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THE HOLY GHOST IN THE BOOK OF MORONI: POSSESSED OF CHARITY

Newell D. Wright and Val Larsen

Abstract: *The role played by the Holy Ghost is an especially important connecting thread that runs through the Book of Moroni. The book illuminates the various ways in which the Holy Ghost transforms fallen human beings into redeemed members of the kingdom of God. Three phrases — “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love” — are particularly revelatory of the role the Holy Ghost plays in our exaltation. But the positive process illuminated by these phrases has an obverse. Those who reject the Holy Ghost cleave to and are possessed of Satan. They are filled with his hatred. Though his message is primarily positive, Moroni has witnessed and describes what happens to those who reject the influence of the Holy Ghost.*

When he was young, Moroni saw firsthand the unspeakable misery that befalls human beings as their society collapses from the weight of its own wickedness, as its citizens become “a people like this, that are without civilization . . . a people like this, whose delight is in so much abomination” (Moroni 9:11, 13). Following the total destruction of Nephite society, Moroni lived the final 36 years of his life in extreme isolation and, evidence and common sense suggest, great loneliness.¹ During that lengthy period, his companions were the people he found inscribed in the pages he carried with him. As Grant Hardy has shown, his writings were a dialogue with his only available mortal companions

1. Sidney B. Sperry, “Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title Page to the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4, no. 1 (1995): 255–59, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol4/iss1/29>. See also Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218.

— the dead who spoke to him from the dust.² While Moroni’s mortal companions were those he found inscribed in the pages he carried, the dead were not his only companions. The three Nephites met with him (Mormon 8:10–11), and the Holy Ghost was his constant companion. Brant Gardner suggests that he also saw Joseph Smith in vision and engaged in conversation with him, because Ether 5 is basically “Moroni’s instructions to Joseph Smith.”³

In his isolation, Moroni seems to have developed a deep appreciation for the Holy Ghost and the important roles it plays in mortal and immortal lives. This divine companion and the ways in which it incorporates us in the divine community became a connecting thread that runs through the materials Moroni assembled in the Book of Moroni. Moroni did not write most of the content in his book. What he appears to have done is compile a set of documents handed down to him from his father, Mormon, that were especially meaningful to him as he wandered alone. Those materials feature the Holy Ghost and the progressively larger role it can play in our lives.

The first five chapters of the Book of Moroni⁴ are all very short, the longest only 153 words. After the first-chapter introduction, each successive chapter focuses on some function of the Holy Ghost that brings us into communion with heaven, allowing us to be possessed by this member of the Godhead and become one with God, Christ, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We begin this paper by analyzing each of the 10 chapters in Moroni, following the connecting and developing thread of the Holy Ghost that runs through them.

Chapters 1 through 6

In Chapter 1, his introduction, Moroni anticipates important themes in later chapters, especially chapters 9 and 10. He tells us that though Nephite civilization is now destroyed, exceedingly fierce wars continue among the Lamanites, with attendant destruction and misery. He will return to this theme in chapter 9. The Lamanites, he here tells us (and will reiterate in the first verse of Chapter 10) are his intended audience. Even as he wanders alone, he is not alienated from and full of hatred toward

2. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 242, 252–54.

3. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6, *Fourth Nephi-Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 333.

4. The ten Moroni chapters in our modern Book of Mormon correspond exactly with the ten chapters in the 1830 edition.

those who would destroy him. He continues to care about their welfare and wishes to hand down to their descendants material that is precious to him and that will be of great benefit to them. The Lamanite hatred which forces him to wander alone is focused, in particular, on those who will not deny Christ. “And I, Moroni, will not deny the Christ.”⁵ The word and phrase he invokes here, deny and deny not, will be an important motif in Chapter 10. There in verses 5–8 and 32–33, Moroni will discuss what we must deny (all ungodliness) and what we must not deny (Christ, the power of God, the gifts of God, the power and witness of the Holy Ghost). Having concluded Chapter 1, Moroni will focus on Christ’s conferral of the Holy Ghost, the agent that transformed history’s best known Christ denier, Peter — only fifty days later on the day of Pentecost — into a fearless, life-long witness of Christ, into one who rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer beatings and ultimately crucifixion for Christ’s name (Acts 4:41).

As just noted, Chapter 2 focuses on the conferral of the Holy Ghost, the connecting thread mentioned in every subsequent chapter in the Book of Moroni and the one constant companion Moroni has during his years in the wilderness. Chapter 2 can be read as an announcement of the Book of Moroni’s theme: the transformation of fallen mortals through the ministrations of Christ and the Holy Ghost. To confer the Holy Ghost, the chapter tells us, one calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. Thus, the ritual invokes all members of the Godhead and links the recipient to all. Since the Holy Ghost is a spirit and can dwell within us, we can be one with this personage. And because this member of the Godhead is one with the Father and Son, to be one with the Holy Ghost is to be one with them.⁶

Chapter 3 focuses on the conferral of a divine attribute, God’s power, priesthood power, on human beings. Like the person giving the gift of the Holy Ghost, the person conferring the priesthood calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. The recipient of God’s power is charged to use

5. David F. Holland explains that Moroni could have chosen to align himself with those who deny the Christ and not wander in isolation, but he did not make that choice. David F. Holland, *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2020), 18.

6. This chapter in the Book of Moroni focuses on the five companions Moroni had during his time in the wilderness: Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the three Nephites, who were among the twelve apostles mentioned in the chapter. That Christ was Moroni’s companion is apparent in the two-way conversation between them recorded in Ether 12.

that power “to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (Moroni 3:3). The person conferring priesthood power functions as an agent of God’s earthly agent, the Holy Ghost, for “they ordained them by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was in them” (Moroni 3:4). As a member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost has God’s power. When priesthood holders properly confer priesthood power on others, they do so by virtue of the Holy Ghost, which is in them, and which has the power that is being conferred.

