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Insights

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In any given year, FARMS-affiliated scholars present their research at a number of scholarly conferences at home and abroad. Brigham Young University's Sidney B. Sperry Symposium in October 2004, entitled "Prelude to the Restoration: From Apostasy to the Restored Church," was one such venue on the home front. Selected highlights follow.

• *Noel B. Reynolds, professor of political science at BYU and director of FARMS, "Traditional Christian Sacraments and Covenants" (this paper was presented by coauthor Bryson L. Bachman).* Whereas traditional Christian sacraments (ordinances) are generally considered vehicles of Christ's unilaterally given grace, Latter-day Saint theology uniquely emphasizes the bilateral nature of ordinances by focusing on the covenants that attach to them. Early Christian sources from the late second century onward do not explicitly link sacraments to covenants. One reason for this deemphasis or loss of the covenant concept in that era may be that *covenant* meant the Mosaic law in Judaism and an illegal secret society in the Roman Empire—and early Christians had good reason to avoid association with both. Although some church fathers did see baptism as an initiation into the new covenant and St. John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) went a step further, viewing baptism as a "contract" with Christ, the covenant concept did not return to prominence until the writings of the Reformation theologians Zwingli and Bullinger. The full connection, however, between covenants and ordinances reappeared only in the Restoration.

• *David Rolph Seely, professor of ancient scripture at BYU and vice-chair of the FARMS board, "Words 'Fitly Spoken': Tyndale's English Translation of the Bible."* William Tyndale is the true father of the English Bible. He had a remarkable gift for rendering the original Hebrew and Greek of the scriptures into his native English language. Studies have shown that 80 percent of the language of the King James Bible is language directly borrowed from Tyndale. In the process of translating the Bible into English, Tyndale coined many English words and phrases that have become standard vocabulary in religious discourse, including vocabulary found in the English translation of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Tyndale was the first to render the tetragrammaton *YHWH* into English as *Jehovah.* He invented the combination of the English words *at + one + ment* to create a word that translates various forms of the Hebrew root *K-P-R,* meaning "to cover up." He also invented the English word *Passover* to render the Hebrew verbal root *P-S-CH,* meaning to "jump over," which is used in Hebrew both as a noun referring to the festival and as a verb describing the Lord's "passing over" (and thus sparing from destruction) Israel's firstborn in Egypt. Tyndale also created the word *mercy seat* to capture the significance of the gold cover of the ark of the covenant that was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement in order to signify the power of mercy that, through the atonement, reconciled repentant Israel with God.

• *Andrew C. Skinner, dean of Religious Education at BYU and FARMS board member, "Forerunners and Foundation Stones of the Restoration."* The latter-day restoration of the gospel and the many signal events that were prelude to it reflect the supervening hand of an infinite, all-knowing God in bringing about a grand plan. Among his foreordained forerunners were the inspired religious reformers of the Renaissance and Reformation periods, which led to the publication of the English Bible and the founding of America, important steps toward the restoration and spread of the gospel. The key events of the latter-day restoration and the

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law of God contrary to his own knowledge." These two passages teach that one can *list* to do right or wrong only with sufficient knowledge to make an informed choice.

List is an English word with several archaic meanings[1] that have generally not survived into our time. In one meaning, *list* is simply a shortened form of *listen,* as in these lines from a hymn: "List! the merry children singing! What a pleasing, joyful sound!"[2] However, the reading "*listen* to obey the evil spirit" poses a grammatical difficulty and is clearly not the intended meaning, especially given Benjamin's concern with serious, active involvement with sin. The same can be said of another meaning of *list,* one still in use: "leaning to one side," as is said of a ship. Benjamin's warnings to his people suggest a concern with more than just a leaning toward the side of evil—a boat that is only listing has not yet capsized (the marine equivalent of the damnation referred to in verses 38 and 39).

The verb *list* was often spelled before 1600 as *lust* and is derived from and related to words denoting appetite, desire, or longing. Its Indo-European root word means "to be eager" and is also the source of *lascivious* ("lewd, lustful") and *listless* ("without desire"), both of which remain in modern usage. *List* also once carried the active meaning of "to choose." Rather than indicating a mere inclination, *list* was used as a verb of action that fits exactly with Benjamin's description of "open rebellion."[3]

These meanings of wishing, desiring, and choosing are preserved in the Bible in only a few passages: John 3:8 ("The wind bloweth where it listeth"), Matthew 20:15 ("Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" though William Tyndale's 1526 translation seems closer to the mark: "ys yt not lawfull ffor me to do as me listeth with myne awne?"),[4] James 3:4 ("whithersoever the governor listeth"), and Matthew 17:12 and Mark 9:13 ("they have done unto him whatsoever they listed"). These same meanings of *list* appear in Webster's 1828 dictionary, namely, "to lean or incline, to be propense; hence to desire or choose."

