

dox Mormon optimism is readily apparent, especially in neoorthodoxy's pessimistic interpretation of the Fall and subsequent predicament of man — a position much closer to traditional Christianity than to traditional Mormonism.

In contrast with the typical Protestant notion that the Fall resulted in a condition of human depravity and the Catholic conception that it led to the withdrawal of supernatural grace, the orthodox Mormon view asserts that the Fall was a necessary condition for man to realize his ultimate potential. His premortal existence as a spirit did not provide him with a physical body, which in Mormon thought is necessary for man to "experience a fulness of joy." A most important consequence of the Fall was the acquisition of physical bodies. Moreover, it was necessary to leave the immediate presence of God, to "enter the school of mortal experience," in order for man to overcome evil and develop the requisite moral character to become like God.

Obviously this interpretation of the Fall, with the consequences primarily positive, implies that the Fall is no fall. It is one of the most fortunate events in human history, a necessary condition for salvation. Without the Fall, man could not realize his ultimate potential. The Mormon reinterpretation is nicely expressed in Sterling Sill's claim that "Adam fell, but he fell in the right direction";²³ and in the oft-quoted Book of Mormon passage asserting that "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy."

Mormon affirmation of the goodness of human nature naturally follows from its positive conception of the Fall. Brigham Young challenged the notion that the natural man is an enemy to God:

It is fully proved in all the revelation that God has ever given to mankind that they naturally love and admire righteousness, justice, and truth more than they do evil. It is, however, universally received by professors of religion as scriptural doctrine that man is naturally opposed to God. This is not so. Paul says in his epistle to the Corinthians, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of God," but I say it is the unnatural "man that receiveth not the things of God."²⁴

Mormon neoorthodoxy, in contrast, takes a much more dismal view of the Fall. Though holding that it was necessary for the exaltation of man, their interpretation is negative. Instead of traditional Mormon emphasis on positive scriptural verses describing the human condition, the neoorthodoxy emphasizes such passages as "the natural man is an enemy to God and has been since the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord" (Mosiah 3:19).

Scriptural passages asserting that the natural man is an enemy to God receive the most attention in neoorthodox literature, and the frequent use

²³*Deseret News* (Church Section) (Salt Lake City), July 31, 1965, p. 7.

²⁴*Journal of Discourses*, 9: 305.

traditional Christian terminology such as “carnal man,” “sensual man,” “devilish man,” and “original guilt,” “evils of the flesh,” and “seeds of corruption” abundantly attest to Mormon neoorthodoxy’s pessimism. This language is employed to support a negative conception of the Fall and to describe man’s inherent propensity to evil, his natural opposition to God. While discussing Karl Marx, Pearson observes that “anyone who rejects Christ is already condemned since that which makes him reject Christ is the inherent wickedness already in him.”²⁵ And Yarn believes man to be possessed of a “rebellious, perverse, recalcitrant, and proud disposition.”²⁶ Though very familiar to orthodox Christians, this language used to describe a pessimistic doctrine of man is generally foreign to traditional Mormons.

While speaking of the corruption of human nature and describing man as “carnal,” “sensual,” and “devilish,” Yarn warns his readers not to confuse this with the “apostate doctrine of depravity.” He is not suggesting that man is born evil. The infant is born innocent; but, as he becomes accountable, through free decisions, and he

refuses to make his will submissive to God by accepting him and making covenants with him, he is carnal, sensual, and devilish.

An examination of the matter suggests, however, that the words “carnal,” “sensual,” and “devilish,” must not be limited to their more narrow and specific connotations, but that they are accurately, though more broadly, interpreted by the scriptural phrase “enemy to God.” That is, not all men who have not made the covenants with the Christ are given to indulging in practices which are appropriately designated carnal, sensual, and devilish. Yet, all men, regardless of how moral and pure they may be with reference to those practices called carnal, sensual, and devilish, are enemies to God until they yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, accept the atonement of the Lord, and are submissive to his will.²⁷

The Mormon neoorthodox conception of the human predicament is not quite the same as the classical Christian conception of original sin. Mormon neoorthodox theologians still work within the context of Mormon metaphysics. They do not deny Mormon doctrines proclaiming the innocence of infants. They perceive the Fall as having at least some positive consequences. Yet, all disclaimers to the contrary, they perhaps approach the traditional Christian conception of man as closely as possible without abandoning central Mormon beliefs. Though generally retaining a conception of actual sin — a position not necessarily irreconcilable with the doctrine of original sin as indicated by Protestant neoorthodoxy — some Mormon neoorthodox theologians define sin in terms barely distinguishable from the Reformation doctrine of original sin. Not unlike John Calvin, Andrus, in a rather explicit instance, argues that the seeds of corruption are hereditarily “transmitted to each embryo at conception.” He writes,

²⁵“Socialism and the United Order or Law of Consecration,” unpublished paper with criticisms by Van L. Perkins and a reply by the author (n.d.), p. 2 of the reply.

²⁶Yarn, *The Gospel*, pp. 129–30.

²⁷Yarn, *The Gospel*, pp. 55–56.

