

W. H. Chamberlin and the Quest for a Mormon Theology¹

James M. McLachlan

IT IS TIME TO RESURRECT W. H. Chamberlin. Chamberlin lived the life of an intellectual and spiritual pilgrim. With little money he filled a mission to the Society Islands and later served as mission president there. When he returned, he did what no Mormon of his time had done: he studied the Bible at the University of Chicago and then studied with some of the greatest American philosophers of his age. His pilgrimage took him to the University of California where he studied with George Holmes Howison. Howison's pluralist City of God with its sympathies for pre-existence and a divine democracy appealed to Chamberlin's Mormon faith. Then, practically penniless, he headed to Harvard to study with Howison's chief idealist rival, Josiah Royce. At a time when other Mormon writers were advocating innovations such as pre-Adamites to accommodate the latest scientific theories, Chamberlin was optimistically penning "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in Christ and the Resurrection." He created a consistent and Mormon theological vision that retains its power today though few have heard of him or encountered his writings.

1. To remain true to the subject of this essay—the theology of W. H. Chamberlin—I should say something about the quest for a Mormon theology. The indefinite article "a" is important here as opposed to "the" Mormon theology. Chamberlin thought, and I agree, that one of the essential claims of Mormonism is that God's revelation is ongoing. Theology is the effort to explain revelation in contemporary, rational terms; thus theology historically follows the development of religion, but it is also logically subsequent to and dependent on the development of the revelation and will never exhaust it. Thus Chamberlin's is "a" Mormon theology not "the" Mormon theology, and there are, and hopefully will be, other Mormon theologies spawned as Mormons reflect on the meaning of what has been revealed and what will continue to be revealed.

Chamberlin should be resurrected not only for his thought, but because his life could assume hagiographic proportions for a new generation of Mormon intellectuals. His relationship to the institutional church could be a story from Kafka, complete with a belated offer of a job only when he lay at death's door. But there is no evidence that Chamberlin himself ever viewed his relation to the church with Kafkaesque irony. He retained an active, even militant, faith, not only through the labyrinthine pilgrimage of studies from California, to Chicago, to Harvard, but throughout his experience with the institution in Utah that forced him to resign and blacklisted him.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

The tragic life of Mormonism's first professionally trained philosopher and theologian, William Henry Chamberlin, has been described elsewhere.² But for the uninitiated, I will briefly outline his biography. William was born in Salt Lake City in 1870 and was an active member of the church. He served a mission to the Society Islands and became mission president. He also translated the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants into Tahitian and wrote a number of tracts.³ He returned to Utah where he was an instructor of mathematics, geology, and astronomy at LDS College and later at Brigham Young College in Logan.

He left in the summer of 1901, during his tenure at Brigham Young College, to study at the University of Chicago. Instead of enrolling in geology, he enrolled in courses in Hebrew and philosophy. He returned in 1902 for the spring and summer terms, and only occasionally visited courses in mathematics. Instead, he spent most of his time in courses in ethics, Hebrew, New Testament Greek, Old Testament literature and history, and "The Life of Christ." He returned to Chicago again in 1903. That year he had transferred to the department of theology at Brigham Young College.

2. The most complete story is his brother Ralph V. Chamberlin's 1925 biography, *The Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press). E. E. Ericksen, one of Chamberlin's students who became head of the philosophy department of the University of Utah and president of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, wrote a thoughtful essay: "William H. Chamberlin: Pioneer Utah Philosopher," *Western Humanities Review* 8 (1954): 4. Chamberlin's embroilment in the modernism controversy and its relation to his attitudes toward evolution and critical approaches to the Bible that shook Brigham Young University in 1911 have been recounted in several places. One account is Richard Sherlock's "Campus in Crisis: BYU 1911: Evolution and Revolution at the Mormon University," *Sunstone* 4 (Jan.-Feb. 1979): 10-16. Phillip Barlow devotes an excellent chapter on Mormon responses to higher criticism at the turn of the century in his *Mormons and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 103-47.

3. Chamberlin kept a detailed journal of his mission experiences in which the sincerity of his commitment to Mormonism is apparent. These are available in LDS church archives in Salt Lake City.

In 1905 and 1906 he took leave from his teaching to travel to the University of California at Berkeley to study philosophy with George Holmes Howison, one of the great personalist philosophers of the golden age of American philosophy. In 1906 he received a master's degree in philosophy and wrote his thesis: "The Ultimate Unity for Thought is the Society of Minds." Personal Idealism would permanently mark his thought. He returned to Chicago in the summer of 1907 to study metaphysics, psychology, Hebrew, and Old Testament Literature.

