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## Nature of the Prophet's Teaching

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### MANNER OF THE PROPHET'S TEACHING.

Next to what Joseph Smith taught may be considered his manner of teaching; in which, as I think, may be seen evidences of divine inspiration as well as in the correctness of his doctrines. Before inquiring into his manner of teaching, however, it is necessary to explain that I shall feel at liberty to refer to any of the revelations he has published as illustrating this method. It must be ever borne in mind that it is claimed for Joseph Smith in these pages that he was a man inspired of God; and as at this point we are about to consider his manner of teaching as an evidence of his inspiration, it will be readily seen that the revelations he announced and any peculiar style they possess may properly be referred to in evidence.

One other remark should be made, namely: That Joseph Smith was not a learned man in the sense that the world regards learning. How limited his scholastic attainments were has been already stated; and though his industry in pursuit of knowledge later in life did much to make up the deficiency occasioned by lack of opportunity in early life, yet, when that is allowed, it must still be said that he was not a learned man in the sense in which that phrase is understood by the world. He knew but little of history, less of languages, and still less of science or the world's philosophy. Nor can this be any reproach to him when the conditions in the midst of which he was reared and lived are taken into account; nor, for that matter, do I believe that the lack of education as that term is understood by the world, was any serious bar to his

success in the work to which God called him. If indeed he lacked the polish and finish which a liberal and polite education are supposed to impart, he also escaped the bias and warping which a training in the schools and colleges might have given to his mind.

It has already been stated how Joseph Smith received his revelations; and from the fact that much of his teaching is in the form of revelations, it may naturally be expected that it will come in the tone and spirit of authority, and will not be like the teaching of men who make no such pretensions as the Prophet did,—but satisfy themselves with deductions drawn from the revelations given in former dispensations, teaching as the Scribes and Pharisees of old. Joseph Smith announced himself a teacher sent of God; and necessarily must place the truth of what he taught upon that authority. It is that which is the peculiar characteristic of his teaching. It is a style that would be altogether out of place for the philosopher or moralist; but one that the position of our Prophet made imperative; and had he failed to teach in that style, his manner would have been out of all harmony with his pretensions and would have been a means of detecting an imposter. As an illustration of the style here pointed out, I quote the following:

“The glory of God is intelligence.’

“It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.”

“A man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge.”

“Whatever principles of intelligence we attain unto in this life, will rise with us in the resurrection; and if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.”

“There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated; and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law on which it is predicated.”

‘There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine and pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes. We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified, we shall see that it is all matter.’

“The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also: but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of spirit. Were it not so the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.”

“Adam fell that man might be, and men are that they might have joy.”

“This is the glory of God—to bring to pass the immortality and the eternal life of man.”

“There are in the Church, two Priesthoods, namely, the Melchisedek, and Aaronic, including the Levitical Priesthood. Why the first is called the Melchisedek Priesthood is because Melchisedek was such a great high priest. Before his day it was called the Holy Priesthood after the order of the Son of God. But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called the Priesthood after Melchisedek, or the Melchisedek Priesthood.”

“Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land. Wherefore be subject to the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign, and subdues all enemies under his feet.”

“Thou shalt not be proud in thy heart; let all thy garments be plain, and their beauty the beauty of the work of thine own hands.”

“Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.”

This perhaps is enough for the purpose of illustration; and will exhibit the spirit of all his teaching. In this manner he sets the officers of the church in order, asserts the powers they severally possess, and defines their relations to the church and to each other. In like manner he states the laws of the church, and gives instruction as to the manner in which the ordinances are to be administered. For example,

of baptism—about which there has been so much controversy in Christendom—he says :

“Baptism is to be administered in the following manner: The person who is called of God, and has authority from Jesus Christ to baptize, shall go down into the water with the person who has presented him or herself for baptism, and shall say, calling him or her by name—Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

And so on throughout in the ordinances to be performed, instruction is given in this spirit. Not a statement deduced from ancient scripture, sustained by labored logic, but stated in bold, round terms by virtue of the authority he possessed. It is to be observed, too, that in all such cases the simplicity and appropriateness of the language employed bear witness to its inspiration. The tendency of man is to verbosity in administering in sacred things; to introduce form and pomp and ceremony; while simplicity and directness mark all the works of God in revelation as in nature. Looked at with a view to the discovery of these excellencies in them, to what advantage do the formulas for ordinances given by Joseph Smith appear! Take this ceremony for baptism—not a superfluous word in it—direct—covering all the ground necessary, and yet how simple withal!

So it is with the formula given for administering the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which is as follows :

“O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.”

The formula for administering the wine or water is only slightly different from this. Of the above prayer I may say "that for a succession of solemn thoughts, for fixing the attention upon a few great points, for suitableness, \* \* for sufficiency, for conciseness without obscurity for the weight and real importance of its petitions"<sup>a</sup>—this prayer so far as I am aware is without an equal excepting, perhaps, the Lord's prayer.

The same qualities, directness and simplicity, are to be observed in the ordination of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the Aaronic Priesthood, by John the Baptist. This is the more surprising when the circumstances connected with that event are taken into account. The Aaronic Priesthood had not been upon the earth for many centuries; it is to be restored by the great forerunner of Messiah, whose business it is to prepare the way before him; he descends out of heaven in a pillar of light, and appears to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and lays his hands upon them.—I am bold to affirm it as my steadfast belief that any mere enthusiast or imposter would have taken advantage of these really dramatic circumstances to have indulged in something theatrical in the ceremony of ordination that was to follow. Some reference to the long absence of the Priesthood from the earth; some glowing words relative to its importance; the awful solemnity of conferring part of God's power on men; the honor these men received in having it bestowed upon them—the temptation to the mere enthusiast or impostor to have indulged in some extravagant expression would have been simply irresistible. But hear what the angel is reported to have said:

"Upon you, my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the min-

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<sup>a</sup> The quoted part of the statement is what Archdeacon Paley says of the Lord's prayer.

istering of angels, and the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness."

That was all, except that the messenger explained that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, that a higher Priesthood would later be conferred upon them, and commanded them each to baptize the other.

The simplicity, directness and appropriateness of this ordination in the presence of such temptation to introduce pomp and ceremony, stamp it with the seal of truth. It is just such an ordination as we could expect—upon due reflection—an angel to make, full, covering all necessary ground, but simple and direct.

Thus it is seen that the manner of Joseph Smith's teaching is in harmony with his pretensions; and while not a conclusive it is at least presumptive evidence of the truth of his pretentions.