

THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT IN EARLY MORMON THOUGHT

by Van Hale

"Where did we come from?" is the first of three questions familiar to Mormons today, thanks to the official missionary lessons and other texts. The most common response among Mormons is that we came from a premortal state where our spirits, literally begotten by a heavenly Father and a heavenly Mother, began their existence. It has been taught in sermons, articles, books, and manuals from near the Church's beginning.

Closely related is the belief that the resurrected faithful of this earth will do what God has been doing: procreate spirit children for future worlds. Few teachings are more widely believed among Mormons, but the origin of this common belief has remained somewhat obscure.

Questionable Use of Scripture

Although there are no clear statements of the doctrine of premortal spirit birth in any of the church's four standard works, Mormons sometimes cite several New Testament passages as support. For example, Hebrews 12:9 speaks of God as the "Father of spirits"; Acts 17:28, calls men the "offspring" of God; and in Galatians 4 and Romans 8, Paul calls certain men "sons of God." But these passages do not state that God procreated our spirits, and while a premortal spirit birth may be inferred by the terms "Father," "sons," and "offspring," the more likely intent of these Biblical authors is that God is the father of those who accept the gospel in the sense that they are his adopted spiritual children. By this interpretation man is not a child of God before accepting the gospel and being adopted.

There is a New Testament exception in the letter to the Hebrews in

which the author clearly views men as children of God before adoption. This is somewhat obscured in the *King James Version*. The following is from the *Contemporary English Version* by the American Bible Society:

Everything belongs to God, and all things were created by his power. So God did the right thing when he made Jesus perfect by suffering, as Jesus led many of God's children to be saved and to share in his glory. Jesus and the people he makes holy all belong to the same family. That is why he isn't ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. (2:10, 11).¹

While this passage supports a view that all are the children of God before conversion, it is not sufficient to conclude that the author believed in a premortal spirit birth.

Even if it could be argued persuasively that the authors believed in a premortal spirit birth, this would be a unique interpretation unknown to Biblical scholars, and the question would still remain, When in Mormonism and by whom did this interpretation originate?

In LDS scripture the passage used to support the spirit birth doctrine is *Doctrine and Covenants* 76:24 in which the inhabitants of the different worlds are referred to as "begotten sons and daughters unto God." However, the context of this passage is that the inhabitants of the worlds are begotten sons and daughters unto God through Jesus Christ. The reference to sons and daughters clearly means "adopted" spiritual children-not procreated spirit children:

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father-

That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created,

and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (76:23-24)

The premortal spirit birth doctrine clearly did not originate in scripture.

It could be argued that most LDS scripture was produced while Mormon theology was in its infancy, and there is little in the LDS canon from the theologically productive Nauvoo period of the early to mid-1840s. However, the recorded teachings of Joseph Smith during this period are also barren on this point.

Joseph Smith's Apparent View

In tracing the doctrine of spirit birth backwards we find hundreds of references to it throughout Mormon literature, and the teaching that spirits originated through premortal procreation has been the prevailing explanation of its origin ever since the Nauvoo period.

What is surprising, however, is that none of Joseph Smith's recorded sermons--including those delivered in Nauvoo--teach the doctrine. In fact, several seem to teach a doctrine logically at odds with the belief that spirits came into existence through premortal birth and are the literal offspring of God. Neither scripture nor the recorded teachings of Joseph Smith

Summary

A summary of his own doctrinal teaching is that the human spirit as a conscious entity is eternal -as eternal as God. It has no beginning and will have no end. It was not created; it is self-existing. God, being more advanced than the other spirits, organized them and instituted laws to give them the privilege to advance like himself. He presides and will preside over them throughout eternity. Smith used the terms "spirit,"

"soul," "intelligence," and "mind" synonymously to describe the eternal, uncreated, indestructible essence of life.

Documentary Sources for Joseph Smith's View

This summary is drawn from eight documentary sources—dating from 6 May 1833 to 7 April 1844. None of them suggest that God presides over the spirits because they are his begotten offspring, but rather because he was more intelligent, more advanced, than they and because he organized them into a premortal council.

① The earliest reference to the uncreated, eternal portion of all human beings is from the Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, dated 6 May 1833:

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

This statement, although brief to the point of being ambiguous, does indicate that some aspect of individual existence was not created.

② The date of the second statement, recorded by Apostle Willard Richards, is uncertain but undoubtedly occurred during the years 1839-1841. Here the spirit is not created and the "Father" is referred to as "organizer":

The Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity & will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be Eternal. . . . The Father called all spirits before him at the creation of Man & organized them. He (Adam) is the head, was told to multiply.²

③ The next statement, from a sermon Smith delivered in Washington, D.C., on 6 February 1840, was published in an eastern newspaper. Note here that "soul" is synonymous with "spirit" and is without beginning:

I believe that God is eternal. That He had no beginning, and can have no end.

