On the cover:
Beautiful Elakala Waterfalls in the Blackwater Falls State Park, West Virginia.

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“That All May Be Edified”

In May 1831, the Lord revealed, “Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” ( Doctrine and Covenants 50:22).

Applying this revelation to publishing, the one who writes and the one who reads also understand each another, and both are edified.

This is the last issue of the *Religious Educator* on which I serve as editor. After my mission call, Robert L. Millet was named publications director and editor of the *Religious Educator*. I look forward to future issues under his able leadership.

My association with the Religious Studies Center started as it does for most people—I was a consumer reading publications produced by the Religious Studies Center (RSC). Once I came to BYU in 1993 my role changed as I became a contributor to the RSC through the submission of books and articles for publication. I remember walking from the Joseph Smith Building to the Heber J. Grant Building (HGB) to visit Kent P. Jackson, who was serving as the publications director at the time. Kent is one of the best technical editors on campus. With his amazing student staff, he produced wonderful books at the RSC. I feel fortunate to have had Kent’s hand make my projects better than they would have been otherwise.

Later, Bob Millet, then dean of Religious Education, asked me to take the reins of a new RSC project, the *Religious Educator*. Eventually I moved to the HGB, where I worked with Richard D. Draper, then publications director. When Richard became associate dean, I took his former position. We eventually merged operations for the *Religious Educator* with the publication of RSC books and the *RSC Newsletter*. It has been a wonderful ten-year journey—I have learned a lot along the way.

I hope that while browsing the pages of the *Religious Educator* during the last decade you have been edified—learning something new or something to improve your classroom experience. We have tried to publish essays that would bless not only the lives of those who produced them (writing always seems to clarify one’s thinking on a topic) but also those who would read them. It takes effort to produce three issues each year that will edify both the writer and the reader. Fortunately, we have been blessed with a number of thoughtful and well-written contributions. As I have read them several times before they were published, their messages have influenced me not only in a classroom setting or in my own research and writing activities but also in the way I think and act. Many articles have become classics—both timely and timeless. Of course, the journal would not have become what it is without the efforts of Ted D. Stoddard (associate editor), R. Devan Jensen (executive editor), Brent R. Nordgren (production manager), Joany O. Pinegar (administrative assistant), and the good people at Stephen Hales Creative. Enjoy!

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel
Editor
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How to Communicate Effectively

PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON

President Thomas S. Monson is President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Communication between people has been a principal problem throughout recorded history. It is complicated further when translation is involved.

Many years ago this country had some diplomatic problems which resulted in riots and general civil disturbances. Just when it appeared that agreement had been reached between Panama, the Canal Zone, and the United States, diplomatic relations came apart because the parties differed as to the meaning of a single word. In the English language text, the two parties agreed to “discuss” differences.

The Spanish language text used the word *negociar*—“to negotiate." Americans assumed that negotiation meant (according to *Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*) “a conference or discussion designed to produce an agreement.” They felt this was synonymous with “discussion.” Panamanians thought that “to negotiate” implied a willingness to *renegotiate* existing treaties. It took months, patience, and the services of communications experts to bring about the ultimate understanding.
In another instance, the realization that the question of war or peace could depend upon effective communication brought about the establishment of the hotline between the world’s nuclear capitals at the time, Washington and Moscow, to avoid an inadvertent pushing of the panic button.

We have a communication problem as we wage war against the powers of the adversary and strive to help members of the Church to live by gospel principles. I suppose we can take some courage from the fact that the Master had His problems with communication, even though He possessed great understanding of people.

On one occasion Jesus was speaking from a ship to a great multitude gathered on the shore. In the course of His remarks, He related the parable of the sower. When He finished, the disciples asked Him, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”

And then He said the ears of these particular people were dull of hearing and their eyes were closed. “But blessed are your eyes,” the Savior told His disciples, “for they see; and your ears, for they hear.” He then continued His sermon, relating several other parables.

Perhaps the disciples were too embarrassed to interrupt again because Jesus had told them it was given to them to understand the mysteries of heaven. But when the multitude had gone, “his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable.”

If the Master found it necessary to repeat and explain in order to have effective communication, I suppose we should not feel discouraged when we fail to communicate effectively at the first recitation.

Effective communication is essential to effective motivation. The leader must first educate himself, develop enthusiasm, and perfect himself in the skill he desires to teach (communicate). He must then project his feeling on the subject until it is shared by the follower. This is the process of most effective motivation.

Effective communication always includes these three Cs: Clear, Concise, and Confirm.

Clear
One must make his presentation clear. The first rule of clarity is to have a well-defined goal or objective—to know what you wish to accomplish through
your communication. Unless you can define this goal clearly to yourself, it is not likely your audience will understand it and be motivated.

Another way in which clarity can be improved is by use of illustrations. Since words have different meanings to various people, the additional definition through supporting illustrations is usually helpful. There are many types of illustrations.

First, words and motions. Jesus made parables a part of nearly every teaching situation. So often did He use this teaching device that Evangelists recorded at one point that “without a parable spake he not unto them.” Jesus said He used parables in teaching because they conveyed to the hearer religious truth exactly in proportion to the hearer’s faith and intelligence. To the unlearned, the parable had story interest and some teaching value. To the spiritual, it conveyed much more, including the mysteries or secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Thus the parable is suited alike to simple and learned. It teaches all people to find divine truth in common things.

For the purpose of teaching in our day, the Savior’s parables have the added advantage of taking on more and more meaning as we understand more about the objects and symbols He used in his parables. These stories also can be suited to a variety of applications.

Closely related to parables are the brief comparisons the Master often used to illustrate ideas, such as: “It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief.” “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

Illustrative stories provide another excellent means of teaching to aid clarity. It is easy for people to project themselves into stories of living people and their experiences. The Lord frequently used this technique. In the case of the widow’s mite, He illustrated a lesson in charity: “This poor widow hath cast in more than they all: for these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.”

Real stories involving real people provide an excellent vehicle to promote clarity.

A third type of illustration involving words and motions is the demonstration. This is particularly helpful when attempting to teach skills that have some mechanical aspects. Examples of situations in which demonstrations could profitably be used include teaching techniques in public speaking,
methods of conducting oral evaluations and interviews, effective use of visual aids, and athletic skills. Pictures can be used. The old adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words” can be supported by many examples.

*Objects* provide another means of clarifying a message. These might be objects from surroundings or from apparel, objects prepared by the speaker for the occasion. Some examples of utilizing objects from surroundings might be (1) using organ pipes to illustrate how priesthood power works through the individual when he is in tune or (2) using a light switch to demonstrate the need to take a voluntary action (turn on the switch) yourself in order to get light (as from the Lord).

**Concise**

Next is *concise*. Make your presentation concise. To be concise means to express much in few words. The amount of time spent in communicating an idea may vary depending on the complexity of the subject matter and the previous knowledge of members of the audience. But communication is improved when each word, each sentence, each paragraph is meaningful and pertinent to the objective.

Guidelines for making a concise presentation could include: (1) study and research until you know you have information that is worthy of presentation; (2) write your thoughts on paper as they come, without concern for style or polish; (3) arrange ideas in logical order.

Some prefer a formula for organizing material into a logical sequence, such as PREP—Point, Reason, Example, Point. The name of a well-known opera has been used as a letter key to a motivation formula. AIDA in this instance stands for gain *Attention*, sustain *Interest*, incite *Desire*, get *Action*.

Eliminate irrelevant ideas, illustrations, and humor which reaches too far for an application. Because of the difficulty of getting full attention, there is a temptation with some to include interesting material even though it is not entirely relevant. When the organizing stage has been completed, reduce every sentence to the fewest necessary words. Last, learn the material well enough to present it as it has been prepared.

**Confirm**

Finally comes *confirm*. To see what has been learned, confirm what you have taught. Fragmentary listening, misinterpretation of ideas, and mistaken meanings of words may cause misunderstandings. It is important, therefore,
to have a method of checkup, feedback, and correction of mistaken impressions whenever possible. One labor negotiator found a very effective way to cool down heated arguments and improve communication in labor and management disputes. The referee made a rule that the representative of labor could not present his viewpoint until he could explain management’s viewpoint to the satisfaction of the management representative, and vice versa.

Here are two of the methods that have been used successfully to improve communication skills: (1) Improve your vocabulary by keeping a dictionary available when reading or writing. Check words about which you have a question to see if your understanding of their meaning is the same as the dictionary definition. The listening vocabulary should be greater than the one you use to speak or write so you can learn on a higher level than that on which you speak or write. (2) Read aloud as a drill when the opportunity to do so presents itself. This strengthens the voice and makes it more clear. It helps the reader to enunciate words more clearly, carefully, and naturally. It helps to prevent speech mannerisms and monotonous patterns because the reader has an opportunity to use other people’s word combinations. The reader should also practice voice inflection and develop a wider range of tones to make the voice more interesting.
The Lord, through His prophets, has given counsel concerning the importance of communication skills. He has also emphasized the need of spirituality as a part of effective communication. When Moses was called to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, he recognized his weakness as a speaker—a communicator. Nevertheless, he had the Spirit of the Lord with him. The Lord, after some reassuring, gave him Aaron as a mouthpiece. He didn't give Aaron the job of leading but assigned that to Moses, who had the other leadership skills that were necessary to perform the task.¹¹

Paul counsels that we should seek spiritual gifts so that we might speak unto men “to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” He then counsels that clarity is even more important than the gift of tongues. “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” Who shall be motivated? “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.”¹²

When we let the Lord be our guide in developing communication skills, He can help us to be humble, to present ourselves to the right people at the proper time and in an atmosphere where we will be trusted and worthy of a listening ear. When communication skills are accompanied by spirituality, the Lord can work through His servants to accomplish His purposes. Hundreds of thousands of newly baptized members of the Church and the many missionaries who taught them the gospel provide a living testimony of effective communication.

One spring day, a humble boy, motivated by a sincere desire to know the truth, sought an audience with his Heavenly Father. The glorious vision which followed, the words from the Father, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear him!” the message from the Master, and the response of faithful service and supreme sacrifice by that boy, even Joseph Smith, were communication at its finest.

As we ourselves prepare to communicate effectively, may this beautiful example govern our thinking and prompt our actions. RE

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Notes

¹. See Matthew 13:1–43.
5. Mark 4:34.
12. 1 Corinthians 14:3, 8–9.
Currently there is avid interest in Latter-day Saint history and the related discipline of Mormon studies. This is a welcome development, as it has resulted in a noticeable increase in public discourse and in the publishing of content dealing with both academic fields. I believe it is a development stimulated not only by the compelling nature of the subject matter but also by the stature of the participating scholars. Good scholars are always an important measure of the quality of the culture from which they spring. If Latter-day Saint scholars—particularly historians—will keep their faith and the sense of direction provided by the Lord’s plan of salvation and His living prophets, they will be blessed to do their work aided by the Spirit of the Lord. If this occurs, the Spirit will give life to their productive efforts, and both the scholarly and nonscholarly communities will continue to be fascinated with Latter-day Saint history, culture, and doctrine. And those who seek the truth will eventually know where to find it.

On a personal note, I feel compelled to acknowledge that more than forty-two years ago I enrolled in several history courses while attending Brigham Young University. Despite my rather modest attainments as a history student,
my love of history—especially the history of the Latter-day Saints—has grown stronger and stronger through the intervening years. The once-small collection of Church history volumes I purchased following my mission to Germany in the early 1960s has since grown to fill many bookshelves, and I happily spend much of my spare time reading and studying Church history. My patient wife frequently pleads with me not to go so close to a bookstore that my irresistible bibliophilic impulses will get the best of me!

Small wonder, then, that when President Gordon B. Hinckley called me in April 2005 to be the Church historian and recorder, I felt both delighted and daunted. To find the particulars of one’s Church calling and duties set forth in revelations given by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph Smith, and to contemplate the contributions of the men who preceded me in this office, is humbling to say the least. The first administrative directive of this dispensation may have been the Lord’s command on the very day the Church was organized that “there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). These words set something wonderful in motion. They are worth pondering when considering the foundational role Church history should play in the institutional Church as well as in the individual lives of Latter-day Saints.

As Church historian and recorder, I feel no obligation more keenly than to help infuse Church members with a sense of the practical spiritual benefit and the eternal importance—not to mention the joy—of acquiring a knowledge of Church history. For this reason, I have titled this paper “Making a Case for Church History.” Part of the appeal of such a title surely comes from my legal training. But more important, it seems in keeping with the Lord’s way of encouraging His children to do the things they ought to do. With our moral agency always in mind, the Lord speaks of influencing our choices by inviting, enticing, and persuading us to do good (see Moroni 7:13–16; D&C 121:41–42). My hope is to offer some convincing reasons why the study and enjoyment of Church history is an important part of a full life in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Values Church History

It seems to me that the strongest case I can make for Church history is to point out that the Lord Himself regards it as something of great value. From the earliest days of the Church, He has directed Church leaders to create and preserve a rich historical record. I have always found appealing the simple
thought that what the Lord and His inspired leaders regard as important, we ought to regard as important—else what’s a prophet for?

Several latter-day revelations speak to the subject of Church history. In them the Lord clearly says He wants “a record kept” (D&C 21:1), and the record is to be kept “continually” (D&C 47:3). The record is to include “all things that transpire in Zion” (D&C 85:1) and is to chronicle the “manner of life” and the faith and works of the Latter-day Saints (D&C 85:2). It is to be written “for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion” (D&C 69:8). Those who keep the record—provided they are faithful—are promised “it shall be given [them] . . . by the Comforter, to write these things” (D&C 47:4).

These carefully revealed details of the Lord’s program for Church history seem to reflect the importance He places on this history. So does the timing of the command to keep a record: it was given even before the Lord began to reveal the essential details of Church organization, procedure, and doctrine.

The Prophet Joseph Smith took these directions from the Lord very seriously. He went right to work to keep the Church’s history. This was typical of him. He was always resolute in his obedience to God’s commands. In the midst of many pressures in Kirtland in 1834, his history recorded, “No month ever found me more busily engaged than November; but as my life consisted of activity and unyielding exertions, I made this my rule: When the Lord commands, do it.”

