

The Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace

Blake T. Ostler

LATTER-DAY SAINTS may be surprised to discover that Joseph Smith did not reject the importance of grace. Indeed, he developed a profound and novel view resolving many problems presented by the grace-freedom dichotomy in classical Christian thought. Moreover, Joseph's concept of grace was consistent through his lifetime, even though it underwent a major shift from Pauline to Johannine categories of thought. The notion of grace presented in the Book of Mormon is essentially the same as Joseph Smith taught in the Nauvoo era. However, some early assumptions underlying the Book of Mormon scheme of grace were abandoned in Nauvoo: notably, the ideas of "original sin" and "regenerating grace." Despite continuity in the underlying concept, the Mormon notion of grace developed from a theology grounded in static states of being to one seeing grace as an ongoing process of growth throughout life and eternity.

For this discussion, I will adopt the following definitions. (These definitions embody concepts about the workings of grace developed largely since Augustine.):

Actual original sin: According to Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, the state of humans before regeneration of the will in which all are morally impotent and unable to freely choose to do any meritorious act.

Common grace: The Arminian notion that God grants saving grace to all persons in the same degree and identical way. This grace is sufficient for salvation if freely accepted.

BLAKE T. OSTLER is the husband of one and father of three. He graduated from the University of Utah with a juris doctorate and is a philosophy instructor at the BYU Salt Lake Center and an attorney in private practice, who would rather be fishing than writing articles or practicing law.

Concurring grace: The view of Luis de Molina that saving grace is sufficient only if it combines with the free human will to become efficacious grace.

Efficacious or operative grace: Grace which accomplishes salvation.

Irresistible grace: Grace which cannot be rejected by an evil will.

Original guilt: Moral culpability, shared by all humans, for Adam's acts.

Prevenient grace: Prior to any act of human agency, grace which moves the human will to have faith or to accept efficacious grace.

Preventing or persevering grace: Grace bestowed on those who have accepted sufficient grace so that they can resist sin and persevere "in grace."

Sufficient grace: Grace which is adequate to salvation in the event it is actually accepted.

Theoretical original sin: A status which would exist but for the atonement and which becomes actual in the event humans freely choose evil.

THE MORMON VIEW OF DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN FREE WILL

Aurelius Augustine, bishop of Hippo (354–430), was primarily responsible for the traditional notion of grace. According to Augustine, humans were free prior to the Fall in the sense that they could choose either good or evil. After the Fall, however, they became slaves to an evil nature unless and until the human will was regenerated through God's gift of irresistible grace. After the Fall, humans could choose only evil unless saved by grace. The Augustinian notion of grace was adopted with very few modifications by Calvin and Luther. It was this notion of grace which the Arminians rejected because it seemed to make God responsible for arbitrarily deciding to damn some persons.

The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon reversed the order of states of grace posited by Augustine.¹ In the Book of Mormon, humankind lacked moral

¹ By comparing Book of Mormon doctrines to Arminian and Calvinist thought, I am not asserting that the Book of Mormon is a nineteenth-century document. However, it is appropriate to compare the Book of Mormon to nineteenth-century religious thought because Joseph Smith could conceptualize the revelation of the ancient text only within his nineteenth-century horizon. See my "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *DIALOGUE* 20 (Spring 1987): 66–123.

freedom *before the fall* because at that point they did not have alternatives among which to choose. God gave them freedom when he provided to Adam and Eve contrary commandments: "It must needs be that there is an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter. Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other" (2 Ne. 2:15-16). Before the Fall, therefore, humans were in a state of childlike innocence, not knowing good from evil. If Adam and Eve had not transgressed, "they would have remained in a state of innocence" (2 Ne. 2:22-23). God created Adam and Eve in this innocent state, incapable of either sinning or doing good (2 Ne. 2:23). The Fall was therefore not regarded as a sin in the Book of Mormon, for one cannot sin unless one possesses knowledge of good and evil, and Adam and Eve did not possess such knowledge until *after* the Fall. Rather, the Fall resulted from the "transgression" of God's commandment (2 Ne. 2:22). The Book of Mormon adopted a notion of sin very similar to Zwingli, who held that where there is no law, there can be no sin: "And if ye say there is no law, ye shall say there is no sin. And if ye say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness" (2 Ne. 2:13). This passage describes sin as an *act* which violates law, not as a *state of being* which one inherits. The Book of Mormon uniformly distinguishes between "transgression"—which always relates to violation of law without moral culpability—and "sin," which refers to culpable conduct deserving punishment. Pelagius and Zwingli noted that inherited original sin is impossible if one is responsible only for one's own acts.

The paradoxical commandments given to Adam and Eve forced a choice upon them. Adam and Eve had been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, but they could not do that unless they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2 Ne. 2:22). Nevertheless, God had also commanded Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2 Ne. 2:18). God thereby granted Adam and Eve a choice among alternatives—to remain in a state of innocence or to confront opposition that would make spiritual maturity possible, knowing joy because they experienced misery, able to do good because they were able to do evil (2 Ne. 2:23). Moreover, God's plan was that Adam and Eve experience opposition (2 Ne. 2:15). It was "appointed" beforehand that they would partake of the forbidden fruit and die (Alma 42:5-6). The Book of Mormon thus established a very strong concept of free will clearly opposed to the Augustinian/Calvinist tradition. Whereas Calvinists defined free will as the ability to do as one pleases, even if one is only capable of

pleasing to do evil, the Book of Mormon defines free will as being capable of both good and evil choices. The Book of Mormon notion of free will requires choice among alternatives that are genuinely open to agents, what we would now call contra-causal, categorical, or libertarian free will: the ability to do both good or evil given all of the circumstances that obtain at the moment of free decision. The importance of this stronger notion of free will in Mormon thought can hardly be overstated. It is the foundation from which the edifice of Mormon theology was constructed.

As a result of the Fall, humankind was “cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord” (Alma 42:7). That is, humans will die and are no longer in God’s presence. *After the Fall*, all persons would be in a state contrary to the state in which God created them and naturally evil (Mosiah 3:19; Alma 41:11, 42:10), captive angels to the devil (2 Ne. 9:8–9), and not free to choose good because they would be subject to the devil (Mosiah 16:3)—or so they would be, that is, *except for the atonement* (2 Ne. 9:6–7; Alma 42:14–16). Because of the atonement, *all* persons overcome spiritual death (alienation from God) and will be resurrected and return to God’s presence “to be judged according to their works” (Alma 42:23; 2 Ne. 9:13–16; Alma 41:3–4). Only “through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” can persons dwell in the presence of God (2 Ne. 2:8). Because of the atonement, *all* persons are delivered from their servitude to the devil and evil natures and made free to act for themselves:

And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And *because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon*, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and *all* things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator and *all* men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity of the devil. (2 Ne. 2:26–27, emphasis added)

Joseph Smith has translated Lehi, here, in terminology familiar to Calvinism. Calvinists held that human will is acted upon but does not act for itself in the decision to accept God’s grace. The Book of Mormon maintains, to the contrary, that Christ’s redemption from the Fall made all persons free to act for themselves and not merely to be acted upon.