Chapter 4 focuses on how elders and priests use the priesthood power conferred on them as specified in chapter 3 to administer the body of Christ to a congregation. As in chapters 2 and 3, the officiant calls upon the Father in the name of Christ. And like those chapters, this one introduces a new dimension on which human beings may become one with God. The Holy Ghost, being a spirit, can dwell within us, be one with us, and make us one with God. Indwelling is not an option for the Father and Son, members of the Godhead who have physical bodies (D&C 130:22). And yet, when priests administer “the flesh and blood of Christ unto the Church” (Moroni 4:1), Christ, like the Holy Ghost, does become part of us.⁷ The prayer suggests that, from within, he empowers us to become like him, to take his name as our name, his identity and way of being as our identity and way of being. Thus, in a profound sense, the Son, like the Holy Ghost, becomes one with us and empowers us to be one with God.

In Chapter 5, priests use priesthood power to administer the blood of Christ. But this prayer does more than merely repeat the words in the previous prayer, replacing bread with wine (or water). In the prayer on the bread, we indicate that we “are willing to take upon [us] the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he has given [us]” (Moroni 4:3). As the prayer is pronounced, we are willing⁸

7. See also John 6:53–58.

8. Bowen points out that the name Aminadab in Helaman 5:39 means “my people are willing.” Comparing his name with Mormon’s word choice in Helaman 6:39, “their ... willingness to believe,” Bowen suggests this reflects the covenantal nature of their relationship with God. Matthew L. Bowen, “‘My People Are Willing’: The Mention of Aminadab in the Narrative Context of Helaman 5–6,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 105, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/my-people-are-willing-the-mention-of-aminadab-in-the-narrative-context-of-helaman-5-6/>. See also Godfrey J. Ellis, “Experiential Knowledge and the Covenantal Relationship in Alma 7,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 59–62.

but, of ourselves, unable to do these things. However, between the prayer on the bread and the prayer on the wine/water, we symbolically put the body of Christ within us. His being becomes part of our being. Through grace, his power to keep the commandments becomes our power. Thus, what we were willing to do during the pronouncement of the prayer on the bread, we are now able to do as the prayer on the water is uttered. Now instead of saying we are willing to always remember him, we say we “do always remember him”⁹ and, having him always in mind, we are able to keep the commandments which he has given us. As a consequence of our grace-empowered new capacity to keep the commandments, an identity is formed between his spirit and ours. We covenant to always remember him, so that he may always be with us. His spirit is our spirit, his name our name. We are incorporated into the body of Christ and, through him, into the kingdom of God.¹⁰

Chapter 6 focuses on the Church, the earthly analog of heaven, the covenant community Moroni no doubt longed for in his solitude. The chapter discusses baptism, then the membership in the Church that follows. Baptism here marks a person’s formal admission into the community of the redeemed. To enter this community, converts are required to come “forth with a broken heart and contrite spirit” and

9. Elder Kevin W. Pearson makes a similar argument in his October 2022 general conference talk “Are You Still Willing?” Kevin W. Pearson, “Are You Still Willing?” *Liahona* 46, no. 11 (November 2022): 67–69, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2022/11/33pearson>. Elder Dallin H. Oaks made a similar argument in another talk. Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking Upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign* 15, no. 5 (May 1985), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1985/05/taking-upon-us-the-name-of-jesus-christ>.

10. John Welch notes the persistence of themes in the sacramental prayers from Mosiah 5 and 3 Nephi 18: “The persistence of certain precise covenantal terms throughout these three texts from Benjamin to Moroni, separated over many years and pages of Nephite history, speaks highly of the cultural sensitivity and logical orderliness of this inspired textual and historical development. . . . Thus it is impressively consistent that Benjamin’s three main covenantal phrases should reappear in Moroni 4 in ways that show continuity with the older covenantal patterns as well as sensitivity to the newer revelation at the time of Christ’s appearance. The phrase ‘take upon them the name of Christ,’ for example, appears in Mosiah 5, but not in 3 Nephi 18. It seems that Nephite texts and traditions have combined and coalesced beautifully into the final sacrament prayers of Moroni 4–5.” John W. Welch, “Our Nephite Sacrament Prayers,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, (Provo and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 286–89. Gardner, however, describes Welch’s argument as “weak.” Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:348.

witness that they have “truly repented of all their sins” (Moroni 6:2). Enveloped in the waters of baptism, the converts emerge born again as members of the kingdom of God on earth, as part of a community charged to reflect on earth to the best of its ability the kingdom of God in heaven (see verse 4). Their old spirits having been buried in and washed away by the baptismal waters, the converts are “wrought upon and cleansed by [a new spirit,] the power of the Holy Ghost.” “Their names [are] taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way” (Moroni 6:4). They “meet together oft to partake of the bread and wine” that makes them one with Christ (Moroni 6:6). They attend meetings “conducted ... by the power of the Holy Ghost,” which guides them as they preach, exhort, pray, supplicate, and sing (Moroni 6:9). If in this heaven on earth, they willfully and persistently sin, “their names [are] blotted out, and they [are] not numbered among the people of Christ” (Moroni 6:7). They are excluded from this heaven on earth for the same reason Satan and the souls that followed him were excluded from heaven in the wake of the war in heaven — because whether above or below, heaven ceases to be heaven if it is populated by willful sinners. “But as oft as they repent ... with real intent, they [are] forgiven” (Moroni 6:8) and readmitted to God’s kingdom.¹¹

Chapter 7

Chapter 7, the longest of Moroni’s ten chapters, is the one that most fully develops the themes that the proper telos for human beings is to become like God and that the agent of transformation is the Holy Ghost through charity. Moroni’s placement of this material in his seventh and eighth chapters probably marks its importance. The number seven is associated with the Sabbath, completion, and fulness, meanings aptly linked with attaining the “rest of the Lord.” The number eight is associated with new beginnings.¹² Moroni develops these themes by citing what seems to be a seventh-day Sabbath sermon his father, Mormon, gave to “you that are

11. God and Christ focus not on what we have been but on what we are. When we — empowered by the enabling power of the atonement — repent, we become sinless, a proper member of the earthly community that strives to live without sin and of the heavenly community that is formed by those who now are without sin.

