

Freedom and Grace: Rethinking Theocracy

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IN THE EARLY 1960s a series of psychological experiments was conducted at Yale University to study the act of obeying. The researcher, Stanley Milgram, devised a simple experiment in which a person would face a conflict between obeying orders and following his conscience.¹ The question to be answered was how far the subject would go in carrying out the experimenter's instructions before he would refuse to perform the actions required of him.

In Milgram's experiment, two people came to the psychology laboratory ostensibly to take part in a study of memory and learning. They were told that the study considered the effect of punishment on learning. One of them was chosen to be the teacher, the other the learner. The learner was told that he was to learn a list of word pairs and whenever he made an error he would be punished. The teacher was told that he was to read the word pairs to the learner and then teach them to him by punishing him with an electric shock of increasing intensity whenever he made an error. There were thirty switches to administer the shock labeled from "15 volts-Slight Shock" to "450 volts-Danger: Severe Shock."

The teacher was the real focus of the experiment. The learner was an actor who actually received no shock at all. However, to convince the teacher that he was actually experiencing pain he grunted at 75 volts. At 120 volts he complained verbally and at 150 volts he demanded to be released from the experiment. If the teacher continued, the victim's protests became increasingly vehement and emotional. At 285 volts his response was described as an "agonized scream." If the teacher hesitated to apply the shock or questioned the experimenter or expressed doubts about continuing to inflict pain on an unwilling subject the experimenter ordered him to continue. The purpose of the study was to discover when and

1. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

how people would defy authority when it required them to go against the widely accepted moral principle prohibiting the infliction of suffering on another human being who is neither harmful nor threatening.

The results of the study were surprising both to the experimenter and to almost everyone who learns of the experiment. To compare people's expectations of what would happen in such circumstances to what actually happened, Milgram explained the details of the experiment to a large audience consisting of psychiatrists, college students, and middle-class adults of varying occupations. They were asked to reflect on the experiment, record how they themselves would respond, and then predict how others would respond. Each person said that he or she would disobey the authority at some point and further predicted that almost everyone else would not go beyond the point where the victim demanded to be released from the experiment. The actual results of Milgram's experiment were that over 60 percent of the subjects continued to administer shocks up to the highest level labeled "Danger: Severe Shock." Of those who disobeyed, fewer than half did so by the 150-volt level—the point at which everyone predicted that almost everyone would refuse to go on.

These experiments and their results demand that each of us examines his or her own ideas about authority and ponders the question, debated inconclusively by ethical philosophers, "What should one do when the commands of legitimate authority conflict with the demands of one's own conscience?"

The popular Mormon version of this question usually goes something like: "If the prophet (or some other church leader) commanded you to do something wrong, should you obey him?" Some Mormons refuse to consider the question; they refuse to grant the premise that the prophet could command something wrong. A significant number of Mormons respond to the question by shifting the moral responsibility for their own actions to the leader. They reason that since God has commanded them to obey the prophet, God will not hold them responsible for any action they commit under his direction; indeed, they will be commended and blessed for obeying the prophet, while he must bear the total blame for any wrongdoing caused by his commands. There are also a significant number of people who argue the liberal position that individual conscience should take precedence over authority when they come in conflict.

It is interesting to compare Mormons' thinking about our version of the obedience dilemma to the response of those asked to think about Milgram's obedience experiment. Milgram's audience overwhelmingly assumed that disobedience was the morally correct choice in such a circumstance and further assumed that nearly everyone would agree. In the circumstances they considered, the obligation to obey the experimenter arose only from a commitment to help in the experiment and the

moral principle they were asked to go against was a very strong one. For Mormons, however, the obligation to follow the prophet is generally considered to be a commandment from God, while the action against conscience we are asked to consider committing is left completely abstract.

One of the most striking aspects of the Milgram experiments is the difference between the expected and the actual results. The people asked to think about the experiment did not see it as a moral dilemma. All agreed that as soon as it became obvious that the learner was experiencing pain the experiment should be stopped. Milgram explained the discrepancy between people's judgment about what ought to be done under such circumstances and what people actually did by analyzing the social forces at work. People underestimate the strength of these forces and do not realize that under the pressure of circumstances people do not see themselves as moral agents faced with a moral choice. As Milgram stated:

This is, perhaps, the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.²

Consider a slightly different version of the Mormon obedience dilemma. "If your church leader asked you to do or not do something and the spirit told you the opposite, should you follow your church leader or the spirit?" At best this is a conflict between a general commandment from God and a direct command from him. It seems to me that the fundamental principles of the gospel require us to follow the spirit. Of course, it is possible to be mistaken about what is and what is not from the spirit of God, and I believe that we should always seriously consider the possibility that we might be mistaken. However, to take the position that we should in this case follow the leader assumes that we must be mistaken or are at least more likely to be mistaken than our church leader. But perhaps focusing on who is right causes us to overlook a more important question: "What does it do to me psychologically and spiritually to go against what I feel is right?" For me the most disturbing part of thinking about the Milgram experiments was the image of a person sitting in a chair, deliberately, without any physical compulsion, hurting another person, not wanting to hurt that person, even feeling pain himself at his actions, but continuing to go against what he feels and knows is good because he feels obligated to do so.