The Book of Mormon also teaches that little children do not need baptism because the atonement *automatically* delivers them from the captivity of the devil and sin (Mosiah 15:24–25). Nor are little children capable of choosing between good and evil, and therefore

their decisions are not subject to judgment: "Little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore, the curse of Adam is taken from them in me" (Moro. 8:8, 12). Further, all those who died in ignorance of Christ's gospel God will also redeem (Mosiah 15:24).

Therefore, no person, according to the Book of Mormon, is actually evil because of depraved nature. At birth, all are automatically delivered by the atonement of Christ from the servitude to evil and all of the effects of the Fall. Thus, although the Book of Mormon promulgates a notion of "original sin," it is a "hypothetical original sin" which does not actually afflict persons unless they reject the atonement. However, those who freely reject Christ during their mortal probation, having a knowledge of good and evil, reject the benefits of the atonement and return to the servitude of the devil and a naturally evil, unredeemed state. That is, persons become evil because of evil choices freely made *after* they become capable of sinning and refraining from sin (unlike little children); evil is not a result of Adam's transgression nor of one's inherently evil nature:

Thus, all mankind were lost; and behold, they *would have been* endlessly lost *were it not that* God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

But remember that he that *persists* in his own carnal nature, and *goes in the way of sin* and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore, he is *as though* there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God. (Mosiah 16:4-5, emphasis added)

The subjunctive tense here indicates that the notion that persons are lost because of the Fall is counterfactual; because of the atonement, persons are not really lost. However, persons may become continually evil and captives to the devil by evil choices freely made (2 Ne. 2:29, 9:16; Alma 41:5-7, 11-12). The Book of Mormon also stresses that because persons are free to make both good and evil choices, God is just in judging *all* persons and rewarding them according to their works (Alma 41:3-5). Moreover, Alma taught that God is just precisely because *all* can freely respond to his grace and are judged for their own acts and not the acts of another. In his discussion of the justice of God's judgment, Alma taught his son Corianton:

Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall all be restored unto him according to his deeds. If he desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God. . . . O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. (Alma 42:27, 30)

Salvation is thus a free gift available to all to be freely accepted (2 Ne. 2:4). Nevertheless, all are free to choose *only because of* God's

grace—because of the atonement wrought by Christ. Though in the Book of Mormon the word “grace” appears only four times in relation to salvation, the book’s view of redemption from Adam’s transgression as the basis of human freedom assumes God’s saving grace. Persons are free to act and to choose for themselves, but such freedom is made possible by grace:

Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life.

Wherefore . . . reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of Christ that ye are saved. (2 Ne. 10:23–24)

Because human freedom arises from God’s redemption, persons are ultimately saved, after all they can do, not by their works but by God’s grace (2 Ne. 25:23). The Book of Mormon asserts, like the Molinists, that all persons are free to choose among alternatives and therefore free to accept or reject God’s grace, but the choice is ultimately made possible only by God’s grace. One *enters* the way leading to eternal life “by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Ne. 31:19). Nevertheless, *once on the path*, the burden is on human agency to persist in faith by God’s grace; there is no guarantee of salvation by virtue of *preventing grace*:

Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved. (2 Ne. 31:15–16)

The Book of Mormon also adopts a notion of sanctification or perfection obtained through grace: “If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ . . . then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God” (Moro. 10:32–33). Sanctification apparently referred to holiness added after one has been justified or cleansed from sin. However, this sanctification through grace was made possible only by dedicating all to God: “might, mind and strength” (Moro. 10:32). The Book of Mormon is very close to the notion of grace made famous by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who coined the term “cheap grace.” “The only man who has a right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace” (1961, 55).

The Book of Mormon also emphasizes that God has decreed the times and order of events (Alma 41). Moreover, God’s elections to the priesthood are conditional—that is, just as the Arminians taught, God

bases his decrees upon his foreknowledge of an individual's faith and choices:

This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world . . . being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things. . . . [T]here were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish. (Alma 13:7, 10)

The order established “from the foundation of the world” included ordinations based on foreknowledge of who *would* “repent and work righteousness.” God’s decrees are, then, clearly not arbitrary. Considering the Book of Mormon in relation to other Christian thought further elucidates its particular perspective on the doctrine of grace. Terminology borrowed from Paul is never used to describe the notion of grace in the Book of Mormon. The term “justification” is never used in the Pauline sense, and neither is the key Pauline phrase, “justified by grace.” Equally remarkable, the Book of Mormon is rich in concepts and theological distinctions defined primarily in response to Augustine and therefore follows the line of thought represented by Irenaeus, Pelagius, Luis de Molina, and especially Arminius.

As did Irenaeus, the Book of Mormon views Adam and Eve before the Fall as immature and innocent. Both view the Fall as God’s plan to enable human growth to spiritual maturity through confronting moral opposition and physical pain. As Irenaeus, the Book of Mormon views humans as neither good nor evil, but capable of freely choosing both. Indeed, the Book of Mormon concurs with Irenaeus on most major points against Augustine. Irenaeus even espoused a doctrine of human deification, although interestingly the Book of Mormon does not — that teaching would come with further revelation. Nevertheless, the doctrine of deification is a natural development from the doctrine of perfection through Christ’s sanctifying grace, just as it was for Irenaeus’s theology.

The Book of Mormon thus reverses the order of states of grace presented by Augustine/Calvin:

<u>State</u>	<u>Augustine/Calvin</u>	<u>Book of Mormon</u>
Before the Fall	Able to choose both good and evil (<i>posse non peccare</i>)	Unable to choose either good or evil (innocent)
After the Fall but before regeneration	Unable to not sin (<i>non posse non peccare</i>)	No such persons; the atonement automatically delivers all persons from captivity to evil.

After the Fall and after regeneration	Unable to sin; <i>some</i> persons are delivered from evil nature by God's prevenient grace (<i>non posse peccare</i>).	All persons are able to choose good or evil.
After free choice	No persons are free in this sense (<i>libero arbitrio</i>). God damns those he does not choose to save and saves those he chooses.	Those who choose evil return to their naturally evil status; those who choose good receive eternal life.

The Book of Mormon may accurately be discussed as similar to a line of thought developing from Pelagius, but there are also significant differences. Pelagius maintained that persons are free without regeneration of the will, that the Fall of Adam had no effect on his descendants. In contrast, the Book of Mormon views the Fall as disastrous, but for the atonement. Without the atonement, all persons would be captives of the devil. However, the Book of Mormon agrees that *in actuality* no descendants of Adam are by nature inherently culpable as a result of the Fall. Both reject the notion of original sin. However, persons can become evil and be restored to "evil nature" if they freely choose evil. Both Pelagius and the Book of Mormon clearly emphasize the role of free will in salvation.