Joseph wasn’t without help in beginning the work of Church history. His efforts in translating the Book of Mormon educated him in many ways. Because record keeping is an unmistakable theme of that unique book, the Prophet’s sensitivities to the value of history must have been awakened. He learned of Nephi’s heroic efforts to obtain the brass plates, which contained “the record of the Jews” (1 Nephi 3:3); Joseph would have perceived that their contents had a marked effect on the entire course of Nephite civilization. Joseph must have also taken note of the careful way other prophet-historians in the Book of Mormon attended to record keeping. In addition, he would have pondered the plight of the people of Zarahemla. Without an adequate historical record, their language had become corrupted, and they had lost faith in their Creator (see Omni 1:17).

Even though he was instructed and motivated, the actual work of record keeping wouldn’t have been easy for Joseph Smith. By training and inclination, he was neither a writer nor a historian. The mental and spiritual exertions
required to create an acceptable historical record would have been taxing. A further complication was his demanding role as the Prophet and leader of the fledgling Church. His days were filled with official duties of all kinds, constant visitors, weighty decisions, vexatious lawsuits, and other distractions. Joseph’s frustrated exclamation concerning record keeping contained in an 1832 letter to William W. Phelps speaks volumes: “Oh Lord God,” he wrote, “deliver us in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”

Yet in spite of his limitations, over the all-too-short span of the Prophet’s adult life a steady stream of revelations, translations, letters, journals, discourses, and histories emerged under his hand or at his direction. He truly was the father of Latter-day Saint history. It is fitting that Joseph Smith himself was a major subject of the record he was commanded to keep: “And in it,” said the Lord, “thou [Joseph] shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ” (D&C 21:1). An important theme in Church history will always be Joseph Smith’s role in drawing us to Heavenly Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

In this connection, it is appropriate to note that currently about twenty-five historians and editors in the Church History Department are toiling full-time five days a week as participants in the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Their stated objective—to be accomplished over an approximately twenty-year period—is “to publish every extant document written by [Joseph] Smith or by his scribes in his behalf, as well as other records that were created under his direction or that reflect his personal instruction or involvement.” Think of it: it will take twenty-five scholars working five days a week over twenty years to get their arms around the documentary output of a busy and often distracted Church President who was neither trained for nor inclined to record keeping and whose productive years totaled at most about sixteen! Can there be any doubt but that the power of the Lord rested upon Joseph Smith throughout his earthly ministry?

The historical enterprise Joseph Smith launched was faithfully carried on by the prophets who succeeded him. Three of them—Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Howard W. Hunter—even served for periods of their lives as the Church historian and recorder. As a result, an unmatched
Making a Case for Church History

record of the Church’s history has been kept, is being kept, and will be kept in the future.

On June 20, 2009, President Thomas S. Monson dedicated the new Church History Library. This beautiful and spacious edifice was constructed during the previous three years at a prime location east of the Conference Center in downtown Salt Lake City. It is a superior facility containing both a library and archives. It provides an optimum preservation environment and needed security for the Church’s priceless historical collections. It will become the mecca of Church history to which interested people from all corners of the world will come. It will also stand as a symbol of the undeviating commitment of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve to the Lord’s command that “there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). Because of the value the Lord and His inspired servants place on the keeping of that record, I invite every Latter-day Saint to make learning Church history a lifelong pursuit.

A Knowledge of Church History Provides a Godly Perspective

A continuing involvement with Church history will affect our perspective on life. Although in the book of Isaiah the Lord tells us His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways (see Isaiah 55:8), He nevertheless wants them to be. Like every loving and right-thinking parent, He wants us to mature and grow in all ways and thereby become like Him. An important step in that process is for Him to help us acquire His unmatched perspective and to begin to see life as He sees it. Acting out of such a perspective, we can make wiser choices and hasten the development of the attributes we must acquire to become like God and live again with Him.

At least two passages of scripture say that “all things are present before [the Lord’s] eyes” (D&C 38:2; Moses 1:6; see also D&C 130:7). Thus, the Lord is simultaneously aware of all things—past, present, and future. This insight helps us understand why He has defined truth as a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). In our quest to become like God, knowing of “things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” provides us with a view of life that is Godlike. This is of critical importance.

The prophet Alma recognized the value of such a perspective. His incomparable sermon in Alma 5 (punctuated by a series of soul-stirring questions) begins with the query, “Have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the
captivity of your fathers?” (Alma 5:6). Here, the starting point for Alma’s efforts to motivate Church members to greater faithfulness was to direct their minds back to the past. This approach is in keeping with the frequent use of the word remember in the holy scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon. Prophetic admonitions to remember are usually calls to action: to listen, to see, to do, to obey, to repent.

Alma then proceeds in his sermon to ask questions of the members that deal with “things as they are,” with “Have ye spiritually been born of God?” (Alma 5:14) being one of the key inquiries. And then, rounding out the desired godly perspective of life that includes a view of the past, present, and future, Alma asks, “Do you look forward with an eye of faith, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?” (Alma 5:15).

The importance of the eternal perspective taught by Alma is reflected in the ceremonies of the Church’s temples as well. In the temple we have repeatedly rehearsed for us important details of our past, the critical nature of our present existence, and the glorious destiny that awaits us if we love God and our neighbor and are true to our covenants.

Most important, the temple experience—like our personal engagement with Church history—impresses us with the significant place and role of the Savior in the history of mankind. His is the ruling hand in the affairs of humankind and of His Church. He is literally the Beginning and the End of history, and He gives purpose and meaning to everything in between. He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, the Creator, Redeemer, and final Judge of all. The highest purpose of Church history—or any history—is to help us receive a witness of these truths and live accordingly.

**Church History and the Power of Stories**

A thoughtful reader of God’s word will quickly discern that much scripture is expressed in narrative or story form. This is because most scripture is history, and the way to make history come alive, as historian Barbara Tuchman said in two words, is to “tell stories.” Being the master teacher, our Father in Heaven knows well the teaching and staying power of stories. So do composers of songs for Primary children. That is why we all still remember the words to “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus” and “Book of Mormon Stories”! The case I am making for the value of Church history in our lives would not be complete
without saying something about the benefit and power of historical narratives or stories.

The Church began with Joseph Smith’s simple story. I feel its canonized form in the Pearl of Great Price is the single most powerful and wonderful historical composition we have.

I remember some years ago reading an account of the conversion of a former professor at Brigham Young University, the late Arthur Henry King. He was a brilliant British scholar and rhetorician who joined the Church at midlife in the 1960s. Speaking of his conversion and the missionaries who taught him, he said:

I am glad that the first thing they did was to give me the pamphlet on Joseph Smith’s vision. The style of the Joseph Smith story immediately struck me. He spoke to me, as soon as I read his testimony, as a great writer, transparently sincere and matter-of-fact. . . . When Joseph Smith describes his visions, he describes them not as a man who feels that he has to make the effort to persuade. He simply states what happened to him, and does it in a way that gives it credence. I am in this church because of the Joseph Smith story; my fundamental act of faith was to accept this as a remarkable document.6

For some years, when the gospel is introduced to a virgin nation and language, it has been Church policy that one of the first items of Church literature to be translated and provided for the use of missionaries and members is the Joseph Smith story. Like no other Church, ours rises or falls on the strength of its history, especially its founding stories.

When President Gordon B. Hinckley was interviewed several years ago for a public television documentary on the Church, he said of the Joseph Smith story, “It’s either true or false. If it’s false, we’re engaged in a great fraud. If it’s true, it’s the most important thing in the world.”7 President Hinckley’s simple logic was actually profound. The truth of our doctrine and our claim to priesthood authority as Latter-day Saints are rooted inescapably in our history. If the stories of angelic visitations by Moroni; John the Baptist; Peter, James, and John; Elijah; Elias; and others are not true, our claim to be the one true Church is unsustainable. History—in story form—is truly the foundation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Not all the stories that make up our history are of the epic proportion of Joseph Smith’s First Vision. Some remarkable stories come from the lives of ordinary Latter-day Saints. History is life, and from ordinary lives come stories that reinforce what we more ordinary people believe, what we stand for, and what we should do in the face of adversity.
Consider, for example, this excerpt from the personal history of Thomas Briggs, a British convert who suffered throughout his life with chronically poor health. Thomas joined the Church at age sixteen, came to Utah in 1864, and in 1865 was living with his family in Bountiful, Utah:

We had a very severe winter and the spring of 1865 was very late. I rented some land on shares from Thomas Fisher, and planted it to potatoes, and I also rented a piece of land from Brother Anson Call, on which I planted onions, beets, and carrots, also a little cane to make molasses. The main thing we had to eat was bread, and occasionally I would go to the mountains for wood, then haul it to Salt Lake City and sell it for what I could get. I had two running sores on my leg, and Ephraim, who was now eleven years of age, was the only help I had. The weather was very good, all our crops grew very fast, everything looked prosperous, and when Fall came we rejoiced to think that we had been blessed so much. We had two fat pigs in the pen, and I was able to haul considerable wood to the city. I was getting pretty well acquainted and a man in the city told me if I would haul him five loads of good maple wood he would give me $100.

One day Ephraim and I started out for a load of wood, and when we were about a mile from home Brother Prescott stopped us, and said, "Brother Briggs, I am very sorry to tell you, but all of your stuff is burned up, your stable, and all that you had in the corral is gone." I asked him if everyone at home was all right and he said they were. I told him that last fall I came to Utah with nothing, and I had nothing now, and that I always dedicated everything to the Lord and if he thought fit to make a burnt offering of it, well and good. When I arrived home everything looked pretty bad. I comforted my wife the best I could. I then went to work with a stronger will than ever. I asked my Heavenly Father to give me strength of body, and prayed that He would help me through as He had many times before.8

A story like this can provide inspiration and balm for the soul. The accounts of those who have gone before us can often teach us how to behave. Consider this statement from the journal of George Q. Cannon, who had associated intimately with the prophet Brigham Young, including serving as his counselor from 1873 until Brother Brigham’s death in 1877:

To describe my feelings upon the death of this man of God, whom I loved so much and who had always treated me with such kindness and affection, is impossible. His family, because of his partiality and affection for me and the desire which he always manifested to have my company when I was at home, to eat with him, to spend my evenings with him, and when we visited the settlements on preaching excursions, to have me stop where he stopped, called me his last wife. I have endeavored to appreciate these manifestations of affection and love, and now that he has gone I feel exceedingly thankful that I had these up to the last—that nothing occurred to alienate his feelings from me. On my part, he was in my eyes as perfect a man as I ever knew. I never desired to see his faults; I closed my eyes to them. To me he was a prophet of God, the head of the dispensation on the earth, holding the keys under the prophet Joseph, and in my mind there clustered about him, holding this
position, everything holy and sacred and to be revered. Some, I am satisfied, now as I write this in Washington, Jan. 17, 1878, have thought that I carried this feeling too far; but I know this, that in revering him as the prophet of the Lord, in obeying him, in being governed by his counsel, in bearing testimony to his teachings and his character I have been blessed of the Lord, peace has been in my heart, light has rested upon me, and the Lord has borne witness to me that my course was pleasing to Him. Now that Brother Brigham has gone I rejoice in this. I never criticised or found fault with his conduct, his counsel or his teachings at any time in my heart, much less in my words or actions. This is a pleasure to me now. The thought that ever was with me was: If I criticise or find fault with, or judge Brother Brigham, how far shall I go; if I commence, where shall I stop? I dared not to trust myself in such a course. I knew that apostacy frequently resulted from the indulgence of the spirit of criticising and fault-finding. Others, of greater strength, wisdom and experience than myself, might do many things and escape evil consequences which I dare not do.9

For those who tend to murmur and nitpick at the Prophet and other leading Brethren, this wonderful expression of loyalty and devotion speaks for itself.

Stories can provide context that enriches and helps us better understand the revelations received in our day. Consider, for example, the story behind the fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Most full-time missionaries commit this section to memory and frequently recite it at missionary gatherings, but few may have considered the historical setting in which it was received. The revelation was given through Joseph Smith to his father, Joseph Smith Sr., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in February 1829. What was Father Smith doing more than one hundred miles from Palmyra in the dead of winter? What were Joseph and Emma’s circumstances at that time?

Joseph and Emma had married in January of 1827 and had received the gold plates in September of that same year. Seeking peace to be able to translate, they went to Harmony in late fall of 1827 and settled near the home of Emma’s father, Isaac Hale. Isaac had not been pleased with Emma’s marriage to Joseph and was skeptical of Joseph’s character.

Joseph was learning how to translate the plates when Martin Harris arrived in Harmony in February 1828 and began to serve as scribe. By mid-June of 1828, Joseph and Martin had completed 116 pages of text. Harris’s uncertainty about Joseph’s authenticity led to the well-known incident of the lost 116 pages. What is not as well known is that at the time Harris left to take the 116 pages to Palmyra, Emma gave birth to her first child, a son, after an exhausting labor. The son died the day he was born, and Emma nearly died herself.

After a brief time, Joseph went to Palmyra to check up on Martin Harris. When he learned that the 116 pages had been lost, he was distraught. “O, my
God!” he exclaimed, “All is lost! all is lost! What shall I do?” His mother, Lucy Smith, later described what she termed “that day of darkness.” “To us, at least,” she said, “the heavens seemed clothed with blackness, and the earth shrouded with gloom.” When Joseph went back to Harmony in July of 1828, his parents’ concern for his welfare must have been acute.10

Once in Harmony, Joseph and Emma translated a little, but the practical need to prepare for winter occupied their time and effort. The Hales refused to assist with Joseph and Emma’s obvious physical needs, so in early winter Joseph and Emma called on their good friend Joseph Knight Sr. in Colesville and revealed their predicament. They secured a little food and other necessities, but it must have been a humbling moment. Joseph seemed at this point to be struggling against considerable odds, without clear direction.11

Because Joseph’s parents had heard nothing from him in nearly two months, and because they were mindful of the great distress he had been under in July over the loss of the 116 pages, they visited him in Harmony in February of 1829.12 It was there and in the context of these discouraging and seemingly hopeless circumstances that Joseph received what is now section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelation was directed to his beloved father but may well have been given as much for Joseph’s benefit. “Now behold,”
Making a Case for Church History

said the Lord, “a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men” (v. 1). That bold declaration must have been as welcome and needed a message as ever reached Joseph’s ears. He appears to have been rejuvenated after his parents’ visit, and the work of translation began again in earnest. Can you see what a knowledge of the history that surrounds section 4, or any of God’s directives, can do for our ability to appreciate and heed His counsel?

