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### The Meridian Dispensation

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## The Meridian Dispensation

*The mission of the Christ in outline.* We come now to the dispensation of the gospel that is to be graced by the advent of the Son of God and the performance of his great mission. That mission is to reveal in person God the Father; and all that is or can be called God in the universe: “For . . . in him ⟨shall⟩ [should] all fulness dwell . . . ⟨even⟩ the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 1:19; 2:9; and context). To redeem man from the consequences of Adam’s transgression, from the “Fall.” To introduce the element of mercy into the divine economy, by making it possible under a reign of moral and spiritual law to forgive the personal sins of men without violence to justice; also bringing men from their alienation from God back to fellowship and union with him; by which they are redeemed from spiritual death, and restored to spiritual life. To bring to pass the resurrection from physical death, by which shall be established immortality—a deathless, physical life. Lastly, the Christ came to stand as a witness for the truth of all the foregoing things; for he said unto Pilate, when brought before the Roman procurator by the Jews. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37). These several things constituted the very heart and life of the mission of the Christ, and, of course, of the gospel, the whole plan of God for the establishment of both the physical immortality of man, and also the eternal spiritual life of man.

*The two great Christian sacraments.* We pass over the historical features of the meridian dispensation as being too well known to require restatement: viz, the coming and mission of the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist; and the birth and youth and early ministry of the Messiah himself. It should be noted, however, that to set forth in concrete form and perpetuate the main features of his mission, the Christ established two sacraments; each having two parts, viz., first, baptism; and second, the Lord’s supper. Baptism, as stated

above, consists of two parts: (a) baptism, or birth of the water; and (b) baptism, or birth of the spirit.

(a) *Water Baptism.* Water baptism is to be performed by immersion, or complete burial of the candidate in water. The official formula for this ordinance as given by the risen Christ to the Nephites in America, was as follows:

Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water. . . . And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them ⟨the candidates⟩ by name, [saying]: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water. (3 Ne. 11:23-26)

This ordinance is to be preceded by a confession of faith, in God the Father, in Jesus Christ his Son, and in the Holy Ghost. In baptism is represented, symbolically, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; as the Christ died and was buried, so the candidate dies to his old life of sin, by separating himself from it by repentance; and he is buried with Christ in baptism. And as the Christ rose from the grave to “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4)—to immortal life—so the immersed candidate rises from the watery grave of baptism to a newness of life in righteousness. The symbolism is complete.

Through this ordinance comes remission of sin by visible acceptance of the Atonement of the Christ, and the cleansing power of his sacrificial blood in that atonement made for sin. Also it is partial entrance, or a preparation for entrance, into the kingdom of heaven—the Church of Christ. Also this water baptism is a preparation for the other part of baptism—the baptism, or birth, of the spirit: this by cleansing from sins, by forgiveness of them, through the grace of God (John 3:3; Mark 1:4; Acts 2:37-39; Rom. 6:4).

(b) *The baptism of the spirit—The Holy Ghost.* The second part of this one baptism—the baptism of the spirit, is administered by the laying on of the hands by those having authority to minister the spirit, by which the properly prepared water-baptized convert receives an immersion of the Holy Ghost to his soul. He is born again into a union with God—into a renewal of spiritual life. This baptism of the spirit completes his entrance into the kingdom of God. He is born both of the water and of the spirit, without which he could neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God—the Church of Christ. This baptism brings him to possession of that spirit which guides him into all truth; which takes the things of God and makes them known to him; by which he

may know that Jesus is the Christ (John 3:3–4; 14; Acts 2:37–39; 8:14–24), by which also he may know the truth of all things (John 14, 15, 16; 1 Cor. 12:3; Moro. 10:4–5). Blessed baptism into a union with God; and to a knowledge of all the things of God.

