

# Can God Be Pictured?\*

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A little boy was hard at work with a crayon. "What are you drawing?" his teacher asked. "God," he replied. "Oh, but we don't know what God looks like." Still busy and without looking up he replied, "We will in just a minute."

On the picturability of God, Mormonism is with the little boy, though perhaps not with his picture. The rest of Christendom tends to agree with the teacher.

## HOW IS CHRIST LIKE GOD?

MORMON: Catholic, Protestant, let me put the issue to you this way: Suppose the three of us were standing in the presence of the resurrected Christ. We each have modern cameras with quality lenses and filters. Would our photographs be adequate portrayals of God?

CATHOLIC: It depends on what you mean by "adequate" and "God." We would, at best, have only a surface glimpse of our Lord.

PROTESTANT: I am not sure I view the Easter event<sup>1</sup> just as you do. Anyway, your question seems strangely unimportant to me. What matters is whether we are "grasped" in the "faith-state."

MORMON: Already different perspectives are emerging. So let me announce where I am leading: Whatever is true of the appearance and nature of Christ as he stands glorified before us

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\*The content of the following dialogue is not invented. It is based on many actual discussions with esteemed figures in Catholic and Protestant circles and is an attempt to speak accurately for them. Its summary form has two main objectives: first, to highlight recent trends in official writing about God, and second, to show how the most fervently urged objections to Mormon teaching of Divine personalism turn, on closer analysis, into compelling thrusts toward it. The author will welcome comment from representatives of any and all faiths, especially critical comment. TGM

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<sup>1</sup>The "Easter-event" and the phenomenon of the "Empty Tomb" are the focus of much Protestant discussion. Resurrection often means the "Resurrection-faith" of the early apostles. Catholic is committed to an actual resurrection but not necessarily a "physical one."

is true of the Eternal Father, not on the surface only, but in depth.

This is not to say, as I am often berated for saying, that the Eternal Father is exactly like mortal man. Rather, Jesus Christ in his perfected and picturable state is exactly and completely like the Father.

CATHOLIC: Oh, no! You are projecting your own finitude! My objection comes from Chalcedon: There were two natures in the one person of Christ—full humanity and full Divinity. Our camera would not reveal the hidden Divinity. You are making the appearance the total picture of God—a serious and heretical error.

PROTESTANT: I am less concerned than Catholic with the exact language of the creeds. Bultmann and others have moved us to a symbolic understanding of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> And many now admit the old formulas are "weak and unintelligible." But I, too, would object to your fastening on the Jesus of history as a veritable icon of the Divine.<sup>3</sup> God is Ultimate Reality, hence, though personal, is not *a* person.<sup>4</sup>

MORMON: For both of you I have a question. If I ought to use personal imagery for Christ (because he is a person) and if I ought to worship him (because he is in every way worthy of worship), why not apply similar images to the Father?

PROTESTANT: You know very well. God is a spirit infusing yet transcending all things, therefore, cannot be spatialized. He is in all things, therefore, cannot be localized: he undergirds all that is, therefore, cannot be objectified.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See Rudolph Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans W. Zartsch (S.P. C.K., 1954).

<sup>3</sup>Much Protestant writing distinguishes the Jesus of history from the Christ of Faith. The outcome of a century of biblical scholarship concludes we must be content to see Jesus through the eyes of the early Church, or not see him at all.

<sup>4</sup>Whether it is even meaningful to speak, as is common, of the ultimate as "personal" while subtracting from the term all the ordinary and even extraordinary qualities at the foundation of personality is a question rarely pursued but, obviously, critically important. Close analysis will show that usually what is meant is that we, as persons, have a personal relationship with God, who is not a person.

<sup>5</sup>Since Schleirmacher the idea of man's "absolute dependence" has prevailed over "detached" or "spectator" observation. The core of religious caring and of the idea of holiness requires an ultimate, it is said; and to fix on any object of finite reality is idolatry. See John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1963), a popularization of Tillich.

## OF MONOTHEISM AND EMANATION

MORMON: You have abandoned our original stance. We are in the presence of Christ. Clearly, *he* does not pervade all things. But each of us may very well be pervaded by the emanation of his, or if you like, *the* Spirit. Why, then, your fixation on the "Universal Spirit" to the exclusion and, in extreme forms, denial of personality?

CATHOLIC: Because, primarily, the moment you talk of singular personality, especially in incarnate person, you limit God.<sup>6</sup> And if there is one thing the whole Christian tradition teaches, it is that God is not limited.