From 1907 to 1908 he was again away from Logan. This time he went to Harvard to study with Howison's famous rival, the great American Idealist Josiah Royce. Ralph Chamberlin, William's brother and biographer, notes that William's relationship with Royce was close because he shared Royce's deep interest in the religious questions of philosophy:

During this year at Harvard, W. H. Chamberlin presented his general philosophic view in papers on "The Conception of God," "The Highest Good," and "On the Nature of Truth," . . . Professor Royce, according to the notes preserved with the papers, was much impressed by the Pluralism, or "Socio-Ethical Idealism," "clearly and beautifully stated as a doctrine" . . . Professor Royce strongly urged him to devote himself to the fuller development of the doctrine, to the critical examination and presentation of its grounds, and to the inquiry into and meeting of opposing positions.

Chamberlin was unable to develop his ideas at that time as financial constraints forced him to return to Utah in 1908.⁴

In 1910 it seemed as though financial hardships would be behind him when he was offered a position at Brigham Young University. But Chamberlin's hopes soon started to come apart in 1911 when he, his brother Ralph (a biologist), and two other members of the faculty were charged with "accepting and teaching certain findings of modern research in Biology and Psychology, and in Historical and Higher Criticism of the Bible."⁵ Three days after being charged, Chamberlin published the essay "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in Christ and in the Resurrection" in a student publication, *The White and the Blue*, to explain that evolution did not threaten Mormonism but harmonized with it.⁶ Three of the accused left the university that year, but William Henry hung on until 1916. He published another piece that year, "An Essay On Nature," in a further attempt to bridge the gap between modernism and his religion by means of an idealist personalism he called "Spiritual Realism." In 1916,

4. Chamberlin was never financially well to do. He also was supporting a family at the time. R. Chamberlin, 118.

5. *Ibid.*, 121.

6. William Henry Chamberlin, "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in the Resurrection," in Supplement to *The White and the Blue*, 14 Feb. 1911.

after years of having his courses dropped from the catalog, in spite of the fact that they were almost always full, the Department of Philosophy was eliminated and Chamberlin resigned. His brother Ralph claimed that this experience broke his brother's health; he died five years later at age fifty-one.

In 1917 William returned to Harvard to attempt to finish his doctorate. Royce had died in 1916 and Chamberlin was urged to study with William Ernest Hocking, an idealist, who had been Howison's younger colleague at Berkeley. But, "idealistically," Chamberlin wanted to test his ideas with a trial by fire and, instead, chose to study with Ralph Barton Perry, a neo-realist philosopher fundamentally opposed to personalism. Though he wrote a dissertation, "Berkeley's Philosophy of Nature and Modern Theories of Evolution," his failing health and family finances once again did not allow him the time to finish the degree and he returned to Utah the next year.⁷ It had been suggested that he seek a position outside of Utah, but he refused to consider that possibility: "I had never thought of it; but for me it would be quite impossible. If I cannot live in the mountains and work among the people I love it may as well be all over."⁸

Back in Utah in 1917 he was unable to find a permanent position. He was banned from teaching in LDS church schools. He taught extension classes for the University of Utah, worked odd jobs, and whatever else was necessary to take care of his family of seven children. During this period he wrote his most comprehensive exposition of his position, *The Study of Philosophy: An Outline*, as a text for his extension classes. Then in 1920 he returned to Brigham Young College in Logan for the 1920-21 academic year. That year he published a booklet *The Life of Man: An Introduction to Philosophy* for his courses. In 1921 he came down with a severe attack of influenza and was too feeble to recover. He received word on his deathbed that he had been chosen to teach religion in the summer school at BYU. He replied, "It is too late, all that can mean nothing now." And after speaking to his children, he said only, "I must go now," and died.⁹

Five years after Chamberlin's death, attitudes in the church had changed. Apostle David O. McKay wrote to Ralph V. Chamberlin in a letter dated 17 February 1926:

That a lofty, sincere soul like W. H. Chamberlin's should have been com-

7. Choosing to study with Perry over Hocking could not have been a "tactically" good move. Perry was a vehement opponent of personal idealism and surely would have slowed Chamberlin's progress toward completion. But Chamberlin's quixotic life is not filled with tactically correct moves.