One does not have to go far back in time or search only on the American continent to find moving stories from Church history. Our religion is now a worldwide movement, and Church history is being made every day in almost every land.

Between 2001 and 2004 my wife and I were able to associate with Helmi Luschin, the widow of Immo Luschin, through our Church service in Europe. Immo was the Church’s lead German translator for more than forty years. He was a brilliant linguist and a strong-willed and wonderful man. He and his beloved Helmi met after the Second World War. Since both were interested in learning English, they courted by writing each other a letter in English each day and coming together after work in the evenings to read Shakespeare.

Helmi told us that shortly after she and Immo were married in the Catholic Church, he said to her one day, “We’ll be together in heaven.”

“Well,” she replied, “I’ve never heard of that.”

He then said, “If they don’t have it when we get there, they’ll invent it for us!” A few years later the full-time missionaries knocked on the Luschins’ door in Gratz, Austria. Brother Luschin’s first question was “What does your Church teach about marriage and family?” The rest, as they say, is history.

A Personal Experience

As I conclude the case I have been making for studying Church history, I realize I might have stressed many other benefits. For me personally, however, the most significant blessing of my engagement with Church history is the spirit I feel when I read a pioneer journal, visit a Church history site, or view a page from the original Book of Mormon manuscript. It is during these times that the peaceful whisperings of the Spirit assure me that Joseph Smith really saw what he said he saw and that the Church he helped found is true and of God.

This feeling has never been more poignant than it was in November 2007 as my wife and I fulfilled an assignment to attend the Palmyra New York Stake conference. Since we had presided over the New York Rochester Mission from 1993 to 1995, we were thrilled to be sent back to a people and place
we love. We arrived in Rochester on Friday evening and arose early Saturday morning so that we could visit the Smith farm and Sacred Grove before my official conference duties began.

It was a cool but clear November morning with the trees in brilliant fall colors as we arrived. We walked into the Sacred Grove as we had done dozens of times with new and departing missionaries during our mission. There were no other visitors that day, so Kathy and I walked deep into the grove and sat on a bench in blissful silence, watching an occasional leaf fall and listening to the morning songs of the birds.

As we sat together on that little bench in that sacred setting, my heart filled with love and appreciation for my wife and for the Restoration of the gospel that gives such purpose and meaning to our relationship and to our efforts to preside over a wonderful and ever-growing family. In the spirit of that moment, I turned to Kathy and did something I have not done often enough during our marriage: I bore my testimony just to her. I told her I knew that somewhere near where we were sitting, Joseph Smith had seen God and Christ and had been called as a prophet to restore the only true Church. I told her I appreciated her faith in those truths and her willingness with me to stake the entire course of our adult lives on the veracity of Joseph Smith’s story. When I finished, Kathy bore her testimony to me. It was one of the finest moments of our married life and the most persuasive and personal experience I might share about the Spirit emanating from the stories, people, and places of Church history.

May we all be blessed to continue our love affair with the past so that we can take full advantage of the present and be prepared for our heavenly future. This is my hope and my prayer.

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Notes

2. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, November 27, 1832, in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, p. 4, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library.
5. *Children's Songbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 57, 118–19.


9. George Q. Cannon, Journal, August 29–30, 1877, Church History Library. Although this passage is recorded under the dates of August 29 and 30, 1877, Cannon actually wrote it on January 17, 1878.


On April 6, 1830, in the home of Peter Whitmer Sr., the Church was organized and Joseph Smith received a revelation that began, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1).
On the day the Church of Christ was organized in 1830, Joseph Smith received a revelation which began, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). Even though the Bible and Book of Mormon emphasize the importance of record keeping and history writing for covenant peoples of an earlier time, Joseph Smith had received from God no specific indication before April 6, 1830, that preserving the past would play a significant role in the Restoration of the gospel in the present dispensation. In Doctrine and Covenants 21, the Lord defines record keeping as one of the core functions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Subsequent revelations magnify and elaborate on this responsibility (for example, D&C 47, 69, 85, 123, and 128); in this revelation, however, the primary purpose of it was to witness to the divinely ordained roles of Joseph Smith. The present essay examines the witness function of history and its consequences for the Church as expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 21.

With reference to the Church’s record, the revelation continues, “And in it thou [Joseph Smith] shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and
the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ, being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay
the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith” (vv. 1–2).
These verses declare that keeping the Church’s record is not an end in itself but
a means of witnessing to God’s mouthpiece on earth. The divinely ordained
roles to which the Church’s record must witness are listed roughly in the order
that Joseph had performed them to date: “seeing” the Father and the Son and
other heavenly messengers, translating the Book of Mormon “by the gift and
power of God,” receiving new revelations from God, bearing a special witness
of Christ, and organizing and leading the Church of Christ. These verses also
direct the Church through its record and the Prophet’s leadership to build up
the faith of its members and establish them as a holy people.

Verse 3 reinforces the need for the record to be accurate by specifying a
crucial historical fact, the date on which the Church was organized: “In the
year of your Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on
the sixth day of the month which is called April.” The record does not pre-
serve all essential facts from early Church history. Nevertheless, from the time
of this revelation, Church leaders have been increasingly successful in record-
ing the crucial information and preserving the key records of the Church’s
being built up “unto the most holy faith.”

The revelation next instructs Latter-day Saints how they are to build their
“most holy faith” in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: “Wherefore,
meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his [Joseph’s] words and
commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking
in all holiness before me; for his words ye shall receive, as if from mine own
mouth, in all patience and faith” (vv. 4–5). The Church cannot “give heed”
to the Prophet’s “words and commandments” unless they are preserved and
made accessible to present and future generations (see also 1 Nephi 4:14–
15; D&C 69:7–8). Commandments usually come in the form of words, but
they come in other forms as well, and many of Joseph’s written and spoken
words served other purposes than as commandments. Together, “words and
commandments” complement each other and comprehend a broad range of
divine instruction that the Prophet revealed to the Latter-day Saints. This pas-
sage further clarifies that Joseph’s “words and commandments” are not simply
a reflection of his own gifts and capacities. Instead they are to be received by
the Church “as if from mine [Christ’s] own mouth.” In other words, Joseph is
not just another mystic, divine, inspired teacher, luminary, religious innova-
tor, or church leader. Rather, he and his successors each serve as the Lord’s
mouthpieces on earth at any point in time. The Church’s record is expected to bear clear and unequivocal witness of this truth.

Remarkable blessings are promised to the Church for witnessing to Joseph’s divinely ordained roles and following his words and commandments: “For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (v. 6). While the full extent of these blessings may not be easily comprehended, modern revelation contains few promises to the Saints that are grander than these: overcoming the kingdom of Satan, being freed from the powers of darkness, and receiving a myriad of unspecified heavenly blessings. It is also clear that the magnitude of these blessings is disproportionate to the requirements of keeping a faithful record and heeding the prophets’ words and commandments.
The Lord next bears his own personal witness of Joseph Smith: “For thus saith the Lord God: him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good, and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard. Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen, and I will cause that he shall mourn for her no longer, for his days of rejoicing are come unto the remission of his sins, and the manifestations of my blessings upon his works” (vv. 7–8). Complementing the Church’s record that bears witness of Joseph’s divinely ordained roles, the Lord’s own witness asserts his success in performing these roles. The Lord states that Joseph has been inspired, diligent, humble, purified, and divinely blessed in his efforts. While the Lord acknowledges that Joseph has been neither perfect nor infallible, he makes it clear that his sins, whatever they might have been, have been remitted because of his faithfulness and will not obstruct the successful completion of his ministry.

The Lord next provides an additional promise to those who work alongside Joseph to establish his kingdom: “For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing.” Specifically, the faithful will be given the capacity to “believe on his [Joseph’s] words” and by doing so will receive “the Comforter,” which will bring them to Christ, whose Atonement will effect a “remission of sins unto the contrite heart” (v. 9). In short, keeping a record, bearing witness, following the prophet, and building up the Church all work together to bring mankind to Christ so that he can redeem them.

Later, the Lord speaks again of the Prophet: “Wherefore it behooveth me that he should be ordained by you, Oliver Cowdery, mine apostle; this being an ordinance unto you, that you [Oliver Cowdery] are an elder under his [Joseph Smith’s] hand, he being the first unto you, that you might be an elder unto this church of Christ, bearing my name—and the first preacher of this church unto the church, and before the world, yea, before the Gentiles; yea, and thus saith the Lord God, lo, lo! to the Jews also. Amen” (vv. 10–12). In other words, priesthood keys and an explicit commission authorize and sustain the revealed pattern of record keeping, witnessing, obeying, and kingdom building.

In summary, this revelation not only inaugurates the record-keeping enterprise of the Church in the latter days, it also defines it as an essential part of the Restoration of the gospel. Specifically, the revelation declares that the Church’s record must bear a clear, compelling, and comprehensive witness of Joseph Smith’s divine callings so that Church members will be inspired to follow his prophetic directions. In turn, the Lord will bless the Latter-day Saints
in remarkable ways, for their and the world’s salvation. The sacredness of this responsibility requires that it be performed within a priesthood context and under the direction of priesthood keys.

Subsequent revelations amplify and refine but do not supplant this inspired foundation of the Church’s history-writing and record-keeping functions.
On the evening of September 21, 1823, the angel Moroni appeared to the boy Joseph Smith. This appearance occurred in the Smiths’ log home, now reconstructed.
Return to the Joseph Smith Family Farm

RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL, DONALD L. ENDERS, AND LARRY C. PORTER

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Holzapfel: Thank you for joining me at the Smith family farm site. Could you tell me about your first visit to the Smith farm and Sacred Grove?

Enders: I first came here as a missionary in July 1961 at pageant time. That was the first time I had the privilege of seeing the Smith farm and the Sacred Grove. At the time, the busy Stafford Road ran right down through the farm. Near the road was a large area with electricity where there was a platform and a little pulpit. The missionaries would gather there and speak. Of course, it was a very beautiful place.

An elderly missionary couple lived in and had responsibility for the Smith home. That couple had some wonderful and interesting interpretations about the place. They thought that Joseph had his own room where Moroni appeared to him privately; after all, there were thirteen rooms in the frame home. Of course, in time we would learn that Moroni’s appearance really did not take place in the frame home but in the log home instead. This is supported by statements such as Oliver Cowdery’s, who said that when the Smith family retired that September evening, all went to sleep and Joseph was there beside his brothers.
Holzapfel: After your mission what is your next connection to the farm?

Enders: I began to come out here on a very frequent basis—two to five times a year—in 1977, when I became a member of the Historical Department’s historic sites team. In those earlier years of the 1970s and ’80s, I worked with the missionaries and directors of the Smith farm in taking care of the site. I became aware that the grove needed some help. So we pushed for and were able to get a cultural landscape study done in the 1990s by a very confident horticultural firm in Syracuse, New York. They outlined a program and hired a fellow named Robert Parrott to manage the land. Since then I have been extremely pleased with the way the land has become more natural and healthy. Since those years in 1977 it has been a privilege to be here on a frequent basis.

Holzapfel: And you were involved in the decision to rebuild the frame house and some of the outbuildings.

Enders: We usually stand on the shoulders of other people. Very good people who preceded me in the Historical Department already had a lot of involvement, Larry Porter and Milt Backman in particular. And based on their studies and other sources we found, we began to gather data about the site long before it was considered a possibility for historic site restoration.

In 1982, after the summer archaeological dig, G. Homer Durham said to me, “We want you to start giving the site some considerations.” So I was able to take the grain that had been planted in the furrows by those wonderful men I mentioned and begin to gather other data. I think that together we have all learned some new things about the Smith family. We know more about their occupancy of the hundred-acre farm and the log home site, their purchase of the property, how they developed it, their work as day laborers, how they worked among the neighbors, their involvement in the community, and how they were accepted or not accepted.

Speaking of the Smiths’ reputation, I cannot help but think of William Smith’s statement: “We never knew we were bad folks until Joseph told his vision” (quoted in Deseret Evening News, January 20, 1894, 11). I think that is an accurate statement. Of course, the data suggest that the Smiths were a good family, but all hell broke loose once Joseph received the plates.

Holzapfel: Larry, tell us about your involvement with this area.

Porter: The Religious Studies Center, under the direction of Truman G. Madsen, was conducting research on Mormonism in the area, with emphasis on any materials relating to Joseph Smith. And Richard L. Anderson had an
assignment from Elder Marion D. Hanks to identify just where the Peter Whitmer Sr. log home was on his farm—not just the approximate area, but the exact spot. Knowing that I was coming to work on my dissertation in the area, Richard Anderson contacted Elder Hanks, who wanted to identify the very location where the Whitmer home had stood at the time the Church was organized. Richard said to Elder Hanks, “Can’t we include him on the team and give him the aegis to find what he can?” Elder Hanks agreed.

Under Dr. Anderson’s direction, we were researching the historical backdrop and interviewing all the people who had been farm tenants or missionaries at the farm there in Fayette. When my family and I came out to New York, Elder Hanks had arranged for us to stay in the existing home at the Martin Harris farm in Palmyra. I soon discovered that, although much had been said about that cobblestone house being the former home of Martin Harris, the two-story Harris frame home had actually burned down in 1849, and the cobblestone home was a William Chapman replacement built on the old foundation.

We also discovered here at the Smith farm that the Manchester frame home was not the home where the angel Moroni had appeared to Joseph. Some people were upset to find out that it was the log house in Palmyra Township where that event took place and could not have occurred in the frame home. People had purposely been married in the room where they supposed Joseph Smith met with the angel Moroni in the frame home, and that disclosure was naturally upsetting.

And finally, we found out at the Whitmer farm that the John Deshler home was not the original Whitmer log cabin that had been merely plastered and boarded over. That Greek Revival home was built about 1842—it was
there in 1852—and appears as an L-shaped home on a map from that year. I was there when the Church contractor, Clyde Larson, cut through the wall to put in a diorama on the east side of the Deshler home depicting the organization of the Church. He found just lath and plaster; there were no logs in that home. The Deshler home was subsequently moved over against the east side of the property line, and the visitors’ center and the Fayette Branch Chapel were constructed on the site where the Deshler home had stood. Later, the careful research of related documents, some excellent oral history from Samuel Ferguson, the former president of the Palmyra Branch, and the obtaining of some exact measurements from William Lee Powell, the tenant farmer in the 1940s, prepared the way for Dale Berge and his archaeological crew from the Nauvoo Restoration Project to excavate the Whitmer homesite in 1969.

