

# Of the Gospel

## THE JOYFUL MESSAGE

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The gospel is one long shout of hallelujah as far as that goes. . . . The gospel is our being here.

“Nibley the Scholar,” 3

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Nothing is easier than to identify one’s own favorite political, economic, historical, and moral convictions with the gospel. That gives one a neat, convenient, but altogether too easy advantage over one’s fellows. If my ideas are the true ones—and I certainly will not entertain them if I suspect for a moment that they are false!—then, all truth being one, they are also the gospel, and to oppose them is to play the role of Satan. This is simply insisting that our way is God’s way and therefore, the only way. It is the height of impertinence.

“Beyond Politics,” 298

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All of us believe things that aren’t true, things that will be proven false in time to come. Scientists Galileo, Newton, Heisenberg, Planck, Hawking, and Penrose all had differing beliefs about the very nature of our existence, the most fundamental doctrines of reality. Einstein used to bring God into it. But they all respected each other and didn’t damn each other for wrong ideas. Yet throughout history, men have damned and persecuted and banished and imprisoned and burned others on a vast scale, not for any crimes they committed, but purely for having the wrong ideas. The only crime for which persons were brought to trial during the inquisition was heresy. . . . Consider the Christians and Muslims of Lebanon, for example, living together for centuries with each other, sharing the same customs and values. Each knows the other not as a bad person, yet for years they’ve been slaughtering each other purely for having the wrong beliefs; and within that group, the Sunni and the Shiites are both good Muslims who disagree on but one point of tradition, and for that the car bombs and artillery fire have reduced their beautiful city [Beirut] to rubble.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 7

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The unique value of Christianity lies in those things which would never in a million years occur to men if left to themselves.

“Easter and the Prophets,” CWHN 3:160

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The gospel of repentance is a constant reminder that the most righteous are still being tested and may yet fall, and that the most wicked are not yet beyond redemption and may still be saved. And that is what God wants: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” (Ezekiel 18:23). There are poles for all to see, but in this life no one has reached and few have ever approached either pole, and no one has any idea at what point between his neighbor stands. Only God knows that.

“Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:461-62

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Who is righteous? Anyone who is repenting. No matter how bad he has been, if he is repenting, he is a righteous man. There is hope for him. And no matter how good he has been all his life, if he is not repenting, he is a wicked man. The difference is which way you are facing. The man on the top of the stairs facing down is much worse off than the man on the bottom step who is facing up. The direction we are facing, that is repentance; and that is what determines whether we are good or bad.

“Funeral Address,” *CWHN* 9:301-2

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To be a believer you must be a literalist with a mind open to infinite possibilities.

“Sophic and Mantic,” *CWHN* 10:314

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Nothing in the restored gospel is more stimulating to the inquiring mind than the infinitely expanded panorama of time and space it spreads before us.

Our existence is viewed as a one-act play, beginning with instantaneous creation of everything out of nothing and ending with its dissolution into the immaterial nothing from which it came (as St. Jerome puts it), but as a series of episodes of which for the present we are allowed to view only a few. The play has always been going on and always will be: the man Adam played other roles and was known by different names before he came here and, after his departure from mortal life, assumes other offices and titles.

Even in this life everyone changes from one to another, gets new names and callings and new identities as he plays his proverbial seven parts—but always preserving his identity as the same conscious living being.

“The Expanding Gospel,” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*, 21

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The idea of a primordial revelation is that a complete knowledge of the world from its beginning to its end is already written down and has been vouchsafed to certain chosen spirits from time to time.

“Genesis of the Written Word,” *CWHN* 12:463

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I've mentioned the third dimension. The other churches live in a two-dimensional world. But our gospel adds a third dimension, so to speak. We think of the other world as being a reality, and so we actually live in another dimension.

"Rediscovery of the Apocrypha," *CWHN* 12:213

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The message of the restored gospel is that one phase of the earth's existence is coming to a close, and another phase, a phase in which God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven, is about to become the order of life on earth.

"Beyond Politics," 281

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A favorite with LDS schoolmen has been Brigham Young's declaration that "Every art and science known and studied by the children of men is comprised within the gospel." But this does not mean, as is commonly assumed, that anything one chooses to teach is the gospel. That would be as silly as arguing that since all things are made of electrons, protons, neutrons, etc., whenever anyone opens his mouth to speak he gives a lecture on physics. It means rather that all things may be studied and taught in the light of the gospel.

"Educating the Saints," 239

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If we have no professional clergy in the Church, it is not because the Church cannot use expert knowledge, but because all members should be experts where the gospel is concerned, and as such they should make their contribution.

"The Day of the Amateur," 44

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Moroni enumerates the spiritual gifts in the last chapter of the Book of Mormon, yet we rarely ask for these gifts today—they don't particularly interest us. There is only one that we do ask for in all sincerity, and duly receive, and that, for obvious reasons, is the gift of healing. But the other gifts? Who cares for them? We make light of them and prefer the real world of everyday life. We do not even ask for the *temporal* gifts, because we don't want them either—as gifts.

"Work We Must, But the Lunch Is Free," *CWHN* 9:234

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“If everything is given to us, do we have to work?” Of course. The gifts do not excuse us from work. They leave us free to do the real work. . . . The Lord . . . [says], “I’ll give you the stone and the chisel—now you show that you are a Michelangelo.” It is much harder to be a Michelangelo than to work enough to buy a chisel and some stone.