The Book of Mormon is closest to Arminianism in its doctrine of synergistic grace. The Book of Mormon explains foreordination to priesthood, for instance, as based on foreseen faith and free choice. Foreordination is therefore conditionally merited by human action. The Book of Mormon thus rejects arbitrary election and predestination. Nevertheless, the Book of Mormon view is that salvation is ultimately by grace which is freely accepted. Like Arminianism, the Book of Mormon presents a two-stage operation of grace. The first stage entails the unconditional restoration of will and redemption from servitude to the devil for *all* persons. This grace is similar to prevenient grace in being prior to any act of human will. Instead of merely preparing the will to exert faith, however, this first-stage grace empowers or restores to the will its ability to accept or reject grace and make choices among alternatives. This grace does not merely "strengthen" the will, then, as in Arminianism, for prior to God's restorative action there is no free will. Only God's regenerating atonement makes free will possible.

In the second stage, God grants sufficient grace to all. All persons may choose to accept grace if they so desire: "Whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely." However, individuals may also choose whether they desire to accept grace: "Whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come" (Alma 42:27). The Book of Mormon thus rejects every form of irresistible and efficacious

grace. Further, the Book of Mormon is like Arminianism in that it rejects every form of reprobation, for God desires all persons to be saved; but the decision whether to accept grace is ultimately up to individual free will. Further, the Book of Mormon rejects the weaker notion of free will adopted by Augustine and Calvin, for God cannot insure that persons will *freely* “choose eternal life” (2 Ne. 2:26–28). For the Book of Mormon, free will is always and only possible in the presence of alternative choices that are genuinely open and ultimately up to the human agent.

Finally, because the Book of Mormon, like Arminianism, rejects the view that Adam’s descendants are culpable for Adam’s sin, it also rejects the view that God can justly condemn persons based simply upon their evil nature. Instead, persons are judged solely on the basis of their sins. Let me emphasize that neither the Book of Mormon nor any other scripture supports the view that some persons will be judged not according to their own deeds, but to Christ’s merits. The Book of Mormon teaches that all must rely wholly on the merits of Christ to *enter* the way leading to eternal life, but *all* will be judged on the basis of their own works. As in Paul’s writings, Book of Mormon writers seem unaware of any tension between the view that persons freely enter into the covenant relationship through God’s grace and the view that all persons are judged and rewarded according to *their* works. Indeed, the Book of Mormon emphasizes that it is only because persons are free to choose, including whether or not to accept grace, that they can be judged on the basis of *their* deeds (Alma 40 and 42). The notion that a person may be punished or rewarded for someone else’s deeds is rejected as unjust by the Book of Mormon. Pelagius was correct, according to the Book of Mormon, in thinking that a person cannot be held guilty of or rewarded for something unless it springs from his or her own free will.

The Book of Moses

The book of Moses reinforces the Arminian line of thought found in the Book of Mormon. It emphasizes the importance of free will by telling of an alternate plan presented by Satan which would guarantee “that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1). However, even at the extreme cost that some persons would be lost, the plan was rejected because it would “destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3). The book of Moses teaches that Adam and Eve were not created free, for God “gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32). God thus gave Adam and Eve agency; it was not theirs by virtue of

creation as Pelagius maintained. Rather, agency arose at the point when God in the Garden of Eden gave Adam and Eve a choice among alternatives.

The book of Moses also emphasizes that persons become “naturally” evil by free choice and are not evil as a result of the Fall. Indeed, the book of Moses uses the precise term “original guilt” and maintains that *all* persons have been redeemed from its effects:

And the Lord said to Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:53-54)

The book of Moses thus teaches that Adam’s descendants do not inherit original guilt because Adam himself had been forgiven of his “transgression.” When he himself no longer bears that guilt, Adam cannot genetically transmit it. The book of Moses further emphasizes that “evil nature” arises from free choice by showing that Adam’s descendants became evil only after their own free choices to reject God:

And Satan came among them saying: I am also a Son of God; and he commanded them, saying:

Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. *And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish.* (Moses 5:13, emphasis added)

The key is that even if children are “conceived in sin” (6:55) as a result of “original guilt” (6:53), the guilt arises in the hearts of those who are returned to their naturally evil and carnal state because their works were evil (6:49). That is, persons suffer from original guilt only after they have freely chosen to reject the benefits of the atonement. So although a notion of original sin appears to be adopted, it is a “hypothetical original sin” that has no effect unless persons freely choose evil works. And furthermore, the book of Moses records unambiguously that the Fall was not a calamity, but a happy occurrence in accordance with God’s plan. Adam and Eve rejoice over the opportunities afforded by God’s plan as a result of the Fall:

Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.

And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10-11)

The book of Moses shares the views of Irenaeus and Arminius that the Fall offered humankind an opportunity to grow and mature.

This passage also echoes the sentiments of the ancient Roman Easter rite: "O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem" (Leibniz, para. 10). O fortunate fault which allowed us to have a Redeemer! The attitude toward the Fall is even more typically Arminian, however. Eve correctly understood God's plan for their spiritual growth and maturation; she complied by partaking of the fruit forbidden by God. God's purpose in commanding them not to eat was not to punish them arbitrarily for trivial acts, but to provide them options among genuinely open alternatives as a necessary prerequisite to genuine free agency.

Derived from Genesis, the book of Moses was part of Joseph Smith's inspired exposition of the King James Bible. This inspired interpretation, in the spirit of midrashic expansion, clarifies for us the Prophet's understanding of the Bible. Also of particular interest in the present context are the Prophet's emendations of Paul's writings regarding grace. He altered one passage in a way that appears to emphasize *sola gratiae*: "Therefore, being justified freely only by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (JST Romans 3:24, underlined words added in JST).

This modification alters a major Arminian proof-text which supports their view that "salvation is freely offered to all through Christ's redemption." The key word is "offered"; acceptance is up to individual free will, suggesting a synergistic working of grace. The addition of "only" to "by his grace" appears to support a monergistic concept of grace, yet the Prophet altered another passage from Romans in a way that clearly emphasizes a synergistic notion of grace:

Therefore, it is ye are justified of faith and works, ~~that it might be by~~ through grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to them that only ~~which~~ who is are of the law, but to ~~that~~ them also ~~which~~ who is are of the faith of Abraham; who is father of us all. (JST Romans 4:16, underline indicates additions; strikeover indicates deletion by JS)

The two alterations are not necessarily inconsistent. I see no way to interpret the latter passage except as a statement of synergism: "justified of faith and works." However, the first passage can be interpreted as consistent with the second, if we read it as a statement of justification through Christ alone rather than grace alone. This interpretation is consistent with the Book of Mormon affirmation that salvation can be obtained only through the name of Christ (2 Ne. 25:20, 23-30; Mosiah 3:17, 5:8).