Eternity means that which is without beginning or end. I believe that the soul is eternal; and had no beginning; it can have no end. . . . the soul of man, the spirit, had existed from eternity in the bosom of Divinity.³

④ The following is from another of Smith's discourses, this one delivered to a school of instruction at Nauvoo on 5 January 1841. Note again that "soul" seems to be synonymous with "spirit," that it has no beginning, and that spirits were organized in the pre-existence:

If the soul of man had a beginning it will surely have an end. . . . Spirits are eternal. At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and the plan of salvation made and we sanctioned it.⁴

⑤ Fifth is a 28 March 1841 statement Smith made to the school at Nauvoo. Again, "spirit" seems to be synonymous with "intelligence," it is self-existent, God was a superior intelligence, and God organized a premortal council:

the spirit or the intelligence of men are self-existent principles before the foundation [of] this Earth . . . God saw that those intelligences had Not power to Defend themselves against those that had a tabernacle therefore the Lord Calls them together in Counsel & agrees to form them tabernacles.⁵

⑥ The next documentary source is composed of parts of three verses from the "Book of Abraham" (3:18, 22-23), published at Nauvoo in 1842. Again spirits have no beginning; the terms "spirit," "intelligence," and "soul" are used interchangeably; and God organized the spirits into a premortal council:

¹⁸...if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, notwithstanding one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal. ²²Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham,

the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; ²³And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits . . .

⑦ In 1845 George Laub was writing his journal from memory and using scraps of notes he had taken in 1843 and 1844. The following comes from his report of a Smith sermon which Laub dates 6 April 1843:

How came Spirits? Why, they are and were Self Existing as all eternity & our Spirits are as Eternal as the very God is himself & that we choose to come on this Earth to take unto ourselves tabernacles by permission of our Father.⁶

⑧ The last, and most extensive, statement of Joseph Smith is from his so-called King Follett discourse, delivered at a Conference of the Church on 7 April 1844. The address eulogized King Follett, who had recently died, and reassured friends and family of the eternal nature of individual existence. Four reports of this discourse were recorded: one by Thomas Bullock and one by William Clayton, both of whom were officially appointed clerks or reporters of the conference; one by Willard Richards, who was keeping Joseph Smith's diary; and one by Apostle Wilford Woodruff for his own diary.

Immediately following the Conference Thomas Bullock, on assignment, prepared a report of the Discourse for publication by combining or amalgamating his report with that of William Clayton. This was published in the Church's *Times and Seasons* August 15, 1844.

In 1855 Jonathan Grimshaw, working in the Church Historian's Office, amalgamated the *Times and Seasons* printing with the journal entry of Wilford Woodruff and the entry Willard Richards recorded in Joseph

Smith's diary. His final draft was reviewed and revised by Brigham Young in 1855. (For the pertinent portion of his draft see page 9). This is the version found in current editions of the official *History of the Church*. After comparing all of the reports and printings of the Discourse, I have concluded that a flaw in Grimshaw's amalgamation lead to an interpretation by B. H. Roberts not intended by Joseph Smith. (See the parallel on pages 6-7).

The following quotation, which I believe more closely represents the thinking of Joseph Smith, is taken from the *Times and Seasons* printing.⁷ Note again that spirit has no beginning - it was not created; that "spirit," "mind," "soul," and "intelligence" are synonymous; and that God's relationship to the spirits is not that of literal father but, being greater than the other spirits, he instituted laws so that the spirits could advance like himself:

...the soul, the mind of man, the immortal spirit. All men say God created it in the beginning... I do not believe the doctrine... The mind of man is as immortal as God himself... spirits existed coequal with God, and they now exist in a place where they converse together, the same as we do on the earth. It is [not] logic to say that a spirit is immortal, and yet have a beginning. Because if a spirit have a beginning it will have an end; good logic... I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man, the immortal spirit, because it has no beginning... God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all... intelligence exists upon a self existent principle, it is a spirit from age to age, and, there is no creation about it. . . . God himself finds himself in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was greater, and because he saw proper to institute laws, whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself...⁸ (For the full quote see the Parallel on pp. 6-7).

Early Views of Joseph Smith's Contemporaries

Although Smith seems not to have

taught that spirits come into existence through a birth process, I have found two references to the spirit birth concept written by Mormons before Joseph Smith's death. Apostles Lorenzo Snow and Orson Pratt believed such a doctrine during his lifetime.

Lorenzo Snow - 1842

On 14 February 1842, Snow, at the time a missionary in England, wrote the following to an Elder Walker:

When I write to you I feel to let my imagination rove I do not know why may be because you are sometimes as foolish as myself wish to know and dwell upon big things of the kingdom.

Then let us indulge our follies at this time and wander a moment into the field of imagination. Some thirteen thousand years ago in Heaven or in Paradise (say) we came into existence or in other words received a spiritual organization according to the laws that govern spiritual births in eternity

We were there and then (say) born in the express image and likeness of him by whom we received our spiritual birth possessing the same faculties & powers but in their infantile state yet susceptible of an elevation equal to that of those possessed by our Spiritual Father

But in order to effect this we must needs be planted in a material tabernacle. Accordingly the great machine was set in motion whereby bodies for the immortal sons and daughters of God came into being . . . the sons of God or the spirits awaiting to be perfected shouted with joy in anticipation of one day being like their Father in all things both in relation to becoming the Father of Spirits and that of Glorified bodies."⁹

Orson Pratt - 1844

When Pratt wrote about this doctrine, he chose not to relegate it to the realm of speculative "imagination," publishing it under the heading "The Mormon Creed" in his *Prophetic Almanac* for 1845. Pratt wrote the pamphlet while in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1844, just prior to Smith's death.⁹ Brigham Young

endorsed Pratt's work at the October 1844 General Conference.¹¹ In it Pratt presents the following catechism:

What is man? The offspring of God. What is God? The father of man. Who is Jesus Christ? He is our brother. . . . How many states of existence has man? He has three. What is the first? It is spiritual. What is the second? It is temporal. What is the third? It is immortal and eternal. How did he begin to exist in the first? He was begotten and born of God. How did he begin to exist in the second? He was begotten and born of the flesh.¹²

Times and Seasons Articles - 1845

In addition, articles on the spirit birth doctrine, authored by several of Joseph Smith's close associates, appeared in the Church's official organ, the *Times and Seasons*, shortly after his death.

