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POLES APART? A LOOK AT MORMON DOCTRINE IN LIGHT OF HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY

Johnnie Glad

Introduction

In the past various church denominations have arrived at the conclusion that they were standing far apart in regard to matters of doctrine. From the outside differences seemed to appear so great that similarities were difficult to find. The distance from one denomination to another seemed extremely long and insurmountable. However, by a closer analysis and dialog one discovered that the areas of disagreement and differences of opinion often were due to problems of definition. In this respect it is sufficient to refer to the many dialogues and discussions that have been held in recent years between representatives from various church denominations. Experiences derived from such encounters indicate that dialogues and talks reveal that the distance between the ones involved was perhaps not as great as first expected. Actually, there was a lot one had in common. Much of that which appeared to be different was mostly on the “outside.”

On the other hand, there are situations that point to quite the contrary. Doctrinal statements of different churches seem to be of a concurrent nature. Theological expressions and the manner in which they are formulated seem familiar. Some of these formulations and expressions are familiar from childhood and adolescence. When a person later in life is confronted with similar expressions, associations are immediately made with what one previously have been introduced to. At the same time it is taken for granted that one’s counterpart gets the same associations and thoughts. However, what one thought to have had in common now turned out to be quite the opposite. The messenger and the receiver stood far apart from one another. What from the outside seemed to be a similarity now turned out to be a deep-rooted difference. A typical example in this respect is *The Articles of Faith* of Joseph Smith:

We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression.

We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.

We believe that that the first principals and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, viz., apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.

We believe in the gifts of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc.

We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this (the American) continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honouring, and sustaining the law.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul, We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.¹

After having read the Articles of Faith the reader may conclude that these articles constitute a platform upon which various Christian denominations may meet and discuss viewpoints they might have in common. In spite of particular points that cannot be accepted there are nevertheless statements that seem familiar and that do not appear to deviate from the Christian faith. As an example one may refer to the first article: "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." A Protestant or Catholic will no doubt feel at home here, because the article referred to can be considered a brief résumé of the Apostles' Creed to which most Christian Churches adhere. A Lutheran will in addition discover the three articles of faith from Luther's Small Catechism - true enough in a condensed and abbreviated form. On this basis some might arrive at the conclusion that we were standing on common ground. However, to draw such a conclusion would be all too hasty and incorrect. Before any final assessment is made it is necessary to go beyond the statements in order to discover what lies behind and what they represent. What do the statements actually say? It is first after having arrived at this point one is able to detect whether or not we are standing on common ground with a common consent. What makes the whole situation so difficult is that these thirteen Articles of Faith give no hint or distinctive information on important Mormon beliefs such as the plurality of Gods, pre-existence, baptism for the dead, the endowment ceremony and eternal marriage. This was most likely done in order to minimize the differences between the Mormons and the other existing Christian denominations in an

¹ Joseph Smith, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952).

effort to make Mormonism more palatable in their missionary endeavour to non-Mormons.

The Concept of God

We believe in God, the Eternal Father. (Art. 1). The Christian concept of God is monotheistic. There is one God. He is eternal and unchangeable. He is transcendent. God differs from man whom he created. God is also a spirit (John 4: 24). This means that God does not consist of this world's substance. The Bible does not prescribe sexuality to God. He is the Creator who created everything. He is from eternity.

According to Mormon theology God cannot have created the world out of nothing since matter has existed from eternity. Matter and intelligence are from eternity. Consequently, God has only rearranged or organized matter. The Mormon concept of God is materialistic. God has a body of flesh and bones. This body is just as sensitive as any human body:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's.²

We affirm that to deny the materiality of God's person is to deny God; for a thing without parts has no whole, and an immaterial body cannot exist. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims against the incomprehensible God, devoid of "body, parts or passions," as a thing impossible of existence, and asserts its belief in and allegiance to the true and living God of scripture and revelation.³

In Mormon teaching the concept of God is indeed anthropomorphic. Brigham Young taught that God the Father was once a man on another planet. He passed the ordeals man now is passing through. He received an experience and suffered and enjoyed. He knew all that man knows regarding toils and sufferings, life and death of this mortality. According to Brigham Young it was impossible to believe that God was destitute of body, parts, passions or attributes. Attributes could only be

² *Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952) 130:22 (hereafter *D&C*).