. . . The effects of Adam's transgression and of man's subsequent transgressions are transmitted in the flesh and are thus inherent therein at conception. It is said in a revelation that no less a personage than God explained this fact to Adam. After observing that the atonement took care of the legalities of the "original guilt," God said: "Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good." Observe that it is when children begin to grow up that sin conceives in their hearts; and this because they are initially conceived in sin. Not that the act of conception, properly regulated, is sin, but the conditions of corruption resulting from the Fall are inherent in the embryo at conception. For a time the power of the atonement holds them in abeyance; but, as children grow up and begin to act upon their own initiative, sin conceives in their hearts. . . .

From this statement it is plain that men are not merely born into a world of sin. Instead, the effects of the Fall and the corruption that has subsequently become associated with the flesh are transmitted to each new embryo at conception. As the physical body develops, these elements of corruption manifest themselves by diverting the individual's drives and emotional expressions toward vanity, greed, lust, etc. These elements of corruption are in the flesh.²⁸

In addition to the above evidences of pessimism, the Mormon neoorthodox fear of reason and education also indicates a basic lack of faith in man. The notion that reason and sensory experience are unreliable is aggressively argued by neoorthodox theologians. They hold that the only way to acquire ultimate knowledge is through revelation.²⁹

Traditional interpretations of Mormon Scriptures used to encourage academic study are abandoned for more restrictive and novel exegesis. Andrus, for instance, reinterprets the passage asserting that the "glory of God is intelligence," a scripture employed through Mormon history to encourage the unlimited pursuit of knowledge, to mean that the "brilliant element" encircling God is "intelligence."³⁰ And Yarn reinterprets the same passage by suggesting that intelligence means character, not knowledge or learning.³¹

The scripture asserting that "it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" frequently employed to encourage intellectual pursuits and academic excellence is reinterpreted to involve only a testimony of Christ's divinity. Thus Yarn writes,

These words, as others previously discussed, have been used extensively to encourage people to seek excellence in the traditional academic disciplines with the express intent that these were the

²⁸"Joseph Smith's Idea of the Gospel," *Seminar on the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Adult Education and Extension Services, 1961), p. 66.

²⁹Both Hugh Nibley and Chauncey Riddle, who lean toward neoorthodoxy, argue this position. See Nibley's *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954) and Riddle's "The Conservative View in Mormonism," discussion with Lowell Bennion at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (n.d.).

³⁰*Liberalism, Conservatism, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965), pp. 81-82.

³¹Yarn, *The Gospel*, pp. 201-2.

things of which man could not be ignorant and be saved. And yet the context of this revelation, which is almost enthusiastically ignored, has little if any relation to the traditional academic disciplines, but does speak of one of the most sublime things available to mortals.

The knowledge of which man cannot be ignorant and be saved is knowledge of the truth, that is, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, and the principles which he has revealed.³²

Not only do the above depart from the spirit of traditional Mormon faith in education but, along with the emphasis on man's contingency, the denial of the basic goodness of human nature, and the acceptance of a peculiarly Mormon doctrine of original sin, they constitute striking evidence of Mormon neoorthodoxy's rejection of traditional Mormon optimism. Furthermore, they imply a conception of man like that of Protestant neoorthodoxy.

While the Mormon neoorthodox doctrine of salvation may be more similar to traditional Mormonism than either its conceptions of man or God, it does depart significantly on occasions, in tone if not substance, from an orthodox Mormon position. Though basic Mormon beliefs in the after-life remain intact, a more restrictive pathway to salvation is defined and a greater reliance upon God is demanded. Indeed, it is these trends that constitute Mormon neoorthodoxy's departure from orthodoxy on the question of salvation. A shift from traditional Mormonism's fundamentally man-centered doctrine of salvation to a more Protestant God-centered conception is apparent in Mormon neoorthodoxy's doctrine of grace.

I am not suggesting that traditional Mormonism has no conception of grace, but rather that the role of grace differs radically from that of classical Christianity. Not unlike Christian orthodoxy, Mormons hold that mortality is one consequence of the fall of Adam which is overcome through the atonement of Christ. Furthermore, as a result of the Fall, Mormon theology asserts that man experienced "spiritual death." In other words, he is separated from the presence of God. Yet, unlike traditional Christianity, this spiritual death does not alter human nature. In fact, it is conceived as a necessary condition for man's moral and spiritual development. For it is through man's own meritorious efforts, outside of God's presence, along with the atonement of Christ that he may be saved — that he may overcome spiritual death and return to the presence of God. Thus, it is essential to an understanding of Mormonism to recognize that the fall of Adam is an expression of the grace of God in as real a sense of the atonement of Christ. Both are necessary for the salvation of man.

Even so, traditional Mormonism does not emphasize the grace of God and indeed repudiates extreme conceptions of it while opting for a doctrine of individual salvation by merit. In contrast with orthodox divines who quote Paul's "by grace are ye saved," Mormon spokesmen quote James's "Faith without works is dead." There is a striking absence of Pauline theology in Mor-

³²Yarn, *The Gospel*, pp. 203-4.