John Taylor - 1845

In one article, published in February, Apostle John Taylor, editor of the *Times and Seasons* since 1842, wrote:

...that Jesus Christ had a father and mother of his Spirit, and a father and mother of his flesh; and so have all of his brethren and sisters...¹³

His position as editor kept him in Nauvoo and thus he was probably Joseph Smith's closest associate among the Apostles.

William W. Phelps - 1845

Issues the following May and June published a story by William W. Phelps, assistant editor, entitled "Paracletes" intended to present LDS concepts in a unique fashion. One of the important points of the story is that premortal spirits are the offspring of a father and mother and would "be born of the flesh as they had been of the spirit."¹⁴

Orson Pratt - 1845

In the June issue the spirit birth doctrine was again published in

Apostle Orson Pratt's address at the funeral of William Smith's wife, Caroline:

His [Jesus] Father unfolded to him the world of spirits. He looked upon them and saw that they were his lawful, legitimate brothers and sisters in the spirit, that they all descended from the same Father, and he possessed the natural feeling of anxiety to redeem his kindred from their situation.¹⁵

Eliza R. Snow -1845

In the November issue Joseph Smith's plural wife Eliza R. Snow published her poem "My Father in Heaven" (better known today as "O My Father"). Snow's poem is dated October 1845 and speaks of a Mother in heaven and of a spirit birth and childhood. Snow indicates that these concepts were unknown to her until Mormonism provided the "key of knowledge."¹⁵

The Puzzle

Joseph Smith was without question the doctrinal authority among the Mormons. Baptism for the dead, eternal marriage, plural marriage, the nature of God, the plurality of gods, and men becoming gods are some of the concepts promulgated by the Saints after they were taught by Joseph Smith.

During the months preceding Smith's death in June 1844, his teachings were questioned by some and rejected by others. In the succession crisis following his death one of the main issues was whether to carry on with all of his doctrines. The Twelve Apostles and their followers were dedicated disciples, determined to perpetuate what Smith had begun. In "An Epistle of the Twelve" in the *Times and Seasons* August 15, 1844, the issue containing the King Follett discourse, they pledged:

to build up the kingdom upon the foundation that the prophet Joseph has laid.¹⁷
It would be going too far to apply

this to details of doctrine, but certainly it would have been a departure from the spirit of this pledge knowingly to teach ideas contrary to what they knew to be the view of Joseph Smith.

It was in this setting that Taylor, Pratt, Phelps, and Snow publicly taught the spirit birth doctrine, either unaware that they might be contradicting Smith's doctrine, or believing their view to have been his view.

While the origin of spirits was not one of the controversial doctrines debated at the time, I would not expect Smith's faithful followers, at that time, and under those circumstances, to initiate a new doctrine which did not originate with him, especially one contrary to his teachings.

And thus the puzzle: Why did Joseph Smith teach that our spirits had no beginning and while his close associates, at the time of his death or shortly following, taught that our spirit's existence began at spirit birth? From one point of view, that Joseph Smith believed in spirit birth, does not seem an unreasonable extrapolation. However, I am more persuaded by the documentary evidence that he believed the spirit had no beginning than the speculation that the spirit birth doctrine appearing in the *Times and Seasons* must have originated with him.

Reasoning on Eternal Marriage

Another factor in determining the origin of this teaching involves the doctrine of eternal marriage. There is no doubt that Smith taught that one of the purposes of polygamy was eternal procreation. In his autobiography Apostle Parley P. Pratt recalled spending several days with Smith in Philadelphia in 1840. Pratt wrote that he was taught for the first time

of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes [resulting in]

an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.¹⁸

Three years later, on 16 May 1843, William Clayton recorded that Smith taught privately,

Except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity, while in this probation, by the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood, they will cease to increase when they die; that is, they will not have any children after the resurrection. But those who are married by the power and authority of the priesthood in this life, and continue without committing the sin against the Holy Ghost will continue to increase and have children in the celestial glory.¹⁹

D&C 131 which speaks of the "increase" of those who are married for eternity is a part of this Clayton journal entry

Two months later Smith dictated *Doctrine and Covenants* 132 in which those married for eternity are promised

a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods" (vv. 19-20).

Here Smith implies that gods procreate but does not specify that their offspring are spirits. There is no known explanation from Smith on this subject. In a 16 July 1843 sermon on the "everlasting covenant" of marriage is one example of the common explanation

that he could not reveal the fulness of these things until the Temple is completed,²⁰

which completion he did not live to see. However, the conclusion some of his contemporaries drew, and the one which has prevailed through Mormon history, is that children born after the resurrection to exalted couples will be spirit children for future worlds.