Holzapfel: How many times have you been here at the Smith farm?

Porter: I honestly cannot tell you how many times. I have been here and at the grove countless times. When I came here in 1969, the Sacred Grove was a place of peace and repose after a long day of research. I would just drop in on my way home. I once met a man here in the grove from Rochester who was not a member of the Church. He said he felt closer to God in this location than in any other place on earth. And I certainly agreed with him that this is sacred ground.

In 2005 and 2006 my wife and I were assigned to serve in the New York Rochester Sites Mission and lived probably three hundred yards from where we are standing. When we first arrived in the mission, this was the first place we came and we knelt down and had a prayer together. And when it was time to leave the mission, we departed from the grove. During the time we were here, at six o’clock every morning—rain or shine, forty-two degrees or zero, in spring, summer, or winter—Sister Porter and I would walk these very trails and enjoy the grove.

Our love and appreciation for the place centered on its being the location of the First Vision. Later, Bob Parrott, the grove’s caregiver and resident forester, taught us about the elms, the black cherry and the bitternut hickory that grew there; he taught us about the trillium, the Jack-in-the-box, and the Queen Anne’s lace and all of the flora and fauna of the grove. We learned to have a double appreciation for this beautiful setting.

Holzapfel: Larry, could you provide some background on how you located the exact site of the original log home of Joseph Smith Sr. here on the Stafford Road in Palmyra Township?
**Porter:** In 1969 I visited the Palmyra Town Hall. As I was reading along in the Old Town Record Book, I saw something that made me take a second look. It was the minutes of a highway survey. Let me share just a couple of lines from that record with you: “Minutes of the survey of a public Highway beginning on the south line of Township No. 12 2d range of townships in the town of Palmyra three rods fourteen links southeast of Joseph Smith’s dwelling house.” How fortunate that on the thirteenth day of June, 1820, Isaac Durfee and Luman Harrison, commissioners of the highways, came down with the old town compass and laid out a line for a road from the south line of Palmyra Township back to the village of Palmyra. And they shot an azimuth on the Joseph Smith dwelling house! I did a double take as I read that, realizing I could virtually find the exact location of the Smith house by recreating the azimuth and measuring three rods and fourteen links from the middle of the Stafford Road.

Dale Berge of the BYU Anthropology Department, later commenced a dig here in 1982 sponsored by the BYU Religious Studies Center. T. Michael Smith and Don L. Enders were part of the Berge Crew on that occasion. That year LaMar Berrett and I came out and spent a day on the dig. We found a bone-handled fork. It was very satisfying to be here as part of that crew for a
short time. T. Michael Smith and Don Enders, now of the Church History Department in Salt Lake, finished digging the remainder of the site in 1997. Later, Don Enders and others were instrumental in seeing that a log home was raised on this site.

Holzapfel: Some of the Prophet’s detractors have said that Joseph Smith fabricated parts of his history. They claim there was no log home here in 1820, meaning the Smith family was not even living here at the time of First Vision.

Porter: Actually, we know the home was here on June 13, 1820. That was the date when the highway commissioners came down and did their surveying of Stafford Road. Pomeroy Tucker remembered a Smith log house in this location in 1818. Orasmus Turner remembered in 1819–20 that there was a log house in that proximity. Thomas L. Cook placed the log home on the west side of the road in this same period. So these records help confirm that the log home was in fact here at the time of the First Vision.

Holzapfel: What information was available to help in reconstructing the log cabin?

Enders: Contemporary sources suggest that the Smith log home was divided into two rooms on the main floor. Later a bedroom wing was added, with an upstairs garret divided into two additional rooms. Based on the archaeological evidence, it appears that this description of the home is indeed accurate. In fact, the archaeological work also gave us additional data. For example, all of the brick from the chimney was in the south end of the structure’s ruins, which suggests that the fireplace was there.

Other documents help paint a picture of the Smith home. For example, a man named Stephen Harding was raised for a time here in the Palmyra area. In about 1829, during a trip back here to his boyhood home, Harding came to visit the Smith family. His description of the home basically suggests it had two rooms on the ground level. He said that he was taken in to the “best” room, which was where Oliver Cowdery would read to him from the Book of Mormon manuscript at night. At one point, the single candle they were using began to flicker, Joseph Smith Sr. said, “I think I know where another one is. I will go get it.” He came back a bit later and said, “Well, I guess the rats have eaten it.” This helps give us an idea of the family’s living conditions. Many homes of that period were quite open, and access for vermin was pretty good.

We also have an account that describes Joseph Smith Sr. bounding up the steps to the upper floor. This means there were stairs, not a ladder, to the second level. These and other bits of information were very helpful in
reconstructing the home. The suggestion that there were two rooms in the upper level probably means there was one bedroom for the boys and one for the girls. It is very likely that you would go up the stairs into the boys’ section first; that way the boys would not be traipsing through the girls’ space, which needs to be a little more private. And it is likely that Moroni appeared there in the boys’ room.

Perhaps that night Joseph sat up or lay quietly in the bed. Perhaps he was thinking about what he wanted to achieve, feeling confident that he would again be able to connect spiritually with God. We know he sought forgiveness of his sins. I think he had some awareness or knowledge of the promise made in the Sacred Grove, that the fullness of the gospel would be entrusted to man. He had gone along this three and a half years probably wondering, the fullness of the gospel? What is that? When will it be restored? What role will I play? And from Joseph’s account, his question is answered by one of the very first things that Moroni says to Joseph that night in the log home: “I am a messenger sent from the presence of God. I have come to instruct you. The fullness of the gospel is in a book.”

Holzapfel: This home was indeed the site of many important events in Church history.

Enders: Yes, and also for the Smith family. It is interesting to see how the family grew and developed during their time here. The day after Moroni’s first visit to Joseph, according to Lucy, Moroni appeared again and asked Joseph if he had told his father about the visitation of the prior evening. Joseph said no. Then, according to Lucy, the heavenly messenger asked, “Why did you not tell your father?” And Joseph’s response was, “I was afraid he would not believe me.”

Now, is it possible that Joseph’s parents believed his account of the First Vision, which revealed God and Christ as separate beings, totally contradictory to Christian perspective, and Joseph thought his father would not believe in the appearance of an angel? I do not think so; it does not work. I think that right from the beginning Joseph Sr. was probably skeptical, or at least aloof, when it came to Joseph’s vision. That may be why Joseph was worried about telling his father about Moroni. However, when Joseph was instructed to go tell his father, he did so, and his father said that it was of God.

So the family needed time to grow. Another perception I had for a very long time was that the Smith family were immediate converts. Maybe I am a Gentile, though, because I have now come to a different conclusion. Following
the First Vision, Joseph returns to the home, weakened by the experience, and leans up against the mantle. His mother says, “Joseph are you all right?” Joseph replies, “Never mind, Mother. I am well enough off.” By “never mind,” I think Joseph means, “I’m not going to tell you why I feel the way I do,” and I do not believe he told his mother. I do not believe he told his Father, and I do not believe he told Alvin or any of the other members of the family. In fact, we learn from Joseph’s 1832 account that none believed in his heavenly vision, including the minister. In fact, Lucy and several of the children were active in the Presbyterian Church until about September 1828.

There is perhaps one other thing that suggests the family learned about the gospel quite gradually. When Joseph returned from the hill that day having seen the plates, what did he tell his family, according to Lucy’s record? It seems to me that it is all cultural material. Lucy said the family had the most extraordinary discussions about what kind of animals the ancient Americans rode, about their warfare, their buildings, and so forth. Apparently Joseph was not in a position to tell them about the restored gospel in September 1823. That would come later in the unfolding process, not only here in Palmyra but on through Ohio and into Missouri.

So what did the family know about the record initially? I imagine they sensed the Book of Mormon was going to have a role in a reformation of Christianity, but not a total restoration. If Joseph even had any inkling of its importance in 1823, it does not look like he was sharing it.

Then, right there in this house one evening in 1830, just before the Book of Mormon came off the press, Lucy retired to bed. As she lay thinking about past times, her mind was full and invigorated. She was thinking about her youth and about her sisters who had died and about different things that have happened in the family. As she thought about the Moroni experience and other things that had happened, for the first time the light came on and she asked, “Am I the mother of a prophet of God?” After some time of growth and development, Lucy finally understood what her son was about.

Holzapfel: Let’s talk about when the First Vision occurred. Joseph said it took place on a beautiful spring morning. Many assume it was in April, but does this date match up with the weather patterns of upstate New York?

Porter: Here, April is a little early for spring, and into May is still pretty cool.

Enders: I have gathered some weather records from the naval station at Sotis Point, which was established in the War of 1812. It is at least fifty miles
north of Palmyra. Those weather records do suggest some warm weather patterns that year, but we have to be careful with those records.

**Holzapfel:** How about the location of the First Vision? As Joseph left the log home early that spring morning, which direction did he go?

**Porter:** I think that he probably went west, to the area Church members know as the Sacred Grove. In 1905, President Joseph F. Smith visited this site. He walked and talked with William A. Chapman, who then owned the farm. Chapman claimed that neither he nor his father had laid any axe to the root of these trees here in the grove, out of deference to what happened here. They left the silent grove as it was, because Chapman’s father claimed this was where Joseph Smith had his vision.

**Enders:** It is hard for me to believe that Joseph went west from the home. Had he done that, he would have had to walk over an area of major water drainage. In the early spring the grasses there were shoulder high and would have wet Joseph right to the bone. And then he would have to cross over into another drainage system. I was there before they put in a culvert. In the early spring, the water expanded out there two hundred feet in some places. How could Joseph have gotten across that to get into this woodland?

But ultimately, the exact location does not matter. I know Joseph Smith had the experience. Where it occurred, I do not know. But the Spirit of the Lord broods over this place. I have felt it much in my life. This woodland is part of the sacred ground where the Father and the Son appeared, whether it happened fifty yards, one hundred yards, or just twenty-five feet from here. President Gordon B. Hinckley once said that this was the most sacred place on earth, except for where the Lord conducted his earthly ministry.

**Holzapfel:** Yes, sometimes we are perhaps too fascinated in finding the exact site. Whether in Palestine or anywhere else, locating the exact site seems to be a proclivity for humans who want to find even just a square inch of holy land. But the importance of this farm is to recall the event. It is fun to do archaeology and research to get the story as best as we can, but the event is what we are celebrating here.

**Enders:** What we are trying to do with the archaeology and the Restoration is recreate the setting as much as possible. We want the visitor to gain an appreciation of the humility of this young man, which took him into the woodland, where he knelt and prayed and the vision occurred. That literal, genuine, physical appearance truly occurred.
"While we were . . . praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us" (Joseph Smith—History 1:68).
For nearly two millennia, meetings have convened to discuss authority in Christian traditions. For nearly two centuries, such meetings have involved Latter-day Saints. One of these meetings took place in Burslem, England, in 1842 at the behest of Brabazon Ellis, incumbent of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. He invited Alfred Cordon, a lay Mormon minister, to discuss authority in Christian traditions. Each man brought a companion, “and after the usual compliments,” they all knelt as Ellis prayed that the Lord would enlighten each of them. Cordon voiced a heartfelt “amen” and then fielded Ellis’s first question:

He asked me who ordained me in the Church of Latter Day Saints. I told him Wm Clayton. I then said and Sir, Who ordained you. He answered The Bishop. He then asked me who ordained Wm Clayton. I answered Heber C Kimball. I then asked him who ordained the Bishop. He answered: Another Bishop. He then asked me who ordained Heber C. Kimball; I answered Joseph Smith and said I: Joseph Smith was ordained by Holy Angels that were sent by commandment from the Most High God. I asked him from what source the Ministers of the Church of England obtained authority. He answered from the Apostles.
Ellis offered Brother Cordon a book to establish his claim to apostolic succession, and Cordon accepted and promised to read it diligently. Then Ellis asked Cordon to “work him a miracle.” Cordon “asked him whether he was a believer and a Minister of Christ. He answered that he was.” “Show me a miracle and then I will believe it,” Cordon replied. From there the conversation touched on several controversies of Christian history and doctrine. Each man asserted authority for his positions. Each arrived at his assumptions and conclusions through different epistemologies. Cordon wrote that afterward “we wished him good night and walked to our own homes, more confirmed in the faith of Latter Day Saints than ever.”

I examine the question of authority in Christian traditions with the same assumptions that Alfred Cordon took to his encounter with Brabazon Ellis. I approach my task as an historian who believes that divine authority is vested in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and as one who is willing to openly investigate all other claims with diligence. I recognize, as Joseph Smith put it, that “it may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of” (D&C 128:9). Given that bold doctrine, my words may sound apologetic or combative to some. That is not my intention. My desire is to explicate Mormonism’s historical claims to divine authority along with a particularly Mormon epistemology. I will put my faith on display for examination, leaving judgment about its merits or weaknesses to readers.

Long before he was a Mormon invited to meet with Brabazon Ellis, Alfred Cordon avidly read the Bible. He was brought up in the Church of England and “in the fear of God.” As a young apprentice in the Staffordshire potteries, Cordon went from one post to another. He married in 1836 but “led a desolate life.” “I was troubled again and again on account of my sins,” he wrote, “but I would not begin to serve God.” Then his infant daughter “took very ill with convulsions” and died in agony in early 1837, spurring Alfred to “pray to the Lord to direct me and to have mercy upon me.” He did. Shortly after the Cordons buried their daughter, members of Robert Aitken’s short-lived Christian Society visited and discussed religion. “I was quite willing to give up my sins and do anything to find salvation,” Cordon wrote. Though he was a bit shocked by what he called the “terrible noise” of an enthusiastic Christian Society prayer meeting, Cordon nevertheless “came home rejoicing in God my Savior and my Redeemer.” He devoted himself to the Christian Society and became a class leader; his wife “yielded and was made happy” also.
About this same time, a Mormon woman named Mary Powel told Cordon that “the Lord had set his hand again the Second Time to recover the remnant of his people . . . and that the Angel spoken of” in Revelation 14 had come, bringing “the Everlasting Gospel once more unto lost man.” Cordon rejoiced, for, as he wrote,

I had many times prayed for this time to come. We began to talk about the Ordinances of the Gospel and I found that I was standing upon the Precepts of Men and not on the pure word of God. Away I went to my Bible and to prayer. The Spirit of God bore testimony to the truth of what she said. We conversed about the Baptism of Christ. I saw plainly it was by Immersion. Without hesitation I made up my mind in spite of all other things I would obey the Gospel. As soon as the Atkinites heard that I Had been with her they came unto me to try if they could stop me but it was all in vain.