³ James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah, Deseret Book, 1966), p. 48.

made manifest through an organized personage. All attributes were expressed in and were the results of organized existence.⁴ Bruce R. McConkie emphasized the very same:

Joseph Smith said: 'God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens'. I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. "God the Father is a Holy Man, an exalted, perfected, and glorified Person."⁵

The development of God from that of being a man is an important concept in Mormon doctrine. Mormon Apostle James E. Talmage emphasized this in the following manner:

We believe in a God who is Himself progressive, whose majesty is intelligence; whose perfection consists in eternal advancement - a Being who has attained His exalted state by a path which now His children are permitted to follow, whose glory it is their heritage to share. In spite of the opposition of the sects, in the face of direct charges of blasphemy, the Church proclaims the eternal truth: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be".⁶

Brigham Young expressed the same train of thought when he pointed out that God had passed the ordeals that man was now passing through. God had received an experience, had suffered and enjoyed, and knew all that man knew regarding the toils, sufferings, life and death of this mortality, for he had passed through all of it, and had received his crown and exaltation and held the keys and the power of this Kingdom.⁷

⁴ *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), p. 29.

⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1979), p. 467.

⁶ James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah, Deseret Book, 1966) p. 430.

⁷ *Teachings of Presidents*, p. 30.

Joseph Smith made it perfectly clear that men would become gods if they complied with the revelations he had received.⁸

Throughout the history of the Mormon Church there has been quite some controversy in regard to the nature of God. Brigham Young, the second President of the church, taught that Adam was the God who made the world. He was the father of the human family as well as the father of Jesus:

When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, He came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is Michael, the archangel, the ancient of Days! about whom holy men have written and spoken – He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.” “Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in heaven.⁹

This doctrine caused problems for many not only in America, but also among members of the Mormon Church in England. Although the Mormon Church has officially rejected this doctrine there can be no doubt that Brigham Young was the source of this teaching. The documentation is too solid to deny the facts. It was not only in America and England, but also in Norway as well as in other countries that people reacted to this strange doctrine that differed so drastically from common Christian beliefs. Orson Pratt once pointed out:

As God the Father begat the fleshly body of Jesus, so He, before the world began, begat his spirit. As the body required an earthly Mother, so his spirit required a heavenly Mother. As God associated in the capacity of a husband with the earthly mother, so likewise He associated in the same capacity with the heavenly one.¹⁰

Orson Pratt continued:

⁸ H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations. Text & Commentary* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1999), p. 325.

⁹ *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 50–51.

¹⁰ Orson Pratt, *The Seer (1853–1854)* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Eborn Books, 1990), pp. 158–159.

We have now clearly shown that God the Father had a plurality of wives, one or more being in eternity, by whom He begat our spirits as well as the spirit of Jesus His First Born, and another being upon the earth by whom He begat the tabernacle of Jesus, as His Only Begotten in this world.¹¹

The “Mother in heaven” is God’s wife. This means that God in heaven first begat the spirit of Jesus and then in this world begat him again in the flesh. According to Pratt:

The fleshly body of Jesus required a Mother as well as a Father. Therefore, the Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have been, for the time being, the lawful wife of God the Father: we use the term lawful Wife, because it would be blasphemous in the highest degree to say that He overshadowed her or begat the Saviour unlawfully. It would have been unlawful for any man to have interfered with Mary, who was already espoused to Joseph; for such a heinous crime would have subjected both the guilty parties to death, according to the law of Moses.¹²

In other words, Jesus was not conceived by the Holy Ghost as confessed in the Apostolic Creed, but by a sexual union between God and the Virgin Mary. Indeed, the conclusion must be that the concept of God in Mormon doctrine differs radically from that which is generally accepted within Christendom.

The Interpretation of Salvation

Mormons believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved, but at the same time add by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. (Art. 3). According to Mormon theology salvation by grace means that someday everyone will be resurrected. This is called unconditional or general salvation that comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law. It consists in the mere fact of being resurrected. Thus salvation is synonymous with immortality. “It is

¹¹ Pratt, *The Seer*, p. 172.

¹² Pratt, *The Seer*, p. 158.

the inseparable connection between body and spirit so that the resurrected personage lives forever.”¹³ However, full salvation or exaltation is only achieved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. This means one has to live according to the principles and rules as defined by the Mormon Church.

Immortality is a free gift and comes without works or righteousness of any sort; all men will come forth in the resurrection because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ (1 Cor. 15:2). In and of itself the resurrection is a form of salvation meaning that men are thereby saved from death, hell, the devil, and endless torment (2 Nephi 9:17-27). “Salvation in the celestial kingdom of God, however, is not salvation by grace alone. Rather, it is salvation by grace coupled with obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”¹⁴ This interpretation of salvation by grace does not correspond with the Lutheran or Protestant way of thinking. Salvation means “all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Works are not a means for achieving salvation. They are only a thankful response of a living faith.