*The sacrament of the Lord's supper.* The nature of this sacrament will best be learned from the prayer of consecration of the bread and the wine of the supper. This is to be found both in the Book of Mormon as given by the Christ among the ancient Nephites, and to the Prophet of the New Dispensation by revelation (Moro. 4:3; 5:2; D&C 20:77, 79). Moroni describing the manner in which it was administered among his people says: “The manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church; and they ⟨did⟩ administer[ed] it according to the commandment[s] of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true” (Moro. 4:1). Consideration of the prayer over the broken bread will be sufficient for the present purpose.

#### Prayer of Consecration

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 hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen. (Moro. 4:3)

A similar prayer to this with only slight variations to make it appropriate as representing the blood of the Christ instead of his broken body is given in the same revelations. These prayers of consecration, are the most perfect forms of sacred literature to be found. So perfect they are that one may not add to them or take ought from them without marring them. One may say of these prayers of consecration what Archdeacon Paley says concerning the Lord's Prayer, namely—

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, is without an equal or a rival.<sup>1</sup>

And as representing a few great fundamental and all-comprehensive truths concerning religion, these prayers of consecration form a rallying point—raise a standard that will make for the holding together in union and fellowship the followers of the Master, beyond all other formulas

<sup>1</sup>Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 235.

known to man; and for that purpose, beyond all doubt, were they given, as well as to call up to man's consciousness the sacrifice God made for man's redemption, and man's covenant to remember and to keep God's commandments, that he might always be in union with God.

*The prayers of consecration expounded.* These prayers of consecration are a "creed," as well as sacramental prayers. This will sufficiently appear if we analyze the prayer over the bread.

*"O God, the Eternal Father."* Here, in addition to being the most solemn form in which Deity can be addressed, is expressed faith in God as "Eternal Father." Remembering that the first fact of fatherhood is creation through begetting; and next is watching over and guiding to proposed ends, loving watchfulness over the creation—fathering! We have God recognized as the Father of men, and the Eternal Creator of all things, and the eternal sustaining power of all things—"the very Eternal Father of heaven and [of] earth" (Mosiah 15:4; cf. Alma 11:38–39), not as "first cause," but as "Eternal," continuing cause, and "Eternal" sustaining power. How fortunate the form of that address, "O God, the Eternal Father!"

*"We ask Thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ."* This is an assertion of faith in Jesus Christ; and in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as Son of the "Eternal Father." He was the "firstbegotten" of the spirits destined to come to the earth, called "firstbegotten" by the father himself (Heb. 1:6; cf. Rom. 8:29); and hence "Elder Brother" to all that host of spirits. Also he is "the only begotten of the Father"; of all the sons of men born into the world (John 1:14)—having reference, of course, to the Christ's birth of Mary and as the Son of the Highest—"the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). So that indeed God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, both of his spirit and of his body, and in this respect the Christ *is* uniquely "the Son of God."

*"We ask Thee . . . to bless and sanctify this bread."* And what is this bread? It is broken when blessed and presented to the communicants, and is the symbol of the broken body of the Christ. Symbol of the fulfillment of the prophecy: "He was wounded for our iniquities" (cf. Isa. 53:5).<sup>2</sup> Symbol of the broken body of the Christ; broken when the crown of hard thorns was pressed upon his brow, and blood streamed down his face; broken when the cruel nails were driven through the quivering flesh of hands and feet; broken when the Roman soldier's spear pierced his side and shed the life's blood that was to save

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<sup>2</sup>And the serpent was given power to "bruise" the heel of the woman's seed (Gen. 3:15).

the world. The Christ's suffering in Gethsemane, where in agony he sweat blood at every pore; and his suffering on the cross, where hung his broken body in unspeakable pain: this was the price *of suffering* paid for man's salvation and the broken bread is the symbol of it. . . . "Bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it." The broken bread is to be a soul-food then, not bodily food; an appeal to remembrance, to gratitude, to moral obligation.