Cordon’s friends told him that Latter-day Saints were “money diggers, gypsies, fortune tellers and anything but a good report.” But Cordon wanted to talk about baptism. Was it essential for salvation? It was not, Reverend Staley declared.3

The next morning Cordon set out on foot for Manchester to be baptized by David Wilding, an elder in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Wilding immersed Cordon and soon thereafter laid hands on him to confirm Cordon a member of the Church and invite him to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. A few weeks later, Mormon leader William Clayton baptized and confirmed several others, Cordon noted, and “he ordained me to be a Priest” by the laying on of hands. “I commenced preaching,” Cordon wrote; and he never stopped, but “went on laboring in the cause of God preaching and baptizing.”4

What does this mean? What in the teachings of the Mormon woman Mary Powel was so compelling to Alfred Cordon, and how did he come to know it for himself? Why would he walk to Manchester to be baptized and confirmed by a Mormon elder? What was it about Alfred Cordon’s ordination that turned him from a teacher whose authority was grounded in knowledge of the Bible into a minister with authority to baptize others by immersion for the remission of their sins, an ordinance in which he would pronounce the words “Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”? (D&C 20:73).

Latter-day Saints believe “that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof” (Articles of Faith 1:5). “By
what authority?” one may justifi-
ably ask, as the chief priests and 
eders did of Jesus (NIV, Matthew 
21:23). By priesthood authority, 
Mormonism answers, meaning an 
unmediated divine commission, 
direct authorization from God 
to preach and administer gospel 
ordinances like baptism, com-
munion, confirmation, and, for 
Mormons, temple ordinances that 
represent the ultimate in our the-
ology.1 The Prophet Joseph Smith 
wrote, “We believe that no man 
can administer salvation through 
the gospel, to the souls of men, in 
the name of Jesus Christ, except he 
is authorized from God, by revela-
tion, or [in other words] by being 
ordained by some one whom God 
hath sent by revelation.”6 Mormonism’s modern Apostles call this “divine 
authority by direct revelation” the faith’s “most distinguishing feature.”7

“And who gave you this authority?” the elders asked Christ (NIV, Matthew 
Priesthood [came] by the ministring of Aangels.”8 In his now-canonized 
history, Joseph Smith remembered the events of May 1829 as he and scribe 
Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon from ancient metal 
plates revealed by an angel. “We . . . went into the woods to pray and inquire 
of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found men-
tioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying 
and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of 
light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us” (Joseph Smith—
History 1:68). Joseph continued his matter-of-fact narrative, noting how the 
angel “said this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for 
the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter; 
and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I 
should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and that afterwards he should baptize me.”
Only late in the account, almost as an afterthought, does Joseph reveal the identity of the ministering angel. He “said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood, he said, would in due time be conferred upon us, and that I should be the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second” (vv. 70, 72).

Joseph Smith combined nonchalance and historicity in his recounting of the event. He remembered that “it was on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized” (v. 72). Oliver Cowdery, by contrast, could hardly contain himself when he sat down to pen the good news:

The angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance!—What joy! what wonder! what amazement! . . . our eyes beheld—our ears heard. As in the “blaze of day;” yes, more—above the glitter of the May Sun beam. . . . Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, “I am thy fellow servant,” dispelled every fear. We listened—we gazed—we admired! ’Twas the voice of the angel from glory—’twas a message from the Most High! . . . But, dear brother think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts and with what surprise we must have bowed . . . when we received under his hand the holy priesthood, as he said, “upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood and this authority.”9

But Cowdery, too, in other statements, reported the events with striking straightforwardness. This example makes the point well: Joseph “was ordained by the angel John, unto the . . . Aaronic priesthood, in company with myself, in the town of Harmony, Susquehannah County, Pennsylvania, on Fryday, the 15th day of May, 1829. . . . After this we received the high and holy priesthood.”10

The understated nature of these claims to overtly historical ordinations by corporeal angels becomes more striking, for neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery composed a narrative of their ordination to the high or Melchizedek priesthood by the Apostles Peter, James, and John. All we have are passing reminiscences: an 1834 revelation to Joseph in which the Lord describes “Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles” (D&C 27:12); an 1842 musing about the time when Joseph Smith met “Peter, James, and John in the wilderness” near the Susquehannah River and they declared “themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom.” They, along with a veritable who’s
who of angels, transmitted to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery “the power
of their priesthood” (D&C 128:21). Smith and Cowdery in turn ordained
new Apostles. Cowdery told them, “You have been ordained to the Holy
Priesthood. You have received it from those who had their power and author-
ity from an angel.”11

The climactic event in this history came as Joseph Smith and Oliver
Cowdery prayed together in the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. No account of the
event was published until 1852, but Joseph’s journal entry for April 3, 1836,
says that they “saw the Lord standing upon the . . . pulpit before them.”12 He
was followed in succession by Moses, Elias, and Elijah, each authorizing some
aspect of the gospel, the gathering of Israel, or the preparation of the world for
the impending millennium. Feeling self-important, Oliver became disaffected
from Joseph shortly thereafter. He confessed later to being hypersensitive but
defended his character on the grounds that he had “stood in the presence of
John . . . to receive the Lesser Priesthood—and in the presence of Peter, to
receive the Greater, and look[ed] down through time, and witness[ed] the
effects these two must produce.”13

“In the early Spring of 1844,” reported Wilford Woodruff, “Joseph Smith
called the Twelve Apostles together, and he delivered unto them the ordi-
nances of the Church and Kingdom of God; and all of the keys and powers
that God had bestowed upon him.”14 Joseph’s commission of the Apostles,
Brigham Young chief among them, is crucial to Latter-day Saint claims to
continuing priesthood authority. An early statement by the Apostles is there-
fore celebrated. It states that a quorum of Apostles were “confirmed by the
holy anointing under the hands of Joseph,” after which he declared “that he
had conferred upon the Twelve every key and every power that he ever held
himself.”15

Many years later, Spencer W. Kimball stood with Elder Boyd K. Packer
and others in the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen, Denmark, admiring
Thorvaldsen’s Christus and his sculptures of the Twelve Apostles. “I stood
with President Kimball . . . before the statue of Peter,” Packer said. “In his hand,
depicted in marble, is a set of heavy keys. President Kimball pointed to them
and explained what they symbolized.”16 Kimball then charged Copenhagen
stake president Johan Bentine to “tell every prelate in Denmark that they do
not hold the keys. I hold the keys!”17 As the party left the church, President
Kimball shook hands with the caretaker, “expressed his appreciation, and
explained earnestly, ‘These statues are of dead apostles.'” Then, pointing to
Apostles Tanner, Monson, and Packer, he added, “You are in the presence of living apostles.” Terry L. Givens wrote that “Mormonism’s radicalism can thus be seen as its refusal to endow its own origins with mythic transcendence, while endowing those origins with universal import since they represent the implementation of the fullest gospel dispensation ever. The effect of this unflinching primitivism, its resurrection of original structures and practices, is nothing short of the demystification of Christianity itself.”

Such claims to authority have always been contested. But how does one contest the claims of two witnesses that they have been “ordained under the hands” of John, Christ’s baptizer? How can one disprove Oliver Cowdery’s testimony that “upon this head has Peter James and John laid their hands and confered the Holy Melchesdic Priesthood?” “Where was room for doubt?” Cowdery asked. But there was plenty of doubt, if not disproof. Joseph Smith was threatened with violence for claiming that “angels appear to men in this enlightened age.” His history says that he and Oliver “were forced to keep secret the circumstances of our having . . . received this priesthood; owing to a spirit of persecution.” But the secret was soon out. Oliver Cowdery “pretends to have seen Angels,” one editor wrote in 1830, and “holds forth that the ordinances of the gospel, have not been regularly administered since the days of the apostles, till the said Smith and himself commenced the work.”

Alexander Campbell also contested Mormon claims to authority. Many of the first Mormons in Ohio came from his flock, including Sidney Rigdon, one of Campbell’s “leading preachers” until, Campbell said, he fell “into the snare of the Devil in joining the Mormonites” and “led away a number of disciples with him.” At least two of those disciples were looking for God to “again reveal himself to man and confer authority upon some one, or more, before his church could be built up in the last days.” Edward Partridge went to New York to be baptized by Joseph Smith and became Mormonism’s first bishop shortly thereafter. Parley P. Pratt liked Campbell’s doctrine very much, “but still one great link was wanting to complete the chain of the ancient order of things,” Pratt wrote (using one of Campbell’s favorite phrases), “and that was, the authority to minister in holy things—the apostleship, the power which should accompany the form.” Pratt began looking for someone like Peter, who “proclaimed this gospel, and baptized for remission of sins, and promised the gift of the Holy Ghost, because he was commissioned so to do by a crucified and risen Saviour.” He asked those of Campbell’s ministry, “Who ordained [you] to stand up as Peter?” Pratt subsequently set out in search
of authority. He found it in Manchester, New York, at the home of Hyrum Smith. The two men talked through the night as Hyrum unfolded “the commission of his brother Joseph, and others, by revelation and the ministering of angels, by which the apostleship and authority had been again restored to the earth.” Pratt said he duly weighed “the whole matter in my mind” and concluded “that myself and the whole world were without baptism, and without the ministry and ordinances of God; and that the whole world had been in this condition since the days that inspiration and revelation had ceased.”

When Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery ordained twelve Apostles in 1835, Parley P. Pratt was one of them.

Campbell’s remaining followers criticized Mormons for “their pretensions to miraculous gifts” and apostolic authority and dismissed Mormonism as one more group of “superlative fanatics” claiming extrabiblical revelation. A war of words ensued in which Campbell and Joseph Smith jabbed at each other by evoking passages from the Acts of the Apostles, each man casting himself implicitly as a modern Apostle. Alexander Campbell was like Paul condemning Elymas the sorcerer. Joseph Smith was like Peter, calling on a modern son of Sceva to “repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ . . . , and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

A December 1830 revelation pressed this point. It called Rigdon to “a greater work” than assistant to Campbell and acknowledged that Rigdon had been baptizing “by water unto repentance, but they received not the Holy Ghost; but now I give unto thee a commandment, that thou shalt baptize by water, and they shall receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, even as the apostles of old” (D&C 35:5–6). Joseph Smith emphasized the point in subsequent editorial answers to Campbell’s critiques, associating himself with Apostles while noting that whatever Campbell’s gifts, he neither had nor claimed apostolic authority to lay on hands: “With the best of feelings, we would say to him, in the language of Paul to those who said they were John’s disciples, but had not so much as heard there was a Holy Ghost, to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins by those who have legal authority, and under their hands you shall receive the Holy Ghost, according to the scriptures.”

In 1832 Nancy Towle watched as Joseph Smith turned to some women and children in the room; and lay his hands upon their heads; (that they might be baptized of the Holy Ghost;) when, Oh! cried one, to
me, ‘What blessings, you do lose!—No sooner, his hands fell upon my head, than I felt the Holy Ghost, as warm water, to go over me!"

But I was not such a stranger, to the spirit of God, as she imagined; that I did not know its effects, from that of warm water! and I turned to Smith, and said ‘Are you not ashamed, of such pretensions? You, who are no more, than any ignorant, plough-boy of our land! Oh! blush, at such abominations! and let shame, cover your face!’

He only replied, by saying, ‘The gift, has returned back again, as in former times, to illiterate fishermen.’

So it went, Joseph Smith claiming that “the Savior, Moses, & Elias—gave the Keys to Peter, James & John . . . and they gave it up” to him, and critics like Charles Dickens citing Joseph’s ignorance, low-breeding, credulity, deception, and “piteable superstitious delusion.” Said Dickens, “Joseph Smith, the ignorant rustic, sees visions, lays claim to inspiration, and pretends to communion with angels,” all “in the age of railways.”

Competing but rarely expressed assumptions underlie these two positions. Mormons assume prima facie the possibility of Peter, James, and John ordaining Joseph Smith. Most people simply do not. Those among the majority who believe in angels at all are confident that they stopped appearing to rustics about the same time the last fisherman was ordained an Apostle, certainly before the Enlightenment or the age of railways. This certainty strikes Mormons as presumptuous, much as Mormon certainty of angels in the age of railways sounds presumptuous to others.

In May 2005, various holders of these two assumptions took the stage at the Library of Congress in a conference on the worlds of Joseph Smith. His assertion of apostolic authority by direct revelation was a pervasive theme in their presentations. It was another installment in the long history of discussions about authority in
Christian traditions, more polite but otherwise not far removed from the nineteenth-century contests over Joseph Smith’s testimony. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, former law professor, university president, and state supreme court justice, was the featured speaker, but not primarily on those credentials. He is an Apostle, and alongside references to his own research and scholarship, he spoke like one.

Mormon philosopher David L. Paulsen spoke on the ways Joseph Smith challenges Christian theology, beginning with the premise that theology itself is necessary only in the absence of Apostles who are chosen and ordained as the New Testament indicates. “Apostolic authority is not something that can be chosen,” Paulsen argued. “It was a divine calling issued by the Lord himself, the fruits of which are evidence of the call’s divine origin.” Chief among such fruits, said Paulsen, are revelations that “enabled the apostles to direct the church’s affairs under God’s direction.” The rise of theology is evidence of the end of apostolic authority, Paulsen contends, and his is no voice in the wilderness. Thus Joseph Smith’s claim to direct revelation from God is his ultimate challenge to theology, “a challenge based on the Bible itself.”

Randall H. Balmer, professor of religion at Barnard College of Columbia, addressed Paulsen’s key points, agreeing that “the issue of authority has been vexing throughout Christian history” but rejecting Paulsen’s premise that a loss of apostolic authority necessitated a divine restoration. Instead, Balmer argued, Jesus put authority in Peter in a very Protestant way, so as to “vitiate some of the authoritarianism of the episcopal polity in the Roman Catholic Church.” Balmer calls Peter “the apotheosis of fallibility,” arguing that Christian authority, God’s special revelation, is Jesus, and following him, “of course, is the scriptures.” Knowing our next question, Balmer asks it himself. “What counts as scripture?” “How does one know what is and is not scripture?” The questions unfold. “How do we know anything? What is the basis for our epistemology?” Elder Oaks had the previous evening set forth a distinctive Mormon epistemology, “the principle of independent verification by revelation.” Paulsen asserted it again by quoting an early LDS newspaper article: “Search the revelations which we publish, and ask your Heavenly Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, to manifest truth unto you, and if you do it with an eye single to His glory nothing doubting, He will answer you by the power of His Holy Spirit. You will then know for yourselves.”