Art. 5 of Articles of Faith deals in essence with the priesthood that in Mormonism is considered of the utmost importance. It is through the power of the priesthood that the message of salvation is channelled to mankind. According to Mormon thinking the church they represent is the church and kingdom of God, and possesses the only faith by which human beings can be brought back into the presence of God.¹⁵ In this sense the priesthood plays an extremely important role that none other can exercise. The gospel and the priesthood are the means God employs in order to carry out the work of salvation.

The priesthood is the power by which the gospel is preached; by which the ordinances of salvation are performed so that they will be binding on earth and in heaven; by which men are sealed up unto eternal life, being assured of the fullness of the Father’s kingdom hereafter; and by which in due course the Lord will govern the nations of the earth and all that pertains to them. As there is only one God and one power of

¹³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1979), p. 669.

¹⁴ *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 671.

¹⁵ *Teachings of Presidents*, p. 18.

God, it follows that there is only one priesthood, the eternal priesthood.¹⁶

Thus the Mormon Church claims to have the sole right to minister the ordinances of salvation through their priesthood.

The Authoritative Scriptures

Mormons believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly. (Art. 8). They use the authorized King James Version (KJV). Joseph Smith meant that the biblical texts had been corrupted and altered by the so-called great apostasy of the post-apostolic church. Many important passages of Scripture had been removed by corrupt ecclesiastical powers as described in the *Book of Mormon*: “Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hast gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:28). All of the existing Bible translations were corrupted and flawed. None were translated correctly.¹⁷

In order to “rectify” the situation Joseph Smith decided to correct, revise, alter, add to and delete from King James Version of the Bible what was necessary. Joseph Smith claimed that God intended him to publish a complete restored version of the Bible, the so-called Inspired Version of the Bible. The project was never completed.¹⁸ Joseph Smith’s new translation is published by The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.¹⁹ In addition to the Bible, the Mormons also believe the *Book of Mormon* to be the word of God. The two books of Joseph Smith, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*, are also considered authoritative and basis for Mormon belief. These four documents comprise what is called the “Four Standard Works.” Together with the statements of the prophets and presidents of the Mormon Church they actually constitute the true sources of Mormon doctrine.

¹⁶ *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 594.

¹⁷ R. Philip Roberts, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), pp. 96–97; *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 422–423.

¹⁸ *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 383–385; Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982), pp. 386–389.

¹⁹ Joseph Smith, *Joseph Smith’s “New Translation” of the Bible* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1999).

The Problem of Revelation

Article 9 deals with revelation. “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God”. This means that the Mormons believe in continuing special revelations through the Prophet who also is the President of the church. Mormon documents contain an abundance of references to these revelations. From 1823 to 1847, 136 of these revelations were recorded. In 1890 the Manifesto and in 1978 the acceptance of black men into the Mormon priesthood were proclaimed.²⁰ Lutherans and many with them believe that God has revealed himself conclusively and authoritatively in Jesus Christ and he continues to make himself known through the Word and Sacraments, where he reveals all that is necessary for the salvation of man. All other claims to revelation must be examined by the church in the light of God’s revelation of himself through Word and Sacraments.

The Millennium

Millenarian movements were a known phenomena among a number of religious groups in the United States in the nineteenth century, such as the Mormons, Millerites, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The subject of the Millennium played an important role in Mormon missionary work and emigration history. It was closely knit to that which often was referred to as the “gathering.” According to William Mulder, the gathering and not polygamy was Mormonism’s oldest and most influential doctrine:

It was the signature of the “new and everlasting covenant” which the Lord had made with his elect in this last of all gospel dispensations. The doctrine reflected a tradition of golden dreams and fierce desires reaching back to the promises made to Israel and forward to the Second Coming. The gathering was as new as the latest proselyte, as old as prophesy.²¹

²⁰ *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 466, 526–528.

