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A New Outlook upon Mormonism

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A NEW OUTLOOK UPON MORMONISM

By

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Ladies and Gentlemen of the Radio Audience:

Forty-two years ago a man of national reputation, a graduate of Harvard, (class of 1821) twice Mayor of Boston, and a writer of no mean reputation, said:

"It is by no means improbable that some future text-book, for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written:

Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet. And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants. History deals in surprises and paradoxes quite as startling as this. The man established a religion in this age of free debate, who was and is to-day accepted by hundreds of thousands as a direct emissary from the Most High--such a rare human being is not to be disposed of by pelting his memory with unsavory epithets".

This was the utterance of Mr. Josiah Quincy of the famous Quincy family of Massachusetts. The quotation is from his "Figures of the Past", published in 1882. In that book the author places his portrait of "Joseph Smith at Nauvoo" with similar portraits of such eminent Americans as John Adams, Daniel Webster, John Randolph, Andrew Jackson, and the French Soldier and Statesman, Lafayette. After the passing of a hundred years since the inception of "Mormonism", and forty-two years since the publication of Quincy's "Figures of the Past", and in view of the persistence of the "Mormon" religion, it may be of interest to an American Radio Audience to consider if there is any likelihood of Josiah Quincy's bold prediction coming true. At any rate "Mormonism" is still with us, a growing, militant Church, and who may say, what shall come of it? Founded in a rural district of New York, among the humblest folk of the country side, nothing in reason could be expected of it beyond a feeble life, and then subsidence. But this was not its destiny. Of the "pelting" of Joseph Smith's memory "with unsavory epithets", while he was still living and since his death, there has been enough and to spare. But, as Josiah Quincy could see, that was not the way to dispose of Joseph Smith; nor of the church he founded; nor of the gospel he preached; for in spite of all these things "Mormonism" persists in vigorous life and power of expansion. Ridicule of its pretensions to new revelation has availed nothing. Mockery of its chief product in the way of newly discovered scripture--"The Book of Mormon"--has not destroyed interest in this alleged volume of sacred, American History and Revelation. That book has been translated into fifteen languages and published in fourteen. Not the violence of mobs in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, in the early decades of "Mormonism", through assailing it in overwhelming numbers and with murderous hate, could destroy it. Not the murder of its first Prophet at Nauvoo, Illinois, could halt its progress. Nay, then, as of old, the blood of

the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church. Nor did the enforced exodus from the United States through a thousand miles of wilderness into the Mexican Territory of the Salt Lake Valley, (1846-7) break up the community, or stay the propaganda of the new faith. In spite of all these things "Mormonism" flourished, and remains the religious wonder of the Twentieth, as it was of the Nineteenth Century.

Having won its right to live by refusing to die, or to be destroyed, "Mormonism" has, at the same time, won its right to tell the world by what means it has lived, the spiritual food on which it thrives. And here let us leave the old beaten path of disquisition on the one hand, and of prejudiced preconception on the other, and listen for a moment to the heart-beats of a system of thought and of life that must have in it some principle of vital strength, else it would not under all the circumstances, survive "in this age of free debate" in which it was born and still lives.

It was by proclamation as bold as it was unique that "Mormonism" sprang into existence,--the declaration of a new revelation; but not the announcement of a new religion. On the contrary, it was a clarion call for a world's return to the one and only Gospel--to the acceptance and worship of the true God, and His Son Jesus Christ, Makers of Heaven and of Earth, and all things that in them are; obedience to whom is man's only hope of salvation. "Mormonism" was fortunate in this, for though an angel should proclaim "another Gospel" than that of the Christ, he would be under apostolic anathema (Gal.I). It was the proclamation of a New Dispensation of the Old Gospel, a call of "Back of God", that gave "Mormonism" its standing; and in the divided status of Christendom, a hundred years ago, with its contentions and its doctrinal strifes, Christendom itself furnished men with a sufficient reason for believing the new proclamation. Just as now, after the lapse of a hundred years from that time, Christendom's doctrinal Disputes, through shifted to new themes, supply ample reason for men thinking that

" 'Tis time for some new prophet to appear,
Or old endow man with a second sight".

"Mormonism" came and persists, then, because of a felt need of it in the religious world. "The earth was defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because men had "transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant", of which the blood of the Christ was the solemn and awe-inspiring symbol. (Isaiah 24:5 of. Hebrews 13:20)

Following its bold and unique initiative, "Mormonism" announced a revelation respecting America and her ancient inhabitants that was equally astounding and appealing. Who were these people of the western world discovered with their continent four hundred years ago? Were they children of the Most High? And if so had God left himself without witnesses among them? To this question men could give no answer. But "Mormonism" did by producing an American volume of scripture written and compiled by their prophets, proclaiming not only an Isrealitish origin for the people, but giving an account of the resurrected Christ's personal visit to them, after his departure from Judea; also the proclamation of the one and "Everlasting Gospel" to them by the Christ; the founding of a church; and at the necessary departure of the Son of God from their midst, a promise given of a future return, and a personal reign with the righteous in a Kingdom of Glory. If all this were not true, it might well be

hoped that it was true, for it should say so much in vindication of the justice of God in not allowing whole continents of people to perish in ignorance of God's plan of human salvation. It would add so much to the vision of a loving Christ, this visit to the people of America, and the establishment of his Gospel and his church among them: It would mean so much to the present distraught Christendom if a New Witness could be found in the voice of the sleeping nations of ancient America, testifying to the Deity of the Christ; to the reality of the resurrection from the dead, and the life everlasting. To the Latter-day Saint this is what the Book of Mormon is, A New Witness for God, and for the fundamental truths of the old Christian faith. This is what it does for him: strengthens his faith, but increasing the evidence on which that faith rests; makes brighter his star of hope of the life everlasting; his church, rising out of all this, and guided by continuous revelation,--abiding in touch with God--becomes for him a present temple of God, built up of living stones wherein is not darkness or doubt.