MORMON: If you mean by "limited" that he has boundaries and measurable, even sensuous qualities, true enough. But if you mean that *therefore* he is prevented from overmastering the universe—including Thomas' "Being" and Protestants' "power of being"—you are negating Christ's testimony: "All power is given me [not all power *is* me] both in Heaven and Earth." (Matthew 28:17) So with the Father.

CATHOLIC: But you do not face the implications of what you are saying. You are talking tritheism—three Gods. You are violating the great Nicene tradition of one substantial God of which I am chief custodian.<sup>7</sup>

MORMON: I must again question your time-honored abuse of "one" and "two." You have a two-ness, Father and Son, as Arius and Athanasius<sup>8</sup> did, which even Protestant's metaphorical reading doesn't help much. Your "two" "participate" in one metaphysical substance, buttressed by Aristotelian definitions. But the "monotheistic" comfort is illusory. For, on your view, almost every attribute we discern in the present embodied

<sup>6</sup>The entire spectrum of Catholic and Protestant writing agrees on this notion of limit, from Billy Graham to the Jesuit Karl Rahner. See his *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon Press, 1961).

<sup>7</sup>The councils discussed "Modalism" (three functions) and "Subordinationism" (that Christ was somehow subordinate to God). See J. S. Whales, *Christian Doctrine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963), Chapter 5. No one considered whether Christ could be an individual, co-eternal, and yet have developed to become fully like the Father. The main issue, traditionally, is how God became *man*.

<sup>8</sup>Athanasius held that the Second Person of the Trinity was not only bodiless but so unlike man that his "self-revelation" was really misleading; his purpose was atonement else he would not have been incarnate in human form. See Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, viii.

Christ must be denied to the Father. You object, as if terrorized, even to admitting that the Father is associated with space and time. "Incorporeal, changeless, unconditioned" are your terms. It is "scandalous" in a technical sense that Christ was a particular.<sup>9</sup>

Who, then, has two Gods? You do. Different? They are radically dissimilar! Much of what inspires honor for the resurrected Christ elicits horror when directed toward God the Father, and this splits your allegiance.

CATHOLIC: Wait. Wait. *We* worship *both* Father and Son in hypostatic union.<sup>10</sup> We do not fall into your logical net. We refuse it.

MORMON: You can say it as you can say "round-square." But you cannot *do* it anymore than you can make a "round square." It is not just a problem of logic, but a problem of action and aspiration. In action I cannot aspire, with say Thomas a Kempis, to become like Christ except by becoming *unlike* the Father. If, with some mystics, I aspire to union with the "changeless, unconditioned God," I am, no matter how you say it, downgrading Christ as an ideal and, if I understand you, attempting the impossible. But, don't you see, either Christ is the "express image of the Father's person" (Hebrews 1:3) whom we may fully emulate, or there is something more and higher. You can't have it both ways.

CATHOLIC: Christ is highest *for us*. But he does not exhaust God. Any way, you side-stepped the issue. What does *your* "two-ness" amount to? Answer my objection.

MORMON: Two separate persons are yet alike and in that sense "one"—perfected, glorified, celestial personalities. Christ is equal with God, as your creeds say. But he *became* so, as your creeds deny. I must say here that for a century it has been a ploy of our ill-wishers to disparage Mormons for "not believing in the Divinity of Christ." It turns out that we alone take seriously the full Deity that Christ achieved. He is not one aspect of the Divine, but now exemplifies through and through

<sup>9</sup>The "scandal of particularity" is a Platonic reaction. Divine individuality is lost in much Platonic and neo-Platonic thought.

<sup>10</sup>Some theologians hold that all three of the Godhead were somehow present in and yet not reducible to the person of Christ.

what it means to *be*, and not just partly to represent Divine nature.<sup>11</sup>

### WHERE LIES THE MYSTERY?

PROTESTANT: Oh, now please. The Trinity in the end has to be treated as incomprehensible. The paradoxes of the incarnation are paradoxes of faith. You lack a sense of mystery; the finite mind is helpless before the infinite.<sup>12</sup>

MORMON: Too often that is a double evasion; first because you don't really remain silent about God, and second because it suggests I alone profess to know more than can be known. But it is just the other way around. You and Catholic are the ones who impose a mass of alien and questionable categories upon the prophetic heritage.