Properly understood, the verb *list* is a powerful word that should encourage us to fervently desire and choose righteousness. Surely that was the hope expressed by King Benjamin in this earnest appeal: "I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. . . . If they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness" (Mosiah 2:41).

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Notes

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (1961), s.v. "list."

2. "Welcome, Welcome, Sabbath Morning," *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 280.

3. See the commentary on the phrase *list to obey* in "Complete Text of Benjamin's Speech with Notes and Comments," appendix to John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 533–34.

4. As cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "list"; original spelling preserved.

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preparatory events leading up to it were revealed long before they occurred—and paralleled in the meridian dispensation, which likewise saw a great restoration of priesthood power, eternal principles, and sacred ordinances under the direction of Jesus Christ, who was an Elias of restoration fore-shadowing Joseph Smith's similar role (see John 1:20–28 JST). Careful study of Nephi's panoramic vision in 1 Nephi 13 increases our own broad understanding of how the Lord orchestrated events in preparation for restoring the gospel on the American continent.

• *John W. Welch, Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU and FARMS founder and board member, "'All Their Creeds Were an Abomination': A Brief Look at Creeds as Part of the Apostasy."*

The Prophet Joseph Smith's accounts of his first vision are a guide for illuminating three stages of creedal apostasy from the end of the apostolic era through the Protestant Reformation. First, the original truth and purity of gospel doctrine are reflected in pre-creedal declarations of belief in the New Testament (the testimonies of Nathanael, Peter, and John, for example, are short, varied, unrehearsed, and personal). Second, an intrusion of doctrinal errors began around AD 200 via accretion, and the creeds became increasingly arcane, philosophical, and obscure over the next several centuries—a stage symptomatic of incremental apostasy. Inevitably, such superimposed creedal uniformity led to protest and conflict, a third stage seen following the Protestant Reformation, when creeds were used to distinguish and differentiate religious groups. The number of creeds and their length and complexity soared in the 17th and 18th centuries. By Joseph Smith's time, these creeds and confessions were employed in or had taken on decidedly combative, polemical stances engendering division and contention. In contrast, the Latter-day Saints' articles of faith (albeit not a formal creed) are short, clear, simply declarative, and open-ended. Only the restoration of the keys of continuing revelation could open the heavens and separate the wheat from the tares amidst these creeds to make the church again a "living church" with which the Lord can be "well pleased" (D&C 1:30).

• *John A. Tvedtnes, senior scholar at FARMS, "Rejection of Priesthood Leaders as a Cause of the Great Apostasy."* Evidence from the New Testament suggests that apostasy was already well under way in New Testament times and that it frequently consisted of Christians rejecting the apostles and other leaders. In addition, some of the apostolic fathers of the first two centuries AD and their successors alluded to New Testament prophecies of a great apostasy and wondered if they were seeing their fulfillment. Individual apostasy sometimes led to mass rejection of church leaders, affirming the validity of Brigham Young's warning that public criticism of one's bishop is the first step to apostasy.

• *Dana M. Pike, associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU and associate editor of the* Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, *"Recovering the World of the Bible as Part of the Restoration of All Things."* The avalanche of historical and linguistic knowledge relating to the ancient world that began in the early 1800s, *at the same time* the Lord was restoring doctrine and authority through Joseph Smith, is part of the Lord's work in "the fulness of times" to "gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Doctrine and Covenants 27:13; see Ephesians 1:10). Beginning in the early 1800s, Western explorers and researchers inaugurated the modern, large-scale recovery of Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts and artifacts. The initial decipherment of these ancient Near Eastern scripts and languages, and the discovery of art and artifacts from these cultures informs and reinforces many aspects of the Restoration (examples given). Joseph Smith was involved in the decipherment and publication of the Book of Mormon at the same time other ancient texts were being deciphered and published. Mummies and papyri came to Joseph Smith because of early exploration and exploitation in Egypt, and the resultant Book of Abraham can be more fully comprehended because of the recovery of the ancient world of the Bible. The efforts of hearty, curious, and insightful explorers and decipherers were thus instrumental in providing an integral part of the world-context of the restoration of the gospel.

Some of the papers presented at the symposium appear in the volume *Prelude to the Restoration: From Apostasy to the Restored Church: The 33rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium,* published jointly by Deseret Book and BYU's Religious Studies Center.