In the prayer of consecration, then, faith is declared in God as Eternal Father; in Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God (in the flesh); in the Atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of men (as a race and as individuals), and this by accepting the symbols of the broken body of the Christ in the broken bread. These *are* three great fundamentals of the gospel, which if a man accepts in his convictions, all else of the gospel will follow as matter of course.

The second part of the sacrament deals with the renewal of covenant with God on the part of man:

*"That they may witness unto Thee, O God, the Eternal Father:*

*(a) that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son";* become Christ's men, and Christ's women—Christians!

*(b) "and always remember him"!* every day remember him, every month, and through all the years—always!

*(c) "and keep his commandments which he hath given them."* In human weakness men may not always "keep" perfectly his commandments; but they may keep alive in their souls their "willingness" to keep his commandments; and by affirming and re-affirming that willingness, the memory of the obligation "to keep his commandment" will be ever present to consciousness.

And the end of all this? the climax? the purpose of it?

*"That they may always have his <the Christ's> spirit to be with them."* What an end to be attained! The spirit of the Christ to be with men always! The perpetuation of the spiritual life into which they were born when they accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ. What could be more desirable? What more admirable? What more profitable for the individual and for *the* community life, than that men should always have the spirit of the Christ to be with them? "To live and move and have their being" (cf. Acts 17:28), and work and serve in that spirit—the spirit of the Master—the Christ!

*The resurrection of the dead.* It is fitting that a word should be spoken here in relation to one other stupendous fact connected with the dispensation of the meridian of times, namely, the Christ's resurrection from the dead. And his resurrection *it* should be remembered, is a

prototype of the resurrection of all men, the actual, physical resurrection of the body of all men, and the immortality of the individual so raised from the dead, in fulfillment of God's covenant made to the spirits of men before the foundation of the world—namely, the covenant of eternal life (Titus 1:2). I waive all discussion as to the physical possibility of such a resurrection. We have God's assurance in his revealed word that it shall be so, and such is the manifest power of God in creation, in the miracle of man's mortal life, in the miracle of the existence of all animal and plant life, the miracle of existence of the earth itself, sun, moon, and stars, that it is not worthwhile carping over the alleged "impossibility" and "improbability" of the physical resurrection of men. It is no more difficult for God to bring to pass the physical immortality through the reunion of spirit and body, than it is impossible for God to bring to pass the mortal life of man; and in the presence of all the "miraculous" things known to men about life and its wonders. We might repeat, even to this scientific age, proud of its acquired knowledge yet confusedly ignorant of the mystery of life in general, and human life in particular, we could still say to them, as Paul did to King Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). This resurrection to physical, immortal life is the great unique thing of the Christian religion as founded by the Christ, and developed by the ministry of the apostles. Other faiths have presented more or less dimly the idea of a continued consciousness of being in some form or other, some spirit essence kind of existence, or some absorption back into the being whence the individual has been called into existence, some survival of ethereal existence, as the perfume of the rose after her petals are fallen, or else some pilgrimage of the soul through transmigration into varied forms of life, sometimes in the way of retribution visited upon the spirit because of the absence of some perfection or failure to fulfill purposes of existence in granted life periods, a procession of chastisements until the right is purchased to escape the painful consciousness of personal existence, and there comes the alleged blessed period of Nirvana, or rest from the weary round of struggle and effort. It is the Christian religion alone out of all the faiths that raises up as a standard this proclamation that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). And the promise of the Christ himself, if a man "believe[th] in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"; and also his solemn words, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (cf. John 11:25); and again the Master's words near the close of his mortal life's ministry:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is *coming*, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear

shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. . . . Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:25-29)

The resurrection of the just and also of the unjust. God's covenant to his spirit children before the earth life of man began was that he would give unto men immortality—deathless physical existence, in the union of spirit and element; and we are assured of the possibility of such a thing by reason of the existence of accomplished things all about us equally miraculous with the fulfillment of this promise of resurrection from the dead.