8. R. Chamberlin, 257.

9. *Ibid.*, 275.

pelled to struggle in our community and to have been misunderstood by those who should have known him best, seems to me to be nothing short of a tragedy . . . I wish it had been my privilege to know him intimately. For one thing, however, I am thankful, namely, that I had no reservation in mind when it came my privilege to recommend that W. H. Chamberlin's services be again secured for the Church Schools.¹⁰

At about the same time, Adam S. Bennion, new superintendent of the church's education system, distributed Ralph V. Chamberlin's biography of William Chamberlin from his office and wanted every church school-teacher to read it.¹¹

E. E. Ericksen attributed the direction of his own life's work to his studies with Chamberlin. In 1954 Ericksen wrote an essay for the *Western Humanities Review*, "William H. Chamberlin: Pioneer Mormon Philosopher." In it he compared his old teacher to Socrates and Jesus who refused to leave their people:

He endured three years of waiting, of disappointment, of lecturing here and there to small and immature groups and unresponsive extension classes in some parts of the state. He felt crushed. He was isolated without banishment; he was denied the opportunity to communicate with those who could understand and benefit by his message. Reduced to downright poverty he died like Socrates, who refused to run away, and like Jesus, loving and forgiving.¹²

Ericksen thought that Chamberlin had given Mormonism a well reasoned "statement of the Mormon concept of the spirits of men as co-existent and co-eternal with God." Chamberlin had attempted to provide a theology that found a balance between science and religion. Ironically, his effort to help Mormonism led to his personal and professional downfall.¹³

THE STRUGGLE OF RELIGION AND MODERNISM

The intellectual history of Christian denominations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is filled with conflicts like the one at BYU.

10. McKay to Chamberlin, 17 Feb. 1926, in possession of David C. Chamberlin, William Chamberlin's great-grand-nephew.

11. Frank K. Seegmiller, member of the presidency of Latter-day Saints High School, to Ralph V. Chamberlin, 25 June 1925, David C. Chamberlin Collection, cited in Barlow, 138.

12. Ericksen, 284.

13. "His lifelong devotion to his community and to the cultural heritage of his group only deepened the tragic pathos of his closing years when, like that other saint and scholar, Roger Williams, he found himself a victim of intolerance, rejected by his own" (*ibid.*, 285).

One of the key thinkers in the personalist movement, the Methodist philosopher Bordan Parker Bowne, was tried for heresy in 1904 after he defended a colleague in the Department of Old Testament at Boston University School of Theology who advocated "scientific findings about evolution, coupled with the higher biblical criticism." But Bowne was acquitted unanimously after arguing that free speech was the moral and spiritual thrust of the attempt to find the meaning of issues essential to religious integrity.¹⁴

An earlier, more famous "heresy" case is that of German theologian David Friedreich Strauss. His experience parallels the experience of many others in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in several respects and illustrates the tension between rising modernism and traditional belief and what were perceived as unacceptable theological efforts to bridge the chasm between them. In 1835 Strauss published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. It created a small firestorm and Strauss almost immediately lost his position. When, in 1839, the liberal government of Zurich offered him a professorship, the people of the city rebelled and the government fell.

What bothered people was Strauss's distinction between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History, a distinction many Christians found, and still find, disturbing. Strauss himself also saw the results of his work as potentially devastating for Christian piety. He found that the results of his critical history "have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Saviour Jesus."¹⁵ But Strauss was not an Enlightenment skeptic, or even primarily a critical historian, but a committed Protestant theologian who wished to defend piety against attacks on his Christian faith. He argued that the Christian faith still subsisted as "an Eternal Truth" despite the most audacious criticism, and that he would restore theologically what had been destroyed historically.¹⁶

It is one of the ironies of intellectual history that Strauss is remembered for the historical destruction of the faith he loved, not for his attempt at a theological reconstruction which he thought to be much more important. Such are the dangers of theology. But the typical Christian be-

14. Peter A. Bertocci, "Bordan Parker Bowne and His Personalistic Theistic Idealism," in Paul Deats and Carol Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1986), 56. Bowne himself was not uncritical of modernism; he saw personalism as a way to accept the insights of modern historical and scientific scholarship while rejecting materialism and positivism. Bordan Parker Bowne, *Personalism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1908), 1-54.