I longed to hear Balmer’s analysis of this epistemology, which I find compelling, but instead he dismissed it as quickly as Alexander Campbell had
done, though on different grounds. Balmer called it, caricaturing Paulsen as saying that we know the Book of Mormon is true because it says so, or that Joseph Smith received revelations because he said he did. Balmer did not engage the epistemology of independent verification by personal revelation, and he offered little instead. “The early church settled the issue of canonicity,” he says, “through a kind of emerging consensus, codified finally in various church councils.” The kind of consensus to which Balmer refers is a highly qualified kind, as Arians and Donatists would testify. When has there been any other kind of consensus among Christians about the canon? Balmer concluded with what must have been self-conscious irony. He quoted Karl Barth’s “simple Sunday-school ditty: ‘Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so.’” The questions he raised went unanswered.

Thus the Library of Congress conference did not resolve Christianity’s contested claims to authority. But it was an impressive stage for the ongoing debate. Durham University professor of religion Douglas J. Davies led off the concluding session with a learned analysis of Mormonism’s potential to become recognized as a world religion. He predicted the possibility that Mormonism would grow globally by decentralizing and taking on regional identities. “Not and continue to be Mormonism,” I thought to myself. Roger R. Keller, professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University and a former Presbyterian minister, offered a penetrating response based on his own learning and experience. “Latter-day Saints have often said to me,” Keller stated, “‘We are so glad that you found the gospel.’ My response has always been, ‘I knew the gospel long before I was a Latter-day Saint. What I have found is the fullness of the gospel.’ The essence of that fullness is that the authority of the priesthood is found only within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . This understanding of authority is absent from Davies’s paper,” Keller said, “and this absence colors what he has said about the dynamics and constraints of Latter-day Saint church growth.”

Keller concluded with his own prediction that Mormonism will never take on the decentralized and diverse characteristics Davies prescribed for global religions, precisely “because . . . restored authority to administer the saving ordinances of the gospel through a divinely revealed structure . . . will not permit us to do so.” Davies rose when it was time to respond and said with obvious frustration, “What are we doing here?” venting some of the tension that always accompanies Mormon claims. Brabazon Ellis vented it by asking Alfred Cordon to work him a miracle. There was none of that at the
Library of Congress, but Davies wondered aloud whether we were having an academic conference or proselyting. It is hard and somewhat purposeless for Mormons to separate the two. Because Mormon claims to authority are historical and because they demystify Christianity, merely asserting them—as I have done—sounds like preaching. They have a kind of challenging aspect.

This is simply so, and it makes me feel like taking another crack at explaining the epistemology of independent verification by personal revelation. It is, first of all, irreducibly historical. As Paulsen put it, “Joseph claimed that God restored divine authority by literal hand-to-head transfer by the very prophets and apostles whose lives and words are recounted in the Bible.” But we misunderstand if we think Mormonism claims to be scientifically provable based on historical documentation or Enlightenment propositions. Rather, the historical record provides Latter-day Saints with something to verify independently by direct revelation. And, to quote Joseph Smith, “Whatever we may think of revelation . . . without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God.” A person does not know that John the Baptist ordained Joseph Smith because Joseph said so, but because God has revealed to that individual that Joseph told the truth when he said so. The first and perhaps finest example of this is Samuel Smith, Joseph’s younger brother. Joseph’s history says that a few days after John the Baptist ordained him and Cowdery, Samuel came to visit. Zealous teaching by the newly ordained missionaries notwithstanding, Samuel “was not very easily persuaded . . . but after much enquiry and explanation he retired to the woods, in order that by secret and fervent prayer he might obtain of a merciful God, wisdom to enable him to judge for himself: The result was that he obtained revelation for himself sufficient to convince him of the truth of our assertions to him, and . . . Oliver Cowdery baptized

Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple.
him, and he returned to his father’s house greatly glorifying and praising God, being filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Joseph Smith was conscious, as I am, of the perils of self-deception and all manner of pseudorevelation. Mormonism certainly runs that risk. But considering the alternatives of agnosticism, or even of strict historicism, or of an epistemology dependent on so-called philosophical consensus, I have chosen to put my faith in independent verification by personal revelation and have not been disappointed. An inerrant Bible would not even suffice unless we had inerrant interpreters, or, as Mormons assert, an inerrant Christ to guide otherwise fallible interpreters by revelation. Still, without revelation, we cannot know anything of God. “God has revealed it to us by his Spirit,” Paul taught the Corinthians, based on the premise that “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (NIV, 1 Corinthians 2:10–11).

I find this principle of independent verification by revelation to be liberated from the limitations of Enlightenment or postmodern epistemologies, and unconstrained by what Joseph Smith regarded as the God-muzzling composition of creeds and closure of the canon. Often Joseph turned the Bible on those who regarded themselves as its biggest defenders. To the question, “Is there anything in the Bible which licenses you to believe in revelation nowadays?” He answered, “Is there anything that does not authorize us to believe so; if there is, we have, as yet, not been able to find it.” But “is not the cannon of the Scriptures full?” “If it is,” he replied, “there is a great defect in the book, or else it would have said so.”

Holding open the possibilities that angels could restore priesthood, and that anyone can verify whether they have by direct revelation, is liberating and empowering epistemology. It frees the mind to believe that some things can indeed be certainly known, though not by history itself. Rather, this knowledge is gained at the intersection of historically attested events and a kind of pragmatism of personal experience.

My life is organized by this priesthood authority. I was baptized by my father, who afterward laid his hands on my head and invited me to receive the Holy Ghost. I share the tangible if incommunicable experience of Samuel Smith and of the woman Joseph Smith confirmed in 1832, whose witness Nancy Towle dismissed as the effects of warm water. My father later ordained me to the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthoods, giving me a line of authority that traces my ordination through him back to Peter, James, and John. He again laid hands on me when I was critically ill with encephalitis, and I was healed. My grandfather laid his hands on my head for a patriarchal
blessing when I was fourteen and was fixated on things other than an academic life. He talked much of school and foretold several of my most formative experiences, including my endless pursuit of education. Most personally, my wife and I were sealed in the temple by this priesthood, which transcends death. For us that means our children are bound eternally to us and us to each other. I now bless and baptize and confirm those children in turn by virtue of the holy priesthood Joseph Smith received from ministering angels. It is the single greatest determinant of my life.

Some will surely say, then, that Mormon priesthood is just so much sentimentality. But for me its power is undeniable. And not primarily because it heals bodies or validates binding ordinances. Rather, the power of the priesthood holds the key to knowing God, the key to transcendence and godliness (see D&C 84:19–23). One of Joseph Smith’s most sublime revelations declared that “the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven,” which cannot be controlled or handled illicitly. Priesthood may be conferred, the revelation says, but “amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” who exercises control, or dominion, or compulsion on anyone in any degree of unrighteousness. Authoritarianism is not authority. Priesthood is not license. Men exercise authority tyrannically by nature and disposition, the revelation says, but this is apostate priesthood. Priesthood power is as dew that distills upon the soul who self-consciously rejects authoritarianism in favor of persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness and meekness, kindness, and unfeigned love without hypocrisy or guile. Otherwise, “no power or authority can or ought to be maintained.” Anyone who exercises what the revelation calls “unrighteous dominion” forfeits priesthood and “is left unto himself . . . to fight against God” (see D&C 121). God, though sovereign, compels no one. He makes plans and provisions for the salvation of his children but neither elects them to grace unconditionally nor saves them contrary to their will. He love, sacrifices, and ministers. We may be confident in his presence only if we willingly act in the same selfless ways.

Nineteenth-century Protestants made no pretensions to “confer any new powers by the acts of ordination,” but increasingly democratized authority by locating priesthood in believers generally. Catholic and Mormon priesthood seemed the opposite of this and akin to each other. Ordination in both traditions elevated one nearer to Christ. But the priesthood Joseph Smith conferred actually elevated the ordained even as it maximized their number. His radical priesthood of believers did not mitigate authority by
democratizing it, but universally endowed ordained men with “transcendent power which cut against every grain of American, republican culture.” Melchizedek was ordained a priest of the Most High God, and made like the Son of God, and abideth a priest continually. But Joseph Smith added a potent gloss, declaring that “all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God, abiding a priest continually” (JST, Hebrews 7:3, LDS Bible appendix; emphasis added). Joseph “wanted to invest all the men among his followers with the powers of heaven descending through the priesthood.” Such power renders God knowable and every man and woman capable of exaltation in the image of God (see D&C 84, 132). A kitschy plaque I received before my ordination summed all this up. “Priesthood,” it said, “is not only the power to act in the name of God. It is the power to become like Him.” That possibility is blasphemous to most Protestants and Catholics, though not, unless I am mistaken, to Orthodox Christians. It seems therefore safe to say that Joseph Smith’s testimony of angels ordaining him to priesthood for the express purpose of exalting men and women as priests and priestesses, kings and queens, will continue to be contested for a long time.

I cannot solve the problem; perhaps I can only exacerbate it. Randall Balmer asked, “Why Smith?” I ask, Why not? The documentation evidencing John the Baptist’s ordination of Joseph Smith is at least as good as the documentation evidencing his baptism of Christ. If one can independently verify both claims by direct revelation through the Holy Spirit, why not believe? And if one cannot independently verify the truthfulness of a claim by revelation, why believe? I wonder whether such an epistemology will appeal to anyone unwilling to grant the premise that angels could have ordained Joseph Smith or that he might have received extrabiblical revelations or that anyone can verify these by an unmediated experience with God. But for me to be convinced otherwise would require potent refutation—not merely rejection—of those same premises. The argument would have to explain why God no longer gives special revelation to prophets and apostles, and it seems unlikely that anything short of a special revelation could do that. The Westminster Confession’s certainty about the sufficiency of the Bible, “unto which nothing at any time is to be added,” not even by “new revelations of the Spirit,” sounds presumptuous in Mormon ears—perhaps as presumptuous as St. Peter ordaining a New York farmer must sound to many Christians. Divine authority by direct revelation is the reason for Mormonism’s existence. Moreover,
the power to know for oneself that divine authority is vested in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that without which Mormonism would cease to be, or at least cease to be compelling to me.62 This pair of doctrines is simultaneously authoritative and empowering to the individual—truth that makes one free.

Is it possible that angels could appear in this enlightened age, bringing authority to unsophisticated mortals to act for Christ again, as in former times? As the epigraph for his influential Millennial Harbinger, Alexander Campbell chose Revelation 14:6: “I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth” (NIV, Revelation 14:6), though Campbell rendered it as “I saw another messenger flying through the midst of heaven, having everlasting good news to proclaim to the inhabitants of the earth.” What Campbell intended by replacing the biblical word angel with the less-defined messenger, I do not know. But Joseph Smith’s literal reading of the same passage is a revealing contrast. He thought John’s revelation foresaw actual angelic ministers, one of whom appeared in Joseph’s New York bedroom as he prayed on September 21, 1823. Joseph said, “He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). Such a claim was foolishness to Alexander Campbell, Nancy Tracy, Charles Dickens, and countless others. It was biblical and thoroughly believable, however, to those who knew Joseph best. And it sounded so to Alfred Cordon on the other side of the Atlantic. But how could he know? He sought independent verification by direct revelation. “Away I went to my Bible and to prayer,” he wrote, and “the Spirit of God bore testimony to the truth” of the assertion that the angel of Revelation 14 had indeed proclaimed the eternal gospel in the age of railways.63

Notes


13. Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young, March 23, 1846, Church History Library.

14. Wilford Woodruff statement, March 19, 1897, Church History Library.

15. Declaration of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library.


25. *Millennial Harbinger* 2 (1831): 100–101. In June 1828 Campbell noted how effective Rigdon had lately been: “Bishop’s Scott, Rigdon, and Bentley, in Ohio, within the last six months have immersed about eight hundred persons.” “Extracts of Letters,” *Christian Baptist* (June 2, 1828), 263.

26. Edward Partridge Papers, May 26, 1839, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.


31. In the January 1831 issue of the *Millennial Harbinger*, Campbell’s influential article, “Delusions,” includes this line: “I have never felt myself so fully authorized to address mortal man in the style in which Paul addressed Elymas the sorcerer as I feel towards this Atheist [Joseph] Smith” (96). Campbell refers to Acts 13:6–12.
32. Joseph Smith, “To the Elders of the Church of the Latter Day Saints,” *Messenger and Advocate*, December 1835, 225–230. The article continues: “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.—Acts: ch. 8, v. 17. And, when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them: and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.—Acts: ch. 19, v. 6. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.—Heb. ch. 6, v.2. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!—Rom. ch. 10, v. 14–15.”


35. Charles Dickens, “In the Name of the Prophet—Smith!” *Household Words* 69, no. 3 (July 1851), 69.


61. Joseph Smith taught that “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded upon direct revelation, as the true church of God has ever been, according to the scriptures.” “Latter Day Saints,” in I. Daniel Rupp, *He Pasa Ekklesia: An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States* (Philadelphia: J. Y. Humphreys, 1844), 404.


The Atonement itself is a fruit of Christ’s own agency: he freely suffered and gave his life for mankind, freely submitting his own will to the will of the Father.
The Articles of Faith reflect the importance of moral agency in God’s plan for his children. They begin with a statement of belief “in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:1). A belief in God is surely the foundational doctrine of the gospel. But what article of faith comes very next? It is this: “We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2). Within the Church, this declaration is most often (and not incorrectly) seen as a rejection of the traditional Christian notion of original sin—the teaching that everyone born into this world is guilty of the transgression committed by Eve and then Adam in the Garden of Eden. But it is more than that. In rejecting original sin, the second article of faith nevertheless affirms the reality of the Fall and establishes the immovable doctrine of each person’s individual liability for the wrong choices he or she makes—we will be punished for our own sins. It is a statement, in other words, that recognizes the operation of individual moral agency. Only after this profoundly basic statement do we have, in the third article of faith, the hope-filled declaration, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved,
by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). In the priority of the Articles of Faith, then, agency precedes even the Atonement and is second only to the reality of the Godhead as a most basic teaching of the gospel; the second article of faith constitutes the basis for the third. If it were not for agency, by which came sin and death, there would be no need for an Atonement, by which comes redemption and life. Indeed, there could be no Atonement, since the Atonement itself is a fruit of Christ’s own agency: he freely suffered and gave his life for mankind, freely submitting his own will to the will of the Father (see Luke 22:42; Mosiah 15:7).

