INVOLUATE FREEDOM. Traditional thought has often held that God limits his own power for the greater good. Usually this view is associated with insistence on the importance of human freedom. Character and personality, it is argued, can develop only if human beings are genuinely free. Likewise, God’s love, if authentic, must be voluntary. These goods are held to outweigh the evil introduced by free agents into the world, even when the consequences are terribly destructive. Mormon thought concurs. Creation is indeed a “vale of soul making.” Experiences of contrast are indispensable to knowledge and growth (2 Ne. 2; D&C 122). God’s self-limitation is essential to the attainment of his purpose. Moreover, God not only will not but cannot ultimately coerce men to choose life over death. “All intelligence . . . is free to act for itself in that sphere in which God has placed it . . . Behold, here is the agency of man and here is the condemnation of man” (D&C 93:30–31). God can bring good out of the experience of evil to the degree that his creatures harmonize their will with his and continue to seek, affirm, and embrace him. In that cooperative mode, he can, and will, enable all his creatures to become what they have it in them to become (D&C 88:14–40).

NATURAL EVIL AND THE NATURE OF POWER. It is commonly observed that not all evil is caused by human beings. Earthquakes, epidemics, plagues, volcanic eruptions, and other natural disasters occur. Furthermore, these and some evils caused by human aberration are of such magnitude as to call for divine intervention. The Holocaust is a glaring modern instance. Such considerations underscore the scriptural teaching that although God has power over the elements, and though there is divine intervention, divine influence over human beings is never “controlling” or “manipulating”; it is liberating, empowering, and persuading. This is the power continuously exercised by God, even in the midst of tragedy and affliction. It is the power most to be sought and most to be emulated.

“No power or influence,” says the Doctrine and Covenants of the uses of authority, “can or ought to be maintained . . . [except] by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). Indeed, in the exercise of power “without compulsory means,” it is not enough to say that man needs God. It is also the case, and eternally, that God needs man.

CREATIVE COMPlicity. Some contemporary movements affirm either that human beings emerged from a long and mindless process of evolution or that they have been “thrown” or thrust into the world. Either way, creatures exist without their permission in a predicament not of their own making. Latter-day Saint thought returns to the oft-forgotten scriptural thesis that all mankind participated in the original plan of life and prepared for the hazards and traumas waiting in this world. In an act of faith and foresight, the entire human family elected to enter mortality. For Latter-day Saints the cumulative witness of sacred texts, ancient and modern, is that, with rare exceptions, every person who ever lived will have benefited from the mortal sojourn and from embodiment.

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THEOGONY

Theogony refers to the origin of God and has been a subject of religious inquiry throughout the ages. Ancient peoples, notably Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, developed elaborate genealogies for their various gods, rationalizing and mythologizing the birth and characteristics of each. This is in contrast to the monotheistic, Judeo-Christian view that God is eternal, uncaused, and without origin. The traditional argument states that if every effect has a cause, there must be a first cause that has always existed, and that is God.

The LDS theogonic view is unlike all others. It is based on a doctrine of eternal existence of all intelligent beings (D&C 93:29) coupled with a belief in their eternal progression (see D&C 93:13–14). By embracing truth and light, uncreated intelligence is capable of growing in knowledge, power, and organization until it arrives at the glorified state of godhood, being one with God (see DEIFICATION). This process known as eternal progression is succinctly expressed in the LDS aphorism, “As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become” (Lorenzo Snow). Adam was told by God, “Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity. Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:67–68).

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