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half century or so. The author distinguishes Mormon thought most sharply from traditional thought on the issue of original sin, yet in his treatment of original sin, couched almost exclusively in the extreme forms of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, there is no recognition of what Chesterton once called "the good news of original sin," the news, namely, that man is not left to his own resources but is the recipient of the grace of God. I would strongly dissent from the statement that "The central dogma of traditional Christian orthodoxy is the doctrine of original sin." (p. 57) The central dogma of traditional Christian orthodoxy is the doctrine of grace. Luther and Calvin do not revel in man's vileness; they glory in God's greatness, and the doctrine of original sin is a way of asserting that man's greatness is anchored in God rather than in man himself. Even the devil can quote Calvin for his purposes.

Similarly, the treatment of evil in traditional Christian faith is presented almost wholly as something privative. To be sure, Augustine gave much space to this notion, particularly during the neo-Platonic hangover from which he never quite recovered even in his later heights of Christian sobriety, but more attention, I think, should be given to the recognition (even in Augustine) of evil as a positive reality, a perversion of the good rather than an absence of it, and a very powerful force at work in the human scene.

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These are only a few indications of places where the issues at stake in the conversation can be sharpened. Professor McMurrin has broken important ground in this book and initiated a dialogue that is long overdue on the American scene. All of us will look forward to his next installment.

THE STRENGTH OF THE MORMON POSITION

Richard Lloyd Anderson

The reader of *Theological Foundations* will see for himself that Mormonism is a religion of intellectual adventure. Joseph Smith reported divine instructions not to rely on traditional theologies, and Professor McMurrin shows how radical are the results. The foreword denies the singularity of individual Mormon doctrines, but the book attests the uniqueness of the L.D.S. synthesis by such observations as "most uncommon" (p. 6), "radical digression" (p. 36), and "basically at variance not only with traditional Christian theology . . . but with occidental philosophy generally, both sacred

and secular" (p. 50). The complexity of this "comparative commentary" precludes detailed review simply for want of space, but an exploration of its significance in Mormon literature can be made.

Theological Foundations begins heavily with metaphysics and concludes with highly subjective evaluations of the status of Mormon theology. A careful reading, however, will reward every reader, no matter what his religious persuasion: whether a Mormon, who is likely to discover the meaning of several technical theological terms, or a non-Mormon critic, who may concede that a religion with a "fundamentally orthodox Christology and soteriological pattern" (p. 74) has more than a small claim to classification as Christian. Yet the religion of the Latter-day Saints is Christianity with a difference, which necessitates a comparative format. Professor McMurrin disarmingly states a merely descriptive intent in the foreword, but produces a work impregnated with a profound critique of traditional theology. The book could with equal justice be titled "The Theological Foundations of Orthodox Christianity." That much is clear by examining the footnotes, since non-L.D.S. sources outnumber L.D.S. sources about three to one and criticism follows about the same ratio. The opening section revises McMurrin's *Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* and raises what I consider to be a question without meaning in Mormon theology: whether "priesthood" and "church" are universals. (Professor McMurrin debated this issue with Truman Madsen in 1960 in *Brigham Young University Studies*.) The vital questions of *Theological Foundations* center on God, man, and salvation.

From the formative years to the present, thoughtful Mormons have found the scope of their doctrine of Deity exciting. With stated admiration, McMurrin follows the tradition of B. H. Roberts, who wrote with intellectual magnificence on the subject. McMurrin underscores the inadequacy of seeing the Mormon doctrine of Deity as unique only because it teaches a physical God. While Mormon materialism is important, McMurrin adds dimensions by exploring the implications of accepting a non-absolute Organizer of the mortal venture. But L.D.S. doctrine, based on this premise, encounters the solid resistance of Christian orthodoxy. In McMurrin's *mot*, "clearly they are not willing to take their problems to a God who may have problems of his own" (p. 35). From the Mormon point of view, however, a God who *has had* problems of his own now has experienced ability. McMurrin sees a

common inconsistency in the presentation of Mormon theology; he thinks that some writers who are committed to the premise of an evolving God with less than absolute power still succumb to the temptation of clothing him with verbal absolutes (pp. 29, 109). Yet the terminology of "omnipotence" and "omniscience" grapples with an important truth. Mormon theology teaches that for the mortal relationship with God their opposites would be less true, since, as the early "Lectures on Faith" were quick to point out, a man cannot trust his problems to a God incompetent to handle them. A university professor may be omniscient in grade school but only relatively learned at higher levels. A finitistic and pluralistic theology demands that differing relationships of the same being be recognized, and one of God's roles is omnicompetence in leading man to salvation, despite the relative nature of his knowledge and power on the level of post-mortal existence.