For many years it was common within the Church to speak of the power to choose as “free agency.” This term was used in the sermons and writings of Presidents of the Church and other General Authorities, in the videos and printed materials produced officially by the Church, and in the common parlance of the general membership. Presumably the term “free agency” was initially intended and properly understood to convey a positive appreciation for the fruits of Christ’s redemptive work, such as when Lehi prophetically testified:

The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. (2 Nephi 2:26–27; emphasis added)

And we have this lyric by Eliza R. Snow, one of the Restoration’s great poets:

His precious blood he freely spilt;
His life he freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.³

According to these and other witnesses, Christ’s atoning sacrifice, freely given, makes men and women free—free from Adam’s transgression, free to choose and walk the path that will lead them to eternal life, or free to take
the path that will lead them to spiritual death. But there are also at least two important ways that men and women are not free.

First, we are not free to remain neutral. We must and do choose; to be indecisive or vacillating is itself a choice. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states: “Agency is such that . . . individuals capable of acting for themselves cannot remain on neutral ground, abstaining from both receiving and rejecting light from God. To be an agent means both being able to choose and having to choose.”

Second, we are bound by the consequences of our choices. In *For the Strength of Youth*, the First Presidency has forthrightly declared: “While you are free to choose for yourself, you are not free to choose the consequences of your actions. When you make a choice, you will receive the consequences of that choice. The consequences may not be immediate, but they will always follow, for good or bad.”

We are no more free to choose the spiritual consequences of our moral choices than we are to choose the physical consequences of driving—intentionally or otherwise—over a cliff, or of swallowing poison. And yet all around us we see pervasive evidence of a society deluded into supposing that unethical or sinful behavior does not matter as long as one is not caught, and that one can in fact get away with murder, fraud, or infidelity. Too many believe as Cain, who, with the innocent blood of his brother staining his hands, “gloried in that which he had done, saying: I am free” (Moses 5:33). Perhaps it is this Cain-like confusion or self-deception that has prompted a shift in diction regarding agency within the Church. The change was first signaled publicly by President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1992. In his April address at general conference that year, an address pointedly entitled “Our Moral Environment,” President Packer noted that “the phrase ‘free agency’ does not appear in scripture. The only agency spoken of there,” he stated, “is moral agency.” More recently, the curriculum for the Primary sharing time and the Primary sacrament meeting program contained the following clarification as part of a glossary of terms:

As you teach . . . this year, please use and help the children understand correct terms and doctrine. Pay particular attention to the following: . . .

Agency: The ability to choose and act for oneself. Use the term agency rather than free agency to describe our freedom to choose. Agency is the term used in the scriptures (see D&C 29:36; Moses 7:32).
Likewise, we find this note in the lesson on agency in *Preparing for Exaltation: Teacher’s Manual*: “Although the term ‘free agency’ is often used, the correct, scriptural term is simply ‘agency.’”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson has summarized the Church’s deemphasis of the term *free agency* thus:

> In years past, we generally used the term *free agency*. That is not incorrect, but more recently we have taken note that *free agency* does not appear as an expression in the scriptures. They talk of our being “free to choose” and “free to act” for ourselves and of our obligation to do many things of our own “free will.” But the word *agency* appears either by itself or, in Doctrine and Covenants, section 101, verse 78, with the modifier *moral*: “That every man may act in doctrine and principle . . . according to the *moral agency* which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (emphasis added). When we use the term *moral agency*, then, we are appropriately emphasizing the accountability that is an essential part of the divine gift of agency. We are moral beings and agents unto ourselves, free to choose but also responsible for our choices.

> These clarifications seem intended to underscore the point that freedom of choice is itself not free; it has multiple costs. First, it comes with irrevocable and unavoidable consequences for each agent. Second, the guarantor of human agency is Christ, who paid its price with his own blood. Third is another price that is sometimes overlooked; it is the price the Father himself paid when he allowed the third part of the hosts of heaven—his children—to use their agency to follow Lucifer in open rebellion against him and the plan he had established to make them free. As a consequence of the Father’s own commitment to uphold the principle of moral agency, a significant portion of his family were lost to him and cast down, put forever beyond the reach of Christ’s liberating and exalting Atonement (D&C 29:36–37; see also v. 29). The events of the premortal Council in Heaven are still reverberating today and still have much to teach about the nature of agency.

**What Happened in Heaven**

Many members of the Church are unaware that there is an area of interpretive ambivalence regarding the account of Lucifer’s rebellion against the Father’s plan to send Christ to be the Savior of the world. There are at least two mutually incompatible interpretations of how Lucifer intended to destroy the agency of man. As will be seen, this is not merely a matter of academic trivia. How we read Lucifer’s premortal gambit for power has implications for our understanding of the nature of agency itself. The ambivalence was
stated succinctly by President J. Reuben Clark Jr. of the First Presidency: “As I read the scriptures, Satan’s plan required one of two things: Either the compulsion of the mind, the spirit, the intelligence of man, or else saving men in sin. I question whether the intelligence of man can be compelled. Certainly men cannot be saved in sin, because the laws of salvation and exaltation are founded in righteousness, not sin.”

The most detailed account of what was said and done in that premortal council is found in Moses 4. The wording is important. There, the Lord teaches Moses:

That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice. (Moses 4:1–4)

The third sentence above crucially says that Satan “sought to destroy the agency of man.” Note that the word is not abridge or curtail or limit, but destroy. Lucifer was plotting a total coup, not just of God’s power, but of everyone’s agency. But what specifically was he proposing to do, and how would it have destroyed agency?

**The “Forced Obedience” Reading**

What seems currently to be the most widespread interpretation of Lucifer’s counterproposal to the Father’s plan is expressed in the lyrics of a popular LDS musical, *My Turn on Earth*, where a character representing Lucifer sings, “I have a plan / It will save every man / I will force them to live righteously.” This is not merely a folk interpretation of the account, however. Perhaps the earliest and still one of the most influential statements of it is found in James E. Talmage’s *Jesus the Christ*, a monumental work first published in 1915. It is still widely read and consulted today, and it is part of the approved library for all missionaries of the Church. Early in the volume, Elder Talmage discusses the premortal council and characterizes Lucifer’s plan as one of “compulsion,
whereby all would be safely conducted through the career of mortality, bereft of freedom to act and agency to choose, so circumscribed that they would be compelled to do right—that one soul would not be lost.”

The logic behind the “forced obedience” interpretation of Lucifer’s proposal might be summed up as follows: If agency is the ability to act for oneself, then the statement that Lucifer sought to destroy agency means that he intended to destroy man’s freedom of action. Man would be compelled in his actions because perfect compliance with an immutable standard of righteousness—without the benefit of any Atonement or grace to make repentance for transgressions possible—would be required for salvation. All souls would be compelled to righteous action at every juncture in order that all might be saved.

This, as has been said, is a very prevalent interpretation. It has been articulated by various leaders of the Church since Elder Talmage and can be found in various places throughout the current official Church curriculum.

In 1950, President David O. McKay taught:

Freedom of the will and the responsibility associated with it are fundamental aspects of Jesus’ teachings.

Force, on the other hand, emanates from Lucifer himself. Even in man’s [premortal] state, Satan sought power to compel the human family to do his will by suggesting that the free agency of man be inoperative. If his plan had been accepted, human beings would have become mere puppets in the hands of a dictator, and the purpose of man’s coming to earth would have been frustrated. Satan’s proposed system of government, therefore, was rejected, and the principle of free agency established.

President McKay uses the imagery of puppets to suggest the outcome of the destruction of agency. Persons would be moved in all ways and in all things by an all-powerful dictator who had total physical and mental control of them. President Joseph Fielding Smith held a similar view:

If there had been no free agency, there could have been no rebellion in heaven; but what would man amount to without this free agency? He would be no better than a mechanical contrivance. He could not have acted for himself, but in all things would have been acted upon, and hence unable to have received a reward for meritorious conduct. He would have been an automaton; could have had no happiness nor misery, “neither sense nor insensibility,” and such could hardly be called existence. Under such conditions there could have been no purpose in our creation.

Note here President Smith’s emphasis on freedom to act as the essential trait of agency. He continues in this vein when he writes that “Satan’s plan in
the beginning was to compel. He said he would save all men and not one soul should be lost. He would do it if the Father would give him the honor and the glory. But who wants salvation when it comes through compulsion, if we have not the power within ourselves to choose and to act according to the dictates of conscience? What would salvation mean to you if you were compelled?”

President Smith’s question is a fair one, and it raises yet another: Who indeed would subscribe to a plan that proposed total compulsion for every action? Is such a plan even plausible on its face? Consider the following thought experiment, quoted in a still-current Church curriculum manual, where, in a much older article from the *Improvement Era*, agency is again characterized primarily as freedom of action:

Even before we came to earth, we were required to choose whether we would follow God’s plan and be free to act as we chose or to follow Satan and act under force. . . .

“Suppose we take a child and arrange to rear him as Satan suggested, so that he cannot make the smallest mistake. We tell him exactly what to do, how to do it and when to do it; and then make sure he conforms to orders. We never let him make choices, never let him try different solutions to problems of everyday living. He must not be allowed to err. Year by year the child’s body will grow, but what of his mind? What of his spirit? Though he grow to be six feet tall, he will never become a mature adult. His mind and spirit will have been starved. They will have failed to grow for lack of nourishment.” (Lester and Joan Essig, “Free Agency and Progress,” *Instructor*, Sept. 1964, 342)

This proposal actually highlights one of the biggest difficulties inherent in the “forced obedience” interpretation of Lucifer’s proposal. Freedom of action and thought, however trammelled, is so integral to human existence that it is difficult to imagine, even for purposes of a thought experiment, conditions under which it could be totally abridged. President Spencer W. Kimball, who also appears to have held the interpretation being discussed here, had this to say:

There was rebellion in the ranks. The proposed program called for total controls by each individual of his personal life, including restraints, sacrifices, and self-mastery. . . . Had the rebels won that great war you and I would have been in a totally different position. Ours would have been a life under force. You could make no decisions. You would have to comply. Every determination would be made for you regardless of your will. Under compulsion you would do the bidding of your dictator leader in whose image the Khurschevs, Hitlers, Nepoleons, and Alexanders were but poor and ineffectual novices in comparison. Your life would be cut out for you and you would fit into the mold made for you.”
It is a sad fact of human history that some people have attempted to
totally control the minds and compel the actions of other people, and the
results of such experiments have been indeed horrific. But even these extreme
examples do not approach the totalitarian proposal that is presumed to have
been Lucifer’s plan under this interpretation. The devil would have removed
from each soul the very ability to think and the capacity even to will—let
alone perform—actions that were alternative in any way to those prescribed
by him. A family of mindless automatons, to use President Smith’s term, or
puppets, to use David O. McKay’s, is the picture that emerges, which returns
us to the question: Is it likely that a third part of the hosts of heaven—untold
numbers of spirits—would have subscribed to such a patently malicious and
injurious proposal, even if Lucifer had made a most cunning and masterful
pitch? Would so many souls have wanted and voted for such a fate? And yet
the scriptures say that Lucifer sought to destroy the agency of man. What else
could his proposal have entailed if not total control of all human actions? Is
not agency indeed the freedom to act? How else than by removing that free-
dom could Lucifer have “sought to destroy the agency of man?”

A possible answer is suggested in the scriptures. In 2 Nephi 2:27, Lehi
teaches that men “are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great
Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captiv-
ity and power of the devil.” In speaking of individual freedom to choose, Lehi’s
emphasis is not on actions, but on ultimate outcomes (eternal life or eternal
captivity). This is crucial to understanding agency in its fullest sense and what
is at stake with each moral choice. Every daily decision—each act taken, each
thought entertained, each word spoken—orients the soul towards one or the
other of the ultimate outcomes of which Lehi speaks. Children of God are
engaged, deed by deed, in a process of becoming, and it is what each soul is
to become as a result of day-to-day and moment-by-moment choices that is
most at stake when we speak of agency. This leads us to the other interpreta-
tion that has been given of Lucifer’s counterproposal to the Father’s plan.

The “Unconditional Redemption” Reading

“Here am I, send me,” said Lucifer to the Father, “I will be thy son, and I
will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do
it; wherefore give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Rather than interpret this
proposal as an attempt to make puppets and automatons of the human race,
a number of Church leaders have interpreted it as Lucifer offering a universal
and unconditional redemption from sin as well as from death. There are several hints in Lucifer’s language that support this interpretation. For example, he says, “I will be thy son.” What did he mean by that? Was he not already, at the time of the Council, a spirit son of God? The Church’s teachings on this point have consistently held that he was. Then what was he suggesting? The answer inevitably appears to be that he was seeking to become the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh—the Redeemer—a position we know that he continued to covet even after he had been cast down.21

The unique mission of the Only Begotten Son, as outlined from the beginning by the Father, was to overcome the everlasting effects of sin and death by coming into mortality, born of a mortal woman but with the immortal capacities of God the Father. In this capacity, the Son of God would have power to suffer beyond what anyone else could suffer “except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:7) and the power to lay down his life and take it again (John 10:17–18, Ether 12:33) in order to loose the bands of death for all mankind. Lucifer, according to the “unconditional redemption” interpretation of Moses 1:4, was ostensibly proposing to do all of this, but with a crucial difference. Joseph Smith characterized it this way: “The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and the devil said he could save them all, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him.”22

By detailing the implications of the Father’s plan as espoused by Christ (that some souls would not be saved due to their freely made choice to reject Christ’s grace), Joseph Smith seems to be suggesting that what was at stake was not whether souls would be allowed to sin, but whether or not they would be allowed to choose

As the Son of God, Jesus had power to suffer beyond what anyone else could suffer and the power to lay down his life and take it again.
salvation from sin after the fact, or be compelled in their salvation. Such a reading is supported by the language of Moses 4:1, where Lucifer proposes to “redeem” all “that one soul shall not be lost.” The primary meaning of redeem is to retake or reclaim, and in the religious sense “to free from the consequences of sin,” not to avoid a loss or to prevent sin from occurring in the first place. On this reading, Lucifer’s proposal was to save all mankind in their sins. This is unambiguously the way President Brigham Young understood the matter when he elaborated his own version of the dialogue in heaven, beginning with the Father’s question:

“Who will redeem the earth, who will go forth and make the sacrifice for the earth and all things it contains?” The Eldest Son said: “Here am I”; and then he added, “Send me.” But the second one, which was “Lucifer, Son of the Morning,” said, “Lord, here am I, send me, I will redeem every son and daughter of Adam and Eve that lives on the earth, or that ever goes on the earth.” “But,” says the Father, “that will not answer at all. I give each and every individual his agency; all must use that in order to gain exaltation in my kingdom; inasmuch as they have the power of choice they must exercise that power. They are my children; the attributes which you see in me are in my children and they must use their agency. If you undertake to save all, you must save them in unrighteousness and corruption.”

