

It does make a difference what we believe. Doctrine is important. We cannot be saved by popular opinion or by expert opinion, but only by *correct* opinion, and by obedience to God's immutable laws. Let us then tune our hearts and minds to him, and listen for his voice, that we may do his will, and know of the doctrine.

## 2

### *Our Belief in God*

*He that comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things: and all things are by him, and of him; even God, for ever and ever.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 85:10 c.

**WE SAID** IN the first chapter that beliefs matter. It makes a great deal of difference how you believe in God, to what degree you believe, and what kind of God you believe in. Men inevitably tend either to become like the gods they worship, or to create some god to worship in the image of themselves. What kind of God do you worship? Does your belief in him make any real difference in your life? Are you convinced of the importance as well as of the existence of God? Everyone has some belief about God, even those who do not believe in God. That is their belief.

The first book of the Bible starts with the words: "In the beginning . . ." The belief in God is placed first in all Christian creeds. The Epitome of Faith or official statement of belief of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints contains as its first article: "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." Belief in God is basic, fundamental, supremely important.

First, we may state it as our belief that God is the ultimate, the infinite Person. So far as our experience and observation go, wherever there is order, law, beauty, purpose, or utility, there is personality. For example, if in a ramble

through the woods you should find some wild flowers scattered here and there at random, you might say that their placement was due to chance. But if you should come upon a group of those same wild flowers neatly and beautifully arranged in perfect rows, or planted in beds in the shape of rectangles, stars, half-moons, or circles, it would be obvious that some intelligent personality had been at work. Yet, if you would examine carefully the smallest individual flower, you would find purposeful, neat, orderly arrangement with which men had nothing to do, and far surpassing the neat mass arrangement of the flower beds.

If you should pick up some tiny fragments of metal on your walk, you might properly conclude that they came there by chance. But, if you should pick up a carefully assembled and organized group of such fragments, each fitting perfectly into every other fragment, and the whole functioning as a mechanism which told you the correct time, it would be excellent proof that some intelligent personality has been at work making a watch. Yet in the heavens above your head there is a much grander, vaster, and more intricate system of orderly arrangement, moving in a perfect timing that sets the pace of the timekeeping of every watch in the universe. Such organization and purposeful order give evidence of a supreme Person, with supreme intelligence, wisdom, and purpose.

In the universe about us we find purpose, intelligence, utility, love, beauty. The universe must be the creation of Personality. Man's personality must be the creative reflection of a greater, an infinite, and absolute Personality. Otherwise we are forced to the conclusion that a lifeless, senseless conglomeration of fortuitously jumbled atoms has accidentally produced the most unbelievable miracle of all time—the personality of man who is served by all the beauty and utility of the universe. To believe that is utter folly and nonsense. It is much more reasonable, much more sensible, much more scientific to believe in a God who is the first great Cause, the self-

existent, uncreated Planner, Organizer, Creator, and Sustainer of all things.

#### THE NATURE OF GOD

Assuming that God is the ultimate and infinite Person, let us consider for a moment what kind of person he is. When Jesus wanted to sum up God's personality in the briefest possible terms, he called God "Father." When he wanted to amplify and emphasize this concept he told the parable of the prodigal son, and of a father who grieved for his son's folly, but respected his personality too much to force him into obedience, a father who so missed his son's fellowship that he stood always ready to receive him back again with feasting and rejoicing when he "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). God is love and love is a manifestation of personality. As God loves good, so he hates evil; he sorrows over the rebellious and sinful; he rejoices over the obedient and righteous. In the person of his Son, God suffered the ultimate in physical and spiritual pain that fallen man might be brought back into his presence, for the God of love is a social being, a personality which is incomplete without the fellowship of other personalities.

Personality as we know it in this world is always associated with physical form, with size, shape, dimension, and location. You know me by observing my physical presence through your physical senses. You say that I am *here* and you are *there*. It is difficult for us to conceive of personality without form, dimension, and location. Yet most of us believe that the real personality is not the body but the spirit which continues to manifest personality in some other sphere even after the body molds in death. When we begin to think about God, we are immediately confronted with the difficulty of trying to recognize his personality without trying to place upon that personality any restrictions of form, size, shape, dimension, or location. It is unnecessary to argue as to whether God has a body, or form, or location, or to decide whether he has substance.

We are made in his spiritual image, but not necessarily in his physical likeness.