I know of two statements of Joseph Smith which can be interpreted to suggest that he believed in this particular doctrine of spirit birth. The

first is found in D&C 132:63. He says of those who attain exaltation

...that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified.

Orson Pratt added a footnote here in the 1879 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* which has been removed from recent editions. His note predictably explains:

that is, the souls or spirits of men to be born in heaven.

The second, four days following the writing of D&C 132, is found in a brief sketch of a sermon delivered on 16 July 1843, recorded by Franklin D. Richards. He reports Smith teaching that

Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal contract are single & alone in the eternal world (Luke 20:35) and are only made Angels to minister to those who shall be heirs of Salvation never becoming Sons of God having never kept the Law of God ie eternal Law. The earthly is the image of the Heavenly shows that is by the multiplication of Lives that the eternal worlds are created and occupied that which is born of the flesh is flesh that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.²¹

In a note following his report Richards concludes:

From the above I deduce that we may make an eternal covenant with our wives and in the resurrection claim that which is our own and enjoy blessings & glories peculiar to those in that condition even the multiplication of spirits in the eternal world.²²

The prophet's point is sufficiently unclear to force Richards to deduce his meaning, and Richards' interpretation is not, by any means, the only one possible. The phrase "never becoming Sons of God" may imply that sonship is not literal but inherited through salvation. While there are several possible interpretations of this sermon report, to conclude either that he was teaching that the origin of spirits is birth or that only those who are saved are sons of God

is tenuous.

William Clayton recorded a brief synopsis of the sermon, but he did not include the statement on the "multiplication of Lives."

He showed that a man must enter into an everlasting covenant with his wife in this world or he will have no claim on her in the next.²³

Thus, while it seems certain that Smith taught that gods procreate, he did not specify that their offspring are necessarily spirits. And it is equally unclear if the alternative possibility, that the offspring of the gods are physical children, would be any more plausible in the prophet's thinking. Perhaps his explanation on this point was awaiting the Temple completion.

Speculative Harmonization

The difficulty of harmonizing Joseph Smith's teaching that our spirits have no beginning, that they are uncreated, with the contemporary Mormon belief that our spirits came into existence through pre-mortal spirit birth has been resolved in two different ways.²⁴ A point of agreement among proponents of each view is the existence of uncreated spirit matter. There is, however, divergence as to how this relates to the origin of our spirits. What is it that is uncreated?

The Uncreated is the Spirit Being

As discussed and summarized, Joseph Smith is on record teaching that the spirit as a conscious, individual, personal being is uncreated and eternal. Among LDS leaders this view has the fewest proponents. In fact, Joseph Smith seems to be alone.

The Uncreated is Spirit Matter

According to another view, it is not our spirit which has no beginning. Rather, it is the "unorganized spirit matter," from which our spirit is formed through spirit birth which is

uncreated. Thus our spirit is only uncreated in the same sense as our physical body is uncreated. It is the spirit matter and the physical matter from which we are formed which is uncreated. According to this view, our spirit as a conscious being began to exist at birth. If faced with this view, Joseph Smith would perhaps argue that "if our spirit had a beginning, it will have an end" returning to its native element.

Brigham Young, in fact, taught that those who do not progress will "regress" until they are disorganized and return to their native element.

If we serve ourselves and evil principles... this will lead to an eternal dissolution of the identity of the person.

"Why," some say, "we thought that the wicked were to be sent to hell to dwell with eternal burnings for evermore." They go to hell and will stay there until the anger of the Almighty consumes them and they become disorganized, as the elements of the fuel we burn are disorganized by the action of fire and thrown back again to their native element. (JD 7:286).

He further explained:

...when people take the downward road, one that is calculated to destroy them, they will actually in every sense of the word be destroyed. Will they be what is termed annihilated? No, there is no such thing as annihilation, for you cannot destroy the elements of which things are made. (JD 2:301-302; also 1:114-118; 4:54).

Heber C. Kimball gives a lengthy explanation of this view, stating:

If I do not live my religion, but turn away from the principles of light and life, my spirit will die. You have heard me speak of that a great many times, and so you have brother Brigham ... Chemists take elements and dissolve them and separate them, and can it not be done with our bodies? I answer yes, and with our spirits too... (JD 5:271).²⁵

Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

Our spirit bodies had their beginning in pre-existence when we were born as the spirit children of God our Father.

KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE PARALLEL - Spirit, Mind, Intelligence, Soul

Thomas Bullock Minutes

I have ano.^f to dwell on c it is impossible for me to say much but to touch upon them— for time will not permit me to say all— so I must come to the res.ⁿ of the dead— **the soul the im.^t Spirit** all man says God created in the begin.⁹ the very idea lessens man in my idea— I don't bel the doct: hear it all ye Ends of the World for God has told me so I am going to tell of things more noble—

NOTE - The bold has been added to aid in comparison.

we say that God himself is a **self existing God**, who told you so, how did it get into your head **who told you that man did not exist in like manner**— how does it read in the Heb. that God made man c put into it Adams Spirit c so became a living Spirit—

the mind of man— the **mind of man is as immortal as God himself**— hence while I talk to these mourners they are only separated from their bodies for a short period— their **Spirits coexisted with God** c now **converse** one another same as we do— does not this give you satisfact.ⁿ

I want to reason more on the Spirit of Man for I am dwelling on the body of man on the subj.^t of the dead— the Sp of Man

