

Mormonism

By Fr. Alexey Young

When asked about Mormonism, the average person thinks of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, of clean-cut missionaries on bicycles, of a non-smoking, non-drinking people who are industrious, family-oriented, prosperous, and have an avid interest in genealogical research. This rather vague and rosy image has been clouded in recent years by media reports of vendetta-murders involving various Mormon polygamist groups; and in 1985 public attention was drawn to some bombing murders in Salt Lake City, related to several forged documents embarrassing to Mormon historians. But basically, there remains the picture of a respectable citizenry with a strong commitment to their Church - the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" - now over 5 million strong throughout the world. (Permission was recently granted for the erection of a Mormon temple in Poland, and a Russian version of the *Book of Mormon* has recently come off the press as part of a major mission venture into [the former] USSR). With nearly 30,000 full-time missionaries, this is one of the fastest growing religions, especially in America, with an average of two new churches or local "parishes" opening *each day*.

All this, however, does not answer the question about Mormonism. What, precisely, do the Mormons believe? They profess to be Christians. They claim that the Bible and the Book of Mormon "complement each other. They both contain the word of God. They have become one."¹ The introduction to the Book of Mormon states that it was written "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God." In fact, Mormonism is "one of the most effective counterfeits of biblical Christianity ever devised."²

Its Foundations

The founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, was born in Vermont in 1805. As a youth Smith is described by Mormons as "honest and sincere, devout and intelligent...humbly seeking the truth."³ According to other sources, however, he was "a poorly educated, superstitious youth" who "made extensive use of divining rods and peek stones" as he accompanied his father on expeditions in search of buried treasure.⁴ As a young man he was much involved in various psychic and occult activities. Objective investigators have concluded that he was probably a teenage psychopath:

"In his self-hypnosis, ideas from the subconscious replaced critical thinking. His abnormal temperament revealed itself in a capacity for clairvoyance. Repeated experiments in this pressed clear, conscious thinking more and more into the background, and the dividing line between the real world of the senses and the world of dreams disappeared almost completely."⁵

Smith's youth coincided with a period of Protestant revival among a multiplicity of sects. In response to his prayer to be guided towards the true religion, Smith claimed to have a series of visions, beginning in 1820. The two "Personages" in his first vision were interpreted to be God the Father and God the Son, and the message was that he should join none of the existing churches, none of them was right, "but that at some future time the fullness of the gospel would be made known to him." Four years later Smith prayed for another divine manifestation,

and a "heavenly being," calling himself Moroni, appeared to him and told him of some gold plates, engraved with "the fullness of the everlasting gospel," buried in a nearby hill. They were written in an ancient language, and Joseph Smith was chosen to have "the glorious privilege of translating the characters on the plates and becoming the instrument in God's hands in restoring the gospel and re-establishing the Church."⁶ Besides the plates, Moroni told him, "lay two crystals joined together by a silver frame and fastened to a pectoral: the ancient Urim and Thummim of the Jewish high priest, a sort of divine pair of spectacles, with which to decipher the writing on the plates."⁷ Smith's translation was first published in 1830 and titled the Book of Mormon.

Soon after the publication of his "scripture," Joseph Smith proclaimed himself a "latter-day" prophet equal to the prophets of the Old Testament and began to gather a following which, by the time of his murder ("martyrdom," in Mormon history) at the hands of an angry mob in 1844, numbered at least ten thousand.

Their reputation badly compromised, most of the community then elected to follow Brigham Young - Smith's successor as "Prophet, Seer and Revelator" - and, after an arduous trek, settled in the Utah territory, with Salt Lake City as their religious capital. Today, 75% of the population is Mormon. Visitors to the city's Temple Square - the "Vatican" of Mormonism - may tour an elaborate complex, complete with films, dioramas, and lectures on Mormon history and theology, based on the Book of Mormon and revelations of later "prophets."