Mormon Thought to 1834

The Mormon view of salvation was initially very similar to the conservative Arminian arm of Protestant thought. Though Arminianism in its many forms in the nineteenth century remained a criticism of Calvinism, both Arminian and Calvinist theologies were interpretations of Paul, primarily from Romans and Galatians. Both thought of salvation in terms of states of being: in a state of grace, in a state of justification, in a state of sanctification. Joseph Smith's earliest revelations also tended to express salvation in terms of states of being derived from Pauline thought. Doctrine & Covenants 20 was first published in the premiere issue of the *Evening and Morning Star* as a statement of the basic tenets and beliefs of the infant church under the title "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ." The Articles defined the Church's belief on grace in familiar terms:

And we know, that Justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is just and true; and we know, also, that Sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength, but there is a possibility that men may fall from grace and depart from the living God. Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; yea, and even he that is sanctified also: . . . (EMS, June 1832, 1:1, p. 1)

The slogans of justification and sanctification by grace were no doubt derived from Paul's letter to the Galatians and Romans and the pseudo-Pauline letter to the Ephesians, but that does not mean that they are used in an identical sense. In almost all instances, Paul used the term "sanctification" synonymously with justification. "Justification" in Paul's thought meant judicially to declare a person not guilty. "Sanctification" meant to regard a person as righteous. Both terms for Paul meant essentially to "right-wise" a person, a phrase coined by Pauline scholar E. P. Sanders meaning in essence to make a person acceptable to entering into a relationship with the holy and right God (1983, 470). These terms took on more technical theological distinctions in discussions of grace after Augustine. "Justification" meant to be regenerated from original sin and thus to be relieved of liability for Adam's guilt. "Sanctification" came to be equated with being so established in grace that perseverance in righteousness was insured. Sanctified persons were unable to sin. Most liberal Arminians in the nineteenth century rejected persevering or preventing grace as inconsistent with free will.

The Articles and Covenants of the Church emphasized that although persons become justified or sanctified by grace, they must persevere in works of love. The Articles reject any notion of a guarantee

of salvation through persevering grace by emphasizing that even “he that is sanctified” must “take heed” because he can “fall from grace” by rejecting God. The Articles are consistent with the Arminian emphasis on human will—but it is expressed in terms of a person’s ability to fall from grace. Grace is thus not ineluctable—it can be rejected even after it has been accepted. A notion of ongoing process “in grace” existed from the very beginning of Mormon thought.

Although the Book of Mormon rejected the doctrine of actual original sin, some early Latter-day Saints still spoke of depraved human nature. For instance, Warren Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery’s brother, supported his views of natural human sinfulness by attributing “this seed of corruption to the depravity of nature. . . . [B]ecause we were born in sin, the Gospel concludes that we ought to apply all our attentive Endeavors to eradicate the seeds of corruption” (*Evening & Morning Star* (Oct. 1832, p. 77). Nevertheless, Cowdery did not accept the Calvinistic doctrine of utter depravity, for he is encouraging persons to eradicate the seeds of sin from their nature. In fact, according to Cowdery, human nature is never totally lost, for there remains in humans “the image of God, in which we were formed, and which can never be entirely effaced. . . . And, because the image of the Creator is *partly* erased from our hearts, the gospel concludes that we ought to give ourselves wholly to the retracing of it, and so to answer the excellence of our extraction.” Warren Cowdery expressed the Arminian view that human nature was wounded, but not fatally injured.

After 1831, Pauline terminology is conspicuously absent from Mormon scripture and discourse. This sudden, resounding silence about humanity’s evil nature, justification, or sanctification by grace heralded a major shift of Mormon thought away from Protestant categories to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s new understanding and reformulated expression of grace. Discussions of “justification by grace” simply do not appear in Mormon scripture after 1831. This absence of Pauline terminology has often been taken to mean a rejection of the concept of grace and adoption of a gospel of works without grace; however, such a view is mistaken. Mormon scripture adopts a new model of grace; it does not reject all concepts of grace. The change was inconspicuously begun in a June 1831 revelation which stated: “That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 40:24). The new model shifted from a notion of grace grounded in states of being to one grounded in an ongoing *process* of growth in the light offered by God. The Mormon expression of God’s saving activity abandoned Pauline terminology and adopted the metaphor of light and darkness found in the Gospel of John. The light

metaphor more accurately expressed Mormonism's notion of God's very power and knowledge offered to humans to be freely accepted or rejected.

The seminal statement of the nature of salvation in Mormon thought is found in a February 1832 revelation known as "The Vision," now Doctrine & Covenants 76. This revelation was regarded as doctrine too strong for new converts and thus was not at first widely circulated. Nevertheless, it had tremendous impact on Joseph Smith. I think it is fair to say that the concepts expressed in The Vision caught Joseph Smith by surprise. He was astounded at the implications of this new knowledge from God. The Vision taught that persons abide to varying degrees in the light offered by God, and he saves all persons except a small class who, having full knowledge of him, openly deny him: "Wherefore, he saves all except them" (vv. 42-44). The fullest degree of salvation is reserved for

they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial . . . that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins . . . and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds on all those who are just and true. (D&C 76:51-53)

Those persons who will abide in the presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are those who share in light that is, by comparison, like the sun (vv. 62, 70). Such persons who "overcome all things" (v. 60) will share fully in divine status: "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God" (v. 58). Those who were honorable and good persons, but who did not overcome all things and were "blinded by the craftiness of men," will not receive of the fullness of glory but will have a glory analogous to the light of the moon (vv. 75-78). Those who were murderers, liars, and thieves will also be "saved" or redeemed, but they will have a lesser share of glory analogous to the light of the stars (v. 81).

This revelation became the foundation for several developments in Mormon thought. The reference to being "sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise" was later fleshed out to mean that some persons would achieve such status before God that he would "seal them up to eternal life," making it impossible for them to forfeit their exaltation to divine status by any action except putting Christ to open shame. This notion is very similar to the Augustinian *donum perseverantiae*, or guarantee of perseverance in grace, except that it is not limited to those few whom God predestinated, but is open to all persons. Whether Joseph understood this full concept at the time he received The Vision is not ascertainable from D&C 76, but the very notion of being "sealed" at

least implies a guaranteed status before God. However, the "sealed" status is contingent on "keeping the commandments" until all things have been overcome.

The Vision was also the basis for a fuller understanding of grace in terms of the light God offers to all. The Gospel of John describes the light of Christ as the basis of life: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men: And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . That was the true Light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world" (John 1:4-5, 9). The universal gift of light and life spoken of by John expresses well Joseph Smith's own conviction that God bestowed his grace on all persons equally. According to the Prophet, differences in degree of acceptance of the proffered grace are referable solely to human free will. In a December 1832 revelation (D&C 88), the power of God was equated with light as in the Gospel of John, but in ways which expand the meaning of The Vision. In Section 88, the light of Christ is not equated merely with knowledge of what is good and what is evil, or conscience, as it had been in the Book of Mormon (Moro. 7:16-18), but assumes cosmic dimensions as an expression of God's knowledge and power. This divine light figures as the literal, physical basis of order and natural law throughout the cosmos. The divine light, imparted to human beings, is the basis of life itself.