12. Val Larsen, “Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and the Big Little Book of Omni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 254–55, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/>.

of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and ... can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3).¹³ Rest with the Lord is already an option for these earthly saints. Membership in the kingdom of God is open to them while they are yet on earth because a properly functioning Christian congregation is a piece of heaven on earth.

As predicate for his discussion of charity, Mormon articulates the doctrine of the two ways¹⁴ by juxtaposing the way of God/Christ/Holy Ghost and the way of Satan.¹⁵ By the end of one’s life, the cumulative set of choices made during mortal life follows either the way of God/Christ/Holy Ghost or the way of Satan.¹⁶ The dichotomous character of this cumulative set of choices is stated still more clearly elsewhere in the Book of Mormon: “there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations” (1 Nephi 14:10). The church of the Lamb of God obviously includes devoted followers of Christ in many different denominations on the earth today, so it is not limited to and does not perfectly correspond with any one earthly denomination. And members of any earthly denomination or no denomination may, through their bad faith, be members of the church of the devil. This dichotomous framing suggests the following.

13. John W. Welch enumerates all the ways that Mormon’s sermon in Moroni 7 echoes the Savior’s sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 11–18, suggesting that much of the content in Moroni 7 comes from or was inspired by that sermon. John W. Welch, “Moroni 7–9,” November 16, 2020, John W. Welch Notes, Book of Mormon Central, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/welch/2020-11-16/moroni_7-9_formatted.pdf. See pages 1161–63.

14. Noel B. Reynolds, “The Ancient Doctrine of the Two Ways and the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 49–76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44507654>. See also Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957): 204; and Mack C. Stirling, “The Way of Life and the Way of Death in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 152–204, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol6/iss2/8/>.

15. It is emblematic of the difference between God and Satan that God is part of a collective, the Godhead that unites him with Christ and the Holy Ghost. Satan always stands alone. He has subordinates but no true partners.

16. This is not to say that one cannot make individual choices to follow Christ or Satan, and then reverse those choices later on in life, through conscious repentance or blatant acceptance of Satan’s way. We all make such choices. Rather, it focuses in on who we have become by the totality of those choices at the end of our lives.

The ability to choose between good and evil comes to us as a gift from the Spirit of Christ (Moroni 7:16). Thereafter, the choices we make are not so much between discrete good or bad acts as they are between the divine and the demonic, the heavenly and the hellish team we choose to join. If we are with Satan, even gifts and prayers will profit us nothing because they will be tainted by a corrupt motive. If we are with Christ, those same acts will have merit because, being manifestations of charity, they bless both us and others. “A bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil” (Moroni 7:11).¹⁷ Through angels and prophets, Christ is preached to us that we may have faith and witness miracles, the greatest of which is, as we shall see, our own transformation from fallen human beings into fully divine sons and daughters of God.

Charity

We come now to a central focus of this article, to charity, which is most fully discussed here in Moroni 7 but which is insightfully alluded to throughout the Book of Mormon. We here combine exegesis of chapter 7 with citations of related passages elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. The telos of this chapter (both its last verse and its summative concept), like the telos of a properly lived life, is that “we shall be like [Christ], ... that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:48). Christ is a divine being who dwells in the kingdom of heaven. His work and glory is to recast us in his image and welcome us into that community. Charity is the efficient cause of our transformation.

17. “[W]e can better appreciate Alma’s words to Corianton that ‘it is also requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works. And if their works were good in this life and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also at the last day be restored unto that which is good, ... the one restored to happiness according to his desires of happiness — or to good according to his desires of good — and the other to evil according to his desires of evil’ (Alma 41:3, 5). This is the ultimate reality to which Mormon’s ‘good fountain’ and ‘bitter fountain’ point (Moroni 7:11).” Matthew L. Bowen, “That Which They Most Desired: The Waters of Mormon, Baptism, the Love of God, and the Bitter Fountain,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020): 297, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/that-which-they-most-desired-the-waters-of-mormon-baptism-the-love-of-god-and-the-bitter-fountain/>.

Mormon helpfully defines charity as “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47).¹⁸ This phrase is fruitfully ambiguous. It can refer either to Christ’s love for us or our love for Christ. Context suggests that here, its primary meaning is Christ’s love for us, though as we shall see, our love for Christ is also in play. Relevant context includes the adjective “pure,” which is more likely to characterize Christ’s love than our love. It also includes the immediately preceding discussion of the doctrine of the two ways, which suggests that like our ability to choose, our ability to love is a gift given by Christ: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In chapter 8, Mormon calls charity “perfect love” (Moroni 8:26) and “everlasting love” (Moroni 8:17). Moroni elsewhere describes it as atoning or redeeming love (Ether 12:33–34). We focus, in particular, on three phrases Mormon uses that each illuminate how this perfect, everlasting, redeeming love, charity, transforms us, fitting us to be members of God’s kingdom: “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love.”