Origins

Reading very much in the style of the King James Version of the Bible (indeed, there are whole passages lifted from the KJV), the Book of Mormon is purported to have been written c. 600 B.C. to 421 A.D. by various "prophet-historians." It tells the rather fantastic story of a Jewish prophet Lehi, living in the reign of King Zedekiah (II Chron. 36:10), who was instructed by the Lord to take his people and leave Jerusalem. They sailed to the shores of Central or South America where they established a great civilization. Lehi's eldest son Laman was rebellious, and he and a group of followers broke away from the youngest son Nephi, who had earlier been chosen by God to rule over his brothers. Nephi exhorted his people to respect the law of Moses and also prophesied the coming of Christ. Other prophets followed Nephi, and their teachings and prophecies were added to the collection of engraved metal plates - containing the law of Moses and writings of earlier prophets - which had been brought from Jerusalem. After Christ's Ascension, according to this Mormon history, He appeared also to these people of the New World. "Here, to, he ordained disciples and gave them authority to carry on his work."⁸ His appearance ushered in two centuries of harmony between the Nephites and Lamanites, but then they began again to fight. The last Nephite prophet, Mormon, seeing that his people were being destroyed, took all the engraved plates and abridges them into the plates of Mormon. After his death in battle, his son Moroni, the sole survivor of the Nephites, added some of his own writings and then buried the plates in a hill, "so that they would be preserved until the Lord was ready to bring them forth in the latter days."⁹

Historically, The Book of Mormon is not supported by any archaeological evidence and has no correspondence to what is known of pre-Columbian civilizations. Mormon adherents seem untroubled by this fact, believing that it's "just a matter of time" before such evidence is uncovered. Their claim that the American Indians

are descendants of the Lamanites is likewise unfounded; they are of Mongolian stock, not Semitic.

Beliefs

Theologically, the Mormons' "gospel" is equally false. A close study of the Mormon belief-system shows it to be an amalgam of many heresies, although its doctrine of the Trinity appears to be unique. They teach that Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not comprise one divine being in essence, but are actually three "gods," who have a highly developed, perfectly human nature. God the Father is "Elohim," who has "a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's" (Smith: *Doctrine and Covenant* 130:22). Brigham Young identifies God the Father as Adam, and Mormons teach that it was not through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit but through the physical union of this immortal Adam-God and the mortal Virgin Mary that God the Son, "Jehovah" or Jesus Christ, was born in the flesh. He had earlier been begotten of the Father as a spirit, together with a multitude of spiritual beings who are all waiting to be born of earthly men in order that they might eventually become gods even as their "elder brother" Jesus Christ.

To become gods. This fundamental aim of all faithful Mormons was clearly spelled out by Brigham Young who wrote: "Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one of them" (*Journals of Discourse*); or again, in the words of former president of the Mormon Church, Lorenzo Snow: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

These statements alone are very revealing; they show Mormonism to be polytheistic, and contain in a nut-shell the Mormon belief in eternal progression and preexistence - none of which find any place in Christian theology. According to these heretical doctrines, "Elohim" is the supreme God of this world, but there also exist other gods of other worlds. Before we were born in the flesh we lived as spirits in the presence of this Father of Spirits, and "what we did there influenced our lives here, just as what we do here will reward or retard us in the life hereafter."¹⁰

Mormons place great emphasis on marriage. It is only through marriage sealed in the Temple ("celestial" marriage "for time and eternity") that one is eligible to attain the highest glory. It is also the duty of good Mormons to have children, so as to provide bodies for existing spirits, for this earthly sojourn is a necessary stage in the progress towards godhead. Error begets error, and on the basis of these teachings, Mormons have rationally inferred that Christ must have been married (to the two Marys and Martha!) and conceived children, otherwise He could not have attained divinity.