This is the light of Christ. . . . And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God. (D&C 88:7, 11-13)

The revelation goes on to explain that the glory one will enjoy in the resurrection depends upon the degree of divine light which will quicken (i.e., give life to) one's resurrected body (88:26-30). All persons will receive that degree of light which they are willing to accept. That Joseph considered the divine light to be a species of grace is apparent from his view that it is a gift bestowed on all without conditions. Nevertheless, the light is a gift of God which can be rejected, even at the time of resurrection:

And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received.

For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receiveth not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift. (D&C 88:32-33)

In the emerging scheme of grace, each person will enjoy that degree of glory and light which he or she is willing to receive. Those who reject the gracious gift of light fail to attain that “which they might have received.” There is no absolute decree which predestines persons to a certain degree of glory, no punishment for failing to accept the gift. Those who reject the gift simply will not have, as a natural consequence of “eternal law,” that degree of enjoyment they otherwise might have had, and God will be deprived of the enjoyment he would have experienced had the gift been accepted. The failure to accept the light God graciously offers constitutes a loss in comparison to what genuinely might have been—but the revelation makes clear that God is not responsible for a person’s choice not to accept the gift.

This notion of grace is very similar but not identical to the Molinist notion of concurring grace, or divine grace which is offered but whose acceptance depends upon the concurrence of human choice. For Molina, however, God specifically aided and enabled every act by grace, whether it was an act of concurrence or even an act of evil. In other words, everything occurs either because God specifically wills it to occur or because he specifically enabled it to occur with full knowledge that it would. A person could not accomplish any act without God specifically granting the power to act. Molina’s position raises the specter of the problem of evil. How could God lend his gracious assistance to murder and rape? Joseph Smith’s notion of concurring grace, on the other hand, entails personal will and very subsistence made possible by grace; however, the specific use of free will once regenerated is not within God’s control.

The Prophet understood personal existence to be contingent on God’s light: “You shall comprehend even God, being quickened [i.e., made a living soul] in him and by him. . . . I am the true light that is in you, and you are in me; otherwise, ye could not abound” (D&C 88:49–50). Whatever else “abounding in the light of God” may mean, it appears to entail at least the continued conscious existence of individuals somehow contingent on God’s grace. Joseph Smith’s further understanding of how grace will lead ultimately to godhood was inspired by 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” This notion of knowing as God knows and seeing as God sees because we shall be like him provided the starting context for the revelation of human deification.

Since the time of Augustine and perhaps earlier, conventional Christians have presumed a vast ontological chasm between God and humans. A May 1833 revelation to Joseph Smith (now D&C 93) oblit-

erated that creator/creature dichotomy by viewing Christ as the revelation of both what God is and what humanity may become. The notion of grace drawing humankind toward godhood was expressed in Johannine categories of thought and terminology. The express purpose of the revelation was “that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship” (v. 19). This revelation, as did those of the Greek fathers, begins with Jesus as the unveiling of the true nature of both God and humankind.

Attributes of Christ

“I [Christ] was in the beginning with the Father” (v. 21).

I [Christ] “am the Firstborn” (v. 21).

He [Christ] “received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness (v. 13). [Christ] received grace for grace (v. 12).

[Christ] received a fulness of the glory of the Father . . . the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him” (vv. 16-17).

“The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (v. 36).

Attributes of Humans

“Ye were also in the beginning with the Father” (v. 23).

“All those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same [i.e., the Firstborn], and are the church of the Firstborn” (v. 22).

Humans must grow in grace and in the knowledge of truth: “You shall receive grace for grace” (v. 20).

“If you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father” (v. 20).

“Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created, neither indeed can be” (v. 29).

This revelation, using the light of God as a metaphor for God’s grace shed upon all persons, unmistakably expresses the view that individuals grow in grace. Salvation is an ongoing process, a very different conception from the theology of grace initiated by Augustine, which conceived of grace in states of being. Augustine began with depraved human nature which led to either eternal damnation or eternal bliss. He was committed firmly to God’s ultimate sovereignty and to ultimate human powerlessness. Joseph Smith’s points of departure — ideas of participation in the divine nature, rebirth through the power of the Spirit, and growth in the light of God — all lead to a concept of deification. Persons would be deified by “growing in the light” offered by God, by sharing fully in the divine power and knowledge: “He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (93:28). Persons can appropriate the grace offered by God and participate fully in the divine knowledge by keeping God’s commandments. However, persons do

not become gods in their own right or merely by keeping the commandments; rather, they become gods to the extent that they participate *as one* in God's glory and his experience. Persons can possess the divine attributes through grace only as they participate in God's divine experience of all reality, for the divine attributes are necessarily shared in relation with all other entities. This theology of grace is the opposite pole from Aquinas's theology premised on divine independence and wholly unrelated simplicity. In contrast, Joseph Smith's view of grace was a theology of perfect dependence.

Though a change of metaphors had enabled Joseph Smith to express the notion of grace in dynamic rather than static terms, the new revelations retained the basic Book of Mormon notion that human agency is made possible only through redemption from the Fall. A person who rejects the spirit or light offered by God to all without condition "groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin" (D&C 84:45, 49-51). The concepts of primal innocence and automatic regeneration of the will to choose either good or evil reappear unchanged yet translated in terms of the Johannine light metaphor: "Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation" (D&C 93:31-32). And in the same section, the situation previously explained as "hypothetical original sin" is reformulated without that term: "*Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. And the wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience*" (93:38-39, emphasis added).

Discussions of grace thus no longer required any reference to "original guilt" or evil nature inherited from the Fall. The Mormon concept of grace was freed from the Augustinian matrix which previously had seemed a necessary assumption to understand the necessity of grace. Nor was this a warmed-over Arminian concept of grace. The notion of salvation as an ongoing and eternal process which involved participation in God's own divine attributes through grace required an entirely new metaphysical paradigm. The One gave way to the many, Being surrendered to becoming, the timeless became temporal, and the abstract ideal was transformed into concrete, material beings. Deification of humans was accomplished, in Mormon thought, by perfect participation in all things: "And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light . . . and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67). Apotheosis is accomplished by grace: Godhood is humanity fully mature in the grace of God.

The notion of grace grounded in Johannine terminology has often been compared to nineteenth-century perfectionism, the view first enunciated by Pelagius that persons are capable of freely refraining from all sin. Most Latter-day Saint commentators on this view have mistakenly asserted that many nineteenth-century Protestants believed that persons could “become like God.” (See Alexander 1980, 26; Vogel 1988, 167). However, freely refraining from sinning and becoming like God are not the same. Little children do not sin, but they are also not divine. In fact, the Mormon view that persons could eventually participate fully in the divine glory, power, and knowledge went well beyond nineteenth-century perfectionism.

