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A Treatise on the Names of God

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I am persuaded we shall greatly clarify the subject matter of our discourse here if we say a few words in relation to the "Names of God", for if the names of God are not considered there is a possibility of our remaining in confusion concerning the terminology of our discussions in this book. This is especially important, since in the use of the names of Deity in the Hebrew Scriptures the name bears some relation to his nature. Hence, as one authority puts it, the various names in the *Old Testament* are very important as showing the various conceptions of the Deity held by them in the successive stages of revelation.

El is the most primitive Semitic name for God. Its root meaning is "strong" or "mighty", for such is the major significance the Hebrews seem anxious to impart unto the character of God. It is found in ancient compound proper names "Isra-El"; "Beth-El".

Elohim is a plural name and is used throughout in *Genesis* i, and has plagued Jewish and Christian scholarship not a little, because of their anxiety to preserve the idea of the "oneness" of God. It is a plural form and literally means "Gods", but shrinking from the idea of a plurality of Gods various devices have been employed to get rid of this plural form. Chiefly it is explained "that the plural seems to be intensive", and often it implies fullness of mind, or richness of attributes. It occurs more than 2500 times in the *Old Testament* and is always rendered "God" in the English (authorized version). Thus they would reduce Elohim from plural to singular. However, the fact remains that Elohim is a plural form and properly rendered into translation means "Gods": "And the Gods said: Let there be light, and there was light; and the Gods said let the dry lands appear", and so on throughout the creative acts. This is in harmony with other *Bible* terminology, for instance: "And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (*Gen.*

i:26). "Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (*Gen.* iii:22).

After the first chapter of *Genesis* "Elohim" seems to be supplanted by "the Lord God", and so he was known under that title in *Genesis* ii and elsewhere as "the Lord God". The name or title appears first in the fourth verse of *Genesis*, chapter ii, which is really the proper beginning of that chapter. This is the translation of the Hebrew "El-Shaddai", which is translated (authorized version) "God Almighty", and in the *New Testament* "God, the Father Almighty".

Perhaps the most important of the names of the *Old Testament* for God is "Jehovah", the English spelling of the word. The vowels of the word had to be supplied by the reader, the consonants which form this name were **JHVH** or **YHVH**. The name was considered so sacred by the Hebrews that in reading, it was customary not to pronounce it aloud, but to substitute for it "Adonai", or Lord. It is said "the word Jehovah was formed about A. D. 1500 by combining the consonants **JHVH** with the vowels of **Adonai**. Also it is held that the original pronunciation was properly **YAHVEH** or **JAHVEH**", and had not before been known as the name of God. It is the name of the God of the "covenant". Previous to this God had revealed himself to Moses from the burning bush as "I Am that I am", i. e. the self-existing one (*Ex.* iii:14). This name Jehovah also must have had within it the significance of this quality of self-existence because in the Scripture giving the name "**I Am that I Am**", it says, "this is my name forever" (*Ex.* iii:14); so that all subsequent names of God must include this idea—"the self-existing one".

Further in relation to the plurality of Elohim—Gods, in *Genesis*, they represent those who have partaken of the "Divine Nature", that is to say, those who have participated in the One Divine Nature (See *II Peter* i:4). Here the apostle says that through Christ God has given unto those who receive the gospel "great and precious promises, that by these ye [those receiving the gospel] might be partakers of the Divine Nature having escaped the corruption that is in the world through

lust." That is by this acceptance of the gospel men become partakers of the Divine Nature, i. e. the One Nature, God's Nature, and hence become like him. Much encouragement to this idea that there exists a plurality of those who have attained unto the Divine Nature is given by reason of the phraseology of a large number of passages from the *Old Testament* Scriptures. For instance—

"The Lord God is God of Gods"—that is from Moses (*Deut. x:17*):

"The Lord God of Gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know"—that is from *Joshua* (xxii:22).

"O give thanks unto the God of Gods, * * *.

"O give thanks to the Lord of Lords"—that is King David (*Ps. cxxxvii:2-3*).

"And shall speak marvelous things against the God of Gods"—that is from *Daniel* (xii:36).

"The Lamb shall overcome them; for he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings"—that is the beloved disciple of Jesus, John the Revelator (*Rev. xvii:14*).