One wonders how a religion claiming authority from Jesus Christ Himself could be so far outside the mainstream of Christianity. Based on Joseph Smith's first revelation, that "all religions are in error," Mormons believe that the great "falling away" foretold in Scripture (II Thess. 2:3) occurred very soon after the deaths of the Twelve apostles, and apart from a branch in the New World, which remained faithful for another 200 years, the Church quite literally disappeared until its revival by Joseph Smith. This view of Church history flatly contradicts Christ's promise: *I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matt. 6:18), and allows Mormons to deny the validity of the Ecumenical Councils where such fundamental Christian doctrines as the nature of the Trinity were

elucidated. As for the Bible, Mormons believe it only "as far as it is translated correctly."

For all its far-fetched teachings, Mormonism is in some respects very rational (a sign, perhaps, of its human origin). The fact that the world lay in darkness for so many centuries, providing no opportunity for salvation, inspired the Mormon practice of vicarious baptism for the dead. This allows a person to be baptized and commute the "grace" to a deceased relative, thereby providing the relative an entry into "salvation" (i.e. progress towards becoming a god). This explains the avid interest devout Mormons have in their family genealogies, trying to "save" as many relatives as possible. The seriousness of their research accounts for Salt Lake City's 5-storey Family History Library with its more than 1200 branches in 44 countries.

One of Mormonism's greatest weaknesses lies in the fallibility and contradictions of its prophets. The Book of Mormon, for example, contains a passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews - *God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and in Him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing* (Mormon 9:9) - and other passages from Holy Scripture are contradicted by the revelations of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and later prophets. New revelations can replace older revelations. Young is said to have claimed that he could "write revelations as fast as a dog trots."¹¹

No less than four new doctrines and practices were introduced by the "Prophet" in the winter of 1841-42. The most radical was polygamy or the "great and glorious principle of plural marriage." Smith's revelation on this subject was initially met with such resistance that the practice was kept secret for several years before it was committed to writing in 1843. Smith went so far as to tell his friend Heber Kimball that if he did not take a "plural wife," he would lose his apostleship and be damned.¹² (During the last five years of his life, Smith lived in polygamy with some twenty wives.) In 1890 a Federal law forced the Mormons to abandon polygamy, and they substituted the practice of "celestial marriages."

Mormon doctrine regarding blacks has also undergone revision. They had always taught that blacks were the descendants of the murderer Cain, and therefore they were inferior to whites and were not admitted into the Mormon priesthood. As the civil rights issue gained prominence, this teaching became a liability. In 1978, however, Mormon Church president Spencer Kimball announced that he had received a new revelation, and that the Mormon Church was now free to ordain blacks.

Here one might also point out the Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and many other prominent figures in early Mormon history were Freemasons (although it appears that Mormon lodges were regarded with some distrust - if not hostility - by a majority of Masons); scholars have shown some similarity between certain aspects of Masonic ritual and the "temple rites" of Mormonism.

These are not the issues and doctrines which Mormons are eager to divulge to prospective converts. Door-to-door missionaries instead play on the "family-oriented" aspects of Mormonism, offering a profound but worldly psychological security within the context of a false version of early Christian history and an exotic theology.

With a clearer understanding of what Mormonism teaches, we can be better prepared when a Mormon missionary comes to our door - not only to defend ourselves against his arguments, but also to challenge his understanding of the Scriptures, the history of the Church and the nature of God, and invite him to examine the eternal truths of the Orthodox Faith, a Faith which, like its Head, Jesus Christ, is *yesterday, today and forever the same*.

Footnotes

1. *Meet the Mormons*, Deseret Book Co., Salt Lake City, UT, 1967; p. 45.
2. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and You*, Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1977, p. 64.
3. *Meet the Mormons*, p. 27.
4. Boa, p. 65.
5. Konrad Algermissen, *Christian Sects*.
6. *Meet the Mormons*, p. 67.
7. Algermissen.
8. *Meet the Mormons*, p. 36.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid, p. 82.
11. L.J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses*, Knopf, NY 1985, p. 305.
12. S.H. Goodwin, *Mormonism and Masonry*, The Masonic Service Association, Washington, D.C., 1924, p. 16.