Yet, if mysteriousness is the highest tribute we can tender the Divine, I submit that personality is, in all cases, more genuinely unfathomable. The elaborate subtleties of selfhood touch us and elude us at more points than all other sorts of reality combined. There is no superpersonal being. All the non-personal is subpersonal. Your own theologians have recently made this point,<sup>13</sup> but you still have a fixation on *being* rather than on the far more profound *living*.<sup>14</sup>

I realize it startles you to be told the Hebraic insight has greater validity than the Greek, but your reversal is a philosophical prejudice which is detrimental to Christendom and even much modern Judaism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The most explicit Mormon statement on this theme is found in the Doctrine and Covenants 93:13-15. "He received not the fulness at the first."

<sup>12</sup>Much effort has been made to make Christ himself revelation. "Revelation essentially consists not in the communication of truths about God but in the self-revelation of the divine Personality," John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (New York: Schribner's, 1939), pp. 175-177. See also John Knox, *Christ the Lord* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1945), and William Temple, *Nature, Man, and God* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1935).

<sup>13</sup>Kierkegaard, for example, in his revolt against reason, held it was more difficult to describe one individual actor on a stage than to build up a whole system of ideas, abstractions, essences.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Hartshorne is, with a minority, influenced by Whitehead and has restored a notion of "process" compatible with "being" in the Divine nature. But his views are widely ignored. See especially his *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

<sup>15</sup>The ancient Hebrews, who taught anthropomorphism, were reverent to the point of refusing to name the name of Diety. But the overlay of metaphysical reflection has often replaced Jewish personalism. See Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man* (New York: Harper, 1959).

CATHOLIC: We are up against semantic blocks. You lack proper understanding of religious language. To avoid the extremes of negation, saying only what God is not, and of anthropomorphism, using human words to apply to the nonhuman God, we have one bridge left—analogy. We can speak only of similarity of relations.<sup>16</sup> Now my question, Mormon: Do you really suppose any finite term or image, or, if you insist, picture, has a one-to-one application to the Divine?

MORMON: We are not discussing what we can *say* about God, but what we are to *think* about God. Therefore, I answer you "yes." What you can truly apprehend and picture of the Christ can be likewise, your word is "univocally," pictured of the Father. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. (John 14:9)

#### *BUT IS IT BIBLICAL?*

PROTESTANT: Oh, but this means unlicensed anthropomorphism—a God bearded and enthroned, one who has to wipe his eyes and blow his nose!

MORMON: A caricature! But such images are less in need of correction than many you recommend. Religiously it does not offend me that Christ wept, but does that a Prime Mover or First Cause cannot. The three of us will save much needless dispute if we stop defining the other man's terms.

PROTESTANT: Just the same, your writers do use finite terms that come dangerously close to blasphemy. In the name of the Bible I object to that practice.

MORMON: The Bible? Both Catholic and Protestant historians acknowledge that Trinitarianism as you and Catholic define it cannot be found in or even between the lines of the Gospels and Epistles. "The problems arose later," they say. Now I have no brief with progressive revelation. On the contrary I am rather alone in holding both to the necessity and actuality of modern self-disclosure of God. I cannot place similar confidence in retrogressive speculation.

<sup>16</sup>For the traditional notion of language see E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (London: Longman's Green, 1949). Also, less difficult by J. V. Langmead Casserley, *The Christian in Philosophy* (New York: Scribner, 1951).

CATHOLIC: I admit historical conditioning,<sup>17</sup> but that does not mean I endorse your position. Let's be more specific. If I follow you, you restrict "personality" to the human dimension, to self-hood and, as Protestant says, to crude materialism. A God the Father embodied?

### IS THIS NOT MATERIALISTIC?

MORMON: Do you want to say Christ is not embodied now?

CATHOLIC: No. A glorious body is his. But not so the Father.

MORMON: Is Christ's body "crude" because material?

CATHOLIC: No.

MORMON: Here again is the division. You say a body is good and glorious for Christ, bad and unthinkable for the Father. Hasn't your own Tielhard de Chardin persuaded you of the possibility of a fusion of spiritual and material in all authentic persons?<sup>18</sup>

Here I can be bold. A glorified body, expands, increases, intensifies all the powers of the soul. To be "free" of a body, a body such as Christ's, is to be enslaved to a lesser order of existence. If this sounds revolutionary, it is because you disregard the central meaning of resurrection. I fear a misguided reverence for God, and, often, a despising of man has led you, finally, to deny bodies to both. What a travesty that makes of Christ and His mission!