2. *Ibid.*, 6.

The present model we have of church government is authoritarian. In this model authority derives from priesthood office which confers the right and power to make decisions and issue commands in the name of God through revelation from God to the group of people over whom the office grants stewardship. Priesthood offices are conceived of as hierarchical: the prophet is at the apex of the pyramid and receives revelation to govern the whole church. His counselors and the apostles function as a body with the same power over the whole church. The church is then divided into smaller and smaller units with a priesthood leader—an area president, a stake president, a bishop—presiding over each unit. The model prescribes that only the bishop deals directly with individual members; leaders on all other levels receive instructions concerning their stewardships from the leaders one step above them and give instructions to those one step below them. This is referred to as “proper priesthood channels.”

This model of church government is thoroughly authoritarian. Because priesthood offices are only conferred on males, church government is also intrinsically sexist, which contributes to the elitism of the authoritarian structure. Although I will not address the gender issue directly in this essay, it will be obvious that because the principle of free agency and the gospel of Jesus Christ make no distinction between men and women, church government should also make no distinction. Priesthood authority is legitimized for Mormons because it is felt to be theocratic—that is, from God. Leaders at every level are believed to be called by God to receive revelation concerning their stewardships. The principles of confirmatory revelation and common consent also serve to legitimize the authority of church leaders. Confirmatory revelation means that members should seek and are entitled to receive the witness of the spirit that their leaders are called of God. Some Mormons, but not all, also believe that they are entitled to receive confirmatory revelation for any particular directive from a church leader. The principle of common consent means that members have the privilege of accepting or rejecting anyone who is called to serve as a leader over them. These principles legitimize the authority, but they do not make the system any less authoritarian.

In this essay I hope to show that authoritarianism is incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ, specifically that the principles of freedom and grace require that we find a way of being a community of Saints that is not authoritarian.

The scriptures teach that God gave us our freedom and that it is indispensable to the purposes of mortality. Lehi said, “And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man . . . Wherefore the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself” (2 Ne. 2:15-16). The scriptural meaning of freedom is being an agent to oneself. “I gave unto man that

he should be an agent unto himself" (D&C 29:35). Agency is the capacity to act, so being an agent to oneself, or free agency, is the capacity to carry out or act on one's own desires, goals, and purposes. It is interesting to note Milgram's definition of what he calls the "agentic state": "the condition a person is in when he sees himself as an agent for carrying out another person's wishes."³ He defines an authority system as a "minimum of two persons sharing the expectation that one of them has the right to prescribe behavior for the other."⁴ In an agentic state a person "feels responsible to the authority directing him but feels no responsibility for the content of the actions that authority prescribes."⁵ Freedom is widely recognized to be a condition of moral responsibility. Does being subject to authority relieve us of moral responsibility?

"And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet" (D&C 29:39). "And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves" (Moses 6:56). And "Men are free according to the flesh" (2 Ne. 2:27). These definitions of free agency recognize the inner self that desires, proposes, and chooses; an environment that supplies enticements to both good and evil; and a body that mediates between the two.

Evil is both a condition for and a consequence of freedom. To be free we must have knowledge of good and evil and we must exist in an environment which provides both good and evil enticements. And being free, we will also sometimes choose evil. If we value freedom we must accept the inevitability of evil; we will be injured by others and we will injure others. This is an inevitable consequence of granting free agency to human beings.

One widely recognized paradox of human freedom is that freedom cannot be absolute. Because choice moves from the many to the one, freedom requires a principle of limitation or law. The relationship between freedom and law is complex. Rules restrict behavior, but some behavior restricts other people's freedom, so in order to preserve everyone's freedom we must put limitations on freedom. A free society must have laws which restrict certain kinds of behavior, and these laws must be willingly obeyed by most of the people. However, since there will always be some who take advantage of the voluntary restraint of others to pursue their own gains, society must do something to compel obedience to its laws. This compulsion cannot mean prevention of disobedience because this would require a kind of supervision which would be both impractical and inimical to freedom. A free society enforces its laws by punishing of-

3. *Ibid.*, 133.

4. *Ibid.*, 143.

5. *Ibid.*, 146.

fenders.

Freedom depends on the existence of natural law. In exercising my agency I modify external reality to conform to my desires through the medium of my body. Without the existence of orderly natural processes it would be impossible for me to have any idea of what would happen if I performed any action, and without a knowledge of physical reality I would be unable to carry out my purposes. All kinds of knowledge from common sense to psychological principles enhance my freedom.

The knowledge which the scriptures teach is essential in fulfilling the purposes of mortality is the knowledge of good and evil or the moral law. Moral law, like the law of the land, imposes duties and obligations which are considered to be binding on us independently of our consent. However, there is no formal procedure for determining the content of moral law. Legal rules are enforced by formal punishment while moral rules are regulated by social pressure. Social pressure includes such things as informal expressions of disapproval, reminders of what the moral principles involved in a certain situation are, reasoning about possible consequences of certain actions, inducing shame and guilt, and severing social relations. It is essential that a free society maintain the distinction between moral rules and legal rules. A free society should also distinguish moral ideals from moral obligations. Moral ideals are supported by praise rather than sanctions.

