

## **The COREY STACH Letters**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I have always been able to count on "Corey" for a good thought-provoking gospel discussion. His sensible and contemplative approach to gospel questions has led to some interesting e-mail exchanges between us. I include three of those here.

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Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" illustrates theological differences between LDS and traditional Christian views of the atonement. What does "infinite atonement" mean?

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**LETTER 1**  
**THE MINISTERING OF ANGELS**

From: Victor Poulsen  
To: Corey Stach  
Date: Sat, 10 Mar 2001  
Subject: Ministering of Angels

Corey,

I read, with a great deal of interest, a talk given by Dallin H. Oaks at the priesthood session of the October 1998 General Conference. Elder Oaks can always be counted on to teach the doctrine of the church and he certainly doesn't disappoint here. This is the best thing I have ever read on the subject of Ministering of Angels. I am comfortable in suggesting that some of the doctrine he teaches here is unfamiliar to most of the church. He addresses some of the interesting questions that came up in Gospel Doctrine Class on Sunday last.

I've attached the talk, entitled "The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament," in its entirety for reference. I have also extracted five paragraphs of note which I numbered 1-5 and included following my comments. (Any highlighting was added by me for emphasis.)

#### MINISTERING OF ANGELS AND WOMEN

We normally think that the Aaronic Priesthood provides its holder with the authority to call down angels to minister to those in need. However, Elder Oaks points out that it is REPENTANCE and BAPTISM that qualifies us for this blessing. (See para. 1). This, of course, excludes no one who righteously pursues this end.

#### MINISTERING OF ANGELS AND AARONIC PRIESTHOOD KEYS

It seems to me that this relationship is not well understood in the church. According to Elder Oaks, the Ministering of Angels comes to one who has repented and received the ordinance of baptism and who renews the covenants of baptism by partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These ordinances are administered by the Aaronic Priesthood. In this sense, then, the Aaronic Priesthood ENABLES (or as Elder Oaks puts it, "opens the door") for those who would receive the Ministering of Angels. (See para. 2, 5).

#### MINISTERING OF ANGELS DEFINED

Elder Oaks reinforces our traditional understanding of Ministering of Angels by citing examples of angelic visitors bearing God's message. (See para. 3). But he also suggests that, in practical terms, the Ministering of Angels can be much more subtle. Indeed, his description of Ministering of Angels as thoughts in our minds and feelings in our hearts is indistinguishable from our traditional view of receiving inspiration through the Gift of the Holy Ghost. (See para. 4). (So, is the Holy Ghost accurately described as a "heavenly being bearing God's message")?

## MINISTERING OF ANGELS AND THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

I am neither prepared nor compelled to conclude that Ministering of Angels and the Gift of the Holy Ghost are identically the same thing. Certainly, we don't normally associate angelic visitations with the Gift of the Holy Ghost. Having said that, however, I must point out that such an angel is **SPEAKING BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST** as Elder Oaks instructs. (See para. 5 / note 1). So in practical terms, for those of us who have never received such a visitation, the Ministering of Angels is indistinguishable from the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, given the Holy Ghost's central role in both functions, it is only with difficulty that one would attempt to completely separate the two. After all, whether I receive a prompting directly from the Holy Ghost or from an angel who is speaking by His power, I can't know any difference and so from my perspective at least, it is the same.

Faithfully yours, Victor

### NOTE

It is interesting to note that Mormonism rejects the sectarian notion of God's omnipresence (i.e. God's being or substance fills the immensity of space), teaching rather that it is His influence that is omnipresent. Neither can the Holy Ghost be more than one place at once. So how is God's influence manifested in our lives? Obviously the Ministering of Angels is at least part of the answer.