The Greatness of God and the Triviality of gods

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Translated Anna P. Joyce/ Barbara Olson

*"Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;
and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"*
(Mat. 23:13).

Not so long ago, the actress Shirley MacLaine delighted a large television audience when, by standing with open arms on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, she began to sing, "I am God, I am God, I am God." This was shown in the television mini-series "Out On a Limb" in 1987. Believers could have ignored that eccentric actress' silly performance if it weren't for the fact that it was a planned act for the popularization of the New Age movement. This now-fashionable teaching preaches that everything is God and God is all; i.e., that God and nature are one. Consequently every person is God. From this comes the conclusion that the task of human life is to reveal one's latent divinity, to recognize oneself as "god." "When you finally understand your divine nature," say the 'apostles' of the new doctrine, "a remarkable sensation will overcome you that you are above space and time, above all that is material."

Similar proud statements are not new; Hinduism has preached them for a long time. One of the modern popularizers of Hinduism, Sai Baba, writes, "You are the God of the universe... You truly are God ... You are not man, you are God" [Sathyam-Shivam Sundaram; Sathya Sai Speaks, Bangalore, India, 1973]. During transcendental meditation, one is advised to convince oneself, "I am the sun; I am the true, true sun... The whole universe moves by me and receives its existence from me... I was before the beginning of the world... I penetrate every atom and bring it into movement... Oh, how marvelous I am... I am the entire universe... Everything is in me... I am God!" [Swami Visnudevananda, The complete Illustrated Book of Yoga, New York, Pocket Books, 1972].

There is no need to say how ludicrous such claims are to the Christian point of view. Recognizing the high purpose of man, Christianity teaches to clearly distinguish between the infinite omnipotent Creator and everything else. "*God dwells in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see*" (1 Tim. 6:16). In essence, God is everything and we are nothing. If a person humbly bows down to his Creator and submits to His will, he is able, with God's help, to grow and improve - within the limits of his nature.

Therefore, it is very strange to listen when preachers, posing as Christians, echo the Indian guru and call for their followers to find their deity. Listen, for example, to what the Mormons preach: "As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become" [Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star*, vol. 7 and vol. 54]. Also, "Remember that God our heavenly Father was perhaps a child, and mortal like we are, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome until He has arrived at the point where He is now" [Orson

Hyde, Journal of Discourses, vol. 1]. Joseph Smith, the founder of the sect of Mormons, preached, "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 It is first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of all us, dwelt on an earth..." [J. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 345-347]. Similar statements can be heard from other Mormon "prophets." For them, the Lord Jesus Christ is not the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial with the Father, but rather one of the gods, equal with the angel Lucifer and with other spirits! The subject of things doesn't change the fact that the Mormons consider one of the gods as the main one, but the fact that their god is limited and is not the unique.

We, however, believe that the true God is not only the main one among those allegedly similar to Him, but that He is **unique** and **the only God**, to Whom there are none similar. There exists only one God - the almighty and eternal Creator; all other creatures are like small numbers in comparison with the infinite.

What is tragic for the modern society is the fact that with all its scientific and technological progress, on the spiritual level mankind is becoming primitive and all the more yields to the sin of pride, under which crazy ideas about the unveiling of one's divinity are met with greater sympathy. In accordance with apostle Paul, the distinctive characteristic of Antichrist, the last enemy of Christianity, will be his boundless pride. This will be *"that man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or holiness, so that he will sit in the temple of God as God, portraying himself that he is God"* (2 Thes. 2:4). Will not his absurd claim of deity be approvingly met by his contemporary society, because it itself will be completely poisoned by the ideas of deification of man?

