

CHAPTER I

The Problem of the Nature of Man

Christian thinkers have debated for ages the question of the basic nature of man and his need for the Redeemer. Our purpose in this chapter is simply to make clear the Book of Mormon teaching on the subject and show how it fits in with some of our other modern scriptures. For the benefit of friends not of our faith, it should be stated that the Church categorically rejects the doctrine of the natural depravity of man and just as explicitly denies the view that man is essentially good by nature and has no need for a redeemer. Our Book of Moses makes clear that the Lord forgave Adam his transgression in the Garden of Eden (6:53):

Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God both atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:54)

The Book of Mormon—and it is sustained by other modern scriptures—clearly teaches that all men, not just "incorrigible sinners," are by nature "carnal, sensual, and devilish" (Alma 42:10), that through the fall of Adam there was brought upon all mankind a spiritual and temporal death by which men were cut off or separated from God (Alma 42:9). If the words *carnal*, *sensual*, and *devilish* seem unduly harsh, let us hasten to add that their true meaning will be brought out as we proceed. No matter how basically good we may consider the spirits of men to have been in their pre-existent state, the fact is that the Nephite scripture makes clear that, except for the Atonement of Christ, the fall of Adam would have made our spirits, following our temporal death, like unto the devil, and we

would have "become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God." (2 Nephi 9:9) Such was the power of the fall. So while man may have been essentially good in his pre-existent state, the fact remains that his acquisition of a mortal body and the effect of Adam's fall upon it make for him a very serious problem.

Now let us follow man's career as he comes into mortality, and examine his moral nature and capabilities as he progresses through life, as seen from the teachings of the Book of Mormon. When he is born into this life, he is regarded as innocent, being neither good nor bad, morally speaking. Little children are innocent because they are not accountable and capable of committing sin. (Moron) 8:10) The penalty pronounced upon Adam and his posterity is held in abeyance, as far as little children are concerned, until they grow up and become accountable for their actions before God. The prophet Mormon quotes our Lord's words as follows:

Little children are whole ["strong," "well," morally speaking], for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in Me, that it hath no power over them. (Moron) 8:8; cf. D & C 29:46-47)

In other words, little children cannot be held for original guilt, Christ having atoned for Adam's transgression. (See Moses 6:54, quoted above.) But when children become accountable for their sins, being free agents with power to act for themselves (2 Nephi 2:16; cf. Moses 6:56), the effects of the fall begin to assert themselves upon the "man of the earth, earthy" (I Cor. 15:47), and "when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good." (Moses 6:55) The *Doctrine and Covenants* states what happens to the "natural man" in this way:

And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light

and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers. (93: 39)

King Benjamin in his last sermon makes it clear that

Men [all men] drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children. (Mosiah 3:18)

And how do they become as little children (innocent) in God's eyes? By believing "that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent." (*Ibid.*) Then the king hastens to give further explanation in these words:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child cloth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

The context of this passage makes it clear that Benjamin is making a general statement which concerns all men. What is meant by "natural man" in the passage? By "natural man" is meant man who is subject to the penalty placed upon Adam, unlike little children in this respect, and who, aware that salvation comes only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, does not yield to the requirements of the gospel, "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit," in order to become a new man in Christ. He remains the "old man," (Rom. 6:6) cut off by reason of Adam's fall "from the presence of the Lord." (2 Nephi 9:6) All men, regardless of how ethical or just they may appear to be on the surface, are in this fallen state unless, after proper teaching, they are "born of the spirit" and become "re-

deemed of the Lord." (Mosiah 27:24) Notice these words of the younger Alma:

And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that *all mankind*, yea, men and women, *all nations, kindreds, tongues and people*, must be born again; yea, *born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state*, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and *thus they become new creatures*; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. (Mosiah 27:25-26; italics ours.)

Notice how King Benjamin's subjects responded to the type of teaching he gave (as in Mosiah 3:19), and surely they can't all have been regarded as "incorrigible sinners," to use the phrase of one of our Church teachers.

And they had viewed themselves in their own *carnal state*, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. (Mosiah 4:2; italics ours.)

And had the king's subjects not responded as they did, they would have remained, to use the king's own words, "in their worthless and fallen state." (Mosiah 4:5) In other words, they would have remained, collectively speaking, as "natural man."

Abinadi, the great Nephite prophet, in speaking to the wicked priests of King Noah, reinforces or supports the thesis upheld here by pointing out that the fall

. . . was the cause of *all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselos to the devil. Thus all mankind were lost*;

and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state. (Mosiah 16:3-4; italics ours.)