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### HIGHLIGHTS FROM ELDER OAK'S TALK

Dallin H. Oaks, "The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament," Ensign, November 1999

1. *"What does it mean that the Aaronic Priesthood holds 'the key of the ministering of angels' and of the 'gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins'? The meaning is found in the ordinance of baptism and in the sacrament. Baptism is for the remission of sins, and the sacrament is a renewal of the covenants and blessings of baptism. Both should be preceded by repentance. When we keep the covenants made in these ordinances, we are promised that we will always have His Spirit to be with us. **THE MINISTERING OF ANGELS IS ONE OF THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THAT SPIRIT.**" (My emphasis.)*
2. *"We cannot overstate the importance of the Aaronic Priesthood in this. All of these vital steps pertaining to the remission of sins are performed through the saving ordinance of baptism and the renewing ordinance of the sacrament. **BOTH OF THESE ORDINANCES ARE OFFICIATED BY HOLDERS OF THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE BISHOPRIC, WHO EXERCISE THE KEYS OF THE GOSPEL OF REPENTANCE AND OF BAPTISM AND THE REMISSION OF SINS.**" (My emphasis.)*
3. *"In a closely related way, these ordinances of the Aaronic Priesthood are also vital to the ministering of angels. **'THE WORD 'ANGEL' IS USED IN THE SCRIPTURES FOR ANY HEAVENLY BEING BEARING GOD'S MESSAGE'** (George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist [1987], 54). The scriptures recite numerous instances where an angel*

*appeared personally. Angelic appearances to Zacharias and Mary (see Luke 1) and to King Benjamin and Nephi, the grandson of Helaman (see Mosiah 3:2; 3 Ne. 7:17-18) are only a few examples. When I was young, I thought such personal appearances were the only meaning of the ministering of angels. As a young holder of the Aaronic Priesthood, I did not think I would see an angel, and I wondered what such appearances had to do with the Aaronic Priesthood. (My emphasis.)*

***BUT THE MINISTERING OF ANGELS CAN ALSO BE UNSEEN. ANGELIC MESSAGES CAN BE DELIVERED BY A VOICE OR MERELY BY THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS***

***COMMUNICATED TO THE MIND. President John Taylor described 'the action of the angels, or messengers of God, upon our minds, so that the heart can conceive revelations from the eternal world' (Gospel Kingdom, sel. G. Homer Durham [1987], 31)." (My emphasis.)***

4. ***"How does the Aaronic Priesthood hold the key to the ministering of angels? The answer is the same as for the Spirit of the Lord. In general, the blessings of spiritual companionship and communication are only available to those who are clean. As explained earlier, through the Aaronic Priesthood ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, we are cleansed of our sins and promised that if we keep our covenants we will always have His Spirit to be with us. I believe that promise not only refers to the Holy Ghost but also to the ministering of angels, FOR 'ANGELS SPEAK BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ' (2 Ne. 32:3). SO IT IS THAT THOSE WHO HOLD THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD OPEN THE DOOR FOR ALL CHURCH MEMBERS WHO WORTHILY PARTAKE OF THE SACRAMENT TO ENJOY THE COMPANIONSHIP OF THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD AND THE MINISTERING OF ANGELS." (My emphasis.)***

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**LETTER 2**  
**THE POWER OF SEALING**

From: Stach, Corey D  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Monday, October 20, 2003  
Subject: The Power of Sealing

Victor,

We had an interesting topic come up in priesthood yesterday. There is an article in this month's Ensign about temple ordinances, that talks about our posterity attaining eternal life, even though they may stray in this life. I had read this article and thought I may have misunderstood it. The sealing ordinance makes this possible. Boyd K Packer has also touched on this in an article called 'Our Moral Environment' in the May 1992 Ensign. The idea that this resolution can take place in the next life made for a passionate discussion. When you get a chance, take a look at these articles, and let me know what you think. I have learned something I did not know before.

Corey

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Stach, Corey D  
Date: Tue, 21 Oct 2003  
Subject: The Power of Sealing

Corey,

I read both Ensign articles and have learned something as well. I tried to come up with a different interpretation but the quotes by Joseph Smith Jr. and Joseph Fielding Smith are quite clear. Joseph Smith's statement "Either in this life or the life to come, they will return," is especially difficult to qualify. I have to assume that all of this takes place PRIOR to the Day of Judgment as Joseph Smith's statement, "They will have to pay their debt to justice..." seems to suggest. I think this needs to be emphasized when teaching the doctrine. It's curious that a couple of lifelong Latter-day Saints such as ourselves should be completely ignorant of a doctrine that has such profound implications in the Plan of Salvation. We, for instance, tend to comfort parents of wayward children by reminding them that Heavenly Father lost one-third of His children. Why not comfort them with this doctrine instead?