Cleave Unto Charity

In Moroni 7:46, Mormon issues the imperative: “cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all.” In scripture the word cleave is most often used to mean adhering firmly and closely or loyally and unwaveringly to some person, e.g., as one would “cleave” unto the Lord (e.g., Deut. 4:4) or unto a spouse (e.g., Gen. 2:24).¹⁹ It is also used with more abstract direct objects, as in cleaving “unto every good thing” (Moroni 7:28) or “to that which is good” (Romans 12:9).

18. Our focus in this paper is not the definition of charity but rather its operation in our lives. The following essays focus fruitfully on the definition of charity: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Love/Charity” in *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 655–65; H. Dean Garrett, “Light in our Vessels: Faith, Hope, and Charity,” in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, From Zion to Destructions*, edited by Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1995), 81–93, <https://rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-fourth-nephi-through-moroni-zion-destruction/light-our-vessels-faith-hope-charity>; Matthew O. Richardson, “‘The Pure love of Christ’: The Divine Precept of Charity in Moroni 7,” in *Living the Book of Mormon: Abiding by Its Precepts*, edited by Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift (Provo and Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2007), 290–301, <https://rsc.byu.edu/living-book-mormon-abiding-its-precepts/pure-love-christ-divine-precept-charity-moroni-7>; and Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:298–99, among many other excellent examples.

19. A secondary meaning of cleave is to cut in two, e.g., “cleave in twain” (D&C 45:48).

Here, Mormon seems to use it in the more specific, personal sense. And the being he urges us to cleave to would seem to be the Holy Ghost. The text explicitly links charity to the visitation of the Holy Ghost. In Moroni 7:44, Mormon teaches that if a man is “meek and lowly in heart and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must have charity.” This is an important idea for Mormon, which he reiterates in his Chapter 8 sermon: “because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth ... until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26). Thus, having charity means that one is filled with the Holy Ghost: we cannot have the one without the other.

The potential intimacy of this cleaving is worth comment. When we physically cleave to someone, we get as proximate to that person as possible. Hence, one aspect of cleaving to one’s spouse is to be one flesh through sexual relations. With human beings, being one flesh is metaphorical because we never fully integrate ourselves into another person and literally become “one flesh,” though we approximate that oneness when a child produced by a man and a woman combines the physicality of its parents into one literal flesh.

But with the Holy Ghost, human beings may attain a degree of oneness impossible to attain with any other entity. By its very nature, the Holy Ghost is indwelling. It penetrates us more fully than any physical thing ever could, being in and through us. What physical cleaving attempts but fails to fully achieve, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost does achieve. When we cleave to and become one with the Holy Ghost who is one with God and Christ, we also become one with God and Christ. In that state, we may experience the pure love of God and Christ not as the object that is loved but as the subject that purely loves others as the Father and Son love them.

Possessed of Charity

Let us return to Mormon’s definition of charity and focus on a phrase he couples with it: “charity is the pure love of Christ, and ... whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47). An important question, here, is who does the possessing? The word *possessed*, like the word *inspired*, is a past participle. In English, past participles form the passive voice, expressions in which the subject of the sentence receives the action rather than doing it. Thus, if we say, Jacob was inspired by the Holy Ghost, Jacob (the sentence subject) is not the one who inspires. He is the recipient of inspiration. The agent doing the

inspiring is the object, Holy Ghost, of a preposition, *by*, that follows the verb. If we apply this analysis to Mormon's phrasing, the *whoso* becomes the thing possessed and the *it*, charity, does the possessing. In the first instance, we do not possess charity. Charity possesses us.²⁰ Or more precisely, the Holy Ghost, the bearer of charity, the pure love of Christ, possesses us.

This reading partially reflects common usage, in which being "possessed" suggests that an external entity, usually a malevolent ghost or other evil spirit, has taken over and now controls a person's body. The human host, no longer having volition, is captained by the malevolent evil spirit, e.g., like Korihor, who was "possessed by a lying spirit, ... the devil [who] has power over [him]" (Alma 30:42). The Book of Mormon mentions numerous types of spirits that can possess us, rest upon us, be in, captivate, or purge us, bring us out of darkness, be poured out, be resisted, or be shown in or by us, and which can stir up our hearts. Thus, figures speak of the "spirit of the Devil," which can captivate them (2 Nephi 2:29); the "spirit of judgment" and "the spirit of burning," which can purge them of the blood of Jerusalem (2 Nephi 14:4); the "spirit of deep sleep," which can be poured out upon them (2 Nephi 27:5); the "spirit of prophecy" or the "spirit of revelation" or "the power of his word," which is in them (e.g., Alma 4:20; 17:3; 43:2; 26:13); the "spirit of power," which can bring them out of darkness (2 Nephi 3:5); and the spirits of "wisdom," "understanding," "counsel," "might," "knowledge" and "fear of the Lord," which can rest upon them (2 Nephi 21:2). We can let "the spirit of contention," which comes from the Devil stir up our hearts "to anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29); we can resist the "spirit of the truth" (Alma 30:46); or we can show a "true spirit of freedom" (Alma 60:25; cf. Alma 61:15). Satan can have power over our hearts if we let him in, because the Devil and other evil spirits can "dwell in the hearts of the children of men" (Mosiah 3:6) or get "great hold upon the hearts of the people" (Alma 8:9; see also Alma 10:25, 27:12; Helaman 16:23; 4 Nephi 1:28; Ether 15:19) such that they are "taken captive by the devil" (Alma 12:11). When Satan gets "possession of the hearts of the people," the Spirit of the Lord ceases to strive with them (Moroni 9:4) and they are led away from belief in Christ and into iniquity (3 Nephi 2:2; 6:15–16). All these Book of Mormon phrases are consistent with the doctrine of the two ways — the idea that our lives and choices

20. Later in this paper, we will return to this point and discuss how we can also *possess* charity in addition to being "*possessed of it*."

are, in great measure, a function not of each discrete choice but of the divine or demonic team we have joined.