“Gifts,” *CWHN* 9:101

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All belongs to us that we are capable of conceiving, and containing, and enjoying. But what happens? We go and spoil everything, and then in our feelings of guilt, we petulantly slam the door on faith and repentance, and we doggedly pretend to find fulfillment after the “vision splendid” of our immortality has faded into the light of common day, which we smugly call “the real world.”

“Goods of First and Second Intent,” *CWHN* 9:550

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We are commanded *not* to ask for or seek for *office*. Yet nobody seems particularly interested in asking or seeking for gifts, while men constantly plan, scheme, and aspire to office. Martin Harris and others actually left the Church because their services were not recognized by high office—Martin Harris, who had the privilege of standing in the presence of an angel and turning over the plates, wanted an office in the Church, something which would only be temporary and a nuisance. Why, let me talk to Moroni for five minutes and I’ll give you the pleasure of sitting on the stand for evermore!

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 19

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Implicit and explicit in the concept of a gospel taught by degrees instead of all at once—“line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:30)—is the idea that the most important, the highest, and the holiest teachings come *last*.

This is the exact opposite of the reasoning of the Christian world today, that the most important teachings must have come *first*, so that everything essential is known while anything that may have escaped is not really vital.

Few would dispute that the higher and holier a teaching is, the fewer are qualified to hear it: One need only recall the Lord’s practice of discussing “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” only with his disciples behind closed doors and of selecting only a few chosen apostles to share in the still greater mysteries such as the transfiguration.

All Christians, indeed, agree that the most glorious manifestations are reserved for the end. But the importance of a teaching is not measured by its depth and wonder but by the particular need of the person receiving it. God does give people at all times what are *for them* the most important teachings that could possibly be given.

“... But Unto Them It Is Not Given,” *CWHN* 7:107-8

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The mysteries are not magic or occultism, but any knowledge that men cannot obtain by their own efforts, knowledge to be had only by revelation. The whole Book of Mormon is such a mystery. There you will find clear, concrete definitions of such daunting words as faith, heaven, hell, creation, atonement, resurrection, redemption, preexistence, hereafter.

“The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” *CWHN* 8:547

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A mystery, by definition, is something that you keep to yourself; the Greek *muo* means “to shut up.” A mystery is something you’ve been initiated into, and you don’t convey that to the general public.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 5

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The established academician with his tried-and-tested platitudes and truisms is welcome to his world of preaching and posturing, but the greatest appeal of the gospel in every age has been that it is frankly wonderful—one glorious surprise after another.

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (May 1970): 86

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Those who turn from the daily paper and the news broadcasts to con the scriptures for signs of the times, revise their charts of prophetic world events, and plot the course of God in history are wasting their time. This is a shabby little show down here—read a last month’s newspaper if you don’t think so.

As a matter of fact, the human race is at this moment as near to an earthly paradise as it can ever expect to be—unless you honestly think that more televisions and cars and play-school education are going to endow man with the wisdom and forbearance of the angels. After every conceivable improvement and correction in our world has been made, we are still at a loss to imagine any institutional setup or scientific attainment that can make men permanently happy. . . .

If the things of this world are all an empty show, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,” what is important? The atonement of Jesus Christ—that is the one supreme reality of our life upon this earth!

“Prophets and Glad Tidings,” *CWHN* 3:263-64

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We cannot enjoy optional obedience to the law of God, or place our own limits on the law of sacrifice, or mitigate the charges of righteous conduct connected with the law of the gospel. We cannot be willing to sacrifice only that which is convenient to part with, and then expect a reward. The Atonement is everything; it is not to be had “on the cheap.” God is not mocked in these things; we do not make promises and covenants with mental reservations. Unless we live up to every covenant, we are literally in Satan’s power—a condition easily recognized by the mist of fraud and deception that has enveloped our whole society.

“The Meaning of the Atonement,” *CWHN* 9:590

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You do not have to be an inspired prophet to know that man’s state is parlous, that life is more than we can handle, and that death is more than we can face. Nothing is more real in this life than the constant awareness that things could be better than they are. The Atonement does not take place in this part of the celestial order. The unreality is all on this side of the great and awful gulf. If there is anything manifestly evident about the doings in the great and spacious building, it is the hollow laughter and silly pretensions of the people in it.

“The Meaning of the Atonement,” *CWHN* 9:595

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In its sweep and scope, atonement takes on the aspect of one of the grand constants in nature—omnipresent, unalterable, such as gravity or the speed of light. Like them, it is always there, easily ignored, hard to explain, and hard to believe in without an explanation. Also, we are constantly exposed to its effects whether we are aware of them or not.

“The Meaning of the Atonement,” *CWHN* 9:603

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To be redeemed is to be atoned. From this it should be clear what kind of *oneness* is meant by the Atonement—it is being received in a close embrace of the prodigal son, expressing not only forgiveness but oneness of heart and mind that amounts to identity, like a literal family identity as John sets it forth so vividly in chapters 14 through 17 of his Gospel.

“The Meaning of the Atonement,” *CWHN* 9:567-68

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We are commanded to be joyful because he has borne our sorrows. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief so that we need not be. Our own sins and limitations are the things that make us sad. He had no sins and limitations; he was not sad for his sake, but wholly for ours. Only one could suffer for others who did not deserve to suffer for himself.

If we remain gloomy after what he did for us, it is because we do not accept what he did for us. If we suffer, we deserve to suffer because there is no need for it if we only believe in him.

