

Acknowledgments

From childhood to adulthood, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are taught and reminded of their divine identity. Primary children sing, “I am a child of God,” while young women declare, “I am a daughter of heavenly parents,” and young men recite, “I am a beloved son of God.” In *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, this truth is reiterated: that every human being “is a beloved son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”

How we see ourselves in relation to God and to each other is important. Elder Bruce R. McConkie once wrote, “No doctrine is more basic, no doctrine embraces a greater incentive to personal righteousness . . . as does the wondrous concept that man can be as his Maker” (133). Recognizing our divine identity and potential shapes our beliefs, thoughts, and actions. Understanding who we are is crucial to envisioning who we might become someday. Each of the authors in this volume of essays work with the theme of divine identity.

Our desire to create an identity begins early in life. Olivia Flynn, in her delightful essay “Sweet Tea Elegy,” expresses her desire, even as a child, to have an identity that would set her apart. “We sat at round tables in first grade, with centerpiece boxes of crayons and safety scissors. A perfect stage. When the episode was over, I turned to the girl sitting next to me and announced, ‘I’m adopted.’ That got everyone at the table’s attention. ‘Really?’ the girl asked. ‘From Mexico,’ I said. I think I chose Mexico because I was wearing a long red pleated skirt, which seemed Mexican to me. Of course, I was not adopted from Mexico, which my teacher later confirmed with my mom, much to my embarrassment” (5). Like Olivia realizes, as we grow, our longing to create an identity can become less focused on impressing others with an exotic origin story and centered on a desire to know the truth about who we are.

Familial relationships lay the foundation for our beliefs about ourselves and how we fit into the world. In “These I Have Loved” by Mercy Thomas, she writes about a tender connection with her beloved grandmother, and how Mercy hopes to become like her. “My grandmother wore hoop earrings. I had never looked like her, but I felt like I could see her staring out of my face, smiling at me as if to say, *Look Mercy, we match*” (15). Likewise, through the process of parenthood, Mikayla Johnson senses her own divine potential as well as that of her children. In her essay, “A Chain of Thoughts I Had upon Seeing a Red Cooler” we read, “Our boys are coated in water, the wet of it glistening off their bodies like the blood glistened off them when I first held them in my arms. . . . [T]he feeling in my chest was like an explosive sunbeam tunneling down to Earth, was like a prayer answered by God. Gods in embryo: this is who my children are, and my head and heart can agree on that much” (24).

Two of our authors explain that not only is our identity often forged through our connection with others, but our understanding of divinity can extend from earthly relationships as well. Kate Romney, in “Everywhere Whispering,” expresses how she learned about God’s reality through watching her mother. “If someone asked me today why I believe in God, I would tell them it is because once, when I was age nine or ten, I awoke, bundled in my sleeping bag next to my mother, to the music of rain staccato on the tent. Because I could hear her breath warming the air next to me like a harmony” (27). Kate learned about the nature of God from her mother-daughter relationship. Similarly, in the essay, “Dear Sister Poe Ei,” Molly Chadwick describes a cherished mission companion whose discipleship brought Molly closer to Christ. “And do you know how I’m going to end each story I tell my kids about you? I’m going to say, ‘Sister Poe Ei, when we were companions, honestly didn’t know as much as you and I do about Christ. And the language barrier prevented her from being able to say everything she wanted to, as you and I can right now. But during the few weeks we spent together as companions, I watched Sister Poe Ei, and I watched her closely. And you know what? As I watched her, I watched Him” (40). Our relationships with those who exemplify Christ can help us comprehend the nature of God, and who we have the potential to become.

We have two authors in this volume who recognize that we need not make our mortal challenges our entire identity. In “The Mountain Is You” by JJ Boren, JJ explains that process of embracing her divine identity more than a temporal one. “As I learned more about OCD, I started recognizing that little voice I’d been hearing for years. This whole time I thought it was me, but it wasn’t. It was my OCD, telling me every second that I wasn’t perfect enough. . . . Realizing that those thoughts weren’t me—but something else—allowed a peace to flood my mind that I hadn’t previously known. I learned to trust myself and to trust God” (50). As we deepen our relationship with God, we sense our eternal identity. In her essay, “Letters To a God Who Stays,” Mairi Aslin expresses how her relationship with God has deepened over time, and that her nascent faith brings her peace. “Such a tender, shaky hope rings through the sentences of a woman asking for companionship. They show a relationship that may have started in fear but has become a precarious faith. I cannot claim something as terrifying as ‘I know’; I may never be able to, not when it’s my life’s challenge to hear the claims of Anxiety, lies or not. However, I think I’ll choose to believe in a God who loves me like a best friend” (64).

As crucial as it is to discover our own divine identity, we must also learn to see the divine identity in others. In “Balloch to Strathblane” by Christi Leman, we read about the necessity of allowing others to discover for themselves who they really are: “So it’s been better, I think, to trust our children to learn as they find their own ways. It’s the same choice our Heavenly Parents are said to have made for us” (72).

Finally, fundamental to discovering our divine identity is a humble reliance on Christ and His Atonement. Without the grace God offers us, we are powerless to be in true relationship with Him or with each other. Samantha Lawson writes of watching her father wrestle with this reality in her powerful essay, “On Ceilings and Doors.” She shares, “part of me wonders if my father can’t believe—because then he would have to admit that he needs to be repaired, to be made whole—that he needs my forgiveness the same way that I feel a need to bestow it” (87).

Our identity matters. Who we believe we are affects who we think we can become. A clearer understanding of our own divinity is a core part of the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The authors in this volume testify of these truths, and in faith-filled ways, help us see the divine in ourselves and each other.

Works Cited

McConkie, Bruce R. *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ*. Deseret Book, 1978, 133.

—Jane Della Brady and Rebecca Walker Clarke