We must relate to authorities in each of these areas of law. How can I do so without relinquishing my agency? Authorities make, enforce, and interpret the law of the land. When I submit to these authorities I am not becoming an agent of their particular wills; I am submitting to the process of law in which I as a member of the group have a voice. I can choose to disobey these laws either as an act of willful disregard for the rights of others or as an act of resistance against laws which I consider unjust. If I disobey I am subject to punishment by authorities.

In the realm of natural law nature or reality itself is the authority. In learning physical skills we must submit to reality. It would be silly for some authority to punish us for making errors. In order to acquire or perfect a skill it is necessary to make errors or fall short of standards in order to learn. A coach or teacher can help us, but it is not necessary for her to punish our failures but merely to point them out. In submitting ourselves to the discipline of a teacher we are not giving up our agency but using it to achieve our goals. By studying the findings of authorities in various fields of knowledge I can increase my own knowledge and ability to act. I maintain my own agency here by adopting a critical attitude toward their methods, reasoning, and conclusions and exercising my right to accept or reject any of these. As I publish my own conclusions I subject them to the same critical process. In a free society a person is allowed to hold and ex-

press false ideas and even harmful ones. Ideas are changed through discourse, not punishment.

What authorities do we recognize in our relationship to the moral law and to what extent do we submit our will to them? Both the law itself and other people act as authorities in getting us to obey moral rules and principles. To what extent do we think about right and wrong in planning our goals? Do we mostly act on our feelings or on our notions of right and wrong? Do we act out of a sense of duty? Do we mostly try to please those around us or ourselves? Philosophers, psychologists, and religious leaders may all act as authorities on ethical questions, but the people closest to us—parents, spouses, other relatives, friends, co-workers—exert the greatest influence on us through various kinds of social pressure. Although moral sanctions are not formalized as legal punishments are, they can be just as effective in compelling behavior; ridicule, rejection, disapproval, and withdrawal of social interaction are types of social pressure which attempt to control others. Other forms of social pressure seek to influence rather than compel.

It is important to understand the distinction between compulsion and influence. Compulsion tries to get someone to do something against her will; influence attempts to change her will. Compulsion sets up an arbitrary consequence for disobeying its demand which will injure a person or cause him pain. Influence points out possible consequences of actions and uses reason and persuasion to convince someone to accept its ideas. Compulsion tries to subvert agency by pretending that its victim has no choice. Influence respects the other's agency and reminds her that the choice is hers. Compulsion is compulsion whether or not its demands are obeyed. If I refuse to obey a command backed by threats it is correct to say that I was not compelled, but the threat itself was compulsion.

A free society has laws forbidding physical compulsion. Paradoxically, these laws themselves are enforced by physical compulsion. The principle involved is that by using force on another person the offender has forfeited his right not to be forced. Moral or social compulsion, however, must be allowed in a free society. This is not because it is right or good but because a free society must allow a large area of freedom. Indeed, a free society is based on the premise that freedom will yield morally superior people who will voluntarily obey the laws of the land and also voluntarily embrace and live by moral principles. Influence, not compulsion, is the best way to deal with the problem of moral compulsion. Perhaps this can best be understood by analogy to the principle of free speech.

The right to freedom of speech is, perhaps, the most fundamental right of a free society. This means that people are allowed to hold and express wrong beliefs and opinions as well as right ones; it means that the

state itself cannot rule on which beliefs are right and which are wrong. This does not mean that a free society has no interest in truth or in ways of determining truth as it applies to particular public problems. But it subscribes to the idea that there is no final truth and that truth is most likely to emerge from a free and critical exchange of ideas. This means practically that opinions will converge through the process of reason and persuasion or, in other words, that influence is a more powerful principle of unity than compulsion. It recognizes that a person's beliefs arise from a complex interaction between his experiences and his own reasoning and other mental processes and they can only be changed by influencing these processes. Compulsion only tries to change behavior while influence affects the whole person.

Similarly, freedom as a moral value implies a morality based on principles and values instead of rules. Such a view of morality will give a lot of attention to motives and the development of inner characteristics because it recognizes that actions flow from character, that the inner person is the locus of will, desire, value, and choice. Bad actions flow from inner flaws, and since influence is the way to change the inner person, a free society will rely on the power of influence to develop the moral characters of its citizens.

I have said that compulsion affects behavior while influence affects the inner person. I believe this is true, but I also believe that there is an important way in which compulsion does affect the inner person. Milgram describes how many of the subjects of his experiment did not feel that they had a choice. They did not see themselves as moral agents with the power to refuse to perform an act which went against their moral feelings. They attributed all moral responsibility to the experimenter. Just like the Mormons who maintain that church leaders will bear the full responsibility for any wrongdoing that results from their wrong commands, these people were unable to see that they made the choice to yield their moral responsibility to another person. What does it do to a person psychologically and spiritually to go against her own feelings of what is good and deny any responsibility for doing so? Although no physical compulsion was exerted by the experimenter many subjects felt compelled to follow his orders under the pressure of the social forces being exerted.