“Prophets and Glad Tidings,” *CWHN* 8:259

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Jesus actually lived—a man standing out in sharp relief against a totally hostile social environment, for without such a leader no group of men could have come together, formed a society, and propounded a doctrine that ran counter to all their own teaching, upbringing, and experience, both individual and collective. . . .

Since Jesus was *not* a product of his time, is *not* to be explained in terms of his background, and cannot have got his ideas from a society to which they were utterly strange and obnoxious, he must have obtained his perfect conviction from personal experience. For the present, what can we do but accept his own version of the thing? He really had seen the Father; he really had seen Lucifer fall from heaven; he really did speak with Moses and Elias on the mount; he really did receive the ministrations of angels in the desert, and there he really did discourse with Satan; he really was before Abraham's day; and he really was resurrected.

"Easter and the Prophets," *CWHN* 3:161

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I have a testimony of the gospel which I wish to bear. Again, as Brigham Young says, because I say it's true doesn't make it true, does it? But I know it is, and I would recommend you to pursue a way of finding out. And there are ways in which you can come to a knowledge of the truth.

When is a thing proven? When you personally think it's so, and that's all you can do. . . . Then you have your testimony, and all you can do is bear your testimony and point to the evidence. That's *all* you can do. But you can't impose your testimony on another. And you can't make the other person see the evidence as you do. Things that just thrill me through and through in the Book of Mormon leave another person completely cold. And the other way around, too. So we can't use evidence, and we can't say, I know this is true, therefore you'd better know it is true. But I know it is true, and I pray our Heavenly Father that we may all come to a knowledge of the truth, each in his own way.

"Brigham Young as a Theologian," 4

## GOD AND SATAN

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God does not fight Satan: a word from him and Satan is silenced and banished. There is no contest there; in fact we are expressly told that all the power which Satan enjoys here on earth is granted him by God. "We will allow Satan, our common enemy, to try man and to tempt him." It is man's strength that is being tested—not God's.

"Beyond Politics," 288

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[God's permission] has given rise to the favorite proposition of the philosophers that God is either weak because he cannot prevent evil or vicious because he does not want to: an argument which conventional Christianity finds unanswerable. But it all makes sense to Brigham Young: . . . "[It] is not necessary that we should sin because sin is in the world; but, to the contrary, it is necessary that we should resist sin, and for this purpose is sin necessary. . . . Sin is co-eternal with righteousness, for it must needs be that there is an opposition in all things" (*Journal of Discourses*,

10:2-3). The idea that sin should be put within the reach of all who want it is by no means the same thing as saying that all are obliged to sin.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 1:2

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God discusses things with men “in all humility” for the sake of our enlightenment. Satan too loves to “discuss,” but what a different type of discussion! He is not teaching but laying traps; his whole line is a sales pitch with his own advantage as the end. He is not enlightening but manipulating. He does not reason, but bargains: his proposition as put before Adam, Cain, Abraham, Moses, Enoch, and the Lord himself is the same one he puts to Faust and Jabez Stone: “If you will worship me I will give you unlimited power and wealth—everything this world has to offer. All you have to do is sign away your rather dubious expectations for the other world.” If his proposition is refused outright he has no other resort but to have a tantrum, falling down, rending upon the earth, screaming madly, “I am the Son of God! Worship me!”

“Beyond Politics,” 291

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There is an enemy, the enemy of all righteousness—but he is a disembodied spirit. How do we come to grips with him, according to Brigham Young? Very intimately and immediately; he enters, or seeks to enter, right into us individually. There(ore) we cannot engage him by attacking other human beings, no matter how full of the devil they may be. The futility of trying to combat Satan in the persons of those whom we deem to be his human representatives is rendered complete by the circumstance that there is evil as well as good in all of us; and while every man can know for himself what is good and evil in himself, he cannot possibly distinguish with any accuracy what is good and evil in others.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:5

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In dealing with this particular enemy, the enemy of all righteousness, the first rule is never to use his methods, for if we do he has already won. He does not care which “side” we are on as long as we act like devils, just as God does not care which side we are on if we keep the great commandments. He held up as the shining example that of a Samaritan who was not a member of the Church, was not even of Israel, and contrasted his behavior (“go thou and do likewise!”) to that of two devout and active churchmen who wanted nothing to do with a drunken bum lying unconscious in the gutter.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:1

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What would it be like if I could view and focus on two or more things at once? If I could see at one and the same moment not only what is right before me but equally well what is on my left side, my right side, what is above me and below me? I have the moral certainty that something is there; and as my eyes flicker about, I think I can substantiate that impression. But as to taking calm and deliberate look at more than one thing at a time, that is a

gift denied us at present. I cannot imagine what such a view of the world would be like, but it would be *more* real and correct than the one we have now.

I bring up this obvious point because it is by virtue of this one-dimensional view of things that we magisterially pass judgment on God. The smart atheist and pious schoolman alike can tell us all about God—what he can do and what he cannot, what he must be like and what he cannot be like—on the basis of their one-dimensional experience of reality. Today the astronomers are harping on the old favorite theme of the eighteenth-century encyclopedists, who, upon discovering the universe to be considerably larger than they thought or had been taught, immediately announced that man was a very minor creature indeed, would have to renounce any special claim to divine favor, since there are much bigger worlds than ours for God to be concerned about, and in the end give up his intimate and private God altogether.