²¹ William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 18; Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997) p. 44; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 1993), p. 13; Per

In Article 10 of the Articles of Faith reference is made to the Mormon belief in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the ten tribes, that Zion will be built upon the American continent, that Christ will reign personally upon the earth, and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory. According to Apostle James E. Talmage the millennium or the thousand years immediately following the establishment of Christ's reign on earth will be specially characterized and different from both preceding and succeeding time. The gathering of Israel and the establishment of Zion on this earth will take place before the coming of Christ. Simultaneously the destruction of the wicked will take place and an era of peace will be inaugurated. The righteous shall reign with God and Christ a thousand years. During this period conditions will be propitious for righteousness. Satan will be restrained. During this period Latter-day Saints will be able to carry on their vicarious work for the dead. When the thousand years are passed Satan will be permitted to once again assert his powers, but that will be for just a short duration before his final doom and punishment. Then the earth will pass to a celestial condition and become a place for the sons and daughters of God.²² In regard to the millennium issue the Mormons appointed a place rather than set a time as millenarians did. The *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* transferred the biblical prophecies and events to the American scene. America was the promised land, the land of Zion. Missouri, that previously had been the site of old Eden, was to be the site of the New Jerusalem. All the believers were to gather in Zion.²³

The history of the gathering and the allocation for this event was not fully developed from the beginning. Shortly before the Mormon Church was organized the *Book of Mormon* revealed that there would be a New Jerusalem in the New World. However, no location was specified.²⁴

M. Aadnanes, *Det nye tusenårsriket. New Age som livssyn* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press/Universitetsforlaget, 1997), pp. 17–21.

²² James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah, Deseret Book, 1966) pp. 368–371, 374; James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1956), pp. 790–792.

²³ William Mulder, *Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 22–23; Mette Skougaard, *Mormonudvandringen fra Danmark 1852–1900. En undersøgelse af baggrunden for udvandringen og en analyse af udvandringens struktur 1873–93* (København, 1976), p. 10.

²⁴ *Book of Mormon*, Ether 13:4–8.

A few months later a new revelation pointed out that although it was not yet known where the city Zion should be built it would nevertheless be located on the borders of the Lamanites, i.e. the western boarder of the United States, particularly in Missouri. This was the boundary separating the states from the Indian territories. The Latter-day Saints often referred to the Indians as Lamanites believing that they descended from those referred to in the *Book of Mormon* (D&C 28:9). Not knowing the exact place of the gathering the Latter-day Saints were nevertheless called upon to bring to pass the gathering of the Lord's elect. They were to be gathered upon the face of this land to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation were to be sent forth upon the wicked.²⁵ In June 1831 Joseph Smith and other leading elders started from Kirtland, Ohio, for the land of Missouri where they arrived about the middle of July. In that very same month Joseph Smith claimed that he had received a revelation from the Lord indicating that Missouri was the land the Lord had appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints. This was the land of promise and the place for the city of Zion. This was the spot for the temple. "Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the court-house."²⁶

The city of Zion was to serve a double purpose. First of all, it was to be the place where the house of Israel was to be gathered in the last days. Secondly, Zion would serve as a refuge from the wicked and the tribulations associated with the coming destruction.²⁷ The millennium would not dawn until the elect from the various parts of the world would be gathered. Not even one person was to be left behind. It was first then that Christ would return. The worldwide missionary work of the church was to provide for the recruitment of obedient gentiles who had accepted the gospel that had been presented to them. Through baptism they would become God's chosen people and become part of the gathering that was necessary to precede the Lord's Day of judgement.²⁸

²⁵ D&C 29:7-8; Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Chicago, 1993), p. 31.

²⁶ D&C 57:1-4; *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 188-190.

²⁷ Dan Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night: The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), p. 97.

²⁸ Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night*, p. 81.

Mormon gathering as a millennial event was of great importance to Joseph Smith:

Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none; for without Zion, and a place of deliverance, we must fall; because the time is near when the sun will be darkened, and the moon turned to blood, and the stars fall from heaven, and the earth reel to and fro. Then, and if this is the case, and if we are not sanctified and gathered to the places God has appointed, with all our former professions and our great love for the Bible, we must fall; we cannot stand; we cannot be saved; for God will gather out His Saints from the Gentiles, and then comes desolation and destruction, and none can escape except the pure in heart who are gathered.²⁹

Millennialism, the New Jerusalem and the gathering were all intertwined in Mormon doctrine during the 1830s-40s. The forthcoming of the *Book of Mormon* was a most important sign that the gathering had begun (3 Nephi 21:1-7). In addition to being authoritative scripture for the Mormons the main mission of the *Book of Mormon* was to recover the lost remnant of the house of Israel. "The Book of Mormon has made known that Israel is, upon this continent."³⁰ The importance of the New World was brought forth through the *Book of Mormon*. Joseph Smith's revelation identified where Zion was to be located. From now on the Mormons could direct their attention to the gathering in America.³¹

The Mormon doctrine of the gathering served two purposes. First, it would be the place where the house of Israel would assemble in the last days. Here the Saints could prepare themselves properly for the coming of the millennium. Second, the gathering would provide a means of escape or refuge from the wicked and from the tribulations that were expected during the last days. The gathering has been described as "the pivotal pre millennial event in Mormon eschatology".³² This Mormon eschatology was in a way a unique form of millennial hope. It incorporated the building of a physical city, the City of Zion. This city was to be located within the borders of the United States where

²⁹ *History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 52.