The magnitude of this choice of ways is well reflected in Alma 34:34–38, Amulek’s preaching to the Zoramites:

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you. . . . And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell. . . . And now, my beloved brethren, I desire that ye . . . contend no more against the Holy Ghost, but that ye receive it, and take upon you the name of Christ;

Let us focus on the phrase “seal you his” in this and another passage. John Gee notes that there are only two verses in the Book of Mormon where the verb seal is followed by a person as the direct object, the verse cited above in Alma 34 and Mosiah 5:15.²¹ In Alma 34, those who procrastinate repentance and are possessed of the Devil are sealed to Satan. Conversely in Mosiah 5:15, those who repent and are steadfast in their faith in the Lord are sealed to Christ:

Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen.

These contrasting sealings are yet another example of the doctrine of the two ways.

21. John Gee, “Book of Mormon Word Usage: ‘Seal You His,’” *Insights* 22, no. 1 (2002): 4.

In Alma 40:13, Alma₂, admonishing his son Corianton, makes the same point as Amulek in Alma 34: "... for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house." Here, the Devil "takes possession" of the "house," or the body of the person who has chosen to follow Satan rather than the Lord. Similar concepts include Satan raging in the hearts of the children of men (2 Nephi 28:20; cf. Moses 6:15). But when humankind is righteous, Satan has no power over their hearts (1 Nephi 22:15, 26). Here again we see the doctrine of the two ways.

In Moroni 7, speaking to the righteous, "the peaceable followers of Christ" (Moroni 7:3), Mormon offers the antithesis of Amulek's message to the Zoramites. To reiterate, "charity is the pure love of Christ, and ... whoso is found *possessed of it* at the last day, it shall be well with him" (Moroni 7:47). If at the time that we go out of this life, we have allowed the Holy Ghost to possess us, if we have voluntarily subjected ourselves to the Spirit of the Lord, if that Spirit has sealed us his, it shall be well with us because the Holy Ghost will "possess [our bodies] in that eternal world" (Alma 34:34).

Here in this temporal, mortal world the Holy Ghost is the essential enabler and catalyst of charity. All properly motivated acts of grace toward others that we colloquially call charity are outward manifestations of that inward possession by the Holy Ghost. Paul makes an important distinction between giving alms and having charity. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, he says, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Here Paul sets up a contrast between alms giving on the one hand (bestowing all one's goods to feed the poor) and charity, the pure love of Christ, on the other. Charity and alms giving are two separate things. "The precept of charity as contained in the Book of Mormon is particular in that it is divinely connected and can never be reduced to mere ethical behavior."²² Giving and serving and caring for others are epiphenomena, are observable manifestations of the presence of the Godhead within us in the personage of the Holy Ghost. And when God is in us, we are like him, and see him as he is and others as they are. And like God, we want others to come to the Tree of Life, partake of the fruit, be filled, and then be transformed as Lehi, Sariah, Sam, and Nephi were

22. Richardson, "Pure love of Christ," 294.

(1 Nephi 8:12–18).²³ When we are possessed of charity, it shall be well with us at the last day (Moroni 7:46) because we have received the Holy Ghost and taken upon us the name of Christ and have entered into the kingdom of God, the community of beings whose work and glory is to redeem others and draw them into the joyous, loving community of the exalted.

Relevant context includes the adjective “pure,” which is more likely to characterize Christ’s love than our love. It also includes the immediately preceding discussion of the doctrine of the two ways, which suggests that like our ability to choose, our ability to love is a gift given by Christ: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).²⁴ (The phrase would have been unambiguous had it been translated *whoso* is possessed by charity.) In addition to being a past participle, *possessed* can be a simple active voice past tense verb, e.g., Jacob possessed the brass plates. And in some phrasing — Jacob was in possession of the brass plates — *of* can mark the word that follows it as the object rather than the agent of an action. Here, it is fruitful to see both a primary and a secondary meaning for *whoso* is found possessed of [charity].

Absent the reception of grace inherent in possession by the Holy Ghost, no human being could ever feel the pure love of Christ as the agent of that love. We must first be possessed before we can possess. To reiterate, “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Our ability to have charity depends upon our relationship with Christ and the Holy Ghost. The greatest grace inherent in Christ’s pure love for us is that if we receive it with a broken heart and contrite spirit, with meekness and lowliness of heart, Christ’s attribute, charity, becomes our attribute, and

23. John A. Tvedtnes suggests that the tree of life is an olive tree and that the fruit of the olive tree produces oil that is a symbol of the Holy Ghost. When new converts are baptized, they symbolically partake of the fruit of the tree of life by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost and become anointed members of the Lord’s earthly kingdom. John A. Tvedtnes, “Olive Oil: Symbol of the Holy Ghost,” in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Provo and Salt Lake City: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1994), 427–59, https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/sites/default/files/archive-files/pdf/tvedtnes/2016-02-04/ch._18-_the_allegory_of_the_olive_tree.pdf.

24. Indeed, this is the argument David Holland makes in *Moroni*, 96–98. His interpretation of *having*, *cleaving*, *possessing*, and *being filled with* charity depends on the idea that we possess charity, not that charity possesses us. Matthew O. Richardson makes the same argument, that we must possess charity. Richardson, “Pure Love of Christ,” 295–97, 300.

we love as he loves. In other words, having first been possessed of charity, we may also possess charity.