This jaunty iconoclasm rested on the assumption that God is subject to the same mental limitations that we are; that if he is thinking of Peter, he can hardly be thinking of Paul at the same time, let alone marking the fall of the sparrow. But once we can see the possibilities that lie in being able to see more than one thing at a time (and in theory, the experts tell us, there is no reason why we should not), the universe takes on new dimensions and God takes over again. Let us remember that quite peculiar to the genius of Mormonism is the doctrine of a God who could preoccupy himself with countless numbers of things. “The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine” (Moses 1:37).

“Zeal Without Knowledge,” *CWHN* 9:64-65

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Meanness of spirit . . . offends God more than anything else. We have no laws ordering men to be charitable and open-handed, or penalizing that meanness of spirit that so often means an enhanced profit, for the obvious reason that no one can know what is in the heart of another. But God knows, and meanness of spirit is the one thing he will not tolerate. If one loved God with all his heart and soul and his neighbor as himself, few if any laws would be necessary; for such love, said the Lord, comprises all the Law and the Prophets; laws against base and contemptible actions are unnecessary for people to whom such actions are themselves unthinkable.

“Work We Must, But the Lunch is Free,” *CWHN* 9:218-19

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The comings and goings of God himself, moving between heaven and earth, must needs be surrounded by an aura of mystery and excitement. Can such things really be? Luke, in his meticulous, almost clinically exact and factual reports, wants us to know once and for all that they really can be. The wonder of it, something akin to the excitement of Christmas, quickens the reader’s pulse, but how could we describe the state of mind of those who actually experienced it? The apocryphal writings go all out to make us feel with them, but it is 3 Nephi who really catches the spirit (3 Nephi 19:1-3).

“Christ among the Ruins,” *CWHN* 8:414-15.

THE RIGHTEOUS LIFE

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It is easy to imagine absolutes, and to think and argue in terms of absolutes, as the theologians have always done: good and evil, light and darkness, hot and cold, black and white. We know exactly what they *are* but in the real world have rarely experienced the pure thing. Our own experience lies between. Yet, standing on that middle ground, we *are* faced with absolute decisions. . . . You are either repenting or not repenting and that is, according to the scriptures, the whole difference between being righteous or being wicked.

“Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:462-63

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This world was organized in the light of infinite knowledge and experience and after due thought and discussion, to offer multiple facilities to an endless variety of creatures and especially to be the home and dominion of a godlike race who would take good care of it and have joy therein. Being a highly favored breed, much was expected of them, and their qualifications for advancement were to be put to the test by allowing an adversary, a common enemy to God and man, to tempt them and try them. It was decided before even the world was that, if man should yield to this temptation and thus lower his defenses and make himself vulnerable to repeated attacks of the adversary, steps would immediately be taken to put into operation a prearranged plan to restore him to his former status.

What God tells us in effect is, “Now that you have fallen and forfeited your paradise by deliberately, knowingly disobeying me, I will give you another chance to get back to that paradise by deliberately and knowingly obeying me. To get back where you were and beyond, you must repent—forever give up doing it your way and decide to live by the law of God, or by the law of obedience, which means doing it my way.”

Adam agreed to do it God’s way, though Satan lost no time in trying to sell him on another plan. Adam’s own children and their posterity, however, chose to achieve salvation *their* way, not God’s way, and ever since then there has been trouble. The Lord Jesus Christ told the young Joseph Smith in the First Vision that men were no longer doing things his way, that as a result that way was no longer upon the earth, but it was about to be brought again.

“Beyond Politics,” 280-81

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I doubt not that when we know the reason for some of the things we do now on faith, the practical value of the actions will be so plain that we will wonder how we could have missed it, and then we shall be heartily glad that we did what we were told to do.

“Prophets and Ritual,” *CWHN* 8:149

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We know that this is not our real existence—even the Gentiles feel that and resent the madness of it all. Here we are nothing, but here we want everything, because we think this is our only chance. And it is indeed our only chance in a sense. Our great day of probation in which we show how we can adjust ourselves to eternity—here is where we do it.

“The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” *CWHN* 8: 568

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There are certain things of which we never tire, with which we never become bored. Those are the things of eternity. Yet strangely enough it is these which we easily dismiss and neglect as if they were highly expendable.

“Goods of First and Second Intent,” *CWHN* 9:529

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The doctrine of probation is the inescapable choice between two ways, everyone having a perfect knowledge of the way he should go. None may commit his decision to the judgment of a faction, a party, a leader, or a nation; none can delegate his free agency to another.

“Prophetic Book of Mormon,” *CWHN* 8:462

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The basic elements of religion are . . . man’s awareness of his lost and fallen state—the “Urtragik” (original tragedy) of his existence—and his hopes of escaping from it. Equal awareness of his present misery and potential for glory meets us at every turn in all the nobler products of his mind.

The problem is how to get from the one state to the other; that is the main concern of the mysteries. The dark coffin chamber and the bright celestial room are the beginning and ending of the story, but the fearful passage itself, the most important learning and doing, is found in the “Mittelraum” (middle room) on the way from the one to the other.

*Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 183

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Much of Christ’s discourse in the New Testament is addressed to schoolmen, the Scribes and Pharisees, who apparently often consulted with him; and yet though he converted farmers and soldiers, tax-gatherers, fishermen, shepherds, harlots, and princes, there is no recorded instance of his ever converting one of the Doctors. . . .