Authoritarianism is the use of compulsion by authorities to force compliance with their orders and adherence to their ideas. Authoritarian systems are legalistic in their prescriptions and fundamentalist in their conception of truth; that is, they focus on details of behavior and are unwilling to seriously entertain the possibility that their ideas might be wrong. Although we live in a free society, authoritarianism pervades it. Many parents are authoritarian as are many teachers, public officials,

public servants, and friends. How can people develop the inner resources and the sense of moral responsibility required to exercise their free agency consciously and responsibly when they are subjected to authoritarianism in so many ways?

The definition I have given of freedom is the common-sense and libertarian one as well as the scriptural one. Philosophical and psychological critiques of this notion of freedom focus on its uncritical notion of the self. They argue that the self does not create itself but is shaped by environmental and genetic forces. Since the self does not choose its own desires, what good is a freedom which only allows expression of those deterministically produced desires? Furthermore, the libertarian notion of freedom emphasizes the rational, choosing, conscious mind and assumes that this part of the self controls our actions, but psychological studies have confirmed the power of the unconscious and other irrational parts of the self in determining our actions. Some Mormon philosophers have argued that the Mormon doctrine of the eternal or uncreated existence of the primordial self supplies a firm foundation for the principle of freedom; since the self is uncreated and self-existent, whatever it is is a product of its own choices and responses to outside influences. This is a thorough-going determinism, although it is a self-determinism. How is it possible for us to become something other than what we already are at least in embryo? The principle of freedom is fundamentally the principle of change and the kernel of freedom in each of us is desire. In desire we recognize our own lack. We desire something outside ourselves; we desire to bring it in to transform ourselves. The kernel of freedom is that we are able to look at ourselves and disapprove of what we see. The existential experience of the self is as a given that we did not create. We realize that we did make some choices, but they seem relatively unimportant in comparison with the solid reality of what we are, how we experience ourselves.

Without grace, the idea of free agency can become a tool of oppression. Because we have our freedom we have moral responsibility; therefore we can be blamed and punished for whatever we do wrong. This can actually be a hindrance to our moral and spiritual development. Free agency by itself lacks the power to transform our inner nature and it is impossible for human beings to meet the full demands of the moral law. I will briefly indicate three reasons for this.

The first concerns the nature of moral law itself. What is its source? God? Tradition? Human reasoning? How can we tell the difference? There are many moral rules, principles, and values. Which are most important? Which rules apply in which situations? What do we do when rules conflict? What do we do about cultural differences in morality? How do we interpret the principles? The moral law is interpreted so dif-

ferently by so many people that it should be obvious that obeying it involves a great deal more than simply using our free agency to choose the right. The moral law cannot fully disclose to us the nature of righteousness, which is only fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Human limitations in knowledge and power also prevent us from fully meeting the requirements of the law. If we try to do what will bring about the greatest good, we are limited by our inability both to know what is good and to know the full consequences of any action. Our egocentricity makes it impossible for us to act without taking our own needs into consideration, that is, in some sense preferring ourselves. Limitations in power mean that there are many good things that we are unable to do because of limited inner and outer resources.

Human solidarity provides the third reason for our inability to live the law perfectly. I am not an isolated individual but part of many different groups and I share the moral responsibility for the actions of those groups although I am unable to fully determine them. I cannot exonerate myself from environmental crimes by recycling some of my garbage and I cannot escape responsibility for economic injustice by donating food to the shelter for the homeless. It is also true that what I am has been greatly influenced by others and that I in turn have greatly influenced the character formation of others. How can I separate my responsibility from yours?

The doctrine of grace recognizes our inability to meet the full demands of the law (which is referred to as original sin or our fallen nature), and it also takes into account our willful disobedience. Lehi says, "And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever" (2 Ne. 2:26). God redeems us through grace, and it is through grace that freedom as the power to change is made possible. As the means by which we are redeemed from sin grace is synonymous with the gospel. The principles of the gospel are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is important to understand grace in all these aspects. First, the grace of God is his unconditional love for us which is manifest in the Atonement. To explain the love of God an angel showed Nephi a vision of the birth, life, and death of the Redeemer. Because of his unconditional love for us God himself came down among us to redeem us from the Fall. He loved us first so that we could love him. He became like us so that we can become like him. Jesus did not make the Atonement for us because of our righteousness but because of his.

Some people have objected to the idea that God's love is unconditional, maintaining that unconditional love is meaningless. "If God loves me no matter what I am or do," they argue, "then he does not see me and love me in all my particularities but only some abstract concept of a hu-

man being with no individual qualities." Love for such a nonentity is, indeed, meaningless, but this is not the meaning of unconditional love. This view fails to distinguish the grounds of love from its particular manifestations. Unconditional love is the foundation for, the condition of, particular love. God loves us in all our particularities because his love does not depend on our possessing certain qualities or meeting some standard of excellence.