Being Filled with Charity

As noted previously, the telos of this chapter and of a properly lived life is beautifully articulated in the last verse of chapter seven. And the import of that informative verse, Moroni 7:48, is clarified if its structure is highlighted.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with
 all the energy of heart,
 that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed
 upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ;
 that ye may become the sons of God;
 that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall
 see him as he is;
 that we may have this hope;
 that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

We are to pray with all the energy of heart to receive the gift of charity, to be possessed of and then possess it, *so* that we may become the children of God, be like him, have hope, and be pure even as he is pure. The first, longest *that* clause sets the predicate for all that follows. As Kiley Nielson Turley has suggested, there is an implicit “so” or “in order” after “Jesus Christ.”²⁵ The Father, Son, and their earthly agent, the Holy Ghost, are engaged in theosis.²⁶ They seek to fill human souls with charity, the unbounded, generous love they themselves feel for all humanity, “black and white, bond and free, male and female; and [they] remember ... the heathen; and all are alike unto [them], both Jew and Gentile” (2 Nephi 26:33).

In this summative verse, Mormon echoes what he and others had written in the Book of Mormon, which is full of filling and very specific about what one is filled with when wickedness is rooted out. One is filled with charity in its various manifestations. Here are examples:

- 1 Nephi 1:12: “And it came to pass that as he read, he

25. Kiley Nielson Turley suggested this reading while reviewing an earlier draft of this paper.

26. Andrew Skinner describes theosis as “the restoration of ancient doctrine, specifically the doctrine of deification or, as it is called in classical Christian theology, *theosis* — the teaching that mortals can become gods.” Andrew C. Skinner, *To Become Like God: Witnesses of Our Divine Potential* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), x.

was *filled with the Spirit of the Lord*.” (cf. 1 Nephi 2:14; Alma 31:36; 3 Nephi 20:8–9; Helaman 5:44).

- 1 Nephi 8:12: “And as I partook of the fruit thereof it *filled my soul with exceedingly great joy*” (cf. 5:17, Mosiah 4:3, 4:20, 25:8; Alma 4:14, 22:15, 29:10, 36:20, 57:36, 62:1; Helaman 3:35, 5:44).
- 2 Nephi 4:21: “*He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.*”²⁷ (cf. Mosiah 2:4, 3:19, 4:12; Alma 13:28, 38:12; Moroni 7:48, 8:26).
- Mosiah 18:16: “...and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and *were filled with the grace of God*.”
- Mosiah 25:8–11: “*they were filled with sorrow, and even shed many tears of sorrow [for the slain Lamanites] ... when they thought upon the Lamanites, who were their brethren, of their sinful and polluted state, they were filled with pain and anguish for the welfare of their souls.*”
- Alma 8:30: “And Alma went forth, and also Amulek, among the people, to declare the words of God unto them; *and they were filled with the Holy Ghost*.” (cf. Alma 36:24; 3 Nephi 12:6, 26:17, 30:2, and 27:15–16).
- 3 Nephi 19:24: “...for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they *were filled with desire*.”
- Moroni 8:17: “And I *am filled with charity, which is everlasting love*.”

In each case, a divine manifestation of charity is “bestowed” upon the true followers of Christ. Each time, an entity fills them, comes upon them, abides or dwells in them, or possesses them. Having the indwelling Holy Ghost in their hearts, they become part of the kingdom of God, one with the Father and Son in their generous love for all humanity.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 contains a letter Mormon wrote to Moroni “soon after [Moroni’s] calling to the ministry.” It begins as follows: “My beloved

27. Compare this with 1 Nephi 17:48: “[Laman and Lemuel] were angry with me, and were desirous to throw me into the depths of the sea; and as they came forth to lay their hands upon me I spake unto them, saying: In the name of the Almighty God, I command you that ye touch me not, for *I am filled with the power of God, even unto the consuming of my flesh.*” The passage in 2 Nephi 4:21 is likely alluding to this verse. The difference between these two passages is the word “love” in 2 Nephi 4:1 and the word “power” in 1 Nephi 17:48.

son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work” (Moroni 8:1–2). At this time — unlike most of the rest of his life — Moroni is still part of an earthly community of believers. He is formally engaged in “the work and glory” of the gods: drawing others into the kingdom of God that still exists on earth in the form of a congregation of believers.

But Mormon is concerned that Moroni’s group of believers, which should be an earthly manifestation of the heavenly community, is split apart by disputations about who will ultimately be covered by the love and grace of Christ. Some want to exclude from Christ’s grace unbaptized children and “all they that are without the law,” beings who can neither sin nor repent. Speaking “the word of the Lord [that] came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 8:7), Mormon declares that it is a grave sin to have a crabbed vision of heaven, to gratuitously exclude others from God’s kingdom. We can’t be saved and dwell in heaven if we feel ill will toward anyone else who is there, no matter how severely they may have injured us. We must feel the same joy in their salvation that Christ, who most fully suffered the injury of their sin, abundantly feels in their repentance and redemption. If it is a grave sin to resent the salvation of those who have grievously sinned against us, it is a still graver sin to deny or resent the exaltation of those who have committed no sin: innocent children and those who sinned unknowingly, not having the law.

Being one with Christ through the power of the Holy Ghost, Mormon speaks the words that Christ himself would speak: “I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation. ... Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in [me] because of [my] mercy” (Moroni 8:17, 19).²⁸

28. As we note in the text, the content of the Book of Moroni seems to be material that was especially meaningful to Moroni as he wandered alone. This particular epistle from his father presumably reminded him of a time when he was still part of a community of believers, however misguided some of his then companions may have been. And it is very possible that Moroni had young children who were killed in the chaos of war when his military position and duties left him unable to be with and protect them. If so, he would have taken special comfort from the promise of this epistle that his young children were all alive in Christ, members, like him (though not now with him) of the heavenly community.