Victor

**Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 110.**

"The Prophet Joseph Smith declared-and he never taught a more comforting doctrine--that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God."

**Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., 2:90-91.**

"Let the father and mother, who are members of this Church and Kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie, and no power of earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang."

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LETTER 3

**"THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST" & INFINITE ATONEMENT**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Stach, Corey D  
Sent: April 14, 2004  
Subject: "The Passion of the Christ"

Corey,

Would you agree with the following:

"The Passion of the Christ," illustrates an interesting theological difference between Mormonism and Catholic and Protestant Christendom. To the Christian community, in general, the atonement of Christ was largely accomplished via the violence perpetrated on Him by others. At the heart of the matter, is the traditional Christian view of the eternities; individuals unworthy of a heavenly reward, are consigned to a place of eternal PHYSICAL torture. A romantic view of the Christian hell is, for instance, a place where naked unbelievers are cast into a lake of fire and brimstone where they forever burn but are never consumed. In such a context, it is easy to conclude that physical pain is the price mankind pays for sin. And if a savior were to pay that price in our stead, he would HAVE to do so with his own physical agony. There is little wonder, then, that Mel Gibson would go to GREAT lengths to portray that physical violence which, after all, IS the price for our sin. But while most of Christendom emphasizes the cross to symbolize the atonement, Mormonism looks more to the Garden of Gethsemane with its mental anguish and spiritual agony. Once again, this is consistent with the Latter-day Saint view of the eternities wherein mental anguish supplants physical torture as the eternal punishment for unatoned sin. This is why you don't find crosses around the necks of Mormon Saints or on the steeples of Mormon churches. No one will, reasonably, argue that there is anything WRONG with the cross as a gospel symbol; Mormons just place their emphasis elsewhere.

Victor

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From: Stach, Corey D  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: April 15, 2004  
Subject: "The Passion of the Christ"

Victor,

Sorry for the late response, I was out yesterday afternoon.

I think this is a fair assessment. Thousands were crucified by the Romans. There is not much recorded about Gethsemane. However I find it interesting that if you read the accounts closely, you find that Jesus prayed in agony that the cup be removed, if possible, three distinct times in

succession in the garden. Also, an angel appeared strengthening him. Some may argue that this was in preparation for what was to follow, but while he was on the cross, his attention was turned to others: "Forgive them for they know not what they do", his comforting comments to the thief, and his concerns for his mother. This doesn't diminish the anguish he experienced on the cross, but puts in perspective his sufferings in the garden. He took upon himself the sins of the worlds in the garden, but in order for the sacrifice to be complete, he had to give his life, which happened on the cross. It seems to me that no physical violence alone can make such an infinite atonement.

Thanks for sharing this.

Corey

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Stach, Corey D  
Sent: April 15, 2004  
Subject: "The Passion of the Christ"

Thanks for your great comments; I'm going to tweak mine to incorporate some of your ideas. I'm actually describing, in a letter to my folks (and posterity), a conversation I had with another engineer. Your use of the word "infinite" reminds me of a question that was raised in Gospel Doctrine class. Perhaps you were there. I guess someone asked the question, "Did Jesus' atonement extend to peoples of other worlds?" Beth responded, "That's a question for Brother Poulsen." Bishop Hunter raised his hand and answered, "yes." I was interested to read, however, in the new "True to the Faith" gospel reference book, under the heading, "Atonement of Jesus Christ/Universal Redemption from the Fall" the following statement: "All people who have ever lived ON THE EARTH and who ever will live ON THE EARTH will be resurrected and brought back into the presence of God..." My caps, of course, but it's an interesting qualification to add to a statement that doesn't otherwise need it.

Victor

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From: Stach, Corey D  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: April 15, 2004  
Subject: "The Passion of the Christ"

This is interesting. We know that other worlds were created, and I guess we assume that the atonement that happened in our world applies to the others, but that concept has always been a little awkward for me.