them to leave the Presbyterian church and come to the Latter-day Saints church, since they sincerely believe that the Latter-day Saints church is a more complete Christian church and God's instrument for salvation. The session calls this activity proselytizing and outright member stealing; the Mormons call it evangelizing and feel it is justified. A meeting has been called to discuss the situation. Role-play the meeting. What do people say to each other? How do the Mormons defend their actions? How do the Presbyterians defend their objections in light of their own mission efforts to convert, for example, Muslims to Christianity?
3. The paper states: "The thesis of the paper is that Mormon theology, biblical interpretation, and rewriting of scriptures separate that religious body from Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic expressions of the Christian faith." To what extent do you think that is true? In light of that, what course should Latter-day Saints/Presbyterian dialogue take?
4. A person's faith is a very personal matter. No one debates the ability of the Mormon church to foster spirituality. The spirituality and piety of any religion can be tested only by the norms of its own faith. The final questions for a study like this are: What have you learned about your own faith and religious norms through this process? What in your faith and tradition are you even more sure of now than before? What do you now treasure more about your faith? What things did you tend to take for granted? How can Presbyterians show continuing respect and courtesy to other religions and to the faith of other people while at the same time witnessing to the truth they see in the Bible and Christian tradition? What is the significance of Christ in a world that does not honor Christ in the same way that we do? How would you evaluate the strength of your own faith? What could you or the church do to strengthen your faith?
5. Closure. Close with Psalm 86, verses 1-12, a prayer of humility and trust that admits our common, human dependence on God for all things and affirms God's love for all those who call upon the divine name. Let the class read the psalm responsively.

- 1 Incline thy ear, O Lord, and answer me,  
for I am poor and needy.
- 2 Preserve my life, for I am godly;  
save thy servant who trusts in thee.
- 3 Thou art my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to thee do I cry all the day.
- 4 Gladden the soul of thy servant,  
for to thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.
- 5 For thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving,  
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on thee.
- 6 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;  
hearken to my cry of supplication.
- 7 In the day of my trouble I call on thee,  
for thou dost answer me.
- 8 There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord,  
nor are there any works like thine.
- 9 All the nations thou hast made shall come  
and bow down before thee, O Lord,  
and shall glorify thy name.
- 10 For thou art great and doest wondrous things,  
thou alone art God.
- 11 Teach me thy way, O Lord,  
that I may walk in thy truth;  
unite my heart to fear thy name.
- 12 I give thanks to thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart  
and I will glorify thy name for ever.

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