I take ring from my finger c liken it unto the **mind of man, the im.^t Sp.** bec. it has no begin.⁹ suppose you cut into but as the L^d lives there wo.^d be an end all the fools c wise men from the begin.⁹ of creation who say that man had begin— they must have an end c then the doc of annihilit.ⁿ m.st be true— but if I am right I mi.^t with boldness proclaim from the house top that **God never had power to create the Spirits** of Man at all— God himself co.^d not create himself

intelligence is self existent it is a Sp from age to end c there is **no creat.ⁿ ab.^t it** the first principles of man are self exist with God—

that **God himself finds himself in the midst of Sp** c bec he saw proper to institute laws for those who were in less intelligence that they mi.^t have one glory upon another in all that knowledge power c glory c so took in hand to save the world of Sp:

you say honey is Sweet c so do I. I can also taste the Sp. of Eternal life I know it is good c when I tell you of these things that were given me by Insp of the H S. you are bound to rece it as sweet c I rej more c more.

William Clayton Minutes

Another subject — **the soul — the mind of man** — they say God created it in the beginning. The idea lessens man in my estimation. Don't believe the doctrine — know better — God told me so — Make a man appear a fool before he gets through if he don't believe it.

We say that **God was selfexistant** who told you so? It's correct enough but how did it get into your heads — **who told you that man did not exist upon the same principle** (refer to the bible) don't say in the old Hebrew — God made man out of the earth and put into him his spirit and then it became a living body

The **mind of man — the intelligent part is coequal with God himself.** I know that my testimony is true. hence when I talk to these mourners what have they lost — They are only separated from their bodies for a short season. but their **spirits existed coequal with God** and they now exist in a place where they **converse** together as much as we do on the earth.

Is it logic to say that a spirit is immortal and yet have a beginning because **if a spirit have a beginning it will have an end** — good logic

— illustrated by his ring. All the fools learned and wise men that comes and tells that man has a beginning proves that he must have an end. and if that doctrine is true then the doctrine of annihilation is true. But if I am right then I might be bold to say that **God never did have power to create the spirit** of man at all. He could not create himself —

Intelligence exists upon a selfexistent principle — is a spirit from age to age & **no creation about it** — All the spirits that God ever sent into this world are susceptible of enlargement.

That **God himself — find himself in the midst of spirit** and glory — because he was greater saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself.

I know that when I tell you those words of eternal life that are given to me I know you taste it and I know you believe it.

Times and Seasons 5:615 - 1844

I have another subject to dwell upon and it is impossible for me to say much, but I shall just touch upon them; for time will not permit me to say all; so I must come to the resurrection of the dead, **the soul, the mind of man, the immortal spirit.** All men say God created it in the beginning. The very idea lessens man in my estimation; I do not believe the doctrine, I know better. Hear it all ye ends of the world, for God has told me so. I will make a man appear a fool before I get through, if you don't believe it. I am going to tell of things more noble —

we say that God himself is a **self existing God**; who told you so? it is correct enough, but how did it get into your heads? **Who told you that man did not exist in like manner** upon the same principles? (refers to the old Bible,) how does it read in the Hebrew? It don't say so in the Hebrew, it says God made man out of the earth, and put into him Adam's spirit, and so became a living body.

The **mind of man is as immortal as God** himself. I know that my testimony is true, hence when I talk to these mourners; what have they lost, they are only separated from their bodies for a short season; their **spirits existed co equal with God**, and they now exist in a place where they **converse** together, the same as we do on the earth.

Is it logic to say a spirit is immortal, and yet have a beginning? Because **if a spirit have a beginning it will have an end**; good logic.

I want to reason more on the spirit of man, for I am dwelling on the body of man, on the subject of the dead. I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man, the immortal spirit, because it has no beginning. Suppose you cut it in two; but as the Lord lives there would be an end. — All the fools, learned and wise men, from the beginning of creation, who say that man had a beginning, proves that he must have an end and then the doctrine of annihilation would be true. But, if I am right I might with boldness proclaim from the house tops, that God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself:

intelligence exists upon a self existent principle, it is a spirit from age to age, and there is **no creation about it.** All the spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.

The first principles of man are self existent with God; that **God himself finds himself in the midst of spirits** and glory, because he was greater, and because he saw proper to institute laws, whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself, that they might have one glory upon another, in all that knowledge, power, and glory, &c., in order to save the world of spirits.

I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life, that are given to me, I know you taste it and I know you believe it. You say honey is sweet and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life; I know it is good, and when I tell you of these things, that were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive it as sweet, and I rejoice more and more.

KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE PARALLEL - Spirit, Mind, Intelligence, Soul

Willard Richards Notes

The soul. doctors of Divinity. God created in the beginning— **he never the character of man.** don't believe it.

—who told you **God was self existent?** correct enough.— in hebrew put into him his spirit. — which was created before.

Mind of man coequal with God himself. friends separated for a small moment from their spirits. coequal with God. and hold converse when they are one with another.—

If man had a beginning he must have an end.—

might proclaim. **God never had power to create the spirit** of man.

Intelligence exist upon a self-existent principle no creation about it. all **mind & spirit** God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.—

All things God has seen fit proper to reveal while dwelling in mortality are revealed. precisely the same as though we were destitute of bodies.—

Wilford Woodruff Journal

Another subject which is Calculated to exhalt man I wish to speak of, The resurrection of the dead. The **soul the mind of man**, whare did it come from? The learned says God made it in the beginning, but it is not so. I know better. God has told me so. If you dont believe it, it wont make the truth without effect.

