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## The Effect of Revelation on Man's Creed

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# The Effect of Revelation on Man's Creed

*By David O. McKay, of the Council of the Twelve*

“As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,  
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,  
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,  
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.”

One hundred years ago Joseph Smith, a mere boy between fourteen and fifteen years of age, declared that in answer to prayer, he received a revelation from God. His declaration was simple, but positive; and he was surprised when men doubted the truth of his assertion. To him his claim was but the statement of a fact; to the Christian world, it was a lightning flash that shattered their religious structure, from turrent to foundation.

Two important elements in his first message were these: (1) That God is a personal being, and will communicate his will to men; and (2), that no creed in Christendom had the true plan of salvation. Indeed, all were an “abomination in the sight of God. The professors of them were corrupt, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”

For boldness of assertion; for rejection of prevailing orthodoxy; as a challenge to professed ministers; this claim of a fair-haired, blue-eyed youth stands without parallel since the days of Jesus of Nazareth. Not even Luther's defiance, at Worms, is excepted; for his inspired effort, at first, was only to purify the church of corrupt practices; while Joseph Smith rejected the creeds as unauthoritative, and many of their doctrines as absolutely false.

And thus, by his simple declaration, he found himself alone in the religious world.

Alone—and unacquainted with the learning and philosophy of his day.

Alone—and unschooled in the arts and sciences.

Alone—with no philosopher to instruct him, no minister to guide him. In simplicity and kindness he had hastened to them with his glorious message; in scorn and derision they had turned from him saying that it was all of the devil; that there were no such things as revelations or visions in these days; that

all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.

Alone—compelled to embark upon the ocean of religious thought, having rejected every known vessel with which to sail, and never having built one or even having seen one built himself. Surely, if an impostor, the bark he builds will be a crude one indeed.

If, on the other hand, that which he builds possesses an excellence and superiority over that which the learned men and philosophers had given to mankind during the preceding hundreds of years, the world will at least stand aside, and say in surprise, Whence hath this man his wisdom? It would seem that, though he was alone, he was alone only as was Moses on Sinai; as Jesus, on the Mt. of Olives and on other sacred places where he communed with his Father. As with the Master, so with the prophet; his instruction came not through man-made channels, but direct from God, the source of all intelligence. He said himself:

“I am a rough stone. The sound of the hammer and chisel were never heard on me until the Lord took me in hand. I desire the learning and wisdom of Heaven alone.”

When Joseph Smith taught a doctrine, he taught it authoritatively. His was not a question whether his thoughts agreed with men's thoughts or not; whether they were in harmony with the teachings of the orthodox churches or whether they were in direct opposition. What was given to him he gave to the world, irrespective of its agreement or disagreement, of its harmony or its discord with the belief of the churches, or the prevailing standards of mankind; and today, after the passing of one hundred years, we have a good opportunity of judging of the virtue of his teachings, and of concluding as to the source of his instruction. It is interesting, as well as profitable, too, to know how the advanced thought of today harmonizes with what he taught so authoritatively, a century ago. The guiding spirit of his life was manifest from the beginning of his ministry and confirms his wonderful declaration that God had spoken to him. In his own words it is this:

*“Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof until long after the events transpire.”*

#### *General Principles*

The stand of the Church in regard to the first principles of the gospel, as given to Joseph the Prophet, is, from a Biblical point of view, invulnerable, and his claim most reasonable, that

divine authority to officiate in the ordinances is necessary. For many years professors of Christendom assailed the Church on its adherence to the essentiality of these principles, and ordinances—particularly on its claim that baptism by immersion is necessary to salvation but all attacks have proved futile. Of course, these principles, in one form or another, were taught by all the different sects, and yet, no one church taught all of them as being absolutely essential to salvation; and even had it done so, the Son of God, through Joseph Smith, denied its authority to administer them. Each succeeding year of the past century has tended only to vindicate the prophet's teachings in regard to these two great questions—the harmony of the doctrines of the Church with the Bible; and the necessity of divine authority to officiate in things pertaining to God.

But the inspiration and the boldness of the Prophet's teachings, and their subsequent effect upon the religious and philosophic minds, may best be seen by reference to some of the more advanced, and, I may say, obscure principles, of the plan of salvation. Take, for example,

#### *Predestination*

At the time Joseph Smith received his revelation, some of the creeds of Christendom were teaching that,

“Election to eternal life is not founded on foresight of faith and obedience, but is a sovereign act of God's mercy, whereby according to the council of his own will some men and angels are predestined into everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death;” and, “these angels and men thus predestined and foreordained are truly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.” (*Westminster Confession.*)

The creed is well satirized by Burns, as follows:

“O Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell;  
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself,  
Sends ane to heaven, and ten to hell,  
A' for thy glory,  
And no' for ony gude or ill  
They've done afore Thee!”

In direct contradiction to this false doctrine, the boy-prophet declared that “all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”

He taught that,

“To every man is given an inherent power to do right or to do wrong. In this he has his free agency. He may choose the right and obtain salvation, or he may choose evil and merit abomination; but one man is not predestinated to do evil and another to do good.”