It is necessary to note that all doctrines exalting man at the expense of the Creator, although they may differ on some minor issues, are either of **occult origin** or at least have developed under the influence of some occult teachings. For example, the ancient pagan polytheism with its magic and mysteries, as well as the modern Mormonism - dictated by "spirits" - introduce a great number of deities. Theosophical teachings, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and the modern New Age movement also preach pantheism. Rejecting the personal God-Creator, they teach that nature itself is Divine. Of course, the pantheistic god is not in any way God, but nature to which is attributed some god-like properties: eternity, ubiquitousness, rationality, and distinctive fairness. Strictly speaking, pantheism is an ennobled atheism.

The ancient Pythagorists, Gnostics, Neoplatonists, and a number of subsequent philosophical schools belong to the third group of doctrines, as, for example, Jacomba Beme, Shopenhauer, Swedenborg, Parasels, Shelling, and others. It is known that Gnostic sects were especially active during the first three centuries of Christianity and were a great hindrance for the Church. The doctrines of this group introduce different intermediary beings between the Absolute-God and the lower world. Some call one of these as Demiurg; others, Logos or Sophia; still others the "universal soul" or the "feminine principle in God," and so forth. These doctrines are extremely confusing and contradictory in many details, but some

form of *emanation* from the Absolute is common to all of them. Lower deities, or "eons" of ancient Gnostics, flow as graded waterfalls from one to another, beginning with the transcendental Absolute, the Highest Beginning, or Primary Source, and ending with our physical world. For some Gnostics, the number of intermediaries between the Great Unknowable and the material world reached thirty-two, for others it was limited to just a few.

Again, the *Absolute* of these doctrines is not the true God we Christians believe in, because by emitting from himself lower beings he himself becomes subject to the laws of change and compulsion. Besides granting his eons with divine characteristics, such as creativity or the power for world management, the Gnostics limit their Absolute. In this way they erase the distinction between the Creator and the creature.

By the way, the temptation to make a bridge between the Creator and the creature has touched Russian theology as well, thanks to the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov. A great number of religious thinkers, enthusiastic about his ideas, as for example Rev. Sergei Bulkakov, Rev. Pavel Florenski, Prof. Nikolai Berdyaev, and some theologians of Saint Segius Theological Institute in Paris, developed further his ideas about Sofia, the global soul and "the feminine principle" in God along the Gnostic ideas. (On this subject refer to the detailed article by protopresbyter Mikhail Pomazanski, Readings on God as Man, Orthodox Way, 1956).

Professor A.V. Kartashov, concerning the influence of V. Solovyov on Russian religious thought, writes, "The mystical horse on which Solovyov flies over the formidable abyss that exists between God and the world is the long-deserted and forgotten Sophia. Repeating thousand-year-old ancient attempts of the Hellenic philosophy, the biblical hokism, the rabbinical Cabala, and the wild Gnostic science-fiction writings, to fill by illusion the abyss between the Creator and His creatures, Solovyov chooses for this purpose... Sofia, and thus infects our religious-philosophical thinkers and poets for a long time... No gradualness, no bridges of eons can possibly cross the ontological breach between two polarities [God and world]... No crescendo-diminuendo from the creature to the Creator et vice versa can create the solid continuity; and through any of the microscopic cracks, as if into the bottomless pit, falls everything that was constructed" (Article on the 1500 year Ecumenical Council in Chalcedony).

Professor Rev. Georgi Florovskii commented about the Sense of Love by V. Solovyov, "This is some ghastly occult project of reunification of humanity with God through multi-sexual love" (The Paths of Russian Theology).

Disassociating oneself from all attempts to make a bridge between the infinite and the finite, the Orthodox Church does not recognize any independent deities, nor emanations from the Primary source, nor intermediaries between God and creature.

The church teaches that originally nothing existed - neither a spiritual nor a material world. Even time and space are not eternal but are qualities of this temporary world. There existed always the Singular, unchangeable and all-perfect God: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as Trinity, one in essence and undivided.