Had these expressions fallen from the lips of Pagan kings or false prophets who are sometimes represented as speaking in the Scriptures, we might question the propriety of making such quotations in the support of the doctrine of plurality, but since these expressions came from prophets and recognized servants of God, I ask those who criticize our faith in the matter of a plurality of Divine Intelligences to explain away these expressions.

Paul's passage harmonizes with these Scriptures above quoted, namely:

"For though there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be Gods many and Lords many), but to us there is but one God, [that is, "pertaining to us" as Joseph Smith explained], the Father, of whom are all things [Creator] and we in him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (*I Cor. viii:5-6*).

From Christ Jesus, our Lord, we learn that he regarded the Scriptures in his ministry and to which he appealed as say-

ing that those "unto whom the word of God came" were referred to as "Gods"; and he holds that the Scripture could not be broken, that is "denied"—they were true—"Then say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified [meaning himself] that I blaspheme because I said I am the Son of God" (*St. John* x: 24-9)! And David in the *Psalms* (lxxxii) says: "God standeth in the congregation of the Mighty; he judgeth among the Gods." These undoubtedly are the "Gods" in heaven to whom Paul alludes in his passage above.

This idea that there exists a plurality of Divine Intelligences or Deities throughout the universe, appointed as Presiding Councils in the subdivisions of God's universe admits of no doubt, and it gives the revealed background of the plurality of the Holy Trinity of the Christian faith of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who preside over the part of the universe of which our earth and its associate heavens are the realms of their dominion. To Joseph Smith, the Prophet, the Lord in giving the source of the knowledge of Moses from which he wrote his story of the creation, represents the Lord as having said to Moses, after he had revealed to him something of the illimitable extent and glory of his creations—

"And the Lord God spake unto Moses saying: The heavens they are many and they can not be numbered unto men but they are numbered unto me for they are mine; and as one earth shall pass away and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works. * * * And now Moses, my son, I will speak unto thee concerning this earth upon which thou standest and thou shalt write the things which I shall speak" (*Pearl of Great Price, Book of Moses, i*).

From this wonderful passage we learn that the revelations of God to Moses in regard to the creation were limited to the earth upon which he stood, and the heavens associated with it; and therefore his revelations to Moses concerning God were also limited to the Presiding Divine Council pertaining to our earth, and its heavens. The One God pertaining to us, consisting of the Holy Trinity. Even in that Trinity a plurality

of Divine Intelligences exists, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Of the enlightenment that is thus infused into the revelation which God has given of himself, I need not further comment here.

Another word brought forth by the Prophet Joseph Smith, of the New Dispensation, adds further light. He was dealing with the name of God in the pure, or Adamic language. This, of course, under the inspiration of God—this knowledge, not from books however, but revealed from God. It stands in the form of questions and answers as follows:

Ques. "What is the name of God in the pure Adamic language?"

Ans. Ah Man.

Ques. What is the name of the Son of God?

Ans. Son Ahman, the greatest of all the parts of God, excepting Ah Man.

Ques. What is the name of men (i. e. in the pure Adamic language)?

Ans. Sons Ahman.

Ques. What is the name of angels in the pure language?

Ans. Anglo man" * * *.

"The revelation," says the Apostle Orson Pratt of the New Dispensation, who gives out this information, in a discourse delivered in 1855 in Salt Lake City, "goes on to say, that Sons Ahman are the greatest of all the parts of God, excepting Son Ahman and Ahman. * * *

"What is the conclusion to be drawn from this?" continues Elder Pratt: "It is that these intelligent beings are all parts of God" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. ii, p. 342).

This statement as to the significance of the names of God the Father and the Son of God, etc., is peculiarly enlightening, and may be advanced here to great advantage in the light of the new knowledge concerning the extent, I may say, the limitless immensity of God's universe, in which we now speak in the language of the discoveries of modern science, concerning the immensity of the universe to a billion of great, splendid, blazing suns that inlay the sky of the visible universe to the mighty instruments of man's invention; and which compose our

own recognized galaxy, or universe, of which there may be endless thousands of such universes; and when it is conceivable that these billions of blazing suns may be like our own sun centers of opaque planets inhabited as is our own earth by intelligences of varying grades and keenness and intensity, with Divine Councils presiding throughout the extended universe each Divine Intelligence an incarnation of the One Divine Nature, and are Gods presiding in a brotherhood of Deities throughout—in the light of all this new knowledge it is not inconsistent to believe in a pluralistic universe with pluralistic Deities of the One God Nature presiding over the many subdivisions of it. Each division separate from others by distinctive peculiarities, but all harmonized into a great Oneness.