“Whosoever will come, may come, and partake of the waters of life freely: and whosoever will not come, the same is not compelled to come;



but in the last day, it shall be restored unto him, according to his deeds." (Alma 42:27.)

### *Creeds of Churches Modified*

Nearly half a century passed before the ministers of some of the churches became bold enough to so modify their creeds as to reject that paragraph on predestination; but they eventually did so. Here is one example:

The Presbyterians, in their General Assembly, May 22, 1902, adopted, by a vote of 600 to 2, the unanimous report of a Revision Committee which had been at work on the subject for two years. The *Outlook* (May, 1902), commenting upon the significance of this revision, summarizes as follows:

"The most important thing in this explanation is the definite declaration that the ordination vows of officers requires the adoption of the Confession of Faith *only as containing the system of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.*"

Thus any officer is left free to reject any part of the Confession of Faith which, in his judgment, is not taught in the Holy Scriptures. One of the particular parts rejected is named by the *Outlook* in these words:

"Following this broad statement are two overtures. The first *disclaims any fatalistic inference from the doctrine of Predestination, and asserts clearly that God loves all mankind and desires not the death of any sinner, and that no man is condemned except on the ground of his sin.*"

If any plainer revision of the Presbyterians' creed on the pernicious doctrine of predestination is needed, it can be found in the statement of Rev. Henry Van Dyke:

"The Presbyterian church, today (May 1902), does not believe that some men are created to be saved, and others to be damned; and to guard against misapprehension on the subject, it wishes to say clearly and unmistakably that God has not put any barrier between any human soul and salvation."

So Joseph Smith proclaimed before Henry Van Dyke was born, at the time, too, when every Presbyterian officer took a vow that God did predestine some to be saved and others to be damned.

### *Infant Baptism*

Closely allied with the doctrine of predestination was the equally false teaching that unbaptized infants were condemned to eternal punishment. Said the old school of Presbyterianism:

"Infants come into the world, not only destitute of knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, but with a nature inclined to evil and only evil."

The Prophet Joseph said:

“Little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ.” (Doctrine and Covenants 74:7.)

Little children need no repentance, neither baptism.

“He that saith, That little children need baptism, denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption.” (Book of Mormon, Moroni 8:20.)

Three-quarters of a century later, creeds, the ministers of which had said the boy prophet’s revelations were from the devil, concluded that this doctrine, too, was right—devil or no devil.

The Westminster creed was modified by the Assembly, referred to above, to deny what it had declared for centuries, and to confirm the view expressed by the Prophet Joseph. It now declared that,

“All who die in infancy are chosen of God and saved by Christ through the spirit.” (Explanation of *Westminster Confession*, 1902.)

This is confirmed by Henry Van Dyke, who says:

“Presbyterians today believe that all who die in infancy are saved by Jesus Christ.”

#### *Pre-existence*

One hundred years ago, theologians seldom, if ever, referred to the doctrine of pre-existence of spirits, let alone accepting it as part of the solution of the eternal plan of redemption. When writers or philosophers mentioned it, it was designated the Platonic opinion; and those who favored it, as Platonists. This because Plato, with a spark of inspiration, taught that pre-existence, and the closely associated doctrine of “reminiscence,” are connected with the doctrine of immortality.

Even Wordsworth found it necessary to offer a half apology for referring to this doctrine in his inspired poem, “Ode to Intimations of Immortality.” In the light of poetic revelation he wrote:

“Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.”

Subsequently, when in the shadowy realm of popular opinion, learning that his doctrine “had given pain to some good and pious persons,” he protested that he “meant not to inculcate

such a belief" (pre-existence). However, with a glimmer of the light still in his mind, he adds: "But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing there to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favor."

Now, undoubtedly, the boy prophet had not even read Plato, and the presumption is that he had never read Wordsworth, or any other advocate of this phase of the Doctrine of Immortality; and yet, when God revealed it to him, note how unqualifiedly he declared the truth:

"I [Christ] was in the beginning with the Father, and am the first born; \* \* \* Ye were also in the beginning with the Father" (Doc. and Cov. 93:21, 23).

And again:

"Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these were many of the noble and the great ones." (Abraham 3:22.)

Though God has taught it to his children from the days of Adam down, yet one hundred years ago this was a bold, strange doctrine. And even today ministers of religion, if not entirely rejecting it, rather shy at it. But the leaven is working, and great minds, accepting the doctrine, are now proclaiming it in their theories of the immortality of man.

In discussing "The Permanence of Personality," Lodge, in *Science and Immortality*, says:

"This doctrine—the theory of a larger and permanent personality of which the *conscious self is only a fraction in process of individualization* \* \* \* as a working hypothesis, illuminates many obscure facts, and serves as a thread through an otherwise bewildering labyrinth. It removes a number of elementary stumbling blocks which otherwise obstruct an attempt to realize vividly the incipient stages of personal existence; it accounts for the extraordinary rapidity with which an individual proceeds; and it eases the theory of ordinary birth and death."