The sick did not have to make Peter’s confession before they were healed, but they *did* have to have faith. The people who would not believe in Jesus believed in nothing—they said they believed in the prophets, but they did not: if they believed in the prophets, in the scriptures, in Moses, or in God, they would believe in Christ—but they do not. The greatest Christian convert was a man who believed all the *wrong* things about Christ—it was not what he believed, but his capacity for faith that made Saul of Tarsus eligible for immediate enlightenment.

“Sophic and Mantic,” *CWHN* 10:331-32

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You are not going to appease God by trying to buy him off, by going through the pious motions of religious observances, your meetings and temple sessions.

It is not for you to decide what to do to please God—it is for him to decide, and he has not required all this display of piety from you. Your most dedicated observances, even following [his] ancient prescriptions, if done in the wrong spirit, are actually iniquity—not to your credit but to your loss.

“Great Are the Words of Isaiah,” *CWHN* 1:219-20

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There are a few absolute and categorical “Thou shalt nots” in the scriptures which we are far from taking to heart.

We have been told that under *no* circumstances are we to contend, accuse, coerce, aspire, or flatter. These practices will be readily recognized as standard procedure in getting to the top in our modern competitive society. What all of them have in common is a feeling of self-righteousness.

“Brigham Young and the Enemy,” 2:7

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Does not one person need repentance more than another? Ezra and Baruch protested to God that while Israel had sinned, the Gentiles had acted much worse, and asked why they should be let off so much more easily. But God was not buying that argument. You can always find somebody who is worse than you are to make you feel virtuous. It’s a cheap shot: those awful terrorists, perverts, communists—*they* are the ones who need to repent! Yes, indeed they do, and for them repentance will be a full-time job, exactly as it is for all the rest of us.

“Great Are the Words of Isaiah,” *CWHN* 1:217

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We can afford the luxury of trusting our fellow-man only because we trust in God, who has assured us that if others let us down, he will make it up to us.

“Uses and Abuses of Patriotism,” 195

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Latter-day Saints have always been the greatest advocates of the Christmas spirit; nay, they have shocked and alarmed the world by insisting on recognizing as a real power what the world prefers to regard as a pretty sentiment. Where the seasonal and formal aspect of Christmas is everything, it becomes a hollow mockery. If men *really* want what they say they do, we have it; but faced with accepting a real Savior who has really spoken with men, they draw back, nervous and ill at ease.

In the end, lights, tinsel, and sentimentality are safer, but a sense of possibilities still rankles, so to that we all continue to appeal. For by celebrating Christmas the world serves notice that it is still looking for the gospel.

“Christmas Quest,” 5

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One does not have faith in propositions, creeds, or institutions, to which one is merely loyal. One has faith in God alone—all else is subject to change without notice. Faith does not seek security by boxing itself in with definite and binding creeds, as did the Doctors of the Church in a time of desperate uncertainty and insecurity. . . .

Professor Gaylord Simpson likes to cite the case of Santa Claus as providing the futility of all faith. But has belief in Santa Claus ever closed the door to knowledge as loyalty to a scientific credo so often has? Is it better for a child to believe in Santa Claus with the understanding that someday he is going to revise his views than for him to be taught what is scientifically correct . . . from infancy, so that he will never, never have to revise his views on anything and thus go through life always right about everything? Which course is more liable to lead to disaster, the open-ended Santa Claus, or the ingrained illusion of infallibility?

“Sophic and Mantic,” *CWHN* 10:332

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Being perfect in the way means keeping the covenants one has made.

“Churches in the Wilderness,” *CWHN* 8:309

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The word *perfect* (*teleios*) does not mean perfect digestion, perfect eyesight, perfect memory, and so on; it is a special word meaning keeping the *whole* law. What remained for the young man, before he could be really serious (*teleios*), was keeping the law of consecration. If he did not keep that, he could not be perfect in keeping the others either, in other words, the *whole* law, for he could not become one of the Lord’s disciples. So there was nothing but for Jesus to dismiss him—and a very sad occasion it was when they parted.

The Lord observed to the apostles that the rich just can’t take it; nevertheless, any alternative plan, any proposal of compromise, easier payments, or tax write-offs, was out of the question. The Lord did not say, “Come back; perhaps we could make a deal.” No, he had to let the young rich man go. One does not compromise on holy things. Unless we observe every promise we make in the endowment, we put ourselves in Satan’s power.

“Law of Consecration,” *CWHN* 9:438

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As Heber C. Kimball reminded the saints, there are no covenants made between individuals in the church. All promises and agreements are between the individual and our Father in Heaven; all other parties, including the angels, are present only as witnesses. Therefore whether anybody else observes and keeps the promise is not my concern, but if I do not what I have promised, what blessings can I expect?

“Breakthroughs I Would Like to See,” *CWHN* 9:385

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These are the gifts and talents that prescribe our proper activities on this earth: . . .

1. First of all, before anything can happen, one must be aware of being in the world. A measure of awareness is apparently possessed by all living things, and the greater the awareness, the greater the intelligence. If our time here is to have any meaning at all, our brain and intellect must be clear and active. . . .

2. In this life we have too many options. There are thousands of good things any of us could be doing at the moment but will never be allowed to do, because of the shortness of time and the peculiar need we have to focus on just one thing at a time. . . . What can any of us do in such a predicament? We can only “hear the word of the Lord,” and to hear is to obey. . . .