When it was pleasing to God, He first created a great spiritual world which He populated with rational spirits called angels; after that - our visible, material world. For creation of one and the other He did not use any substance, because there was none, but created everything from nothing by the distinct action of His omnipotent will. Nothing forced Him to create: He created when and how it was pleasing to His will. So, God is the single source of existence for all things visible and invisible. The angels and human souls are not eternal, but only immortal, and are so not by nature, but by the will of their Creator. Only God is eternal and immortal by His essence.

"God always was, is and will be, or better to say, always is," explains St. Gregory the Theologian, "because the words 'was' and 'will be' indicate divisions of time and are characteristic to transient nature. But 'being' is always. And by this name (Jehovah) He calls Himself... because He concentrates within Himself the most complete being, which does not begin and will not end. He is like a sea of essence, indescribable and infinite, extending beyond the limits of any comprehension of time and nature."

Between infinite and perfect being of God and everything else there exists a **qualitative abyss**, which does not allow for any intermediary. Between God and the world there cannot be anything in the middle, just as there is nothing between the logical one and the logical zero.

But being infinite and all perfect, God is not far from the world, as some think, as if he dwells somewhere far beyond the limits of the universe. On the contrary, He embraces everything and penetrates everything with Himself; He is simultaneously everywhere, but at the same time He, as the purest Spirit, does not mix with anything and nothing touches Him.

One must speak of God always with the greatest reverence and self-restraint because *"He dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see"* (1 Tim 6:16). Only with weak hints can we attempt to describe Him, Whom we call this mysterious name. "Wishing to theologize," edifies Saint Maxim the Confessor, "do not attempt to comprehend God in His essence, because that is not attainable to human or any other kind of intellect. Reflect if possible on His qualities: eternity, infiniteness, incomprehensibility, bliss, wisdom and omnipotent power, which directs everything and which righteously judges everyone. After all, one becomes a great theologian among people, when he learns at least some of the Divine attributes."

Sometimes a person, forgetting the greatness of God, compares himself with people similar to him, and begins to dream of how important and wise he is. In such a situation it would be useful to gaze at the starry sky and to mentally envision himself from the depths of space: somewhere in the boundless sea of space there is a small dot of light which is our galaxy called the Milky Way. On the edge of it, among billions of other stars, hides our solar system which is so small that it cannot be discerned with the most powerful telescope. And still further somewhere within the solar system lies buried our microscopic planet Earth. And there, on its surface some virus-like one-day creatures bustle about - who are you and I! If we are so insignificant in comparison to the universe, then what are we in comparison to Him, Who has created everything with the power of His word?

And one does not know at which to marvel more: the greatness of God or that with all His boundlessness He remembers and cares for each of us! He not only sees each of us, but completely knows everything that is within us: our deepest thoughts, forgotten feelings, and future intentions; and all of this he knows better than we do ourselves. *"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do"* (Heb. 4:13). Knowing our needs and our frailties, He cares for us, as the most caring and loving of mothers; and all while He manages the limitless universe, everything visible and invisible. He directs towards goodness and the existence of every creature - regardless of how insignificant it may be. If we all have followed His Divine will then what a paradise and bliss we all would have enjoyed!

But instead of that we see something completely different. What is the reason for the disasters for humanity? In accordance with the Bible, it is our ancestors' proud desires to become gods. That ancient snake-devil, himself having fallen from the Heavens due to his own pride, had instilled the knowledge in them that by eating the forbidden fruit, they would not die, but *"will be as gods"* (Gen. 3:5). But why did our ancestors believe such an insolent proposal? Probably because it sounded credible. A lie is most effective if it holds a grain of truth in it.

Primordial man understood that he was given something great, something that raises him above other unreasoning creatures. That something great was the mark of the image and likeness of God, which the Creator placed on his immortal soul. It was the mark of resembling God which opened to man the way to uncovering the mystery of being and creativity; it attracted him to the ideal and the infinite; it made him capable of unselfish love, it attracted him to communion with God, it made him king over nature. By God's plan, man, working on himself and developing his spiritual abilities, should have been perfecting himself. God set for man the high goal of following His perfection, to which he was to have ascended under His direction and with His help.