Another misconception about unconditional love is that since it does not demand that we change in order to receive love it does not care whether we change, although it is obvious that we are in need of many improvements. To undo this misconception we need to think carefully about Jesus' injunction to love our neighbors as ourselves. Usually we assume that by "love" Jesus means just that which we sometimes feel for our neighbors—a feeling of attraction or affection or approval. We think that he means we should try to feel this for everyone all the time. This is difficult because everyone has some unattractive qualities which we disapprove of. In fact, we realize that there are many things in ourselves that we dislike so we end up concluding that we also need to work on loving ourselves. But Jesus is trying to get us to think about love in another way. What is the essence of the love that we feel for ourselves? It is not dependent on our possessing any particular qualities or measuring up to any standards; we love ourselves just because we are ourselves. We try to avoid people we dislike, but we cannot stay away from ourselves. We cannot not be ourselves. We are absolutely committed to ourselves. We must feel what we feel, think what we think, experience what we experience. Therefore we hope for good things for ourselves, including changes in ourselves. God's unconditional love for us means that he is absolutely committed to us. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

We experience ourselves as subjects; that is, as thinking, feeling, desiring beings who are able to choose according to our desires. Because God's love for us is unconditional it does not demand that we change; it grants us our free agency, that is, it allows us to be subjects. To love the other unconditionally I must respect his freedom. I must allow her to be a subject as I am a subject. This means that I cannot use compulsion to control her. I must address him in his subjectivity with reason and love. Thus, grace, as the unconditional love of God, is inextricably connected with freedom.

To have faith in Jesus Christ is to accept his unconditional love. This frees me from the great burden of having to prove my worthiness, of having to justify my existence. Paradoxically, being accepted as I am with all my weaknesses and sins makes it possible for me to change. Since I am not required to be perfect, I can open myself to the process of repentance.

In the gospel sense repentance means the change of heart that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. This repentance requires that we first see and experience the goodness and love of God and that we view our own sins in contrast: our pride, envy, fear, our inability to love, our failures, and our ignorance. As we experience our own lack of goodness we desire to receive the goodness of God. This desire opens us to receive his redeeming grace and to experience a change of heart. It is the grace of God that makes this change possible. Our desire is called forth by the vision of God or goodness, something outside us, and we use our agency to receive God's redeeming love which has the power to change our wills.

Through the ordinance of baptism God offers us the opportunity to enter into a new relationship with him, a covenant relationship in which we obligate ourselves to always remember him, to do his will, and keep his commandments. Jesus promises to forgive our sins and give us his spirit. By entering into a covenant with us God shows respect for our free agency. He wants us to obey him because we want to and choose to. The covenant with Jesus is a covenant of grace, not a contract of equals. In it we exchange our sins for his righteousness. We promise to keep his commandments, but he gives us the power to do so. This power is called the spirit of the Lord or the power of God, and it is given through the ordinance of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost a person is justified, that is forgiven of his or her sins, and enters into a state of grace. The state of grace is also referred to as being alive in Christ or being born again. In a state of grace we will not be judged for our sins and we will not be punished for them, but grace will be extended to us as we try to keep the commandments and develop in ourselves the attributes of Christ through the transforming power of his spirit.

It is important to understand the principle of freedom in relationship to living in grace or by grace, which is also called the process of sanctification. First, we will examine the change of heart which is effected by repentance. In the scriptures a person who has not experienced this change of heart is referred to as being in a fallen or carnal state, while a person who has repented is said to be in a spiritual state. Because these terms imply that the spirit-body dualism is at the root of the distinction between good and evil, which I do not believe is true, I will not use them. Instead I will call these two states pride and grace. I want to make it clear that whether or not a person is in a state of pride or grace does not simply depend on whether he or she is a member of the church or even a Christian. Baptism is probably the least important step in entering grace. Faith in God or love, the willingness to see one's own sins or errors and try to change them, a commitment to obey God or follow truth or love others,

and a receptiveness to truth or others can also put one in a state of grace. Also it should be understood that most of us experience both pride and grace in varying degrees at different times in our lives, and although our course in life generally tends toward either pride or grace, we may also experience dramatic reversals.

I define the condition of pride as a person's being in the wrong relationship with God and others and grace as being in the right relationship with God and others. This right relationship is most succinctly stated in the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him." And "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (D&C 59:5-6). In the state of pride we are bound by our egocentricity. We objectify others, trying to manipulate and control them, and we see ourselves as the only subject. Because we are unable to understand or accept God's unconditional love, we expend our efforts in trying to prove our superiority. We are able to love the Lord only when we have first experienced his unconditional love for us which allows us to esteem ourselves simply because we are loved by him and to realize that every other person, because he or she is also loved unconditionally by Jesus, is equally valuable as a human being. The right relationship with Jesus is seeing ourselves as totally dependent on him for the spiritual powers we need to overcome death and sin and the right relationship with others is to see ourselves in a new relationship with them because of our covenant to serve God.

The definition of free agency is the power to act according to our own wills, to fulfill our own desires and carry out our own purposes. In baptism we commit ourselves to do the will of God and keep his commandments. Do we thus use our agency to give up our agency? Do we give up our own will and desires in becoming God's servants?

If we think about our own will, our desires and purposes, we realize that they are neither simple, constant, harmonious, nor unrelated to the desires and purposes of others. We have to deal with the problem of means and ends: undesired means leading to desired ends and desired means leading to undesired ends. We are sometimes unsure of what we really want. We discover that attaining goals we worked hard to achieve does not satisfy us as we thought it would. We may want to do what is right, but not know how to sort out all the moral rules, principles, and values we have been given or what relevance they have to a particular situation. We all desire happiness, but what thoughts and actions will lead to it? How is our happiness related to the happiness of others?