3. . . . “The eye cannot choose but see,” and what it sees is the big picture—it gauges and measures, perceiving ratios and proportions and noting those that are pleasing and those that are not, and it compares and structures all by the awareness of light, the constant and the measure of all things. . . .

4. . . . If an important aspect of our sojourn here is the release of tension, monotony, and drabness by those sensual delights best represented by the nose, it is the *disciplined* taste, smell, and touch as well as hearing and seeing that have, as Brigham Young again informs us, the greatest capacity for enjoyment; and discipline means control. Appetites, desires, and passions can give us the best of what they have to offer only if they are kept within the bounds the Lord has set. . . .

5. . . . What God asks of the mouth and lips . . . is not that they eat the proper food—they have means of sensing that—but that they *never speak guile!*

6. . . . The ancients considered the neck as the tower, a sort of control on the rest of the body, the index of confidence and courage. It is the characteristic mark of the alert and healthy animal. . . .

7. You can expect to have trials and burdens not a few, for that is part of the game; and for that your shoulders and back should be strong—those burdens are necessary to the plan and are meant to be borne. Best of all, they will not hurt you! . . .

8. Along with that, you are to be valiant; mere innocence is not enough, as Brother Brigham said, if you are to realize your potential. The ancient formula blesses the arms to be strong in wielding the symbolic sword of righteousness. . . .

9. Besides the brain, the *phrenos*, the ancients considered the *thumos*, the breast, the main receptacle and processor of our feelings and emotions. It is there that the surges of passion or fear are felt, and it is there that our prevailing attitude to things is engendered. . . .

10. As to our reins (kidneys) and liver, you leave your innards alone; they should perform their proper function on their own, and the less they attract our attention, or anyone else’s, the better! . . .

11. The Hebrew and Egyptian rites place one goal and one delight above all others, the joy in one’s posterity, in patriarchal succession. . . .

12. Lastly comes our means of getting around in the world, feet and legs. The Egyptians place great emphasis on this; the resurrection is finally achieved only when the legs are set in motion on the path of eternity. . . . The Saints

are the most mobile of mortals, *das wandernde Gottesvolk* (God's wandering people), like Abraham, strangers and pilgrims, but missionaries in the world, meant to circulate abroad, to get around and broadcast the good news and spread the stakes of Zion.

"But What Kind of Work?" *CWHN* 9:265-70.

## PRIESTHOOD

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The moment I even *think* of my priesthood as a status symbol or a mark of superiority, it becomes a mere hollow pretense. At the slightest hint to gloating or self-congratulation the priesthood holder is instantly and automatically unfrocked.

"Best Possible Test," *CWHN* 12:536

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As far as the whole world is concerned, the Priesthood is a thing of value which is cruel to withhold from anyone, because it enhances one's status and dignity among his fellows, whether inside the Church or outside. And yet the one thing that renders that Priesthood completely null and void is to treat it as something to aspire to among one's fellows! Priesthood is strictly an arrangement between the individual Priesthood holder and his brethren in the eternal worlds; as personal and private as anything can be.

"Priesthood," 1

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Nothing is more wonderful than the way in which the Spirit operates through the priesthood; especially firm was its foundation in a principle by which the priesthood cannot be abused or misused; its power cannot be applied to further private or party interests or to impose, coerce, or intimidate—the moment it is directed to such ends, it automatically becomes inoperative.

The priesthood is further more invulnerable because it is indivisible. As long as *one* true holder of the higher priesthood is on the earth the potentiality of the church is there. It suggests the idea of cloning, that from one cell one can produce a whole organism; it also suggests present-day ideas of manifestations of energy at various levels.

"How Firm a Foundation!" *CWHN* 9:152

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RELEVANCE is the one thing the world has a right to demand of words delivered by divine revelation, or personally by the hand of an angel who took the trouble to come down, hand over, and explain.

"Some Reasons for the Restored Gospel," 24

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In recent years, one frequently hears (especially in testimony meetings) such things as, “We are thankful for having a Prophet who can tell us exactly what we have to do and think every moment of the day.” The Prophet is a convenient time and trouble saver. Actually, people pester him to death for these things (they always have), as someone ready to bail you out no matter what silly things you’ve done or what a fool you’ve made of yourself. Well, you’re not going to learn anything that way. Let us recall Joseph’s warning the people who were depending on the prophet, hence “darkening their minds, and neglecting the duties devolving upon themselves” as much as the prophet; but he was not to be called on for every emergency. “It is a great thing to inquire at the hands of God, and we feel fearful to approach him, especially about things which men should obtain in all sincerity for themselves by humility and prayer.” Don’t ask me for revelation. You have just as much right to it, he says.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 11

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What the Brethren say is the word and the will of the Lord (D&C 84), but only, as President Clark pointed out no less than twenty-seven times in a speech on the subject, when they are so moved upon by the Holy Ghost. “How can we know that?” asked Brother Clark. By following the oft-repeated principle that everyone must so live that the Holy Ghost will reveal to him whether the others are speaking by the spirit or not. . . . Before I question another or make a direct appeal to God, I must be perfectly sure of my own purity and integrity, because what I’m asking for is the same revelation.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 12

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I think if you live right and keep your mind open—if you ask for revelation . . . and your mind is open, you will receive hints and proddings that are stronger than just normal insights and things like that.

“The Faith of an Observer,” 13

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Ask the Lord and he will tell you what to do as long as you behave yourself. Nothing in the world is more personal than that.