This passage also makes clear the capabilities of fallen, sinful man. Through the atonement of Christ all men may be redeemed. Through repentance and being "born of the Spirit" (Mosiah 27:24) they may become "new creatures" (Mosiah 27:26) and, like the younger Alma, will not be "cast off." (Mosiah 27:27)

Another classical passage which shows the true nature of all men (informed, accountable men) in this life who have not taken advantage of Christ's atonement and redemptive power is this:

Therefore, as the soul could never die, and *the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death* as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death. Therefore, as *they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature*, this probationary state [mortality] became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state. (Alma 42:9-10; italics ours.)

We repeat, all men, whether "incorrigible sinners" or so-called "good men" who are ethical and just, "the honorable men of the earth," (D. & C. 76:75) are carnal and fallen as long as they fail to become "new creatures" by yielding to "the enticings of the Holy Spirit" and by laying aside the "natural man" and becoming saints through the atonement of our Lord. (Mosiah 3:19) In other words, men must be spiritually reborn, even as the Lord taught Nicodemus, or they cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3) Now we suppose that Nicodemus was an ethical, just, and honorable man in his relationships to others; nevertheless, the Savior made it perfectly clear that he had to have a spiritual rebirth or he would remain, as Book of Mormon language has it, a "fallen" or "natural" man.

When the Nephite record refers to fallen man as "carnal, sensual, and devilish," it seems to shock some people - and it should. But let us here introduce the following explanation by Dr. David Yarn of Brigham Young University:

An explanation . . . suggests . . . that the words *carnal*, *sensual*, and *devilish*, must not be limited to their more narrow and specific connotations, but that they are accurately, though more broadly, interpreted by the scriptural phrase "enemy to God." That is to say, not all men who have not made the covenants with the Christ are given to indulging in degrading practices which are appropriately designated carnal, sensual, and devilish in a dictionary sense. Yet all men, regardless of how moral and how pure they may be with reference to such practices, are enemies to God, until they yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, accept the Atonement of the Lord, and are submissive to His will. A significant point here is that what we conventionally call basic personal and social morality is not enough. In addition to these things one must do other things which are binding upon him by virtue of his covenantal relationship with the Father and the Son. Or, putting it in another way, for one not to be an enemy to God he must endeavor to do all things whatsoever the Lord his God shall command him. (See Abraham 3:25)

Summarily put, the natural man (he who is carnal, sensual, and devilish, he who is an enemy to God) is the man who has not humbled himself before God and made covenants with God by receiving the revealed ordinances at the hands of God's authorized servants; or the man who, having done these things, has failed to live according to the covenants made in baptism and to the injunction given when he was confirmed a member of the Church—"Receive the Holy Ghost."¹

The Book of Mormon teaching relative to the nature of man may be briefly summarized in this way:

1. When man comes into this life as a child, he is re-

garded as innocent, being neither good nor bad, morally speaking. The atonement of Christ frees little children from original guilt brought about by Adam's transgression.

2. Though man may have been essentially good in the pre-existence, the Nephite record makes clear that the fall brought upon man dreadful consequences. Man was cut off, temporally and spiritually, from the presence of God. Save for the atonement of Christ, they would become devils after death, angels to the devil.

3. When men become accountable for their actions before God, unlike little children in this respect, the curse brought upon Adam becomes effective, and they become carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature, fallen men, cut off from God's presence. All men, whether regarded as "incorrigible sinners," or as just, ethical, and honorable, are in this state or condition, even as Nicodemus of New Testament fame.

4. Man in his carnal state, "natural man," must have a "spiritual rebirth" and become a new creature before God if he is to defeat the consequences of Adam's fall and return to God's presence. He can do this by accepting the gospel, by acknowledging the atonement of Christ and repenting of his sins, by being baptized by proper authority, and by receiving the Holy Ghost after the laying on of hands. He is then in "the straight and narrow path which leads to eternal life," but he must even then "press forward with a steadfastness in Christ." (2 Nephi 31:18, 20) So there is no end to the capabilities of "natural man" if he recognizes his state and attempts to remedy his condition.

In a revelation given by the Lord to Joseph Smith in 1832, He makes clear the state of men throughout the world, including so-called Christians. Here it is:

And the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth un-

der darkness and under the bondage of sin. *And by this you may know they are under bondage of sin, because they come not unto me.* For whoso cometh not unto me is under the bondage of sin. (D. & C. 84:49-51. Italics ours.)

How can certain members of the Church, in the light of this revelation and the plain teaching of the Book of Mormon, hold that man is essentially good? Wouldn't it be more rational to admit that he is still "natural man," "fallen man," man in the raw, spiritually speaking? Wouldn't it be far more sensible to extol his infinite capabilities if he receives a spiritual rebirth than to stress his essential goodness in his present unsaved, carnal state? For if he undertakes his spiritual regeneration, the Book of Mormon makes clear that even in this life he may become a saint (Mosiah 3:19); indeed, he may become sanctified (holy) and look upon sin with abhorrence. (Alma 13:11-12) Such a state is much to be desired.

¹*Gospel Living in the Home*, p. 51. Deseret Sunday School Union, 1962.