CATHOLIC: Against both you and Protestant the Pope has recently reiterated the doctrine of the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. Such a "body" must be metaphysical in a way that no finite "physical" body is.<sup>19</sup>

MORMON: Therefore you are obliged to ascribe capacities to a body that earlier Protestant was reserving for the "Universal

<sup>17</sup>See *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: America Press, 1966).

<sup>18</sup>Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist and a Catholic Jesuit who won the plaudits of Julian Huxley, maintains in his best-seller, *Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961) that the thrust of matter and life is toward "Christogenesis," the personalizing of the impersonal. But this thesis interferes with traditional Catholic dogma concerning creation, original sin, and the nature of man.

<sup>19</sup>Some Catholic progressives recently urged the Pope to endorse an "analogical presence" rather than the traditional "real presence." His refusal reflects an anxiety about too rapid and too extreme "reconstruction" in Church policy and practice.

Spirit." But that is beside the point. The point is you are locked-in to a pseudodivision of reality.

CATHOLIC: This much I can allow to you, the old Jansenist and Augustinian pessimism and dualism have been balanced now.<sup>20</sup>

MORMON: Only halfheartedly. No papal encyclical and no Protestant journal has announced that matter is as sacred as spirit, that the two worlds are continuous, and that, in Joseph Smith's words, "All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not."<sup>21</sup>

CATHOLIC: That is going too far.

MORMON: Then Christ went too far.

### WHAT MOVES THE HEART?

PROTESTANT: I detect a tendency in you to assume that your picture of Christ is motivating.

MORMON: Yes, powerfully motivating.

PROTESTANT: Well, I admit, indeed insist, that rich biblical language, such as "Lord," "Redeemer," "Savior," is to be retained in worship. So, in fact do Brunner and Tillich.<sup>22</sup> Thus though the protestant principle finally "breaks" any worldly image, we can be motivated by the imagery without claiming, as you seem to, that it has a solid connecting link.

MORMON: Your view, and commendable tolerance, can become self-defeating, a plea for "fruitful illusion." Thus not only statements about Christ, but also Christ himself are viewed not as revelatory of God, but as "transparent to" God. From there it is an easy step, and what is to prevent it, to the view that

<sup>20</sup>Augustine, partly no doubt due to his sympathy with neo-Platonic philosophy, tended to disparage the flesh and the world more than the more influential, for Catholic theology, St. Thomas Aquinas. But the Catholic still believes the "fall of man" was a wounding fall more than a "complete depravity" fall such as in Calvin.

<sup>21</sup>Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1938), p. 181.

<sup>22</sup>Emil Brunner, a German "neo-orthodox" theologian, deplored "the philosopher's God" who "simply allows himself to be looked at." Tillich too falls, or as I would say rises, into personalistic imagery. See Paul Edwards, "Tillich's Confusions," *Mind*, Vol. 74 (April, 1965), p. 192 ff; also *The Honest to God Debate*, ed. David L. Edwards (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

even if Jesus never lived it doesn't really matter.<sup>23</sup> Next, nothing matters. To this the most sophisticated answer is that, as Christ clearly exemplified, it makes a magnificent difference if the God you care for and pray to is there!

PROTESTANT: Your appeal to "differences" may be your undoing. Don't you see how easily you can distort the religious life? Everywhere are people who hear God called "Father." Immediately they transfer the trauma and misery of their childhoods with all-too-human fathers to their notion of God. The effect on worship and prayer, as any psychiatrist can tell you, is disastrous.<sup>24</sup> This is reason enough for careful theological correction of picture-thinking.

MORMON: You can't really mean what you just said. If a *picture* of a loving Father of whom Christ is a present prototype, moves you, then what of an actual one?

Look at the diagnoses of Jaspers, Unamuno, and various literary figures who describe the problem of modern man as depersonalization.<sup>25</sup> We have become things, objects to be manipulated, serial numbers. Renewal and reunion, they say, can only come when we find again the inward, distinctive, humane levels of sharing and communicating. Religion joins in the effort.

But how strangely opposite is your therapy when you turn to God. It is as if you had learned nothing from these writers. The plea for genuine intimate person-to-person relationships with God brings out the cry, "Oh, no! Recognize that God transcends all existence, that he, or should we now say 'it,' is beyond finite form or structure. Ultimate concern demands more."<sup>26</sup> Actually our ultimate concern reaches toward the intimate concern of a real, not a projected Father.