One of Professor McMurrin's most consistent themes (the book's essay style involves deliberate redundancy) is the strength of the Divine Personality declared by Latter-day Saints. The cost of accepting the bundle of superlatives traditionally called God is depersonalization. In a "Supplementary Essay," which is actually a provocative climax, Professor McMurrin virtually states his own *credo* by examining alternatives. If God is restricted to his own temporal dimension, as the theologians' "life-destroying intellect" asserts (p. 123), then he has no logical relationship with personalities, which exist in time. If God is unique, can he enter into the interaction that men call love? If the anthropomorphism of the scriptures is effectively "cleansed," what is left of personality? In McMurrin's own question about the meaningfulness of traditional theory, "can there be an eternal, non-temporal person?" (p. 131) On this issue a deep correspondence exists between the theology of a God with similarities to mortals and the mortal need to identify with a Being of power but without such forbidding distance that his participation in human affairs is inconceivable.

McMurrin has set up a dilemma for Christian theology worthy of Orson Pratt: the choice exists between "personalistic theism" (p. 123) and pantheism, "the only theism that can be genuinely absolutistic" (p. 131). The modern creed of the United Church of Canada (not cited by McMurrin) typically attempts to marry discordant elements by defining God as "the eternal, personal spirit." *Theological Foundations* would term this an uneasy union of "quasi-absolutism" accompanied by the "constant threat of pantheism" (p. 31). The choice between personality and abstrac-

tion is of compelling relevance in this century when Christian leaders have insisted on meeting the question of the reality of ancient symbols and scriptures. Mormon scholarship will continue to probe the historical origins, the psychology, and the epistemology of this issue, all of which are treated only in passing in McMurrin's essays.

A book titled *The Mormon Doctrine of Humanity* remains to be written, but McMurrin works with the kind of materials that may be brought together in such a book. He sees theistic humanism as the "authentic spirit of the Mormon religion" (p. 111). Theological writing seldom so candidly recognizes that the extent of God's glorification has had, theologically, an equal and opposite reaction in the abasement of man. But McMurrin portrays Mormon theology as capable of exalting God without diminishing man's potential. He even feels that many Mormons are untrue to their religion in being pessimistic about man's nature. A conflict is seen in Mormon writers on this issue, represented by those who may follow Paul in portraying the natural man as opposed to God and by those who follow Brigham Young, who affirmed that "the natural man is of God" (p. 68). But Brigham Young was talking of the disposition of the immortal soul towards truth and goodness, while Paul was referring to the pressure of one's mortal (and Corinthian) environment to force the compromises defined as evil. It is thus an oversimplification to deny either the innate goodness of man's spirit or the forces that produce evil *in the world* (which Mosiah 3:19 and Moses 5:13 are specifically talking about). Precisely because McMurrin sees great virility in the Mormon view that evil is actual both to God and man, his position strengthens the L.D.S. doctrine that the environment inclines man to evil.

Aside from this oversimplification, Professor McMurrin has accurately contrasted "the radical heresy of Mormonism against the traditional Christian faith" (p. 55) on the subject of man. Man is in his own right an uncreated citizen of the universe. Man possesses inherent powers as a creator — of both good and evil. Man has eternal dignity in the midst of a mortality that actually insures the reality of will and choice. Whether or not the L.D.S. view of man is liberal, it is clearly liberating: "Mormonism's conception of human possibility far exceeds those of humanism and the standard forms of religious liberalism" (p. 110). Yet Professor McMurrin can report as an aware observer that the typical misgivings of orthodox Christians on this subject are unjustified. The "faithful Mormon" develops self-confidence within the framework of "a profound sense of dependence upon God for his present estate and for whatever salvation he may achieve" (p. 56).