Does all this excellent initiative and procedure in the founding of a great religious movement arise merely from the happy and forceful but erratic cogitation of an ignorant youth, Joseph Smith? Or is there something more in it than that? Something that will lead to the fulfillment of Josiah Quincy's half prophecy? Of this the world can be sure, ignorant blatancy will not account for "Mormonism".

Joseph Smith taught:

That "The glory of God is intelligence";
That "It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance";
That "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge";
That "Knowledge saves a man, and in the world of spirits no man can be exalted but by knowledge";
That "If one man, by his diligence, obtains more knowledge than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come";
That "There is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated; and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law on which it is predicated".

This is not the thought or the language of ignorance.

It may be objected that Joseph Smith taught the anthropomorphic idea of God, but if so it is but such stressing of the personality of God as the scriptures warrant; incorporated with such ideas added of the everywhere-ness of God, and everywhere-ness with power, as to make for the conception of the indwelling of God in his creations, God immanent in the universe. This upon a principle altogether unique, however, being no less than the conception of God as so strongly personal as to be individual, and yet while persisting as so personal, vibrating forth from his presence such a spirit from Himself, that is of Himself, and exhaustless, as fill "the immensity of space". This, even as the sun vibrates from its surface rays of light and warmth, which are of itself, to fill our solar system space. This extends God into all space. This the "Presence Bright" which "all space doth occupy, all motion guide"; and in the Prophet's revelations is called "the Light of Christ". "The light which is in all things; which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God". Yet God the while, though a spirit, throughout the

creations, and indwelling in them, is a personage "Seated upon his throne in the bosom of Eternity, in the midst of all things".

This conception leaves God as personal to the point of being individual, capable of personal, tangible relationships; and object of love and reverence; and yet, at the same time presents Him as the sleepless and everywhere present energy that finds expression in the force, of nature, in the vital processes of plants and animals, in human lives, and in the development of human societies--God in and through-out the world.

"It is the first principle of the gospel to know God", taught the Prophet Joseph Smith. "If men do not comprehend the nature of God, they do not know themselves", he went on to say; "for man was created in the very image and likeness of God". "The elements" said he, "are eternal; yea, the elements are the tabernacle of God. Man is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and spirit and element inseparable united, receive a fullness of joy". Hence the importance of man's earth life, in which spirit is united to earthly elements; and it is the purpose of God "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man". "The spirit and the body is the soul of Man", he continues; "and the resurrection of the dead is the redemption of the soul". "Adam fell that man might be, and men are that they might have joy" is one of the Mormon Prophet's noblest utterances.

And again he said:

The things of God are of deep import; and time and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity--Thou must commune with God!"

These doctrines expressed here somewhat in headline fashion, are the vital principles on which "Mormonism" rests, the spirit-life on which it thrives. Acceptance of these principles, and a special privilege of fellowship with the Holy Ghost, due to their acceptance of the gospel and continued obedience to its laws, constitute the spiritual life of the membership of the church, their bond of union with God. The Holy Ghost, for them--it should be remarked--is the Third Person of the Christian Trinity; God's Witness to the human soul of the verity of spiritual things; that takes of the things of God and shows them unto men (St. John 16:15); a spirit which proceedeth from the Father (Isaiah 15:26); the very Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but he dwelleth with the saints, and is in them, (St John 14:16-17), though he may be to them "as the wind blowing as it listenth, and they hear the sound thereof, yet may not tell whence he cometh, not hither he goeth"--for such are they that are born of the spirit--the Spirit choosing the time and the place and the manner and the measure of his manifestations; but never-the-less, he is the voice and the power of God in the human soul; his presence in the heart of man being the witness to him that he is born of God, hence a child of God, and wholly acceptable to him.

These are the higher things of "Mormonism", the things that sustain its

devoted, and make it to persist in the earth. The principles here set forth are the truths that justify the probability expressed by Josiah Quincy. That some future text book answering the question, What historical American of the Nineteenth century exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his country, may say, "Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet:". "And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious common place to their descendants".

The Prophet Joseph Smith has made two statements regarding the most important work in the New Dispensation: One - salvation for the dead and the other preaching the gospel. Adding these two items together the result is that the most important work in the New Dispensation is "The Salvation of Men" to bring about God's glorious purpose "For this is my work and my glory to bring to pass the immortality and the eternal life of man", of all men who will be saved. What do we mean by being saved? By salvation? It is upon this subject I wish to read to you this evening. I was asked to give a scripture reading, but in order to more clearly set forth the meaning of "salvation" I have chosen to read some excerpts from a sermon delivered by President B.H. Roberts which will give both scripture and an explanation.

He begins this particular discourse in giving a definition of the Gospel as follows:

If this is the meaning of salvation, surely it is most important to preach the gospel and also likewise to do the work for our dead, some of whom lived upon the earth when the authority of God to administer in the ordinances of salvation were not here and those who in their blindness rejected it during their sojourn upon this earth.