CATHOLIC: From my point of view, you are confusing philosophical ultimates and personal faith. I would not give up

<sup>23</sup>Some, e.g. positivists, point out that this kind of theology is "compatible with any state of affairs"; hence it is neither true nor false, but simply meaningless. Others, e.g. pragmatists, prefer to say that if religious beliefs, though literally false, are functionally important, they should be permitted to flourish.

<sup>24</sup>Psychoanalytic theory is actually "neutral" on the relevance of religious belief. But whether one follows Freud or not, there is much evidence of the impact of mortal fathers on one's religious conceptions.

<sup>25</sup>Gabriel Marcel, a Catholic, has also been eloquent on this theme.

<sup>26</sup>The phrase "ultimate concern" is Paul Tillich's. See his introductory volume, *Ultimate Concern*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper, 1965).

thinking of God in personal terms. Witness the great mystic works of St. John of the Cross, the devotional literature of Thomas Merton, and our art and liturgy.

MORMON: Yes, and you might also add the Catholic layman's interest in, and even preference for, the intimate saints and the Virgin. Likewise, Protestant hangs on to the personal pronouns "He" or sometimes Buber's "Thou" even in his technical writing.<sup>27</sup> But if both of you transcend these remnants of personalism in your theology, how can you seriously pray, sing, or even worship with them?

CATHOLIC: We must do so because it is the best we, being finite, can do.

MORMON: True. And for a reason—it is the best God can *be*.

CATHOLIC: Are you saying you cannot improve or refine your imagery?

MORMON: No. My images are not yet one-to-one because I am imagining what the prophets experienced. But some of your creedal ones are one-to-nothing. Mine can be revised and enriched by progressive unfolding and finally by communion face-to-face. But you want them "purified" by the categorical denial that God the Father *has* a face.

#### BUT SHOULDN'T WE DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY?

PROTESTANT: The more I listen the more I feel you are making some very questionable assumptions, apparently unaware of the great gains of recent discussions of myth and symbol.

MORMON: I'm glad you have said it so starkly. It reflects a strange misunderstanding.

Demythologizing, to name one enterprise, reminds us that in this scientifically enlightened age we should make none of the "primitive" assumptions of the New Testament cosmology.<sup>28</sup> How cosmology relates to God is a puzzlement, since

<sup>27</sup>Martin Buber, a brilliant Jewish philosopher, in *Ich Du* (I-Thou) protests defining man's relationship to God as an I-it or I-he relationship. See *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 1937).

<sup>28</sup>Bultmann's effort to "demythologize" is an attempt to interpret the "myths," not necessarily fictions, of the New Testament in terms of their relevance to the modern "existential predicament" of man. See *Kerygma and*

others of your influential writers, such as Barth, Brunner and the Niebhurs, inveigh against "natural theology."<sup>29</sup> But in most instances they are not really "depicturing" the biblical message, but replacing images with images.

Robinson suggests we abandon our notions of God "up there" and "out there." For what? For the god "down there," "ground and power of being."<sup>30</sup> Here we are with a spatial image again. Catholic says "beatific vision" and seems to fancy a vortex of beautiful light rays. Some theologians prefer "spirit-itself," "love-itself."<sup>31</sup> More images. Process philosophers talk of "creative force" or "principles of harmony."<sup>32</sup> The radical and secular theologians prefer to redefine "God" as the name of man's love for other men.<sup>33</sup> Told to avoid any images or concepts at all, we squint our eyes and try to envisage a quality-less blur, itself an image. I conclude, therefore, that you cannot consistently be against pictures, but only against the Christ-picture.

And what has all this done for us? Some call it the "trivialization" of God. Some call it "death by a thousand qualifications," and Altizer and friends call it just plain death. But the

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*Myth.* A lucid criticism is Ronald W. Hepburn, "Demythologizing and the Problem of Validity," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and Macintyre (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1955).

<sup>29</sup>See Karl Barth, "The Christian Understanding of Revelation," *Against the Stream* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1954); Emil Brunner, "The Natural Knowledge of God," *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950); and Reinhold Niebuhr, "Reinhold Niebuhr," *How My Mind Has Changed*, ed. Harold E. Fey (New York: Meridian Books, 1961). "Natural theology" is broadly the effort to gain access to the existence and/or nature of God by reference to natural world or natural reason. These writers argue this is impossible.

<sup>30</sup>John A. T. Robinson, an Anglican theologian, has stirred up immense controversy (some of it second-handed through Bishop James Pike) in his widely-read *Honest to God*. (See footnote 5) He canonizes "being" and repudiates "person."

