

## ELDER MILTON R. HUNTER

*Of the First Council of the Seventy*

My dear brethren and sisters, it is a real inspiration to look into the faces of so many people as are assembled in this vast congregation. I do humbly pray that the Spirit of God will attend me in the few remarks that I make on this occasion. It is my desire this morning, with the help of the Lord, to say a few words which will supplement the beautiful talk just given by President George F. Richards.

## THE CHARACTER OF GOD

It is my sincere desire to bear my testimony and say a few words regarding the Latter-day Saints' concept of God the Eternal Father, whom we as members of the true Church of Jesus Christ so devotedly, humbly, and prayerfully worship.

Shortly before his death, the Prophet Joseph Smith stated that:

It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345.)

We read in the gospel of John (and a similar statement is recorded in modern revelation) that:

... this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3; see D. & C. 132:24.)

From these statements made by holy men through divine revelation, we find that the concept of God that a people have is very important in helping to determine the type of life that they live. History affirms that when any group of people have had as their belief the concept that God was a God of love, charity, and kindness; in other words, when they have accepted God as a divine Being possessing all of the characteristics of goodness in an infinite portion, those people have tried to emulate in their lives that type of Deity. On the other hand, when a group of people have believed that the Eternal Father was a God of caprice, a God who is unjust and prone to play favoritism, we find that those people have resorted to very low forms and modes of worship, such as human sacrifice. In fact, their moral behavior was on the same plane as their concept of God.

As I occupy this position this morning, I realize that it will be absolutely impossible for me to explain very accurately the Latter-day Saints' concept of the personality of God the Eternal Father, because he is an infinite being with infinite characteristics and attributes while I am merely a finite man. It is impossible for the finite to understand and fully comprehend the infinite; and yet I would like to say a few words, as I have already indicated, to

supplement what President George F. Richards has so masterfully explained regarding Elohim—the Eternal Father.

### GOD A PERSONAL BEING

We believe that God is a personal being. By a personal being, we mean that he is a man—an exalted man. Approximately one hundred years ago, soon after Lorenzo Snow became a member of the true Church of Jesus Christ, he formulated a remarkable couplet which has since that time become famous. He said: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." (Lorenzo Snow, *The Millennial Star* 54:404.) Time and time again during the period of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Prophet Joseph Smith, various evidences were given to him sustaining, amplifying, and explaining the personality of God. If time would permit, many excellent quotations could be cited from the Doctrine and Covenants which would help to describe the personality of our Eternal Father. However, I would like on this occasion to quote a statement taken from a great sermon which was given by the Prophet Joseph shortly before his death. This quotation is a continuation of the statement I have already quoted from the Prophet. To use his exact words:

*It is the 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 us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. . . .*

I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of a being God is. What sort of a being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth. . . .

*God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens. That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instructions from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 345-346.)*

I would like to discuss with you for a moment or two the doctrine of what kind of being God is at the present time. He is an exalted, glorified, celestialized man, but actually and literally a personal being. By this description I mean that his body is eternal, being composed of spiritual matter which cannot decay, age, nor deteriorate. Furthermore, Elohim, or the Eternal Father, is a being brighter than the noonday sun. From that Divine Personage radiates light, light with the characteristic of excessive brilliance.

## THE FIRST VISION

I believe that in order best to define what I have in mind, we could with profit refer to that wonderful experience had by the Prophet Joseph Smith, known as the "First Vision," which was so beautifully explained a few moments ago by President George F. Richards. When the Prophet Joseph was engaged in deep prayer on that memorable spring morning in 1820, a pillar of light, as he explained, brighter than the noonday sun came down from heaven and fell upon him. In the midst of that light, Joseph saw two ". . . Personages whose brightness and glory defy all description," as far as their glory, radiance, and brilliance are concerned. (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith, 2:17.)

The Boy-Prophet returned from the Sacred Grove that morning with more knowledge, yes, with a clearer concept in his mind regarding the personality of God and the Godhead than had all the ministers in the world combined. And it would be no exaggeration to say that his knowledge of God, received through that divine manifestation, surpassed the understanding had at that time by all the people in the world combined. I feel deeply that it is a fact that one of the principal purposes that God the Eternal Father and his Only Begotten Son had in coming to the Prophet Joseph Smith on that beautiful spring morning was to give to the world again a true concept of the personality of God.

## THE HOLY TRINITY

Jesus Christ came into the world in the meridian of time to reveal to the human family the Eternal Father. Shortly before Christ's death Philip asked him to show the Apostles the Father. The Son of Man answered that those who had seen him had seen the Father, meaning that he was a perfect prototype of the Father and that he exemplified the Father in all things. (See John 14:8-9.) Throughout the pages of the New Testament we find a very definite doctrine proclaimed of the actuality and existence of three members in the Godhead—three personal beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—constituting the Holy Trinity.

During the early Christian centuries following the death of Jesus' Apostles, darkness crept into the minds of the Christian leaders. This fact resulted in the holding of council meetings during the early portion of the fourth century for the purpose of re-defining God. At those council meetings, the "Christian Fathers" formulated a creed or creeds in which they attempted to define the personality of God and the Godhead. In those creeds, the three Divine Personages of the Godhead were merged into one. Their new and corrupted concept of God did away with his personal attributes, making of him a God without body, parts, and passions. In fact, they confused and polluted the beautiful concept of the Holy

Trinity which had been revealed to his followers by the Son of God by making the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible and indefinable. During the following fifteen hundred years, all Christian churches were affected by the erroneous and benighted thinking of the fourth century "Christian Fathers."