15. David Friederich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 742.

16. *Ibid.*, 757.

liever found it difficult to recognize Strauss's Hegelian reconstruction of belief as Christian. Strauss's argument was that the Christ of faith was different from the Jesus of history who symbolized the historical realization of the universal divine in humanity. In short, it was not necessary for the Jesus of history to have been the Christ of faith. What was important was that the universal idea, the divine, revealed itself as immanent in humanity. Humanity itself was divine. It was not surprising to anyone, except perhaps Strauss, that Lutheran Christians did not warm to his message, though later those two famous atheists Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx would. Strauss's work thus not only initiated the famous "Quest for the Historical Jesus," but he also participated in the ongoing "Quest for a Philosophical Jesus" that began with Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.¹⁷ The philosophical and theological quest was an effort to reinterpret the faith against the assault of both reason and science. The difficulty then and now has been to create an interpretation that does not simply desert the faith in favor of the most recent intellectual trends.¹⁸

Chamberlin is in no way as theologically radical as Strauss, and his creation of a Mormon theology in personalist terms is not as alien to Mormon sensibilities as Strauss's Hegelian theology was to Lutherans. But, like Strauss, Chamberlin's studies, first in the sciences and then in biblical criticism, led him to believe that a philosophical articulation of Mormonism was necessary for Mormon students, who, like him, were confronting modernism. As Ephraim Ericksen put it:

His spiritual realism is a reasoned statement of the Mormon concept of the spirits of men as co-existent and co-eternal with God. The personal nature of God and the social relations between God and men argued for in his philosophy are no different for Mormon conceptions. Nor, of course, is the concept of immortality, which, for both Chamberlin and Mormonism, is a logical consequent of the metaphysical ultimacy of persons.¹⁹

CHAMBERLIN'S "SPIRITUAL REALISM": A THEOLOGY OF MORMON BELIEF

In 1906, after three years of study at Chicago, Chamberlin chose to study for a master's degree at California under George Howison. He must have known that Howison's "Personalist Idealism" would not be

17. Vincent A. McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

18. Recent battles over the historicity of the Book of Mormon are another round in this fight.

19. Ericksen, 284.

unsympathetic to his Mormon faith.²⁰ Howison had been a Hegelian but had repudiated Hegelian monism for an idealistic pluralism. In his major work, *The Limits of Evolution*, Howison gave a systematic statement of his position that persons were co-eternal with God.²¹

Chamberlin's years with Howison clearly influenced his vision of Mormon doctrine. His master's thesis, "The Ultimate Unity for Thought is the Society of Minds," is a fusion of Howison's idealism and Chamberlin's Mormon belief, and this metaphysical and pluralist personalism deepened in later years, modified by his own mature thought and studies in psychology and pragmatism at Chicago and the more traditional ideal-

20. Howison coined the term Personal Idealism in his famous debate, *The Conception of God*, with Josiah Royce at the University of California in 1895. The debate brought together four philosophers: Royce, Jacob Laconte, Edward Meyes, and Howison. It was later published as a book. Howison's essay in *The Conception of God*, "The City of God and the True God at its Head," criticized Royce's idealistic monism that Howison thought ended up in destroying the freedom of human being and thus the relation between God and Humanity. George Holmes Howison, ed., *The Conception of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1898).

21. In the preface to *The Limits of Evolution*, Howison set forth a ten point outline of his Personal Idealism. First, all existence is either the existence of minds or the experience of minds; existences that are known as material consist of certain types of these experiences. Second, time and space owe their existence to the correlation and coexistence of minds. This co-existence is not spatial or temporal but must be regarded as an internal relation, each is a logical implication of the other. This recognition makes their co-existence a moral order. Third, these many minds form the eternal "unconditionally real" world. They constitute what Howison called the "City of God." Each has the common aim of fulfilling one rational ideal. God is the fulfilled type of every mind, the "living Bond of their union, [and] reigns in it, not by the exercise of power, but solely by light; not by authority, but by reason; not by efficient, but by final causation." Fourth, the members of this "eternal republic" have no origin other than the purely logical one they have in reference to each other. This includes their relation to God, which means they are eternal. However, according to his fifth point, they are not independent of each other; they exist only through the mutual correlation, and are the ground of all temporal and spatial existences. They are thus, in his sixth point, free in reference to the natural world and to God. Seventh, this pluralism is held in union by reason. The world of spirits is the genuine unmovable that moves all things. It is the final cause of all activity. Eighth, this movement of changeable things toward the goal of the common ideal is the process of evolution. And the world of spirits, as the ground of the project, can therefore not be a product of evolution itself, nor subject in any way to evolution except that "every mind has an eternal reality that did not arise of change and that cannot by change pass away." Ninth, all these conceptions are founded on the idea of a world of spirits as the circuit of moral relationship and they carry within them a profound change from the traditional idea of God. Creation is no longer an event. Rather, it is ongoing. God, who is a person, also represents the realized final cause. Without this goal "they would be but void names and bare possibilities." Finally, the final cause is here not merely the guiding principle but the grounding and fundamental principle of all other causes. The reference to every other mind brings us into relation to the divine mind. In this way mutual recognition is essential to all minds. God is the type of all intelligence. God is the final goal, the ideal by which all are influenced, which is the only causation in the moral world. George Holmes Howison, *The Limits of Evolution, and Other Essays Illustrating the Metaphysical Theory of Personal Idealism* (New York: Macmillan, 1901).