If our own wills are so complicated, it seems to me we ought to approach very humbly the task of knowing the will of God. God has declared, "And this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the im-

mortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39), and Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). In a state of pride the self does not understand its connection to God and others, and its will is thus self-centered. In grace a person must retain the primary desires to experience, act, give, and receive, otherwise he is not a human being. But these primary desires are put in a new context where they are constantly in a state of tension with a secondary desire, the desire to do the will of God; they are transformed by being put in the right relationship with Jesus and others. Submitting my will to God does not mean emptying my will of all content and then waiting for instructions from God to tell me what to do. It means that I open myself to love and truth and take into consideration the commandments of God and the needs of others as well as my own as I use my agency, allowing my will to be transformed by the power of God's spirit.

To understand what it means to live in grace or use our free agency while in a state of grace we need to consider the question, "How does God command us?" The first commandments, of course, are the commandments of justification—faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. They are given to us by the word of God through his servants. Once we have accepted them, kept them, and are in a state of grace, the primary way God communicates with us is through his spirit. Nephi taught this clearly: "If ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do" (2 Ne. 32:5). In the process of sanctification we must learn to live by the spirit.

"The spirit" has at least three meanings in the scriptures. One is the Holy Ghost who is a personage of spirit and a member of the Godhead. Another is any spirit being who acts under the direction of God to give revelation. The third meaning of spirit is that force, power, intelligence, or substance which emanates from the person of God and fills the immensity of space and permeates all things. The gift of the Holy Ghost involves both an endowment of this spiritual power and the privilege of receiving the ministration of spirits from time to time. The primary way the spirit speaks to us is in our minds and hearts. The Lord said to Oliver Cowdery, "Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation" (D&C 8:2-3).

Because the spirit speaks to us in our minds and hearts it is often difficult for us to distinguish our own inner voice from the voice of the spirit. Sometimes this seems like a defect in the method of revelation. But this attitude misunderstands God's purposes for us. It is not simply to use us as servants to carry out his commands. If that were the case, then a clear voice obviously outside of us telling us exactly what to do would be a superior method of commanding us. But God wants to bring to pass

our eternal lives—to help us make ourselves into beings like him. This requires that we be separated from him. The authority of God is so great that if he commanded us in his own unmistakable voice we would be unable to resist him. Because the voice of God is within us it invites us to study it out in our minds; we may receive it as ideas and develop it as skills of reasoning, understanding, and intelligence. Because the spirit of God also speaks to our hearts it also expands our ability to love; it invites us to develop such attributes as justice, mercy, patience, and receptiveness to the feelings of others. The spirit can be compared to the milk which a mother feeds her baby from her own body which the baby's body then receives and transforms into its own body.

Of course, revelations may also be objective in the sense that they clearly originate in a supernatural source outside of us. Although such revelations are important, we must still assimilate and interpret them in our hearts and minds if they are to be meaningful to us.

Joseph Smith taught that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"⁶ and that "No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations,"⁷ so we ought to be open to receiving the truths of God from all our fellow saints. We should also understand that because everyone is given the spirit of the Lord to enlighten him, anyone who speaks the deepest truths of her heart is speaking with the voice of God. God also speaks through ecclesiastical leaders, but they do not have the authority to issue their own commandments. To guard against this possibility they should be strictly accountable to relate the manner in which they received their revelation. Did an idea come into the leader's mind? Did he experience a burning in the bosom? Did he hear a voice or see a vision? Was he visited by an angel? Church authorities should not presume to speak to us in a more authoritative manner than God himself. We must subject their revelations to the tests of truth and the confirmation of the spirit within us.

The word of God is also given to us in the scriptures and other inspired writings. Here it most obviously assumes the form of written commandments; some are specific rules to obey, others are given in the form of principles to live by, values to incorporate, and attributes to acquire. The principle of grace is often seen in opposition to the law, works, or commandments. I am not able to fully address the question of the relationship between grace and works here, so I will give a simple answer and then try to indicate briefly the meaning of the law in grace.

We are saved by grace so that we may do works of righteousness, but as finite human beings we can never meet the full demands of the law. In

6. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1968), 269.

7. *Ibid.*, 328.

grace we exchange our sins for Jesus' righteousness and he is judged and pays the penalty. The purpose of grace is not to permit us to live in our sins but to enable us to overcome them and be like Jesus. Those in a condition of pride tend to emphasize rules and regulations and observable behavior. Because they must prove themselves worthy it is very important for them to have ways of measuring whether or not they are meeting the standards. Grace recognizes that the law cannot fully disclose righteousness, but that it is an important guide for us as we try to become like Jesus. When we live in a state of grace we must reflect upon our actions, scrutinize our behavior and motives from a moral point of view, think about the consequences of our actions, and ponder deeply the nature of righteousness while knowing that as finite beings we will always fall short of the perfection required by the law. We must use the spirit within us and the powers of discernment and intelligence we have developed as well as the promptings of the Holy Ghost to understand and interpret the commandments of the law.