The Mormon Theology of Grace, 1835-44

The expression of saving grace in the new terms of growth over a period of time raised new questions. Mormon scripture maintained from the beginning that accepting Christ entailed both baptism and sacramental participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. Moreover, the dynamic notion of grace seemed to presuppose that persons must be old enough to make choices among alternatives and possess knowledge of good and evil. How then could infants, who had no opportunity to grow from grace to grace, be saved? Merely exalting them as innocents would not be possible from the Mormon point of view because the purpose of mortality is to undergo testing in situations of genuine choice between both good and evil. This is a necessary condition to grow from grace to grace. This question was poignant for Joseph Smith personally because his oldest brother, Alvin, had died before the ordinance of baptism could be administered to him. Joseph received the answer to this quandary in a January 1836 revelation:

Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom. (D&C 137:7-8)

This revelation adopted the notion of “middle knowledge” championed by Luis de Molina. God’s knowledge in this case is not based merely on what he foresees will happen, because the persons referred to in the revelation will not in fact accept the gospel in this life. His knowledge is of hypothetical reality. In other words, God must know what persons would have done if reality had been different. For example, God knew what Alvin Smith would have done if he had not

died before the Church was established in 1830. That is, God knew that something else would have been true than actually was true. It follows that God must know what persons will do in all possible situations, not merely in those situations that actually occur. Moreover, this revelation implied that actually experiencing mortality is not necessary for salvation, for God can save persons knowing what they would have done had they survived to adulthood and had the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel. Whatever the merits of this response in terms of personal comfort to Joseph Smith, the notion of middle knowledge on which it is premised faces grave difficulties. (See Adams 1977; Hasker 1986).

The notion of middle knowledge in fact turned out to be inadequate even in the Mormon scheme of things. Joseph Smith later introduced vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead as a means of resolving this same problem (D&C 128). Thus, God need not know what persons “would have received if they had been permitted to tarry,” nor have special foreknowledge of their faith. He need only observe whether they *in fact* do accept the gospel in the afterlife when presented with the opportunity provided by vicarious baptism for the dead.

After 1835, Mormon thought turned from the role of grace in salvation and exaltation to the way persons appropriate grace. Subsequent revelations emphasized that salvation is appropriated through gaining a fullness of human experience and knowledge—what the second-century Christians, both orthodox and heterodox, would have denominated *gnosis* or saving knowledge. “Intelligence,” designated as the glory of God, appears synonymously with Spirit, Light, experiential knowledge of all things, and divine power manifested as natural law in all places of the physical universe. The highest human goal continued to be full participation in God’s glory or intelligence. The road to salvation necessarily required gaining knowledge of all truth from whatsoever source it could be derived (D&C 88:78–79; 93:53). Mormonism thus emphasized both sacred and secular knowledge as a means of divinization: “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come” (D&C 130:18–19). Joseph Smith could thus consistently maintain that a person can be saved no faster than he gains knowledge.

Joseph Smith also taught that saving knowledge could be gained through sacramental participation in God’s experience. In August 1839, Joseph Smith stated: “Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances” (in Ehat and Cook 1980, 12). Ordinances were a

means of making God's grace or divine power manifest in human lives (D&C 84:20-21). The purpose of ordinances for Joseph Smith was to gain saving knowledge by vicariously experiencing Christ's experiences: "Reading the experiences of others, or the revelations given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things, can only be obtained by experience in these things, through the ordinance of God set forth for that purpose" (in Ehat and Cook 1980, 253).

Joseph Smith's concept of the efficacious power of ordinances implied a notion of grace similar to the Catholic position. Probably the most familiar description of the necessity of ordinances comes from Thomas Aquinas, who borrowed Augustine's idea of Christ-instituted sacraments as outward signs causing inward grace. The ordinances were not merely outward performances for Aquinas because they caused what they signified. What they cause is grace, and Aquinas held that the grace of ordinances is *effective* only if the sacrament is properly performed (*ex opere operato*) and if the recipient accepts the grace by performing the ordinance (*ex opere operantis*) (*Summa Theologica* 3, 62, 1 and 4). Joseph Smith never worked out a systematic theology of ordinances (or anything else for that matter), but his notion seems to be that ordinances are a means of participating in the divinizing experience of Jesus Christ. For example, one could vicariously experience Christ's death and resurrection through baptism, being born a new person as grace effectuated through the ordinance. The purpose of the endowment ordinances seems to have been similar, namely, a vicarious experience of successfully negotiating mortality: accepting the gospel, growing from grace to grace in an ascent to the highest glory as one obtains the saving knowledge given by God, and finally entering into the presence of the gods.

Joseph Smith focused on one ordinance in particular that would seal a person up to eternal life in a manner similar to persevering grace in Protestant thought. The ordinance in question was often referred to as the "second anointing" and accompanied the reception of the second comforter, or "other comforter" spoken of in the gospel of John (see Buerger 1983). "This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom" (D&C 88:4). Joseph Smith expressly compared this sealing ordinance and persevering grace in a March 1844 discourse in Nauvoo, Illinois:

Now we come to talk about election . . . the prespetary [i.e., the Presbyterians] say once in grace always in grace, the Methodist says once in grace can fall from grace and be renewed again. There is truth in both of these statements. Paul says in the 6th chapter of Hebrews that after arriving at a certain knowledge and then fall away it is impossible to renew them again, well Paul the presprataria

(i.e., Presbyterian) says once in grace always in grace[.] I say it is not so[.] The Methodist says once in grace can fall from grace and be renewed again I Paul say it is impossible seeing that they crucify to themselves the son of God afresh and put him to open shame.

Make your calling and election sure go from grace to grace until you obtain a promise from God for yourselves that you shall have eternal life. This is eternal life to know God and his son Jesus Christ, it is to be sealed unto eternal life and obtain a promise of posterity. (James Burgess Notebook, 10 March 1844, in Ehat and Cook 1980, 333–34)

Joseph Smith thus acknowledged that the sealing ordinance and promise of eternal life was in some respects similar to the Presbyterian doctrine of persevering grace, rejected by the Methodists in his day. It differed from the Presbyterian view, however, in that a person may fall from this election to eternal life by openly shaming the Son of God—in effect, becoming a son of perdition as outlined in *The Vision* (D&C 76:35). However, the Methodists were also wrong because once a person had rejected Christ in this manner, there is no possibility of repenting and again entering into a state of persevering grace. For all others, however, the ordinance was a guarantee of eternal life regardless of whatever minor sins they might commit. It should be noted that this calling and election to eternal life was granted only

after a person hath faith in Christ, repents of his sins and is Baptized for the remission of his sins and received the Holy Ghost (by laying on of hands) which is the first Comforter then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and living by every word of God and the Lord will soon say unto him Son thou shalt be exalted and when the Lord has thoroughly proved him and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazard then the man will find his calling and election made sure then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter. (Willard Richards Pocket Companion, 27 June 1839, in Ehat and Cook 1980, 5).