ism of Royce at Harvard. But the fundamental pluralist and personalist idealism remains.

The essential features of Chamberlin's personalist idealism can be summarized in the following five statements.

1. Persons are eternal, they are ontologically and metaphysically ultimate. This personalism is tied to a pragmatic theory of knowledge in which truth is determined in relation to its outcome and the interests and purposes of persons.

2. Community and sociality is an essential feature of the being of persons. The moral meaning of the world grows out of the relation of eternal co-dependence of persons in community. At the head of this community is God.

3. God is a person and is the ultimate example of personal existence. God is dependent on the other members of the community of minds.

4. God's revelation in the world is limited to the capacity of human truth; it must be stated in human terms.

5. Evolution is a true and explanatory principle through which we can come to understand the development of the "Kingdom of God." Evolution must be viewed as a teleology reflecting God's design and not as a string of efficient causes.

ETERNALITY AND THE ULTIMACY OF PERSONS

Persons are eternal, they are ontologically and metaphysically ultimate. This personalism is tied to a pragmatic theory of truth in which truth is determined in relation to the interests and purposes of persons.

Chamberlin's "spiritual realism" is based on the proposition that persons are the ultimate ontological unity.²² The individual is a *self-organizing unity or principle* whose activity results in progressive expansion and complication of life. The individual has a measure of freedom and this is the foundation of ordinary intercourse.²³ All reality evolves out of the interaction and development of persons. Chamberlin thought personal ide-

22. It has often been noted that the Mormon view of the world is linked to materialism. But Chamberlin is an idealist. His idealism is based on the assumption that a Mormon view of the universe should be an ethical view in which matter is subject to moral and religious concerns. Chamberlin is an idealist if one holds by idealism that mind is fundamental in the world and there is no reality that is not supplemented or connected with mental and spatial activity. But if idealism is taken to be the denial of the objective world, then Chamberlin was not an idealist.

23. For personalism, the category of "person" extends beyond the human to any being that projects its interests on the world. These could include divine beings, animals, even plants.

alism or spiritual realism was actually the most concrete philosophical position. All abstractions, like our notion of matter, require the interaction of persons, they have no meaning in themselves.²⁴ For example, the concrete experiencing person is more fundamental than the abstract notions of either brains or minds. Persons presuppose brains, not brains persons. We often turn concrete experience around and take the abstract explanation for the concrete existent. We should not make the concrete reality dependent on the abstract one simply because the abstraction is more simple than the concrete. Persons cannot give an account of their world without some acknowledgement of the spiritual (mental) reality.

Chamberlin explains that we live in language and any attempt to explain experience is shot through with mental constructs.

When viewed most concretely, then, the world-whole of which our lives form a part is a natural federation of lives or persons. Persons of various degrees of intelligence in a natural unity should come to be regarded as the great independent real. Man is not a reality within his skin looking out through the window of sense upon a world which is foreign to himself. . . . Persons come to be seen as the concrete, the obvious, the basic and static reality, by those who would understand their lives.²⁵

Our awareness of the world is to a large extent determined by our interests or purposes. These need not only be conscious but are also habitual and unconscious. But our interests also support the interests of others. Other lives support our own and are integral parts of us. This interaction of lives is the most concrete reality. Our understanding of the world is filtered through our purposes. Time, space, and exteriority exist because of the interactions of personal beings. "Time and space and matter are absolutely real, and co-eternal with the mind; but the mind must be thought of as embracing them and therefore as their eternal author."²⁶