Grace is fundamentally a gift and living in grace and freedom requires that we understand and participate in gift-giving. Several features of gifts should be noted. These are ideal qualities; actual gifts may involve some of the characteristics of obligations, contracts, and coercion. (1) A gift is freely given. I choose to give, what I give, and to whom I will give. Some obligations such as promises and contracts are made voluntarily, but once assumed they are considered binding. Although I may choose whether to meet an obligation, I cannot choose whether I have the obligation. (2) A gift is unconditional, that is, the giver does not require that any kind of payment be made to her. The gift itself, however, may impose conditions for its full use. Contracts typically impose conditions on both parties. (3) A gift is given primarily for the good of the one on whom the gift is bestowed. Of course, giving gifts has its own rewards but the giver's attention is focused on the recipient's needs. (4) A gift is given through, by, and because of love. This must be the case if the gift is truly unconditional. The source of all gifts is Jesus' unconditional love. When we accept and are filled with this love we are able to love others unconditionally and we desire to give gifts as an expression of this love. (5) Finally, a gift invites reciprocity. In a contract each party gives and receives something. An attempt is made to make the terms as specific as possible so that the exchange is fair and equal. A gift can establish a connection between the giver and the receiver in which the roles of giver and receiver are continually being reversed.

Because grace recognizes that it is impossible for us to meet all the obligations of the law and does not require us to do so, it opens up the possibility of giving gifts. Under the law there is an infinite obligation which I as a finite being can never meet. Unconditional love is the source

of grace and living in grace means giving to and receiving from both God and others. This allows us to freely choose which gifts to give and receive under the influence of the spirit. This does not mean that those in a state of grace have no obligations. They have the legal and social obligations prescribed by the countries they live in and the societies they belong to as well as any personal obligations they freely incur. It does mean that grace opens up a space for a freedom which is more than the mere right to choose whether or not to meet our obligations.

From this discussion of freedom and grace it is possible to establish several convergent principles which are in direct opposition to the basic features of authoritarianism.

(1) The individual human being is the most basic value. Free agency means that the individual is recognized as the locus of desire, value, and choice. In grace God's love given unconditionally to each person and made manifest through his death on the cross makes each person equal to God himself. In authoritarianism the most basic value is order, truth, or an ideal such as justice. Because these values are seen as absolute, that is, as existing apart from human beings, and are defined, maintained, and implemented by compulsory means, they are static and oppressive.

(2) No human being is more important than any other. Neither freedom nor grace gives any reason to prefer one person over another. Authorities are essential to authoritarian systems both to establish orthodoxy (since truth really isn't independent of human beings) and to order society. Because authorities have greater responsibilities and more privileges they are more important in authoritarian systems.

(3) Responsibility rests in the individual. This responsibility should be seen primarily as directed toward the future rather than interested in the past. It is more important to see individuals as active agents than as sources of blame. Grace frees us from blame and punishment and enables us to choose under the influence of the spirit. Authoritarianism gives the responsibility to make decisions, give commands, and control the affairs of the system to the authorities. Blame and punishment are instruments of control rather than a recognition of moral responsibility.

(4) The necessity of evil and error is accepted. Freedom is meaningless if we do not have the power to do evil as well as good, to make mistakes as well as get it right, and to believe false ideas as well as true ones. Grace recognizes that it is impossible for us to meet the full demands of the law and that we will sin in the process of sanctification. Authoritarianism attempts to eliminate evil and error through compulsory means. Paradoxically truth and goodness flourish in freedom and grace and wither and die under authoritarianism. Truth is dynamic and it emerges when all ideas are subjected to vigorous criticism and people are allowed freedom of belief and speech. Because love is unconditional in grace, it is

easier to acknowledge our sins and errors. Although Christians may not judge another person's standing with God, they may call each other to account for faults, offenses, and errors. However, they must finally freely forgive one another, remembering that Christ has forgiven each of them. Because holding wrong ideas and failing to obey rules and standards are punished in authoritarianism, people try to hide their mistakes. Hypocrisy, lying, and accusations are common. Because it is important to be able to judge people's worthiness, rules proliferate. People are not allowed to criticize authorities or the established authority.

(5) The happiness of people is more important than the perfection of society. Neither freedom nor grace makes any attempt to define the perfect society. They only require that the principles of grace and freedom be honored in human associations. If they are, then happiness, an object of desire, will follow as a gift. Authoritarianism exists for the perfection of society. Since happiness is an inner state and authoritarianism is primarily concerned with the measurable and controllable, it rarely concerns itself with people's happiness except perhaps as an obligation for them to meet.

Utopias or perfect societies will be authoritarian if they insist on defining and establishing their perfection. We envision millennial Zion as the perfect society and the church as its forerunner. We assume that the organization of the church is basically the model for theocracy or Zion independent of secular authority. Many of us see Moses leading the children of Israel as a model for Zion with the political, economic, and religious spheres all united under and directed by ecclesiastical authority. The prophet receives the word of God and delivers it to the people. Only, of course, the people will be righteous and, unlike the Israelites, perfectly obedient.