#### REVELATION OF GOD'S PERSONALITY

Since the Prophet Joseph Smith revealed the fact that the first principle of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God and the world was engulfed in spiritual darkness, it became necessary for Elohim, the Eternal Father, to open the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times with a new revelation of his personality. As a result of that revelation and the restoration of the gospel in its fulness, Latter-day Saints accept the viewpoint that God is omnipotent, that he is omniscient, and that he is omnipresent. In other words, he is all-powerful and all-knowing. We believe that he always works according to natural law, and through his understanding of those laws and by putting them into operation he has created worlds without number, that is, they are not numbered to mortal man. In fact, he created this earth upon which we live and gave the laws or put the laws into operation which govern it. Also, he put into operation the laws which govern all the worlds that he has created.

We believe that God is omniscient: that he is all-knowing, that he sees all things and that he hears all sounds. In other words, that his sight and his hearing know no bounds, and that his knowledge is absolutely unlimited. We even believe that so great is the infinite power of that Divine Being that he can see the things that we do at nighttime in our private chambers or even read the secret thoughts of our hearts.

We also believe that God the Eternal Father is omnipresent. Now by that I might point out that since he is a personal being, he can be in only one place at one time; and yet from him emanates a divine substance or spirit which we term the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, or the Holy Spirit. That divine substance emanates from God to fill the immensity of space. It is through that divine spirit that he performs his great work. Also, it is through that divine Spirit that he is omnipresent.

#### DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

This Supreme Being whom we worship has a number of attributes. In fact, all the good attributes that you and I possess, he possesses to an infinite degree. The attributes of love, justice, mercy, kindness, integrity, honesty, charity, purity, and constancy are among those that belong to him. The author of the Gospel of John was explaining and defining God, and he summarized his

great explanation by saying that "God is love." So deep, so great, so universal, and so all-comprehensive is the love of our Divine Father that John's definition—"God is love"—describes the Infinite and Eternal One very aptly.

We are informed by the holy scriptures that God is a God that cannot sin; and also, that God is a God that cannot lie. He lives in accordance with truth and eternal law, therefore, every act that he performs is in complete harmony with divine truth and divine law.

The Book of Mormon prophets proclaimed that all truth emanates from God and that he is the author of all truth. Having put himself in harmony with all truth and by being interested in you and me, he reveals to us those divine and eternal truths as fast as we are willing and able to receive them; and so he is the author of all truth.

One of the greatest attributes of God is the attribute of intelligence. We read in the Doctrine and Covenants that "The glory of God is intelligence." (D. & C. 93:36.) In the great vision given to Father Abraham, referred to by President Richards, the Lord showed the ancient patriarch the spirits that he had created and made the remark, "I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all." (Abraham 3:19.) For these reasons I have concluded that God's intelligence is one of his greatest attributes.

You and I are closely akin to God. He is our Father. He is actually and literally the Father of all people who have ever been in this world and who ever will be in this world. We were born unto him in the spirit world as his sons and daughters. By being his children, we inherited from him the divine attributes that he as our Father possesses. It is our duty to develop those attributes. Since we are his sons, he has a great concern over us and a great love for us. He desires that we live in harmony with the gospel plan of salvation in order that we may eventually come back to dwell in his presence.

### TESTIMONY

In conclusion I would like to bear my testimony.\* I know that God lives. I know that he is the Father of the human family. I know that he has a deep concern and love for us. I know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the true and Living God, the Savior of the world, and that his name is the only name given whereby salvation can come to the children of men. I know that Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God, and the great prophet who was foreordained to open the last dispensation of the gospel. If you and I will live according to the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I know that we will some day return to the presence of God our Eternal Father and become exalted, glorified, and celest-

tialized beings, receiving a portion, along with him, of the great glory that he possesses.

I humbly pray that you and I will do this, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## ELDER THORPE B. ISAACSON

### *Second Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric*

President Smith, my dear brothers and sisters, (and I can call you my dear brothers and sisters because I feel that way towards you, and I hope you feel that way toward me), I feel very humble this morning, and I can publicly admit that I have asked the Lord not once, but many times, to bless me this day while I speak to you for a few moments. I am sure that I could not occupy this position and say anything worth while without the help of the Lord, and I will be grateful to you if I can have an interest in your faith and prayers.

### DEFENSE IN SPIRITUALITY

This is surely a spiritual conference, and the Spirit of the Lord is here in rich abundance. Each one of us knows that. The testimonies that we have listened to about the Prophet Joseph are true, and the words that we shall hear from your brethren will be inspired by the Lord. I hope that we can take the advice and the testimonies that will be given to us, that our minds and hearts will be open. Truly, we can rejoice in the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

If we can live close to our Father in heaven, we can partake of his Spirit. If we get too far away from the Lord, we cannot partake of his Spirit. I have come to believe that the only defense that we can have against the spirit of the adversary or against the spirit of the devil is the Spirit of the Lord. That is truly the great defense that we can have.

May I repeat from Corinthians, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9.) As I think of that, it makes me feel that I cannot quite understand the blessings that the Lord has in store for us if we love him. They are great blessings, but, to the best of our ability, we can partake of them if we truly love the Lord. How can we love our Father in heaven? The best way, I believe, is for us to draw near to him each day of our lives, and it is good for us to study his words and his life. We have so beautifully heard this morning, "Love our Father in heaven, try to serve him and keep his commandments, and he will bless us to a greater degree than we can ever realize."