Unlike Aristotle, but like his own turn-of-the-century contemporaries Nietzsche, Bergson, and James, Chamberlin did not believe that philosophy began with wonder. He thought that only as we are presented with difficulties do we begin to reflect and that human notions of truth are tied to their usefulness in fulfilling our interests and purposes.²⁷ Different types of life require different instruments of truth, and truth is tied to interests and purposes. There is no strictly disinterested thinking. Like the Romantics, Chamberlin distinguished between reality, which defies being reduced to concepts, and truth, which is definable in human concepts. All

24. Chamberlin, *The Study of Philosophy: An Outline*, 21-22.

25. *Ibid.*

26. William H. Chamberlin, *An Essay on Nature* (Provo, 1916), 10-11.

27. Chamberlin, *The Study of Philosophy: An Outline*, 3.

truth is human truth. "Truth and reality are not identical. Truth does not pertain to the absolute; it is a quality of idea or act and is relative to utility." There are different ways that truth is expressed: these depend on the interests and purposes of the people in question and the historical situation in which they think. The results determine the truth value of the ideas employed. One of the problems of modernism is its failure to recognize the value in the ideas of other times and peoples, and its inability to see its own limitations.

In this we fail to recognize that the ideas and acts of a child or of any other person are the means only, a means ephemeral and vanishing, of growth for far more fundamental attitudes toward the world. But foolishly identifying the abstract aspect with the very concrete reality, we often despise the life for its ideas, falsely regarded as false, and a cause or a people that are nourishing the truest attitudes towards God and man and nature, we reject for no truer reason. One's interests require a simple tool, another's will require a most complex and delicate one, the only test of the validity of the idea or of the tool that most men can or do employ is the outcome. By fruits, by good works, far more than by beliefs or ideas, are men and causes to be properly judged.²⁸

COMMUNITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Community and sociality is an essential feature of the being of persons. The moral meaning of the world grows out of the relation of eternal co-dependence of persons in community. At the head of this community is God.

Unlike Nietzsche, Chamberlin, a personalist, was not willing to historicize and relativize morality in the same way he relativized and historicized theoretical truth. In fact, like Kant, Schelling, and his teachers Howison and Royce, Chamberlin sought to ground metaphysics and epistemology in an ethical and eschatological vision of the "eternal community." Thus the idea of eternally existing free persons presupposes the relation between them and a view of reality based on these relations that is, at its most basic level, a moral view. The moral meaning of life is what remains eternal. This moral meaning is tied to the idea of a community of intelligences.

The world-whole, the world of persons seems to permit of no greater values than those which are embodied in moral and religious interests, the religious being but the moral extended to embrace the greatest person of all,

28. Ibid., 37.

even God. Moral and religious interests grew out of the organic and the prudential. The latter are tested first and are trusted as the most concrete and practical.

All other objects in time vanish, and interests supported by them must fail unless they can be made to support the interests of others and so the interest in others. Moral and religious interests are the truly concrete and the practical.²⁹

Without the love of others, the promise of the world proves false. Because of these higher values, the lower ones acquire meaning.

Thus Chamberlin, true to the Mormon idea of eternal beings, argued that ethical rules arise from the concrete situation of the relation of persons. Basically, the argument runs, the most fundamental element of these intelligences is their freedom and upon that freedom purposes depend. Even though some are more gifted and powerful than others, the possibility of freedom as basic to each gives dignity and creates the basis of an ideal of non-coercive relations between persons. This notion of freedom is related to creativity and also governs the hierarchy of values that exist in the world. Our highest values are spiritual values which involve the least constraint but give meaning to lower values. For example, in religious belief, friendship, or love there is a higher element of choice and the need for community based on respect than there is in natural functions such as the need to eat. Though my need to eat is absolutely necessary, it only has meaning in relation to the higher values that involve choice. For Chamberlin, the purpose of the universe is as a stage for the interactions of intelligent beings.

Nature, then, is a vast social organism. The experience of each one is a sample of the Intelligences, beings with the power to do, to know and to feel, who constitute Nature. These Intelligences differ among themselves in this power as the sun and stars differ from one another in brightness. These Intelligences co-exist so that one who is in every way superior to the others, not withstanding his superiority, was not in existence before the others, each and all of them being ultimate and eternal.³⁰

Of these, one stands superior to them all and is inseparably connected with each of the others and supplies a large portion of their environment. This being is God. It is God's purposes that sustain the world. But these other Intelligences, in turn, constitute God's environment. We are parts of a social organism, but the organism is not ultimate, the individuals whose relations form the organism are. Love is created; it can only exist between persons, not without them. Personality is created only

29. *Ibid.*, 32.