God was a self existing being. Man exist upon the same principle. God made a tabernacle & put a spirit in it and it became a Human soul.

Man existed in **spirit & mind coequal with God** himself. You who mourn the loss of friends are ownly seperated for a moment. The spirit is seperated for a little time. They are now conversant with each other as we are on the earth.

I am dwelling on the **immutability of the spirit of man.** Is it logic to say the spirit of man had a begining & yet had no end? **It does not have a begining** or end. My ring is like the exhistance of man. It has no begining or end.

If Cut in to their would be a begining & end. So with man. **If it had a begining it will have an end.**

If I am right I might say **God never had power to create the spirit** of man. God himself Could not create himself.

Intelligence is eternal & it is self existing. All mind that is susceptible of improvement.

The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences that they may be exhalted with himself.

This is good doctrin. It taste good. I can taste the principles of eternal life. So can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ and I know you believe it. All things that God sees fit to reveal to us in relation to us, reveals his commandments to our spirits, and in saving our spirits we save the body, the same as though we had no Body.

History of the Church 6:310-312 -1855

I have another subject to dwell upon, which is calculated to exhalt man; but it is impossible for me to say much on this subject, I shall therefore just touch upon it, for time will not permit me to say all. It is associated with the subject of the resurrection of the dead,—namely, the **soul—the mind of man—the immortal spirit.** Where did it come from? All learned men and doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning; but it is not so: the very idea lessens man in my estimation. I do not believe the doctrine; I know better. Hear it, all ye ends of the world; for God has told me so; and if you don't believe me, it will not make the truth without effect. I will make a man appear a fool before I get through; if he does not believe it. I am going to tell of things more noble.

We say that **God Himself is a self-existing being.** Who told you so? It is correct enough; but how did it get into your heads? Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? **Man does exist upon the same principles.** God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul. (Refers to the Bible.) How does it read in the Hebrew? It does not say in the Hebrew that God created the spirit of man. It says, "God made man out of the earth and put into him Adam's spirit, and so became a living body."

The **mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal [co-eternal] with God** himself. I know that my testimony is true; hence, when I talk to these mourners, what have they lost? Their relatives and friends are only separated from their bodies for a short season: **their spirits which existed with God** have left the tabernacle of clay only for a little moment, as it were; and they now exist in a place where they **converse** together the same as we do on the earth,

I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the **intelligence of spirits is immortal**, and yet that it has a beginning? The **intelligence of spirits had no beginning**, neither will it have an end. That is good logic. That which has a beginning may have an end. **There never was a time when there were not spirits; for they are co-equal [co-eternal] with our Father in heaven.**

I want to reason more on the spirit of man; for I am dwelling on the body and spirit of man—on the subject of the dead. I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man—the immortal part, because it had no beginning. Suppose you cut it in two; then it has a beginning and an end; but join it again, and it continues one eternal round. So with the spirit of man. As the Lord liveth, **if it had a beginning, it will have an end.** All the fools and learned and wise men from the beginning of creation, who say that the spirit of man had a beginning, prove that it must have an end; and if that doctrine is true, then the doctrine of annihilation would be true. But if I am right, I might with boldness proclaim from the house-tops that **God never had the power to create the spirit** of man at all. God himself could not create himself.

Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age and there is no creation about it. All the **minds and spirits** that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement.

The first principles of man are self-existent with God. **God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits** and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exhalted with Himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know that it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more.

Through that birth process spirit element was organized into intelligent entities.

Also:

Abraham used the name intelligences to apply to the spirit children of the Eternal Father. The intelligence or spirit element became intelligences after the spirits were born as individual entities.²⁶

While these views may harmonize the idea that spirit is eternal - in the sense that spirit matter is eternal - with the idea that spirits come into being through a spirit birth, it is foreign to Joseph Smith's doctrinal statements. From this point of view our existence as a unique individual had a beginning. Joseph Smith's interchangeable use of uncreated "mind," "soul," "intelligence," and "spirit," as well as his description in the King Follett discourse of spirits communicating (see the parallel), portray uncreated spirits as having individual personal identity. When he declared that spirits are eternal, he was clearly speaking of beings, not of uncreated, inanimate spirit matter.

The Uncreated is the Intelligence

B. H. Roberts was the leading proponent, and I believe originator, of the this view. The spirit was born of heavenly parents. But, the mind or intelligence is that portion or aspect of the spirit which is without beginning. Through procreation a spirit body is formed from inanimate, uncreated spirit matter to clothe the uncreated intelligence.²⁷ This view that, not only the inanimate spirit matter, but also the conscious personal aspect of our being, the intelligence of our spirit, is uncreated, is closer to Joseph Smith's teaching.

For this view Roberts relied on the 1855 amalgamation of the King Follett discourse which, on this point, is textually flawed. In the earlier 1844 version, "mind," "intelligence," "soul," and "spirit" are used synonymously and are declared to

be eternal, uncreated, and without beginning. But the flaw in the 1855 version allows for Roberts' view that the mind or intelligence is only part of the spirit, and as a conscious entity is uncreated. This allows for the interpretation that the uncreated mind or intelligence is clothed with a procreated spirit body. The weakness is that Roberts relied heavily on the phrase "intelligence of spirits" found in the 1855 amalgamation, but which has no support in the four original reports or in the 1844 published version of the discourse. (See parallel).