“Nibley Talks about Contemporary Issues,” 14

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At no time did Smith claim that his gift of translation was permanent; on the contrary, the gifts of the Spirit are given when and where God wills, and men have no control over them. Joseph Smith stated publicly more than once that he had to study languages like anyone else, save for the brief time when he was actually receiving revelation. To say that his interpretation of one document proves or disproves that of another document made many years before, is to introduce one’s own rules into the game.

“On the Pearl of Great Price,” 3

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[Referring to the Wd3t-eye symbol, Facsimile 2, fig. 7] The key of knowledge and life, the secret of the resurrection, the key to the measure of all things, of science itself, the knowledge of “every gift and endowment,” the consummation of every good thing—what comes nearer to “the great keywords of the priesthood”?

“Three Facsimiles from the Book of Abraham,” 67

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Religion becomes magic when the power by which things operate is transferred from God to the things themselves. . . . When men lack revelation they commonly come to think of power as residing in things. . . .

In time the Bible became a magic book in men’s eyes, conveying all knowledge by its own power, without the aid of revelation. So also after a fierce controversy on the matter, priesthood itself acquired the status of a thing that automatically bestows power and grace, regardless of the spiritual or moral qualifications of its possessor—it became a magic thing.

“Some Fairly Foolproof Tests,” *CWHN* 7:261

## PROPHETS AND REVELATION

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The rejection of living prophets and the veneration of dead ones is not a folly limited to one nation or to one generation. It meets us throughout the long history of Israel as a sort of standard procedure. Nor did it cease with the coming of Christ, who promised his disciples that they would be treated as badly and rejected as completely as he.

“How Will It Be When None More Saith ‘I Saw,’” *CWHN* 8:7

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The sectarian world simply cannot understand how it is possible for a prophet of God to make a mistake. They could never see, for example, why Brigham Young, if he was really a prophet, would need to experiment with sugar beets or silkworms. Why should a prophet experiment? Shouldn’t God reveal to him exactly what to do in every instance so that he need never, never, make a mistake? . . .

If God ever permits a prophet to be wrong or to learn by trial and error as the rest of God’s children do, how can we ever be sure whether he is right or not? That, of course, is where revelation comes in.

Every individual must get a testimony for himself and be guided by the Spirit entirely on his own; then, and only then, as Brigham Young so often and so emphatically declared, can the people of God be led by revelation. In the

light of such a doctrine, whether Joseph Smith ever made mistakes or not becomes completely irrelevant. . . . What mortals have ever been more keenly aware of their weaknesses and shortcomings than the prophets?

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (March 1968): 17

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People use perceived imperfections of the Church as a pretext for them to relax their own personal moral standards. The psychologists tell us regarding our own emotional feelings not to keep these feelings bottled up too tight, because it can lead to an explosion. So what should we do? Be like the importunate widow and complain. Itemize your griefs, your doctrinal objections, your personal distastes. Lay them all out in full detail and get it out of your system. (You may wonder why people see me talking so much to myself.) With this understanding—you will do all this before the only Person qualified to judge either you or your tormentors. As you bring your complaints, be fully aware that he knows everything already—including everything there is to know about you.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 23-24

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[Certainly] I would sustain Judas. He was one of the apostles. . . . If we sustained only perfect people, we wouldn't sustain anybody. The Lord has his purposes in these things.

“Nibley the Scholar,” 10

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If you think any of the Brethren seem to be underendowed in any particular gift or knowledge, know that God has chosen that brother for other gifts, and God will endow him with the gifts he needs as the occasion arises.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 20

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The Brethren have their work cut out for them, and strenuous work it is. It calls for studying the gospel, and to see that the greatest possible number of people in all parts of the world get to hear the first principles. This requires constant repetition of first principles to fresh audiences wherever General Authorities go; they cannot be expected to set forth advanced ideas or front-line research.

“Criticizing the Brethren,” 21

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It has been common practice to dismiss any saying of [Brigham Young's] of which one disapproves (and he makes no effort to please) by observing that he said so much on so many things that he was bound to contradict himself, and therefore need not be taken too seriously all the time.

No view could be more ill-advised, for there never was a man more undeviatingly consistent and rational in thought and utterance. . . . Granted that Brigham would admonish the Saints to wear overcoats one day, so to speak, and the next day turn around and advise shirtsleeves, the element of scandal and confusion vanishes if we only get the main idea, which is that it is not the rule-book or the administration but the weather that prescribes the proper dress for the day. All the other apparent contradictions in Brother Brigham's teachings likewise vanish when we grasp the main idea behind them.

"Educating the Saints," 230-31

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Was there ever a preacher or leader more willing to admit his fallibility or more emphatic in exhorting his followers *not* to follow him blindly or believe a thing was so because he said it? If there was one teaching that Brigham Young emphasized more than any other it was the importance of the individuals getting a testimony for himself independently of all human guidance, and putting his trust not in the words of any leader but in the Holy Ghost.

"Sounding Brass," in *CWHN* 11:679

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No matter how wildly improbable or paradoxical or utterly impossible a thing may seem to the cleverest people on earth, only by witness and not by reason, theory, or speculation may its truth be ultimately established, whether the truth be scientific or religious. "This is the testimony . . . which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him . . . and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father" (D&C 76:22-23).

Compare this testimony of modern prophets with that of the ancients: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen *with our eyes*, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1-3). After all, it is the testimony of the prophets that gives us the real Easter.