The devil's lie was that man - by just desiring it, with one daring leap, apart from and even contrary to God's plans - could attain the state of deity and could attain all knowledge and perfection. Instead, however, the deceived man by his own insolent "salto mortale" not only missed the state promised to him by the tempter, but rather fell into a terrible abyss of sin and thus lost even that which he had already. From being the ruler over nature he became a pathetic toy of his own passions. Adam and Eve transmitted their nature damaged by sin to their descendants. Apostle Paul thus presents the moral poverty of sinful humanity, *"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death: the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"* (Rom. 7:19-24).

God should have destroyed man for his insolence or simply should have turned away from him and left him at the mercy of the blind and destructive forces of nature. But God is as great in mercy as He is omnipotent in creation! Instead of rejecting man, He Himself, in the Divine person of the only-begotten Son, descended from the throne of His unapproachable glory to our valley of sorrows and darkness.

By coming to us He not only taught us to believe correctly and to live righteously, but He adopted our human nature. Through this wonderful and incomprehensible unification of His Divinity and His humanity, God injected invigorating spiritual

energies into our decrepit nature. Thanks to them the ascent to God became for us a real possibility. Without the miracle of incarnation the Gospel doctrine would have remained an inaccessible ideal.

One must say that in the days of the Old Testament people also had many sensible ideas about good and evil; many people had very elevated ideas about God, but they were morally powerless to perfect themselves. God's help was necessary to all, and the Lord Jesus Christ brought us that help. That impassable chasm between God and creature, which no one could cross, was crossed by the Lord Jesus Christ by His becoming man. He became like a bridge between the transcendental and the finite, between the Creator and the creature. He took us in communion with Himself. Not with our own efforts, but because of Christ we *"might be partakers of the divine nature"* (2 Pet. 1:4).

Thus, the deification of man, from one side, is an unattainable dream and a terrible temptation, when man himself tries to reach it. Any attempt to self-servingly jump across the abyss between earth and Heaven inevitably plunges one to the depths of hell, where Lucifer the proud angel fell. If man with humility and repentance turns to Christ, then, as holding His hand, he can begin to ascend to God spiritually.

Unity with Christ, partaking of His Divine nature, is not an abstract theory, but reality, which happens during the Sacrament of Communion. Tragically, the world of other beliefs, which speaks so much about the spiritual revival, does not understand the purpose of the incarnation of Christ. It was precisely for this reason that Christ became man - i.e., to join us to Himself. Of course, an angel or one of the prophets could have taught us or could have given us a good example. Christ incarnated specifically because only through unity with Him true rebirth and communion with God becomes possible, *"No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me"* (John 14:6).

Therefore God taught, *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Who so eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day... He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him"*(John 6:53-56). In the sermon about the grape vine Christ explains how important is to unite with Him: *"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:4-5).

Thus, the purpose of incarnation of the Son of God is the spiritual and physical rebirth of man. Spiritual renewal begun in this life will be finished by physical restoration of man on the day of all resurrection of the dead. Then shall *"the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Mat. 13:43). Apostle John the Theologian wrote about this a little bit mysteriously: *"Beloved, now are we 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"* (1 John 3:2).

So, we are still not yet capable of completely comprehending the entire grandeur of the calling to which the merciful Creator is drawing us. It is important to

remember, however, that perfection is possible only under the direction and with the aid of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He can renew our damaged state, only He can pour into us the so needed spiritual strength; only He, by uniting us with Himself, can deify us. Without Him we are nothing, just dust and ashes, as other lower creatures.

Therefore, remembering our sinfulness, let us hasten to our Doctor, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us humbly and obediently follow the path shown by Him remembering that *"whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"* (Mat. 23:13).

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