Roberts believed Joseph Smith taught that the "intelligence of spirits" is uncreated, while the best documentary evidence holds that Smith taught that the "intelligence or spirit" is uncreated. While Roberts claimed no source beyond the King Follett discourse for Joseph Smith's view, perhaps the flaw upon which he bases his interpretation of Joseph Smith should not rule out the possibility that B. H. Roberts, in substance, was correct. Had Joseph Smith live to expand on his views in the completed Temple. His explanation may have been that a portion of our spirit being is uncreated and a portion procreated.

If Roberts were correct in his interpretation, it escaped the LDS authorities of the nineteenth century. In 1912 his view was considered to be a new doctrinal innovation by Charles W. Penrose and Anthon H. Lund of the First Presidency who prevailed upon him to delete it from an article he had written for publication on the philosophy of Joseph Smith.²⁸

Others who believed like Roberts include John A. Widtsoe, James E. Talmage, and Joseph Fielding Smith.²⁹ Roberts' belief is closer to Smith's. They both believed that a conscious intelligent part of our be-

ing has always existed. I suspect that in spite of the apparent contrary view of Joseph Smith and the documented contrary view of other LDS authorities, that Roberts' doctrine will be the one to endure in Mormonism. The belief that we are literally children of God is pervasive and spiritually moving among members. The frequent comparison between earthly parents and a literal Father in heaven have such appeal that I doubt Mormon thought will ever move toward a non-literal view of God as our Father.

Roberts' final and most extensive discussion of the spirit and intelligence of man in *The Truth, The Way, The Life* remained unpublished from his death in 1933 until 1994. I believe this persuasive discussion now available will further cement his view in Mormon thought.³⁰

Speculation on Procreation

After arriving in Utah in 1847, Brigham Young taught on a number of occasions that God is both the literal father of our spirits and the progenitor of our flesh and that those who are exalted will beget both physical and spirit children. According to Young, the first physical bodies born on each world are the offspring of the god of that world.

After men have got their exaltations and their crowns - have become Gods, even the sons of God - are made Kings of kings and Lords of lords, they have the power then of propagating their species in spirit; and that is the first of their operations with regard to organizing a world. Power is then given to them to organize the elements, and then commence the organization of tabernacles. How can they do it? Have they to go to that earth? Yes, an Adam will have to go there, and he cannot do with Eve; he must have Eve to commence the work of generation, and they will go into the garden, and continue to eat and drink of the fruits of the corporeal world, until this grosser matter is diffused sufficiently through their celestial bodies to

enable them; according to the established laws, to produce mortal tabernacles for their spiritual children.³¹

What was the origin of his view? I have found no direct statement of Joseph Smith that either God or exalted men will beget physical children. However, he did teach that everything comes through a progenitor. For example, on 16 June 1844, he said publicly,

Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way.³²

This might suggest a possible origin for Brigham Young's view that the first physical beings on this earth were begotten. If Smith believed that the offspring of God are physical beings, not spirits, this could resolve the apparent conflict between the belief that spirits have no beginning and the belief that gods procreate. According to this possibility, the idea of spirit birth may be a misunderstanding of Smith's admittedly partial teaching on divine procreation.

Speculative Reconstruction of Joseph Smith's View

I here combine known teachings of Joseph Smith with some speculation, discussed above, to create a possible summary of his belief. Based on a careful reading of the documents, it seems clear that he taught the doctrine that God organized a number of uncreated spirits who were less advanced than he. To enable them to progress as he had done, he organized the earth. I add to this the speculation that Joseph Smith believed God came to earth with his wife³³ and, by begetting the first physical children themselves, began the process which now provides physical bodies for the spirits he formerly organized. Those from this earth who gain exaltation will

1855 Revised Manuscript of Jonathan Grimshaw

NOTE - In 1855 Jonathan Grimshaw, working in the Church Historians Office, was assigned to prepare the King Follett Discourse for inclusion in the Manuscript of Joseph Smith's History which is the source for the six volume *History of the Church*. This extract presents the most significant of the several revisions made in the 1855 draft.

The interlinings, with on exception "the spirit of," are in the handwriting of Albert Carrington and apparently are the revisions referred to in a note in the Manuscript History of Joseph Smith at the end of the April 7, entry: "read in Council Sunday 18th Nov 1855, and carefully revised by President Brigham Young." Carrington was present at this reading.

The mind, ^{or} ~~of man~~, ^{ce} ~~the intelligent part the spirit existed~~

is ~~and is as immortal as~~ coequal with God himself. I know that my testimony is true; hence when I talk to these mourners, what have they lost? Their relatives and friends are only separated from their bodies for a short season;

^{which existed coequal with God,} their spirits, have left the tabernacle of clay only for a little moment as it were, and they now exist in a place where they converse together the same as we do on the earth.