And then, after commenting upon the subject of "Dislocation of Memory," he continues:

"The analogy pointed to is that whereas we, living men and women, while associated with this mortal organism, are ignorant of whatever experience *our larger selves may have gone through in the past*—yet when we wake out of this present materialized condition, and enter the region of larger consciousness, we may gradually realize in what a curious though legitimate condition of ignorance we now are; and may become aware of our fuller possession, with all that has happened here and now fully remembered and *incorporated as an additional experience into the wide range of knowledge which our larger entity must have accumulated since its intelligence and memory began*. The transition called death may thus be an awakening rather than a sleeping; it may be that we, still, involved in mortal coil, are in the more dreamlike and unreal condition."



### *Hell*

When Joseph Smith as a boy attended any of the churches in his neighborhood, he undoubtedly heard the furies of hell pictured in thrilling eloquence. At any rate, in his day this place for the departed sinner was associated with—

“Red hot gridirons, attended by shrieking demons who kept the gridirons well filled with boiling victims; huge cauldrons full of boiling lead and brimstone, to be poured over new comers as the ceremony of welcoming them to the society of the lost; pestilential atmosphere laden with concentrated diseases, and men driven by demons to breathe this disease-laden air; horned and cloven-footed demons, goading their victims around circles, up and down steep heights, onward and onward, simply for gratification of their hatred, and to add to the sorrows of the lost.”

And to all this and much more must be added “dreadful shrieks issuing from dungeons and prisons into which special victims were thrown for special enormities.”

And to such horrors many men and women were predestined, there to burn and burn, and never to be consumed forever and ever!

That is the doctrine of the damned which Joseph Smith heard from man.

This is what he heard from God:

“The only ones on whom the second death shall have any power; yea, verily, the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord \* \* \* are the sons of perdition, who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him:

“Wherefore, he saves all except them.” (Doc. & Cov. 76:30-48.)

The Lord revealed to him all the different degrees of glory in which men receive judgment in accordance with the deeds done in the body, and he

“Saw the glory and the inhabitants of the telestial world, that they were as innumerable as the stars in the firmament of heaven, or as the sand upon the sea shore,

And heard the voice of the Lord, saying—these all shall bow the knee, and every tongue shall confess to him who sits upon the throne for ever and ever;

For they shall be judged according to their works, and every man shall receive according to his works, his own dominion, in the mansions which are prepared.” (Doc. and Cov. 76.)

“He will judge them not according to what they have not, but according to what they have; those who have lived without law will be judged without law, and those who have a law will be judged by that law, we need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah. He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence; the laws by which they are governed.” (*Times and Seasons*, Vol III, p. 759.)

### *Modern View of Christendom*

The modified view of modern Christendom is probably best expressed in an article entitled, “What Has Become of Hell?”



by Rev. George W. Shimm, and printed in the *North American Review*, 1900. After asserting that all churches had practically ceased to speak of Hell as a place of eternal punishment, he concludes:

"It cannot be that all the redeemed in the future will be equally happy, and that all the lost will be equally wretched; for there are varying degrees of capacity. There must be infinite grades of happiness there, as there must be vast difference between those who are driven into outer darkness.

"When men's eyes are opened, they may see that the loss of what they might have been and their degradation through sin, is indeed the visitation of penalty. Judgment consists quite largely in deprivation. Such a judgment has begun here, and it points to the awful issues of the future, when the days of earthly probation shall have ended.

"Men are condemned by themselves. They must recognize at some period that they prepared themselves for their own place and for their own condition."

And so we might refer to Tithing, Organization of the Church, the principles of Co-operation, and even the United Order, and show what a marked change of sentiment has taken place in regard to them during the last half century; but space will not permit.

The world will not admit, nor do we ask it to admit, that all these modified views regarding man's place in the universe have been brought about solely by the influence of the Prophet Joseph Smith. God's Spirit is ever ready to guide away from error the sincere seeker after Truth; and undoubtedly, hundreds of honest men and women have rejected in their hearts the errors pointed to above without ever having known the truths as revealed to the Prophet. However, the marks of his influence upon religious thought are manifest upon every hand, and whether men acknowledge it or not, the Light that came from heaven a century ago is dissipating the darkness that has enthralled the minds of men for ages.

As we look through the vista of one hundred years and see the boy prophet standing alone in the midst of a tempestuously religious world, declaring that God had spoken to him, and that there was not an authorized Church of Christ upon the earth; when we know that to make good his claim, he must give to the world something superior to that produced by the philosophy of the ages and the best wisdom of man; when we realize how impotent he was to do this, if dependent upon his own learning and wisdom,—we cannot help but conclude, since he has given to the world something which has stood the acid test of time and criticism, and which stands today in brilliancy and sublimity, superior to anything proclaimed by human wisdom, that surely he was indeed the Chosen Prophet of the Latter Day.