However, both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught that the millennial Zion will not be an independent political unit, but that it will exist within a world government. This world government will be theocratic in the sense that it will be established by Jesus Christ and will recognize his will, but it will be a true republican government. Brigham Young wrote, "But few, if any, understand what a theocratic government is. In every sense of the word, it is a republican government, and differs but little in form from our National, State, and Territorial Governments."⁸ Its main purpose would be to establish and maintain individual freedom and justice. The Lord declares that he allowed the Constitution of the United States to be established and maintained "for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles; That every man may act in

8. Quoted in Hyrum Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom*, Vol. III, *Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 366.

doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment" (D&C 101:77-78).

The just and holy principle of free agency is never to be abrogated not even for the purpose of instituting true worship of God because God will not force us to obey him and true worship must be from the heart. Brigham Young also said, "This government will sustain all the religious sects and parties in the earth in their religious rights . . . not that the diverse creeds are right but the agency of the believer therein demands protection for them."⁹ Since millennial Zion exists within this world government established to protect the individual rights of every person, we must assume that this protection also extends to the people of Zion. Zion, too, must be established on the principle of freedom and the protection of individual rights.

When we look to Moses and the Israelites as a model for church government we overlook Joseph Smith's teachings about their rejection of the gospel. The Israelites prayed that God would speak to Moses and not to them. In Doctrine and Covenants 84:23-24 we read that Moses "sought diligently to sanctify his people so that they could behold the face of God. But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence." Therefore the Lord took the holy priesthood away from them which administers the gospel and manifests the power of godliness to men and women in the flesh. They were left with the preparatory gospel "which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments." Missing from this gospel is faith in Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which, as has been shown, is the principal means by which the Lord communicates to us in grace. Moses wished that "all the Lord's people were prophets" (Num. 11:39), but they refused the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Doctrine and Covenants 1:19-20, one reason for the restoration of the church was so "that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—But that every man might speak in the name of the God, the Lord, even the Savior of the world."

The gospel of Jesus Christ puts every person in direct communication with the powers of God. Speaking to the Nephites of his gospel of faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the reception of the Holy Ghost, Jesus said, "[T]his is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them" (3 Ne. 11:39). And in Doctrine and Covenants 33:12-13 he says, "This is my gospel . . . and upon this rock I will build my church; yea, upon this rock ye are built, and if ye continue, the gates of hell shall not prevail against

9. *Ibid.*, 380.

you." The church of Jesus Christ then has its foundation in the faith of the individual believer in Jesus Christ and his or her connection to him through the power of the Holy Ghost. "The kingdom of God is within you," Jesus told us (Luke 17:21). The Mosaic theocracy was that of a rebellious people who feared the living God. Insofar as we as members of the LDS church put our faith in such a model with such beliefs as that God will not permit the prophet to lead us astray, we will lose our connection to God. Those who demand certainty will revert to idols. This has been providentially manifest to us in the incapacitation of several of our prophets.

This is not to diminish the importance of the priesthood, for it "administereth the gospel and holdeth the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh" (D&C 84:19-21). The primary responsibility of priesthood bearers is to bring others into contact with God, as the fifth Article of Faith declares, by preaching the gospel and administering its ordinances. We misunderstand the nature of priesthood if we see it primarily as the ecclesiastical authority to make decisions and command, control, and direct the church. The Lord's view of what it means to be the head of the church is different. "For I the Lord, the king of heaven, will be their king, and I will be a light unto them forever." The individual human being is the locus of decision-making, action, and reception of truth in the kingdom of God.

Priesthood is a channel for revelation, but no priesthood bearer has the right to obligate others to receive or accept his revelations simply by virtue of his or her priesthood. A priesthood bearer can offer gifts and exercise influence, but he cannot obligate others or exercise compulsion. As the revelation declares, "The rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness." The powers of heaven are under the direction of the Holy Ghost and the principles of righteousness are the principles of grace. Priesthood cannot be used "to cover our sins" because those in grace freely confess their sins or "to gratify our pride" because pride is in opposition to grace or "to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of men in any degree of unrighteousness."

This is sometimes misinterpreted to mean that there can be righteous dominion or compulsion. However, the rest of the revelation makes it clear that compulsion is always unrighteous. "Everlasting dominion is without compulsory means," it declares. "In any degree of unrighteousness" means simply that although compulsion is always unrighteous,

some ways of compelling are more unrighteous than others. The power of the priesthood operates through the principles of influence—"persuasion, long suffering, . . . gentleness and meekness, and . . . love unfeigned, . . . kindness and pure knowledge" (D&C 121).

I have tried to show that authoritarianism is incompatible with the principles of freedom and grace and that a church founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ is connected to him primarily through his spirit in the hearts and minds of each member. Since the structure of the LDS church is authoritarian and the principles of freedom and grace are not clearly taught in the institutional church and since it is the nature and disposition of almost everyone in a position of authority to exercise compulsion, it is not surprising that the church exhibits so many characteristics of authoritarianism. Grace and freedom can exist in an authoritarian structure if people love each other, accept responsibility for themselves, and are open to the enlightening influence of the spirit; and authoritarianism can exist in egalitarian structures if people are centered in pride and try to manipulate and control each other. Nevertheless, power arrangements do greatly influence the way we relate to and value each other. As long as the church is governed in an authoritarian way, freedom and grace cannot flourish and people will be hindered in their spiritual maturation.