On the issue of the atonement, however, man's dependence on God is not developed with theological accuracy. *Theological Foundations* describes a salvation determined "by human merit" and yet "possible only through Jesus Christ and the grace of God" (p. 56). But the former is clearly given preferential treatment, since the author maintains that "Mormonism is essentially Pelagian in its theology" (p. 82), which means to him a salvation through human agency. Such a choice, he recognizes, raises the issue of whether there is a real need for "the traditional pattern of atonement through Christ" (p. 82). It is questionable whether the book states a genuine solution, particularly in the light of the author's opinion that an orthodox view of Christ's atonement does not harmonize with the Mormon concept of Adam's fall (p. 74). In presenting his solution, Professor McMurrin seems to say what some Mormons popularly maintain: that Christ's sacrifice grants to all a resurrected immortality, but human merit alone determines the degree of exaltation. The author stresses a key issue of Mormon theology by equating salvation with overcoming of sin, and not with simple forgiveness. But if he simplifies by maintaining that salvation comes "through merit" (p. 71) or "is earned" (p. 90), the atonement is logically superfluous. However, if one takes the position, as L.D.S. theology does, that salvation is the cumulative achievement of building a sin-free character, then salvation is in a deep sense earned, but at the cost of many mistakes, the consequences of which, the revelations affirm, are forgiven through the atonement of Christ. In Mormon doctrine it is not entirely true (from a mortal point of view) that salvation is earned.

Probably every well-done book has a vulnerable point, and the issues of man and his salvation reveal epistemological difficulties in *Theological Foundations*. Mormonism is certainly not Augustinian, but the author is obligated to discuss his evidence for the conclusion that it is Pelagian. Professor McMurrin recognizes the "error" of deducing Mormon theology from "metaphysical principles" (p. 18) and maintains that the L.D.S. doctrines on God are known "by revelation only" (p. 48). This would suggest that the student of Mormon theology must control his definitions by the scriptures. As a professional philosopher, Professor McMurrin brings not only the strength of the comparative method to his task, but also the weakness of lack of analysis of the scriptural sources of Mormon theology. His comments on Talmage and his disdain for scriptural explanations of the atonement (pp. 89-90) express a certain impatience at documented theology; the reiterated dictio-

tomy of Christ and Paul (e.g., p. 56) is hardly this settled in current New Testament scholarship; reference to "the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith only" (p. 88) seems to reflect more what theologians say about Paul than Paul's words, where the term "only" is wholly absent.

This problem transcends *Theological Foundations*. The Mormon intellectual is capable of drawing inferences from isolated sources and then formulating conclusions that may not correspond to the body of revelations. No thinking person can avoid theological generalizations, but the student of Mormonism must frame these in the context of the basic doctrinal sources, the Standard Works. Whoever aspires to formulate Mormon theology is committed to his scriptural homework: Pratt, Roberts, and Talmage led the way here. Professor McMurrin is a competent technician at methods which are not always adequate to this task. Nevertheless, his mastery of other theologies must challenge any Mormon writer who seeks to write significantly on doctrine. Judged by the author's statement of intention in the foreword to produce a "comparative commentary," he has clearly succeeded. Extraneous opinions on origins aside, Professor McMurrin has commented impressively on the strength of the Mormon position.

A STANDARD OF OBJECTIVITY

David W. Bennett

The appearance of Sterling McMurrin's new book *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* will be regarded as an event of first importance by anyone who has a serious interest in this subject. Mormon readers will delight in seeing their theology shine with a natural lustre beside other systems which men have been polishing up for a much longer time. Non-Mormon readers will welcome a chance to view Mormon theology under this new lamp, which lights up the more striking and attractive features of its subject without generating uncomfortable heat on any side, and without casting distorting shadows across any face or into any hidden corner. Indeed, the dispassionately cool but sympathetic light in which the ideas contained in this book are examined sets a very high standard of objectivity for future writers, in or out of the Church, a standard which could usher in a new era for scholarly studies on Mormonism.

The title of Professor McMurrin's book gives no hint of its real scope; as the author indicates in his foreword, he has "composed a