I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is

^{al} ^{the intelligence of} it logic to say that ~~a spirit s~~ is immortal, and yet that it

had a beginning? ^{The that intelligence of spirits had no beginning} ~~Nay, because if a spirit has a beginning~~

^{neither} ^{That which had a beginning may have an end.} ^{There never was a time when there was not spirits} ^{it} ^{for they are co-equal with our Father in heaven} it will have an end; that is good logic. I want to reason more

on the spirit of man; for I am dwelling on the body and spirit of man - on the subject of the dead. I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man - the

immortal ^{part} ~~spirit~~ because it has no beginning. Suppose you

but join it again and it continues one eternal round ^{the spirit of} cut it in two, then it has a beginning and an end; so with man- as the Lord liveth, if it had a beginning it will have an end.

All the fools, and learned and wise men from the beginning of creation, who say that the spirit of man had a beginning

^{if that doctrine is true} prove that it must have an end and then the doctrine of annihilation would be true.

do likewise.

While this view harmonizes Smith's statements, it has two weaknesses. First, there is no explicit statement of this view from Joseph Smith. Second, none of his close associates taught it; in fact, I have found no Mormon who has ever advocated it, even though it seems to be a plausible explanation of Smith's teachings that gods procreate but spirit beings are uncreated.

Conclusion

One of the most cherished doctrines of Mormonism, that spirits are the literal offspring of God through premortal birth, is widespread in the teachings of Mormon leaders with one surprising exception - Joseph Smith. The concept of God as our literal Father is not to be found in his recorded revelations or teachings. His documented statements that our spirits are uncreated is seemingly contrary to the concept that our spirits began at premortal birth taught by his closest associates and successors, leaders who maintained that they were perpetuating, in general, what he had initiated. The origin of the Mormon spirit birth doctrine resulted from one of three possibilities:

1. Smith's early followers misunderstood his doctrinal statements;
2. Their view derived from his unrecorded private teachings in Nauvoo;
3. They introduced new doctrinal innovations.

Regarding our being, the central question is: What is uncreated? Among LDS leaders there are advocates for three different positions. While all agree that physical matter and spirit matter are uncreated, there is diversity concerning our personal identity.

1. From the recorded teachings of Joseph Smith our spirit, to him our personal identity, is uncreated; it had no beginning.
2. To other leaders our personal identity

began when uncreated spirit matter was organized to form our individual spirit at the time of premortal birth.

3. To others our personal identity is our uncreated intelligence which became a part of our individual spirit at premortal birth. Our uncreated intelligence was incorporated into our procreated spirit.

The third view is the one I suspect will prevail. The flaw in B. H. Roberts' argument attributing this view to Joseph Smith is now overlooked. Its strength is that it combines Joseph Smith's emphatic declaration of the eternal nature of our personal identity with the cherished view that, literally, "I am a child of God."

Footnotes

1. For other translations see *Mormon Miscellaneous Scrapbook* (MMS), 6.7.
2. In Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 9.
3. *Ibid.*, 33, 46-47. The original newspaper has not yet been located.
4. *Ibid.*, 60.
5. *Ibid.*, 68.
6. In Eugene England, ed., "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 171-72. England argues in a footnote that Laub's dating of the sermon is in error and that it is probably Laub's report of Joseph Smith's King Follett discourse, given on 7 April 1844.
7. The four reports, the 1844 amalgamation, and the 1855 amalgamation are discussed in my "The King Follett Discourse: Textual History and Criticism," *Sunstone* 8 (Sept./Oct. 1983): 5-12. See MMS 5.
8. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 Aug. 1844): 615.
9. From a letter dated 14 Feb. 1842, in Lorenzo Snow Notebook, typescript, 75-76, archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
10. See *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 27:88.
11. See *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 Nov. 1844): 693.
12. Orson Pratt, *Prophetic Almanac for 1845*, n.p.
13. "The Living God," *Times and Seasons* 6

(15 Feb. 1845): 808-809.

14. "Paracletes," *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 May 1845): 891-92. Phelps included the idea of a mother in heaven in the song, "A Voice from the Prophet, 'Come to Me,'" which he wrote for the dedication of the Seventies' Hall at Nauvoo in December 1844. See *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 Jan. 1845): 783.

15. *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 June 1845): 920.

16. Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 Nov. 1845): 1,039. 17. 5:618.

18. Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 297-98.

19. In *History of the Church*, B. H. Roberts, ed., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 5:391.

20. Ehat and Cook, 233. This counsel to the Saints was frequent. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 237, 308, 312, 323, 346; D&C 124:42; *Times and Seasons* 3:601, 625, 830; 4:11; 5:472, 668, 694.

21. *Ibid.*, 232.

22. *Ibid.*, 293.

23. *Ibid.*, 233.

24. See Blake Ostler, "The Idea of the Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982): 63-74.

25. See the discussion: Boyd Kirkland, "Eternal Progression and the Second Death in the Theology of Brigham Young" in Gary James Bergera, ed. *Line Upon Line* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 171-181.

26. Bruce R. McConkie *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 750, 387.

27. See Ostler, 68-72.

28. See MMS 5.

29. See Ostler, 69-72.

30. B. H. Roberts, Stan Larson, ed., *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 279-290.

31. For Brigham Young's teachings, see *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter-day Saints Booksellers Depot, 1855-86), 4:218; 6:31, 275; 7:101; 11:122.

32. *History of the Church*, 5:476.

33. While there is no direct source in which Joseph Smith taught that God is married, he did teach that those who will be gods in the resurrection will be married. D&C 132:19-22. See also, Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven" *Line Upon Line*, 103-113.