30. *Ibid.*, 44.

in relation to others. Our existence as people always presupposes the community of persons: "As the reflected face presupposes the real one, so the effort to know others and their relationships presupposes their prior existence and a lived and profound knowledge of them."³¹

Chamberlin thinks that God is experientible and knowable, though not in the sense that I understand ideas. But just as people can be experienced and known while their dynamic character cannot be finally reduced to concepts, similarly God cannot be reduced to a concept.³²

GOD, THE ULTIMATE PERSON

God is a person and is the ultimate example of personal existence. God is dependent on other members of the community of minds.

Chamberlin argues that God, as a person, must be a free living individual. "Unless we co-exist with God, there is no ground for his living and growing." Neither can we think of God as unchanging for then God ceases to be personal. "But we cannot love the impersonal and changing. . . . Persons, only, the ultimate and abiding environment, can nourish our life and growth, sustain our efforts and yield a moving and satisfying equilibrium."³³ At the highest level our activities must be directed toward others and must be seen in those terms as affected by and dependent upon others. "Our powers are logically prior to God's creative task."³⁴ God differs from humans only in degree, not in kind. God is far in advance in power, knowledge, and love. Chamberlin refers to the environing world as God and the heavenly host. It exists for and through the development of persons.

But among all these Intelligences some are more intelligent than others, and God is more intelligent than they all. Upon God all of us depend . . . in a special way, though our dependence on each other is clear. But God also depends upon us and without us would have no environment, no adjusting attitudes, and so no personality. And so, although God is immanent in our lives, we are, in the same sense, immanent in His life, and like Him, save in the degree of His power and intelligence.³⁵

31. *Ibid.*, 45.

32. "The ultimate reality is unknowable only in the sense that one of our ideas or attitudes, while it experiences itself in living, cannot be so known by another attitude, save in the external and picture process. The latter effort or attitude does not deny the former but presupposes it. Of the relationships of persons to each other and to our Father we are immediately aware. We are inextricably knit to one another and to God, our Father" (Chamberlin, *An Essay on Nature*, 44).

33. *Ibid.*, 32.

34. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

35. *Ibid.*, 24.

The idea that God and others are immanent in us is a repudiation of a subjectivism that maintains that the self is cut off from others. We find ourselves in a world we did not create but one we constantly modify, speaking a language that we did not make but one we constantly use and change. The goal of the spiritual evolution of God and children is toward freer, deeper, and fuller relation. God is the ultimate example of this goal, the embodiment of the highest expression of our strivings.

REVELATION AND HISTORY

God's revelation in the world is limited to the capacity of human truth, it must be stated in human terms.

The development of relation to others and the environment is a history of adjustments to concrete realities. Adjustment to God is called religion. There is a dialectical development toward more adequate understanding of God, though our understanding will never be complete. From nature worship in Baalism with its lack of personality to a fully developed concept of the personal God, God's revelation is always through human beings and in human terms. Revelation is tied to the historical culture in which it is given. There is in every revelation a set of attitudes that was necessary at the time to the cultivation of a particular attitude that God desired to cultivate in us. These are like a husk, and, unfortunately, they are often conserved when they are no longer useful. But in their time they were necessary to the revelation.

God's revelation is limited by the habits and attitudes of any given age. God can only communicate to us in ways that we would understand. Only by a slow evolution do we arrive at a true relation with God. Chamberlin writes:

If one is anxious to train others in a belief that God is the creator of the world, he will have to use the Hebrew or Greek idea of the world in one age, the Ptolemaic idea in another, or the commonly accepted Copernican idea of the world in this age. Now all of these ideas are, from the point of view we are taking, false; and yet through them men have in different ages had established in their lives the same vital and fundamental belief that God is the creator of the world. Now granting that God can influence the interests of men he must in doing so make use of the ideas of men, ideas always different in different ages. His aim must be, like that of the teacher, to establish fundamental attitudes rather than the truth of the passing ideas used by him. He must even use one set of ideas at one time, and another set at another time, all of which may be false in the sense that they could not be used successfully now, to awaken the same vital attitude.³⁶

36. Chamberlin, *The Study of Philosophy: An Outline*, 38.

The scriptures may express numerous ideas that are now believed to be false. But at the time, these were the most adequate ideas for that environment.