"Easter and the Prophets," *CWHN* 3:162

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Who can draw the line between insight and inspiration believing, as the Latter-day Saints, that all knowledge comes from God at various levels of revelation?

"New Approaches to the Pearl of Great Price" (March 1968): 17

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Eusebius develops the theory that all that is good and desirable in any civilization is actually a survival from some previous age of enlightenment when the Gospel was on the earth and men received light from heaven. Since civilization and the arts are of course older than Christianity, he does not presume that God's gifts to mankind began with Jesus, but conceives of earlier dispensations when the earth was blessed with divine visitations and showered with heavenly gifts, only to be followed in the course of human affairs by inevitable corruption and apostasy.

Dispensationism is a conspicuous item in the Jewish and Christian apocrypha, in the early Christian writings, and now in the Dead Sea Scrolls. A dispensation is not a reformation but a restoration, specifically, a return of revelation—"again the heavens were open."

Whenever revelation is resumed, the holy order of things revives, while that holy order cannot survive after revelation has ceased no matter how hard men try to preserve and imitate its institutions. The sacral order is thus completely dependent on revelation. . . .

All this is important when it comes to understanding the peculiar role of Mormonism in the world.

"Sophic and Mantic," *CWHN* 10:371-72

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The one true religion cannot overlook the existence of other beliefs and practices that have been followed by the vast majority of the human race over many centuries. It cannot be a localized provincial religion such as Roman Catholicism and the extremely limited Protestant sect. That does not mean that it must have a large membership, but that its doctrine should acknowledge and seek to understand the full scope of human experience. Thus Abraham treats the knowledge of the Egyptians and the morality of Pharaoh with reverence and respect; he doesn't share their beliefs but understands their position. Today the existence in prehistoric times of an "archaic religion" or "ancient wisdom" is ever more strongly suspected as comparative studies accumulate. Mormonism is not only a world religion, it is *the* World Religion.

"Egypt and Joseph Smith," 3

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The yearning of Augustine for real revelation and the inadequacy of all substitutes is beautifully brought out in his last conversation with his mother. Here these two saintly people bare their souls, and what they both wish for above all else is a real revelation: what is it like when God really speaks, they ask each other, when he alone speaks, not by any intermediary "but by himself, that we may hear his word *not* through any tongue of flesh nor angel's voice, nor in the sound of thunder, nor in the dark riddle of the similitude, but we might hear the very One whom we only love in these other things, that we might hear his very self *without* these—and if this thing could be continued on . . . so that life might be forever like that one moment of understanding for which we now sighed—would not that be 'entering into thy Master's joy?' And when shall that ever be?"

In this moment of frank self-revelation Augustine admits that what he really wants is not revelation that comes by the preaching of men or even of angels, nor that comes through his laborious intellectual demonstrations, nor is the manifestation of God in nature—the voice of thunder—nor even the mystic flash of insight which both he and his mother experienced in their last conversation together, for even then they still "sighed after" the real thing and wondered what it was like.

"A Substitute for Revelation," *CWHN* 3:91-92

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In a testimony meeting, it is the spirit who testifies to the individuals there, not me. I may get up and say that I know it's true, and if a person does not receive the spirit there, that will leave him cold.

“Fact and Fancy in the Interpretation of Ancient Records,” 28

## THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH

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The gospel and the Church: we call one the *plan* and the other the *work*. The plan looks to the eternities and must necessarily be perfect; but the *work is right here and is anything but the finished product*. Yet the two are inseparable! “To bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” is the *plan*; to carry it out, “*this is my work and my glory*”—the glory is in the work. We are permitted to take part in the work, to participate like eager but bungling children in the kitchen or the shop—dropping things, doing it all wrong, quarreling, getting in each other’s way, trying the patience of indulgent elders. What a headache! Yet such is the best and happiest arrangement for all concerned, everybody having a wonderful time—and it is found only in the restored Church, where the plan and the work are equally exhilarating and equally sacred. . . .

Yet the plan does not suffer fools gladly. If its object is perfection—eternal progression, no less—nothing could be more retrograde to it than the easy self-congratulation, shallow learning, vanity of office, quest for wealth and recognition, the futile ambition and careerism that characterize our present society. . . . It is the schoolmen and the fundamentalists who stop the process with final answers, satisfied with what they have. Too often the mere fact that the teaching and history of the Church raise unanswered questions is taken as proof positive that something is seriously wrong. And it is wrong if we ever stop seeking.

“Foreword” to England’s *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel*, CWHN 12:555-56

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Origen, the first and foremost of Christian theologians, divided the church itself into two bodies of members—the “esoteric” and the “exoteric”—corresponding to two different ways of comprehending the teachings. The words are his, and they speak volumes. Both societies shared the common membership, but while the exoteric side made up the popular congregations, the esoteric community was limited to those who understood and could be trusted with the deeper meaning of the doctrine. . . . Throughout the Book of Mormon the church itself regularly split into a worldly society, notably the religion of the Nehors, and another consisting of “a few . . . humble followers of Christ (2 Nephi 28:14) to whom special gifts and revelations were given (Alma 12:9). These were Origen’s exoteric and esoteric churches respectively. That is why true Israel was called a peculiar people; people often ask today in what sense the Latter-day Saints are still peculiar, and it is not always easy to find an answer.

“One Eternal Round,” CWHN 12:386-88