³⁰ *History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 358.

³¹ Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night*, p. 94.

³² Underwood, *Millenarian World*, p. 29.

the gathering of the elect from all over the world would take place. All this was to fit into the divine plan of preparing the world for Christ and the millennium. Millennialism was an important factor in all aspects of early Mormon teaching and missionary activity.³³ As Noah gathered the various animals into the arch in like manner shall the Saints from all over the world be gathered in the western part of America in the land of Zion waiting for the coming of Christ and the millennium. The Saints interpreted Dan. 2:4 into their own context: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people."

After the Mormons had moved to the west their preoccupation regarding the destruction of the world and the coming of Christ continued to remain as a major topic in their teaching. They were constantly reminded of that these two events would come sooner than expected and follow each other rapidly. The Lord would cut his work short. Those who eagerly had been used to looking for signs forecasting things to come could now relax, according to Jedediah M. Grant, member of the First Presidency. The events were now developing so rapidly that they exceeded "even our most sanguine expectations."³⁴ Children would live to raise the dead and that in no more than fifty years worthy Saints would be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ. Apostle George A. Smith cautioned the world that the day of the Lord was near and the Saints should watch for the coming of the Son of Man. As pointed out earlier, the gathering of the elect was an important part of Mormon doctrine that continuously was held before the Saints, now with Utah set apart as the place where God wanted his chosen people to gather. In this connection it has been pointed out, that crossing the plains to Zion in the valleys of the mountains was not just a journey but a rite of passage, the final, devoted, enduring act that brought one into the kingdom. The entry into Utah was not only entry into sacred space, i.e. into the Promised Land, but a move into sacred time.³⁵

Brigham Young considered the "gathering of Israel" to be of such importance for the work of the church that he was willing to give priority to these matters, even if it meant that one had to infringe upon other requirements. He restricted certain religious ceremonies to Utah

³³ Underwood, *Millenarian World*, pp. 90-91.

³⁴ Underwood, *Millenarian World*, p. 151.

³⁵ Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night*, pp. 151-152; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 122.

in the belief, that if this was not done it could have negative effect on the gathering. One of these ceremonies was the so-called “second anointing” when a person had to gather with the “body of the church.” According to Dan Erickson, this was “part of the Mormon empire building effort.” The “second anointing” was also referred to as the “fullness of the Priesthood.”³⁶

Conclusion

We have in this article made an attempt to look at important Mormon doctrine in light of historic Christianity. How close or how far apart do we stand from one another? Are we total strangers to one another or do we have a common ground from which we may start our orientation?

The first Mormon missionaries who came to Norway in the beginning of the 1850s were of Norwegian decent. As emigrants to America they had become acquainted with this new religion Mormonism and converted to the new faith. Many of these converts felt the call to return to their original homeland as missionaries. In proclaiming their new faith in Norway they used the same words and expressions that were familiar among their former countrymen. But now these words and expressions had gotten another connotation or meaning. The audience was confronted with a new religion clothed in familiar linguistic wrappings while the contents differed considerably from the religion they had been brought up in. The reaction occurred when people became aware of this. In addition the missionaries introduced a new book, the *Book of Mormon*, that seemed just as important to them, if not even more important than the Holy Bible. In Norway Martin Luther’s Catechism was highly regarded and much used particularly in the religious instruction of children as well as of adults. However, Luther’s Catechism, as important as it was, was never put on the same level as the Holy Bible. The road of dialogue is no easy road to travel. Time and time again we may find hurdles and obstacles on our journey, obstacles that seem insurmountable. In our search we may find some points of contact, but in many doctrinal matters we have to admit that we still stand far apart as outlined in this article. However, whatever the situation may be, the door for dialogue must always remain open.

³⁶ Erickson, *As a Thief in the Night*, p. 152; David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco, California: Smith Research Associates, 1994), p. 99.