<sup>31</sup>Thus Nels F. S. Ferre, an intrepid critic of Tillich, claims Tillich, toward the end of his *Systematics* (and, it turned out, his life) wished to rewrite it entirely, substituting as the basic category "Spirit" instead of "Being-itself." But while Ferre himself refuses to retain person, preferring "The personal" in his latest book, *The Living God of Nowhere and Nothing* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), he retains Spirit, Life, and Love as "Primary descriptions" of God. He says, "God cannot even be personality in the sense of our knowledge of personality," because such a God would be "bound." (p. 23).

<sup>32</sup>See John Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), a reworking of Whitehead's religious thought.

<sup>33</sup>See Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966). A most perceptive criticism is Robert McAfee Brown, *The Meaning of the Death of God*, ed. Bernard Murchland (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

Mormon, immersed in the prophetic tradition, has held no funeral. For the prophets, such depersonalized gods never lived.

### IS APPEARANCE REALITY?

CATHOLIC: There is another difficulty I have wanted to mention all along. You startle me with your confident objectivity. You are giving much too much validity to your apparitions. I warn you that what God is "experienced as" has little if any bearing on what God *is*. We make room, and some of your people don't seem to realize it, for visionary and dream experience like your Joseph Smith's. But that is secondary to sound rational metaphysics demonstrable by reason.<sup>34</sup>

Some of our children, for example, start by "seeing" saints and the Virgin. At another stage of maturity they report impressions of Christ. But finally they become clear on First Principles, and they anticipate in abstract thought the pure, undifferentiated white light of the "beatific vision."

MORMON: The process of our maturation is just the reverse. We *begin* with the light and spirit that emanate from God. "To every man is given the light." Inferential knowledge develops. Then we grow to closer understanding and communion in the realm of "saints." But finally these preparatory experiences lead to the crowning presence of God. We do not thus "get beyond" personality, ours or his, but are transformed by him until we are capable of entering his presence.

### BUT IS NOT THE DIVINE BEYOND VISUALIZATION?

PROTESTANT: That brings up another of your intolerable assumptions. Your discussion shows that by "pictured" you finally mean "visualized," as if someday we will really see, not just imagine. Now surely you will not say the invisible is visible.

MORMON: You and, even more, Catholic, though your theories prohibit visualization of Deity have worked hard to achieve just that, a striving that includes Michaelangelo, Blake, and Dali. We needn't argue the justification here. Someday maybe all of us will be able to recognize how much and how little difference there is between your "immaterial substance" and

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<sup>34</sup>See Gustive Weigel and Arthur G. Madden, *Religion and the Knowledge of God* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961).

my "refined matter." There are subtleties of soul, as well as of body, that no clumsy dualism can account for.

But even on your own premises you should not give up prematurely. Scientists tell me they "visualize" electrons even though they are unseeable. It is fashionable to talk of "models" of this unseen reality. These are not just useful fictions, but in some way they actually connect with or "reflect" reality.

All I need to say here is that since among the prophets there are genuine visions and visitations, I cannot honestly regard as conclusive the doubts of those who have had neither.

**PROTESTANT:** Let me issue my final admission and hesitation. My struggle to make sense of God in this new age may be awkward at times. But my motives are clear, as are Catholic's for all his strange "sacred traditions." We want to uphold the majesty and sacredness and grandeur of the Divine. The Absolute, admittedly slippery, is traditionally the most sublime.

**MORMON:** I raise a question about your Absolute, a question rarely spoken that afflicts the depths of man more than all secular attacks combined.

Why should an Absolute in power, plenitude of being, or whatever, create men so hopelessly unlike him? Why should I revere the so-called majesty and grandeur of a God who chose to place an everlasting gulf between his nature and mine, with whom I have and can have nothing in common except being?

**CATHOLIC:** The question is blasphemous. It shows an appalling irreverence, an incredible blindness to man's contingency. Here I contribute my witness: God's very nature forbids that he should have equals.

**PROTESTANT:** Finally, I believe the "Ultimate Reality," is gracious and fulfills man's quest for grace. But, again, I oppose any identification of the ultimate as *a* being.

**MORMON:** I witness in reply: God's very nature *requires* that he should have equals, sons becoming joint-heirs. Christ was the first to become fully like the Father. And he is the exemplar of *our* actual Divine possibilities. Thus I have left to the last the question that should have been first: Which God, or which picture of God, is most worthy of our all-consuming love?