Even so, Chamberlin argues, the scriptures reveal the highest human values. In the life of Jesus, he thought, God is revealed most fully. "God could only reveal His character and the nature of the most satisfactory living to man through a human life fundamentally like his own."³⁷ Chamberlin's idea of the nature of God and the mission of Christ is revealed in his love of the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus gave the *message of God* as immanent in the world, but when he wanted to reveal the *character of God*, he chose the image of a loving parent waiting for the return of a lost child.

Chamberlin is traditional in his treatment of the life of Jesus. He believes that he was the literal son of God. His birth was the result of "a special act to meet the needs of an Intelligence of such great promise that he could use the advantage thus given him." But Jesus' claim to be the "son" of God accords most closely with the universal love that characterized his life. This love enabled him to constantly lay down the interests that are so important to most men and women. And finally this love gave him the power to reveal God's love for us in that he could not withhold the life of his body. He voluntarily gave it up in order that nothing might be lacking in his efforts to realize the fullest life of humankind and, at the same time, give to God the greatest possibility for continuing his work in creating eternal lives.³⁸

TELEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

Evolution is a true and explanatory principle through which we can come to understand the development of the "Kingdom of God." Evolution must be viewed as a teleology reflecting God's design and not as a string of efficient causes.

Chamberlin, like many thinkers at the turn of the century, was an evolutionary thinker. He saw evolution as a principle that was part of Mormonism. His view was not driven by Darwin's idea of natural selection but closely followed George Holmes Howison's modified Aristotelian teleology. This was a religious evolutionism. In fact, like the other personalists of his age, Chamberlin opposed agnostic evolutionism. Personalism reacted against the "cut throat" evolutionism of Herbert Spencer and the cosmic evolutionism of John Fiske which it saw as antithetical to Christianity.

37. *Ibid.*, 39.

38. *Ibid.*, 41-42.

Chamberlin viewed the history of religion as the evolution of more and more adequate attitudes and conceptions of God. Natural history has been God's painstaking effort to create the "Kingdom of God" as a society of minds. His effort to express his belief at BYU culminated in his essay "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in God and in the Resurrection." In this essay he begins with a quote from Doctrine and Covenants 88 that Christ is in "all things" and that the universe is the visual image of God's effort to further the society of eternal beings. The creation of the human body is one of the culminating events of this evolution that makes communication and love between persons possible. Therefore God would not have gone through this painstaking effort merely to see love destroyed. He ends the essay in an ecstatic vision of the resurrection.

There is nothing that science contends for in the way of an obstacle to belief in the resurrection of the body; and, through the above discussion, we are helped to believe in future stages of activity in which we may "partake of the fruit of the vine" with the Lord Jesus and with the great and good of every age, and in the society of all those loved ones who have made life so sweet here and who have passed or shall pass to their glory in those happy worlds; and there we may hope to stand in the presence of the Ancient of Days, the Adamic Being who, perhaps, as we have suggested above, headed the race of man, and who, through his devotion to immortal spirits, his children, won the resurrection of the body and with our heavenly mother, presides in the celestial world from whence he secures with Christ the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, who is in and through all things to the end that we might win the fullest lives here and companionship with Him in the eternal world hereafter.³⁹

CONCLUSION

William H. Chamberlin accomplished a reasoned statement of Mormon belief in philosophical terms that should be remembered and examined by Mormons with similar interests. There are few comparable. To paraphrase Sterling McMurrin, Chamberlin may be the best philosopher/theologian Mormonism has produced.⁴⁰ This "Mormon Socrates" would prefer to be remembered for his ideas that reflected his love of Mormonism and its people, not merely as a casualty in the chronic uneasiness between the church and its intellectuals. Besides leaving us with an important philosophical-theological legacy, Chamberlin exemplified

39. Chamberlin, "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in God and in the Resurrection," 4.

40. Remarks during a panel discussion on "A Mormon Socrates: William H. Chamberlin" at the 1993 Sunstone Symposium.

what Mormon theologians should be doing. Though he had more to complain of than most, he got on with his work to present, given the conceptions of his age and his own limitations, the best interpretation of the revelation of God he could give. This interpretation was written under great personal strain, but he did not desert his belief or his people. To the end he held a belief in the Mormon revelation. His work deserves to be read, for though theological reflection should not be the center of Mormon religious life, it can be an important tool in keeping the revelation vital. It may be that religions do not have "Theological Foundations" but instead have "Theological Implications" and can give birth to a variety of theological interpretations of the central revelations. Chamberlin's is one of the most fruitful of these; it deserves to be revived and remembered.