As for those who are under the law and can sin and repent, Mormon describes very clearly the process by which they may be incorporated into the kingdom of God. Donald W. Parry's analysis of the rhetorical structure highlights the importance of Holy Ghost and charity or love in that incorporation:²⁹

for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation
and under the curse of a broken law.
And the first fruits of repentance is
baptism; and
baptism cometh by faith unto the
fulfilling the commandments; and the
fulfilling the commandments bringeth
remission of sins; And the
remission of sins bringeth
meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of
meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the
Holy Ghost, which
Comforter filleth with hope and perfect
love, which
love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end
shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God.
(Moroni 8:24–26)

Here, as in Chapter 7, Mormon describes how one comes to be possessed of charity, of perfect love, through the indwelling visitation of the Holy Ghost. Through this process that is open to all who will receive it, souls possessed by the Holy Ghost perform the works of grace and qualify themselves to join the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in heaven.

Chapter 9

The structure of the Book of Moroni is similar to the structure of the larger Book of Mormon. Just as the Book of Mormon describes the complete collapse of Jaredite civilization in its next to last book, Ether, so the Book of Moroni describes the complete moral collapse of the Nephites in its next to last chapter, Chapter 9. These accounts of civilizational collapse underscore in the penultimate position in the text how much is at stake in

29. Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007): 559, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=mi>.

the choices we make as individuals and as societies, i.e., the importance of the choice Moroni will so powerfully lay before us in Chapter 10. After describing very clearly in Chapters 7 and 8 the process by which people may be incorporated in the divine community of heaven, Mormon concludes Chapter 8 by sadly saying that the Nephites are now refusing to repent, that they reject all “authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost” which has “ceased striving with them” (Moroni 8:28–29). Then Chapter 9, a second letter from Mormon vividly delineates the consequences of that rejection of God’s way. As previously noted, in the Book of Mormon account, there are only two paths one may tread, two teams one may join. Since the Nephites no longer follow Christ and participate in the process of theosis, they *ipso facto* follow Satan and participate in its obverse, what one might call demonosis.³⁰ As followers of Satan, both Nephites and Lamanites are now a part of the community of the damned.

Unsurprisingly, these followers of the ultimate anti-Christ, Satan, are possessed by feelings that are the opposite of charity, the pure love of Christ: “They have lost their love, one towards another; and they thirst after blood and revenge continually. ... And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good” (Moroni 9:5, 19).

Having become servants of Satan, both Lamanites and Nephites administer a kind of anti-sacrament. Mormon succinctly marks their demonization by describing two particular and related acts of evil. The Lamanites kill the Nephite men they capture. Then “they feed the women upon the flesh of their husbands, and the children upon the flesh of their fathers” (Moroni 9:8). Not to be outdone in their devotion to Satan, in what seems to be an act of ritual evil, the Nephites rape the daughters of the Lamanites, then torture them to death, “and after they have done this, they devour their flesh like unto wild beasts, ... and they do it for a token of bravery” (Moroni 9:10). Clearly, the moral degradation of both Nephites and Lamanites could have been signified by any number of atrocities. It is probably no accident that Mormon (and

30. For a discussion of theosis in the Book of Mormon, see Val Larsen and Newell D. Wright, “Theosis in the Book of Mormon: The Work and Glory of the Father, Mother and Son, and Holy Ghost,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 56 (2023): 275–326, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theosis-in-the-book-of-mormon-the-work-and-glory-of-the-father-mother-and-son-and-holy-ghost/>.

Moroni) illustrated that degradation with two acts of cannibalism that contrast on so many dimensions with the most important ritual act we perform to memorialize and accept the sacrifice of the Savior on our behalf.

These instances of literal cannibalism,³¹ inspired by Satan, are the antitype of what some anthropologists would call the spiritual or ritual³² cannibalism³³ Moroni described in chapters 4 and 5. In the sacrament ritual Christ gave us, the Savior signifies his sacrifice of himself to save us by having us symbolically eat his body and drink his blood as a token of our faith. We are strengthened spiritually and empowered to enter heaven by making him part of us, us part of him. The suffering signified in the ritual was fully and voluntarily borne by the Savior. It is the ultimate example of charity, of magnanimous love and grace, that if received, transforms us into pure and holy inhabitants of heaven. In the Satanic anti-sacraments of the Lamanites and Nephites, all suffering is involuntary and inflicted on others. The narcissist Satan's sacrament entails no self-sacrifice, no self-giving on his part. It is wholly grounded in hatred for and the suffering of others. And it transforms those who participate in it into inhabitants of hell.³⁴

31. Brant Gardner correlates these instances of cannibalism with the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. "Eating human flesh is best known from Aztec times. Pieces of the victims were cooked and distributed to be eaten. Because this was a religious rite, it would be unfair for us to label it cannibalism because of the connotations we bring to that label. For the Aztecs, it would be more accurate to see it as a rather too-literal 'sacrament' of flesh. Where the Christian symbolically eats the flesh of the Savior, the Aztecs literally ate the flesh of their sacrifices." Gardner, *Second Witness*, 6:400.

32. "While other forms of cannibalism may be unethical, ritualistic cannibalism, in which the human and divine come into relation, supersedes any moral rule against cannibalism." Lucilla Pan, "Cannibalism and the Eucharist: The Ethics of Eating the Human and the Divine," *SOPHIA: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions* 61, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00928-x>.