The election to eternal life was thus not the result of God's absolute decree as Calvinists maintained, nor was it based upon the foreseen faith of a saint as the Arminians maintained; rather, God promises election will follow actual acceptance of God and proven character.

This emphasis on human endeavor should not be taken as a rejection, even during the Nauvoo period of Mormon theology, of all notions of grace prior to final election. In March of 1841, Joseph Smith reaffirmed the view of grace held since the beginning of Mormonism:

Joseph said in answer to [Hosea] Stout that Adam did not commit sin in eating the fruits for God had decreed that he should eat and fall—but in compliance with the Decree he should die—only he should die was the saying of the Lord therefore the Lord appointed us to fall and also redeemed us—for where sin abounded grace did much more abound—for Paul say[s] Rom—5.10 for if—when were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much

more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (McIntire Minute Book, 2 March 1841, in Ehat and Cook 1980, 63).

Though the meaning of this passage is not as clear as it could be, it appears to confirm the view that Adam's fall did not result from a sin but from compliance with God's decree. However, God provided a way to redeem all persons automatically from the effects of the Fall. Joseph Smith interpreted Paul as saying that grace reconciles persons to God. The Prophet seems to have adopted fully the Book of Mormon view that prior to all assessments of culpability and moral decisions, Christ's atonement intervened to redeem all persons from their evil nature which otherwise would make them enemies to God.

The thesis that the Mormon view of original sin is one of hypothetical sin that persons would suffer from but for the atonement was reaffirmed by Joseph Smith during the Nauvoo era as well. M. L. Davis, in a letter to his wife, recorded his understanding of a speech delivered by Joseph Smith on 5 February 1840. Joseph dwelt on the details of original sin at some length, "the result of which tended to show his complete disbelief of what is termed *original sin*." With unusual clarity, the letter stated that Joseph Smith believed original sin

is washed away by the blood of Christ, and that it no longer exists. As a necessary consequence, he believes that we are all born pure and undefiled. That *all* children dying at an early age (say *eight* years) not knowing good from evil, were incapable of sinning; and that all such go to heaven. "I believe," he said, "that man is a moral, responsible, free agent; that although it was foreordained he should fall, and be redeemed, yet after the redemption it was not foreordained that he should sin again. (in Ehat and Cook 1980, 13)

It is thus not merely that children do not suffer from original sin because of Christ's atonement which "washes away" the effects of original sin prior to any choice—indeed prior even to birth—but children are *incapable* of sinning until they appreciate the distinction between good and evil and can act as moral agents. It is not that little children are immunized from actual sin by the atonement until age eight and then God decides to remove the immunity; rather, children are responsible for actual sins only to the extent they appreciate the goodness or evilness of their individual acts. Joseph Smith uniformly treated sin only as specific acts committed by persons, never as a state of being "in" which a person exists prior to regeneration. That is, persons, as morally responsible agents, can be guilty or blameworthy only for the actual sins which they commit and not for any vitiated or evil nature. However, persons are free from original sin not for any act of theirs, but only as a result of Christ's atonement. Of equal importance, once all are delivered from original sin and its effects and become automatically redeemed to free will through the atonement, God did not ordain

that persons should commit actual sins. Adam's "fall" was foreordained because it was a part of God's plan. It accomplished a divine purpose and was good in the sense that it made further growth and experience necessary for apotheosis possible. However, actual sins are not a part of God's plan and are not ultimately for a greater good.

In July of 1843, Joseph Smith explained that God created man "innocent and harmless and spotless bearing the same character and same image as the Gods." However, the Fall impacted the "character of God" which humans originally possessed — that is, humans lost their immortality and participation in God's divine status. As Joseph Smith went on to explain, "When man fell he did not lose [God's] image but his character still retaining the image of his maker." In the resurrection and through the atonement of Christ, however, "we shall again be conformed to the image of his Son Jesus Christ, then we shall have attained to the image, glory and character of God" (in Ehat and Cook 1980, 231). Joseph Smith seems to have retained the Arminian notion that human moral nature was not totally vitiated by the fall, but persons retained the "image" of God. Joseph Smith went beyond Arminianism in his doctrine that persons will again participate in the "character of God."

A FEW CONCLUSIONS

In his brief but excellent overview of *A History of Christian Theology*, William Placher observed that a conflict between grace and works never really developed in Eastern Christian theology, partially because it was unaffected by Augustine's doctrinal revamping and partly because of the Eastern notion of salvation as a process ending in divinization:

Augustine's claim that we are saved by the grace of God alone, without regard to our works . . . would have seemed too extreme to most Eastern theologians. It is not that the two halves of Christianity disagreed on specific issues so much as that they thought about these matters in different ways. Western theologians thought in terms of states. With Adam's initial sin, humanity had fallen into a state of sin. Christ redeems us, bringing us to a state of grace. The emphasis falls on the moment of conversion, in which one moves from one state to another. Eastern theology, on the other hand, tended to think in terms of processes. We gradually move toward deification. Since Western theologians thought of salvation as occurring at the moment of conversion, they could say that human works had no part in it and still leave an important place for human efforts after conversion in response to God's grace. Eastern theologians . . . thought of deification as a process that continues throughout one's life. Therefore they had to build human works into that process. (1983, 96-97)

Mormonism shifted from thinking of salvation in states to a theology of gradual eternal progress to divinization. Mormonism thus evolved

from a theology reacting to the Western debate over grace and works to a theology more like early Eastern Christianity, seeing no conflict between grace and works. The language of Mormon scripture shifted from terminology derived from Paul (but interpreted through the optic of the Calvinist/Arminian debate) to the participationist theology of the gospel and epistles attributed to the apostle John. The notion is that persons "participate" in God's glory by accepting his grace. Assertions that Latter-day Saints accept or deny grace in human salvation must therefore be qualified.

Some familiarity with the basic notions of grace in Christian thought is necessary to a discussion of the subject in Mormon thought. Mormon scripture does in fact express a coherent theology of grace that, notwithstanding the shift from Pauline terminology to Johannine participationist theology, remained more or less constant even through the Nauvoo period. Mormon scriptures acknowledge a notion of grace that restores persons to the power of acting for themselves and of choosing good or evil prior to any human action. In some respects, this notion of grace is similar to prevenient grace; however, it differs significantly in that it does not involve God's moving the human will to faith. Actual manifestations of faith are left up to individual agency. However, grace is a necessary, even if not a sufficient, condition to the exercise of morally significant choices.