*The testimony of the Judean apostles.* The fact of the resurrection of the Christ from death is witnessed by the apostles in their discourses in the New Testament scriptures; and is also used by them as proof positive of the divinity of the Christian scheme of things, as witnessed in Paul's speech in Athens where he represents that God hath given assurance that he hath called all men to repentance under the Christian scheme of things—"in that he hath raised him (the Christ) from the dead" (Acts 17:31 and context).

To all this is to be added the testimony of each of the writers of the four Gospels who represent the resurrection of the Christ as a most literal resurrection of the personal Christ by the reunion of his body and spirit. The reality of this reunion is most emphatically given perhaps in St. John's Gospel where on his second appearance to the apostles he gives the assurance of the reality of his resurrection to Thomas, who had said to his brethren who reported the first visitation of the risen Christ, "Unless I see the wounds in his hands and in his side and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." On the second visitation the Master called "Doubting Thomas" to him and said unto him, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to the risen Christ, "My Lord and My God!" And the Christ reproved him for his previous lack of faith (cf. John 20:24-29).

On the first visit of the risen Lord, when the disciples were affrighted at his appearing among them, supposing that they had seen a spirit, he said unto them,

Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?  
Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see;



for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. . . . And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of [a] broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. (Luke 24:38-43)

Peter in the course of his ministry was wont to refer to this and other circumstances of physical contact with the risen Christ, an example of which is found in his discourse in the home of Cornelius, saying, “We”—referring to himself and brethren that were with him on that occasion—

we are witnesses of all things which he ⟨the Christ⟩ did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. (Acts 10:39-41)

*The testimony of a modern prophet.* This is the testimony of the Jewish scripture, more especially of the New Testament, although through the whole course of the scriptures there is abundance of witness to this great truth, and especially in our modern revelation given through the Prophet of the New Dispensation: “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him,” said this prophet, “this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we”—referring to himself and his early associate, Sidney Rigdon—“For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father” (D&C 76:22-23).<sup>3</sup>

*The testimony of the Book of Mormon.* Also in the Book of Mormon is given a most dramatic and soul-thrilling testimony to the resurrection of the Christ by the appearance of the risen Redeemer to a multitude of people in America, shortly after the resurrection of the Christ; for to the people of America, no less than to the people of the Eastern hemisphere, did God give assurances through their ancient prophets from time to time of the existence of his gospel and of its power unto salvation; and lastly the risen Christ came to them to assure them of the verities of the plan of salvation and especially of this feature of it, the

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<sup>3</sup>The whole great revelation in this section of the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the greatest outgivings of God to man in any age of the world, is based upon this testimony of the risen and present living Christ, the Son of God, and we commend that whole revelation to the consideration of the reader.

resurrection from the dead, by his own glorious appearance among them, and his quite extended ministry among them.<sup>4</sup>

Here the resurrected Christ according to the Nephite record, descended out of heaven and appeared to the multitude, proclaiming himself to be the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world; and the multitude blessed the name of “the Most High God,” “And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (3 Ne. 11:17).

*Assurance of the resurrection.* No incident in the gospel history is more emphatically proven than this great truth, the resurrection of the Son of God, and the promise of the resurrection of all men. It was the center around which all the hope of the early Christians was grouped—the hope of immortality, of eternal life. It is the vital force of the Christian religion. It is the hope of the world, ~~for~~ the only kind of a future life that can meet the aspiring, uplifting desires of the human soul. If such a life as that which is promised through the resurrection, as taught in the Christian religion, is not to be realized, then the future hopes for any existence worthwhile fall in dark confusion about the feet of men.

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<sup>4</sup>For all which see Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi, the whole book, but especially chapter 11.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Smith, *History of the Church* 4:553-56; the closing chapter of each gospel: Matt. 27, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 21; Acts; 1 Cor. 15; Epistles; Moro. 4-5; and D&C 20; 45; and 76.