33. For profound thoughts from a faithful Christian on the ritual cannibalism of the sacrament, see James R. Wheeler, "The Shocking Nature of Holy Communion" (sermon), Saint John's Episcopal Church, August 19, 2018, <https://stjohns-stamford.org/sermon-archives/shocking-nature-holy-communion-august-19-2018/>.

34. The episode in the Book of Mormon most analogous to the two demonic acts Mormon describes in Chapter 9 is the one recounted in Alma Chapter 14:9–27. There, too, women and children are brutally murdered. When the perpetrators of that evil act, gnashing their teeth and spitting, ask, "How shall we look when we are damned?", the answer is, much as they look in that moment. They are being transformed into demons and stand on the threshold of hell, about to enter it. The

What is striking is that even while surrounded by people engaged in so much evil, Mormon and Moroni must manifest charity, the pure love of Christ, having as the objects of their love both the Savior who saves them and the sinners who surround them. Thus, Mormon instructs Moroni as follows:

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God. ... My son, be faithful in Christ; and ... may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever. And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen. (Moroni 9:6, 25–26)

Mormon here echoes Lehi's account of his First Vision. Charity will qualify Moroni to enter the divine community Lehi saw in that vision, where the Father is seated on his heavenly throne and the Son sits at his right hand.³⁵

Chapter 10

In chapter 10, Moroni exhorts us to receive the message that has come to us in the Book of Mormon, to “ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.” If we “ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto [us], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). And having received this testimony through the Holy Ghost, we qualify ourselves to receive as gifts the attributes and powers that divine beings possess: wisdom, knowledge, the power to heal and work mighty miracles, to prophesy, to consort (as God consorts) with angels, to speak and understand all languages (Moroni 10:9–16). And chief among the divine

Nephites and Lamanites in Moroni Chapter 9 are likewise being transformed into demons as they immiserate themselves and others by following Satan.

35. See Larsen and Wright, “Theosis,” for an in-depth analysis of this proposition.

gifts, we qualify ourselves to receive is charity, the pure love of Christ, without which we “can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:20–22).

Moroni reiterates this principle: If we refuse to receive the testimony and gifts he lays before us in this chapter, we “cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:26). If we do receive them, he tells us in his concluding message, we will be made perfect and achieve our divine destiny. His phrasing suggests that we, like the twelve who descended with the One (1 Nephi 1:8–11), have inborn potential to be like our Heavenly Parents, godly. Our task is to shed all the “ungodliness” that we accrue in the course of our mortal lives, to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, ... [to] love God with all [our] might, mind and strength, ... that by his grace [we] may be perfect in Christ, ... sanctified in Christ, ... that [we] become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:32–33). If we do these things, Moroni optimistically concludes in the final verse of the Book of Mormon, we will meet him and the Savior “before the pleasing³⁶ bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and

36. Royal Skousen argues that *pleasing* should be replaced here and in Jacob 6:13 with *pleading* because *pleasing* does not make sense. For Jacob 6:13, which reads, “I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear,” the change from *pleasing* to *pleading* does seem to be justified by the context. In Moroni 10:27, where Moroni has just said, “wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and cannot be saved,” a *pleading* bar would have been more apt than a *pleasing* bar. But here in the context of all the promises that one can be made perfect in Christ (Moroni 10:30–33), *pleasing* seems at least as appropriate as *pleading*. Royal Skousen, “The Pleading Bar of God,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 21–36, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-pleading-bar-of-god/>. Even though Skousen recommends *pleading* instead of *pleasing* (and incorporated it into *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), not all scholars agree with him. John Welch offers ten reasons why he disagrees with Skousen’s interpretation in “Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God,” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 18, no. 1 (2006): 139–47, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol18/iss1/9/>. “In summary, based on these ten points, I see no viable basis for accepting the proposed conjectural emendation to replace the traditional *pleasing bar* with the problematical phrase *pleading bar*. ... There is no adequate reason to think that Jacob and Moroni would have engraved the words equivalent to *pleading bar* on the gold plates, that the words *pleading bar* would have been revealed to Joseph Smith in the translation process, that Joseph would have thought of them himself, or that he would have dictated them to Oliver Cowdery. The term *pleasing bar* should be retained in the Book of Mormon, where it has been since 1829” (146–47).

dead” (Moroni 10:34), a place of judgment that can be pleasing only if we have been transformed by grace, filled with charity, and have thus qualified ourselves to be fully and finally included through that judgment in the divine kingdom of heaven.

If that does not happen, we will be like Alma₂ in his pre-repentant state, desiring to “be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that [we] might not be brought to stand in the presence of [our] God, to be judged of [our] deeds” (Alma 36:15), “for our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence” (Alma 12:13–14).

Conclusion

The Holy Ghost is the connecting thread that runs throughout the Book of Moroni. In particular, the Holy Ghost is the source and bestower of charity, the “pure love of Christ.” Three phrases in Mormon’s discussion of charity in Moroni 7:44–48, “cleave unto charity,” “possessed of it,” and “that ye may be filled with this love,” help enlarge our understanding of how charity operates in our lives. We *cleave* unto charity by allowing ourselves to be *possessed* of and be *filled* with the Holy Ghost, which, when it is in us, fills us with charity. When we cleave unto the Holy Ghost and are possessed of charity, we become one with Christ and the Father, see them as they are and become like them. The obverse is also true: if we cleave unto, are possessed of, and filled with the spirit of the Devil, we become one with him, possessed of his spirit, and are filthy as he is filthy. Those two paths are open to us. It is, thus, vitally important that, influenced by the Holy Ghost, we make the choice Moroni urges us to make as he concludes the Book of Moroni — the choice to be “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God [and] become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:22).

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