THE UNITY OF GOD

“Human language,” says one authority upon this subject, “has much difficulty in expressing the truth which the doctrine of the Trinity [the Tri-une God] is intended to convey. The Christian believes in the unity of God, i. e., it is inconceivable that the three Persons could act otherwise than in perfect harmony together; it is inconceivable, e. g. that the Son should wish to forgive and the Father be unwilling to do so. But at the same time the *New Testament* makes it clear that there are relationships within the Godhead [i. e. the Trinity]. * * * We do not find the doctrine of the Trinity anywhere clearly defined in the *New Testament*, but there are many passages which imply it, and which require it if we are to give them any satisfactory explanation; e. g. the Baptismal formula, ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost;’ and the Benediction, ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all’ ” (See *Bible Dictionary* of the Cambridge edition, A. V., James Pott & Co., N. Y.).

The matter of unity in God when consisting of three Personages is not inconceivable. John Stuart Mill in his essay on “Theism”, sets forth this idea in speaking of the evident unity in nature which suggests also that nature is governed by one

Being, comes very nearly stating the exact truth in an alternative statement on the Oneness or unity of God, in his remarks, namely:

“At least, if a plurality be supposed it is necessary to assume so complete a concert of action and unity of will among them, that the difference is, for most purposes, immaterial between such a theory and that of the absolute unity of the Godhead” (*Essays on Religion, “Theism”*, p. 133).

The plurality of Divine Personages is so apparent in both the *Old Testament* and the *New* that there is no escaping the fact of such plurality and at the same time there is such a demand for the idea of “unity” in the Divine Presiding Councils that it can not be otherwise than that it is a unity subsisting between different personages and hence both plurality and unity is an absolute need to meet the reasonable conceptions of God, and that necessity is here made by the ideas and evidences advanced in support of this glorious idea of a plurality of Persons being a unity of will, of purpose and of achievement.

Still a further word from the Prophet of the New Dispensation is enlightening in its harmonizing effect into Oneness or Unity of our conceptions of Deity. It occurs in one of his revelations, and stands as follows:

“He that ascended up on high [referring to the Christ], as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things the **Light of Truth**, which Truth shineth [i. e. it is manifest—is to be seen]. **This is the Light of Christ** as also he [the Light of Christ] is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. * * * As also the Light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; and the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the Light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same Light that quickeneth your understandings” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, sec. lxxxviii:7-11).

This represents the Light or Spirit of Christ as creative power; also as preserving and world-sustaining power; and in-

telligence-inspiring power. Doubtless it joins in truth-union with the passage of St. John's *Gospel Preface*, which says:

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the Light of men." * * *

Then he refers to the mission of John the Baptist, who came to bear witness of this Light, the Christ—"that all men through him might believe." He (John the Baptist) was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light—

"That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,"—intelligence-inspiring power, i. e. the Light was the source of the intellectual Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

In a later verse he says:

"And the Word, [which was with God from the beginning, and was God] was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory) the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father full of grace and truth."

Thus the Light which accompanies every man into the world, or in other words, the Light which is the intellectual Light of man, is identified with the Christ, and now resuming our quotation from the revelation of Joseph Smith, and with emphasis—

"Which Light [i. e. the Light or Spirit of Christ] proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The Light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, sec. lxxxviii:12-13).

In other words, through the Spirit that vibrates forth from

the presence of God and is fused into One Divine essence, extends God with all his attributes, qualities and powers, into the universe; bringing God into all the space-depths; establishing the every-where-ness of God—his **Omnipresence**; also his **Omnipotence**; and **Omniscience**; with all his attributes of knowledge, judgment, justice and love-manifestation everywhere extended: everywhere dynamic and the true unity-manifestation of God, the Almighty. The unity growing from all the Deities incarnate in those who have attained unto St. Peter's One God Nature of which those who receive the truth may become partakers, participants in God.

This is said under this section (vi), on the "Names of God" to bring us into the heights and glories of this subject we are contemplating.