Modern science is now agreed that energy does not proceed from matter, but that matter proceeds from and is a form of *energy*. The atom is not composed of little granules of matter, but of positive, negative, and neutral charges of electrical energy which have no material, tangible substance at all until they come together in the atom. The force, or energy, or mind, or spirit which holds the universe together, and which forms the millions of atoms which compose its substance, is the mind, the force, the energy, the Spirit of God. Because we say that spirit is substance, we say that God is a God of substance. But he is indefinable because to define him would be to limit him, and his personality knows no limitations of time, form, size, dimension, shape, or location. In the language of our Scripture lesson, "He comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things: and all things are by him, and of him; even God, for ever and ever" (Doctrine and Covenants 85:10 c). Paul says that "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28), that "to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and *we in him*" (I Corinthians 8:6). He is in all things and is the power by which they are made and sustained. Yet he is not a vague, unapproachable, unknowable pantheistic God, so diffused through his creations that no one can find him. He is the ultimate, the infinite Person, who loves us, and who makes us for fellowship with himself, and who is willing to make himself known to us.

God is omnipotent. There is no other God besides him. There is one God ruling the universe, one law by which that universe is governed. If we discover a law of God's universe we may be utterly certain that under similar conditions that law will be valid and trustworthy for any man, at any place

in the universe, in time or in eternity. God can be trusted. He and his laws are stable, eternal, unchangeable, impartial.

Because God is omnipotent, he must exercise free moral will or agency. There can be no one greater than he, standing over him and forcing him to do right. It therefore follows that God is good and holy and righteous because he wants to be, because he chooses to be, because that is his nature. Right conduct that is forced has no moral value. God is always free to choose, but he always chooses right. He allows us, his children, the same privileges of choice, hoping that by our choice we will prove our worthiness to fellowship with his perfection and glory and righteousness.

We have said that God is love, that he is a God of mercy. He is also a God of justice. He could not maintain his laws unless obedience to these laws always brought certain desirable consequences, and disobedience always brought undesirable consequences or punishments. We can rely on his love and mercy only if we obey his laws. Though men may seem to escape his justice, they never do. There are always certain results or consequences which follow the breaking of God's natural or spiritual laws, whether we can always observe them at the moment or not. And there will be a final judgment day in which all things will be made right, when God's justice, as well as his mercy and his love, will deal with all men as they deserve.

God is an eternally *creative* personality. He did not create the world in six days and then sit down to a perpetual rest. Science now says that the processes of creation are still continuing, that the cosmic rays which bombard the earth constantly are creative rays. The voice of God through Joseph Smith the prophet, nearly a century and a quarter ago, said: "As one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof, even so shall another come; and *there is no end to my works*, neither to my words; for this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality, and eternal life of man" (Doctrine and Covenants

22:23). His paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

God is articulate. He makes himself known to man. He can be known not alone through his physical senses but as men are quickened spiritually to discern him. Adam and Eve walked and talked with him in the Garden of Eden. Moses spoke with him in the burning bush and, together with Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel, saw him and heard him on Sinai. Enoch walked and talked with God. Stephen, at the moment of his death by stoning, saw God and Christ at his right hand. Isaiah declared, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Jacob said after his night-long wrestle with the angel, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30). Latter Day Saints believe that if God has been known intimately by all these men of the past, if he has spoken to them, and if he is eternal, impartial, unchangeable, and no respecter of persons, he may still be known today; he will still speak to men today if they are tuned to hear him, and if they are worthy to receive that transforming Spirit by which it is possible to know and hear him. The restoration of Christ's church and doctrine in the latter days through the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith began in the same way. The boy Joseph saw in vision two personages, God and Christ, and heard one speak to him saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him."

God, the eternal Father, still loves and seeks after his prodigal children. His work will not be complete until all have heard the story of his love, and have had the fullest opportunity to repent of their ways and return to him. Let us tune our hearts to hear the word of his Son; let us repent of our rebellion and pride and wickedness so that we may be worthy to know, to hear, to see, and to talk with God. Unless we thus know him, we have no life; for "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

### 3

## *Our Belief in Christ*

*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.—John 3:14-19.*

THE CENTRAL figure of the ages, the personality who has influenced more lives, who has changed more of the world's thinking and more of the world's ways than any other personality who ever lived, is Jesus Christ. Belief in him is fundamental to all who call themselves Christian. Yet among the many church bodies which call themselves Christian one finds an almost infinite variation of belief concerning the nature, the identity, the purpose, and the mission of Jesus, the Christ.

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints places Christ at the center of its faith. Our official "Statement of Belief" opens with the words: "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ. . . ." Christ is the central figure of the Book of Mormon, which many people have erroneously believed to be a non-Christian book. Jesus Christ is the central figure of the revelations