The Mormon scriptures also express a notion that grace assists the human will in making proper decisions. Accepting the divine light—or divine power and knowledge—empowers the human will in a way that involves grace as both concurring and sufficient. This notion of grace is, therefore, properly termed "synergism." The fundamental problem resolved by grace in Mormon soteriology (theory of salvation) is not regeneration from a sinful status prior to free choices, but alienation from God's presence. The goal is to return to God's presence and complete happiness by participating in the divine life (Alma 42). Some have argued that Mormonism retained a notion of original sin (Allred 1983, 12-18; White 1987, 70-74, 90-104). However, Mormon scriptures uniformly reject at least the notion of "actual original sin" taught by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. As I have endeavored to show, the point of Mormon scripture is that persons suffer from "evil nature" only as a result of free choices. Any notion of original sin is merely hypothetical. Moreover, the affirmation of Mormon scripture that Adam did not sin but merely transgressed obviates any notion of actual original sin in Mormon thought. Because Mormonism rejected the view that persons are naturally and inherently evil, human will may be aided or assisted in salvation without God ultimately having to make all of the decisions regarding salva-

tion. I consider this aspect of the Mormon view of grace to be a source of major theological strength.

Mormon scriptures also recognize a notion of sacramental grace. This aspect of Mormon thought awaits a careful theological treatment, but the possibilities for a rich theology of grace manifested in the ordinances of the priesthood are tantalizing. In particular, the sealing ordinances manifest a form of grace similar to preventing or persevering grace, yet the human will remains free to reject the light offered by God's unconditional grace. In effect, this form of grace is an agreement that God will overlook any sin except openly shaming the Son. This decision to overlook sins is not arbitrary, however, because it is founded on a character established in doing God's will.

Nevertheless, Mormon scriptures clearly repudiate the notions of grace promulgated by Calvinists—salvation by grace alone or judgment based on Christ's works rather than one's own. In particular, Mormonism rejects every form of irresistible, efficient, and operative grace, reprobation, arbitrary election, and predestination. One would have to overlook the major thrust of Mormon scriptures to drag these notions back into Latter-day Saint theology.

The participationist theology adopted primarily in Doctrine and Covenants 84, 88, and 93 provides a rich theology of grace consistent with Mormon affirmations of free will, growing from grace to grace, and divinization. The theology of grace grounded in states of being is not well suited to the possibility of human divinization. The Johannine terminology allowed Joseph Smith to express the notions of human participation in God's knowledge of all reality (D&C 88:49–50; 93:28), in God's power over all things (D&C 132:20), and in the fulness of God's glory (D&C 93:20). This shift allowed Joseph Smith to adequately express Mormonism within the line of thought represented by Irenaeus and the Greek fathers prior to Augustine. However, it must be emphasized that humans become like God—and therefore gods—by participation in *God's* glory and not by virtue of their own glory or ontological status. The Mormon scriptures teach that persons are contingent on God for their status as gods. Persons can participate fully in God's status as gods only through God's grace—not in their own right.

Mormonism restores original Christianity in the sense that it returns to a soteriology of divinization through gradual growth from innocence to fully mature humanity, from grace to grace. It returns to a theology of redemption accepted before the notion of original sin, which arose only with the Ambrosiaster mistranslation of the Greek Bible (see Pagels 1989, 109–11; Kelly 1978, 354). Mormonism avoids the entire conflict over grace and works because it sees the distinction between them as a false dichotomy. Mormonism does not need to

explain how persons can be saved by no act of their own for a sin that was not their own act. It avoids the convoluted debate over how God can justly choose not to save some while choosing others. Further, rather than adopting an arbitrary cut-off between the elect who are saved and the reprobates who are damned, Mormonism adopts a notion of grace accepted in varying degrees.

The metaphor of grace as the light offered by God can be re-translated back into Paul's thought without much straining—so long as Paul's thought is not overlaid with Augustine and Luther. For both Joseph Smith and Paul, God offered a loving relationship to *all* persons without any conditions attached. One enters that relationship by having faith in Christ *through grace*. The relationship is offered through grace because we do not have to—indeed cannot—earn it. None can earn a relationship if that relationship is genuinely offered in unconditional love. Faith, in Paul's thought, has strong overtones of interpersonal relationships. Being faithful to the relationship meant not injuring it through conduct inconsistent with being in the relationship: the terms of the relationship are love. However, both Paul and Joseph Smith taught, I believe, that humans manifest love toward God by keeping his commandments. Both believed loving others is an integral part of loving God. Both also taught that the loving relationship can be severed—persons can fall from their status of being in grace—by failing to observe the law of love. I am not sure that Paul thought of salvation in terms of varying degrees of light—though he does make such distinctions regarding the resurrected but “spiritual” body. Both also thought of persons as sharing in God's experience as a means of salvation. There are, of course, differences between Paul's and Joseph Smith's thought. For example, Joseph Smith did not battle against Judaizers who sought to reinstate the Law of Moses as a condition of salvation. However, both hoped to universalize the scope of Christ's grace, not limit it to Jews or a predestined few. Both regarded God's love as too expansive to be limited to just one small group.

I personally believe that understanding God's grace as an offer to enter into a covenant relationship with him, of an interpersonal union sought by God in unconditional love, is the most profound doctrine of Mormon scripture. God seeks us as a lover seeks the beloved. “In” his grace we find loving union and fulfillment until we are made over in our Heavenly Parent's image. The doctrine of grace, properly understood, is the doctrine that God is love and we are his beloved. It is the doctrine that God became a man so that he could offer himself to us. It is the realization that by accepting his free offer, we become what he is by being transformed to his image and likeness.

The implications and possibilities of Joseph Smith's participationist thought have not even begun to be plumbed by Mormon theologians—that breed so rare that few seem to exist any longer. Nevertheless, the charge that Latter-day Saints have rejected all notions of grace is not quite accurate. It is only that they are all too willing to ignore the notions of grace growing out of their peculiar theology. Some Mormons, though willing to adopt a theology of grace, have traded these distinctively Mormon concepts of grace for the Protestant counterparts—trading a birthright for a mess of pottage in my view. It is time to accept our true inheritance and seek the riches found therein.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Robert. "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 109-17.
- Alexander, Thomas. "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology." In *Line Upon Line*, edited by Gary J. Bergera, 53-66. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988.
- Allred, Janice. "Toward a Mormon Concept of Original Sin." *Sunstone* 8 (May-June 1983): 12-18.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. In *Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas*, edited and translated by Anton C. Pegis. New York: Random House, 1965.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Translated by R. H. Fuller. New York: MacMillan Publ., 1961.
- Buerger, David John. "'The Fullness of the Priesthood': The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice." *DIALOGUE* 16 (Spring 1983): 10-44.
- Ehat, Andrew F., and Lyndon Cook. *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980.
- Hasker, William. "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge." *Nous* 20 (1986): 545-57.
- Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. Rev. ed. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1928.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Theodicy*. In *Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, edited by E. M. Huggard. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966.
- Ostler, Blake T. "The Concept of Grace in Christian Thought." *DIALOGUE* 23 (Winter 1990): 13-44.
- Pagels, Elaine. *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Placher, William. *A History of Christian Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983.
- Sanders, Edward P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
- White, Kendall, Jr. *Mormon Neo-orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987.