Note that this version specifically indicates that an atoning sacrifice (“the sacrifice for the earth and all it contains”) was required, and that, by asking to be the one sent, Christ and Lucifer each signaled that they were willing to offer it. But Lucifer, according to this interpretation, wanted to use his sacrifice to save God’s children in—not from—unrighteousness and corruption.

President Young’s interpretation finds resonance in the more recent writings of Elder Bruce R. McConkie. He, too, indicates his reading of Moses 4:1 by way of offering a restatement of the dialogue in Heaven. Lucifer, he suggests, was saying: “I reject thy plan. I am willing to be thy Son and atone for the sins of the world, but in return let me take thy place and sit upon thy throne. Yea, ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; . . . I will be like the most High’” (Isa. 14:13–14).

On Elder McConkie’s reading, as with Brigham Young’s, Lucifer was offering to perform an atonement of some kind as God’s Only Begotten (note that he capitalizes “Son” in his paraphrase). The difference would be that instead of an atonement in which forgiveness of sin would be conditioned on faith, repentance, baptism, etc., Lucifer would offer an atonement that could ostensibly save all souls universally and unconditionally. Furthermore, since Lucifer would be the one to “make the sacrifice,” acting in the office of God’s
On Agency

Only Begotten Son, he was demanding that the glory should be given to himself for the salvation of God's children.

An interesting variation on this reading of Lucifer’s proposal is found in the writings of President John Taylor. He also held the view that a redemptive sacrifice would somehow be required under Lucifer’s proposal, but he suggested that rather than offering himself as the one who would make the necessary sacrifice, Lucifer may have intended to make each person pay for their own sins in some way:

Satan (it is possible) being opposed to the will of his Father, wished to avoid the responsibilities of this position [as redeemer], and rather than assume the consequences of the acceptance of the plan of the Father, he would deprive man of his free agency, and render it impossible for him to obtain that exaltation which God designed. It would further seem probable that he refused to take the position of redeemer, and assume all the consequences associated therewith, but he did propose, as stated before, to take another plan and deprive man of his agency, and he probably intended to make men atone for their own acts by an act of coercion, and the shedding of their own blood as an atonement for their sins; therefore, he says, “I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost; and surely I will do it; wherefore, give me thine honor.”

It is more difficult to imagine on what basis Lucifer would claim all the glory for himself under this scenario, since the suffering for sin would devolve upon the sinners rather than upon himself. Perhaps it was enough that he had proposed the plan and on that basis he wanted to claim all the glory for its eventual “success.” In any case, the guilt of sinners is presumed here as well. The only question is whether forgiveness and redemption would be conditioned upon their desire for it, or whether they would all receive atonement by compulsory means.

While these speculations on the mode of atonement proposed by Lucifer may vary, the core understanding that Lucifer was proposing to save men unconditionally and universally despite their sins predominates in the statements of the earliest presidents of the Church and is articulated afresh in modern times by Bruce R. McConkie.

According to the unconditional redemption scenario, rather than being turned into automatons, persons under Lucifer’s plan would be free to act as they wished and heaven would be the reward regardless of their actions. Stated this way, unconditional redemption offers a stronger explanation as to why Lucifer’s proposal might have persuaded a third part of the hosts of heaven to rebel against the Father and follow Lucifer to perdition. The notion of being
rendered a puppet (forced obedience) seems far less appealing than the free pass idea of unconditional redemption. If human nature here in mortality is any guide to what mankind’s propensities might have been in premortal life, then surely unbounded freedom and escape from negative consequences for behavior are more appealing than to be subject to the whims and dictates of someone in total control of life in every way. People here below will fight to the last drop of blood for their freedom, but once freedom is secured in some measure, many people will, like Cain, go to great lengths to skirt the law, get something for nothing, hide their misdeeds, and evade any consequences for wrongdoing. Everything from notions of salvation without works, to abortion, to exploitation of the poor, to fraudulent business practices may be seen as manifestations of this proclivity. If this intuitive appraisal of human nature is granted, it would seem that Lucifer’s plan, in order to win the numbers that it did, must have appealed to this notion of effortless salvation for all rather than to some desire to be dominated and controlled at every turn—an impulse that is still scarce to be found in human nature. For these reasons, I find the unconditional redemption version of Lucifer’s proposal (in its basic outlines at least) to be the most plausible, and it is this interpretation and its ramifications that will be considered for the balance of this essay.

The Justice of God and the Agency of Man

Lucifer’s proposal was too good to be true. His “plan” for saving all souls may have made a great presentation, but the devil was literally in the details. His proposal was both malicious and insidious. It violated at least two inviolable principles: the justice of God and the agency of man.

Saving persons in their sins, not from them, was incompatible with the justice of God, as the Book of Mormon dialogue between Zeezrom and Amulek makes clear:

And Zeezrom said again: Who is he that shall come? Is it the Son of God?
And he said unto him, Yea.
And Zeezrom said again: Shall he save his people in their sins? And Amulek answered and said unto him: I say unto you he shall not, for it is impossible for him to deny his word. . . .
And I say unto you again that he cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins. (Alma 11:32–34, 37)
Salvation without conditions, without requirements for obedience to law or repentance for violations of that law would have the effect of rendering any such law meaningless. There might as well be no law at all. And if so, there might as well be no lawgiver. The justice of God would be destroyed and, if it were possible, God would cease to be God. This annihilating logic is spelled out scripturally in Lehi’s monumental discourse in 2 Nephi 2:

And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away. (2 Ne. 2:13; see also Alma 42)

It is precisely this kind of catastrophic collapse of divine law and divine justice that Lucifer’s proposal would have set in motion.

But what of moral agency? Under unconditional redemption, people would have been granted maximum freedom of action with no lasting jeopardy to themselves. While this approach at first might seem to enhance individual freedom and autonomy, in the broader analysis it destroys agency by violating the law of consequences. The Encyclopedia of Mormonism discusses this law succinctly:

To be an agent means both being able to choose and having to choose either “liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator” or “captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Ne. 2:27–29; 10:23). A being who is “an agent unto himself” is continually committing to be either an agent and servant of God or an agent and servant of Satan. If this consequence of choosing could be overridden or ignored, men and women would not determine their own destiny by their choices and agency would be void.

Though mankind would be saved despite “unrighteousness and corruption,” they would also be saved whether they wanted it or not. Like forced obedience, the unconditional redemption scenario results in persons having no choice in the matter of their salvation. Salvation ostensibly would have been accomplished either by Lucifer’s fiat, or by an unconditional atonement that he performed and then imposed upon all, or by an atonement that he compelled all to undergo themselves. Whatever the case, his plan was indeed a plan of compulsion, but compulsion at a different point or on a different basis than simply controlling individual actions. It destroyed the opposition between sin and righteousness and obliterated the need for
genuine repentance, allowing an anything-goes state of universal anarchy while claiming—or rather insisting—that somehow all people would irresistibly be saved. Everyone would be compelled into heaven.

Elder McConkie put it this way:

Lucifer sought to dethrone God . . . and to save all men without reference to their works. He sought to deny men their agency so they could not sin. He offered a mortal life of carnality and sensuality, of evil and crime and murder, following which all men would be saved. His offer was a philosophical impossibility. . . .

Lucifer and his lieutenants preached . . . a gospel of fear and hate and lasciviousness and compulsion. They sought salvation without keeping the commandments, without overcoming the world, without choosing between opposites. (Bruce R. McConkie, Millennial Messiah, 666–67)

Note that Elder McConkie is suggesting that the very notion of sin would have become void under Lucifer’s lawless proposal. As a result, “righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Nephi 2:11) because his plan would have erased these distinctions—not because people would be compelled to be righteous. “Hell” would have become a null concept, and “heaven” would have been populated with every kind of morally recumbent soul. Such a place, of course, ceases to be heaven in any meaningful way. Hence the “philosophical impossibility,” to use Elder McConkie’s characterization, of Lucifer’s plan for totalitarian exaltation.

To Become or Not to Become

Moral agency is more than just the power to act; it is the freedom to become. Individual agency and Christ’s Atonement make it possible to become as God is—or not. Agency is the freedom to put on the nature of Christ by obeying his word (his law and covenant) and by freely seeking and freely receiving his redeeming and compensating grace—or not.

But why would anyone choose not to be saved? Why would anyone deliberately reject God and his proffered gift of exaltation and eternal life? Here is a question that gets to the very heart of what it means to be free and what it means to be saved. Once again, the problem arises only when we lose sight of the principle of becoming. We choose “liberty and eternal life” or “captivity and death” not in a single, once-and-for all decision, but through a series of decisions—an accrual of countless choices under myriad circumstances, each one of which has the effect of orienting us more or less towards one or the
other of those ultimate outcomes. To be obedient is a choice, to sin is a choice, and to repent is also a choice.

Ultimately, the Atonement makes available to each soul the power to become like Christ through a pattern of choices—made or amended through the grace of Christ—that lead to oneness with the Father. The Atonement makes this possible because God's grace gives strength beyond each person's own, but also because it gives second chances, third chances, fourth chances, and so on. If it were not for the Atonement, each person's first sin would be spiritually fatal. It is the Atonement that allows the Father's plan to function as a saving process for his children, rather than an all-or-nothing, now-or-never proposition. It is the Atonement that makes it possible for persons to learn by doing, liberated from the paralyzing fear that, spiritually speaking, the slightest misstep would be their last. But even the Atonement cannot guarantee success if the patient is not patient.

To be one with the Father is eternal life; anything less is not. But this is a station, taught Joseph Smith, at which no one arrived in a moment. Anyone can raise their hand for salvation; but are they willing to undergo the tutoring and sometimes painful transformative work that the grace of Christ must perform upon them in order to convert them from their natural, carnal, and fallen state into creatures of grace, the children of Christ? The answer to this question cannot be given with the lips; it must be given in the authentic, counterfeit-proof currency of actual effort—of work and sacrifice and sustained faith. To be saved, in the fullest sense, means nothing less than to become like Christ, acquiring his attributes and forsaking all else. Anything short of growing "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) is to take his name in vain.

It requires more than mere assent to Christ's Lordship to do this. Jesus himself proclaimed, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The surest way to signal one's desire to be like Jesus is to actually try to be like Jesus. Such an effort will be imperfect and will inevitably fall short of the goal without God's grace, but the effort itself is crucial. Salvation is and must be the result of due diligence on the part of both the Savior and the saved. The Savior has abundantly fulfilled his mission of rescuing love. His arms of mercy are extended toward each soul as far as he can possibly reach without infringing individual agency. The free choice
of each soul to be rescued by him is proven in the effort each makes to reach back in return.

**Final Thoughts**

It is significant that the first hymn in the first hymnbook of the restored Church emphasizes the point and promise of moral freedom or agency:

> Know then that ev'ry soul is free,  
> To choose his life and what he'll be;  
> For this eternal truth is given,  
> That God will force no man to heaven.

> He'll call, persuade direct him right;  
> Bless him with wisdom, love, and light;  
> In nameless ways be good and kind;  
> But never force the human mind.

> It's my free will for to believe,  
> 'Tis God's free will me to receive:  
> To stubborn willers this I'll tell,  
> It's all free grace, and all free will.²⁹

God himself exercises agency and has consistently and resolutely respected and defended the right of his children to make crucial choices for themselves. Agency is welded to the law of consequences from which God exempts neither himself nor his children. Whenever people suppose they can somehow circumvent this law, the outcome is inevitably sorrow and lost opportunity for growth. The more faithfully God’s children freely adhere to his plan, the greater their progress in becoming like him, and the greater their growth and happiness.

Whether one is persuaded more by the forced obedience interpretation of what took place in the premortal Council in Heaven or the unconditional redemption interpretation, we can speak of these matters with sufficient care and precision as to avoid inaccuracy when teaching about agency. For example, when discussing the Council in Heaven, it is accurate to state that Lucifer’s proposal would have destroyed the agency of all mankind. Depending on the circumstance, one may further acknowledge that there are different versions of how his proposal would have functioned: either he was going to compel
righteousness or he was going to save all with regard neither to their works nor their desires. In either case the outcome would have been the destruction of moral agency and the overthrow of God and his plan of happiness for his children.

The unconditional redemption reading of Lucifer’s proposal holds greater explanatory power for why so many premortal spirits were persuaded by him and aligned themselves with his impossible attempt to supplant God. Furthermore, attention to this option is worthwhile because it demands a richer view of what moral agency fully is—the power and freedom not just to act but to become according to our wills. But until further authoritative clarification of the issue—that is, more revelation—becomes available, this point of ambivalence is open to further study. In either case, the good news of the gospel is that endless possibilities are enfolded within the single point where human agency meets the grace of God through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Notes

An excellent article by Kevin M. Bulloch on a similar theme as this essay was recently published in *Religious Educator* 11, no. 1. Each of us composed and submitted our work for publication unaware of the other. Taken together, the two articles bear witness to the significance of the points upon which they coincide even as each makes a unique contribution to a discussion of the subject.


2. For examples, see some of the quotes appearing later in this essay. A fairly late example of the use of the term *free agency* in official Church media is “Our Heavenly Father’s Plan,” a video produced in the mid-1980s to introduce the gospel message to people outside of the Church.


5. *For the Strength of Youth* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 4.


7. 2006 Outline for Sharing Time and the Children’s Sacrament Meeting Presentation: *I Will Trust in Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, Their Promises Are Sure* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 2.


13. I am aware that this summary of forced obedience does not address the question of whether there would even be a law to be obeyed or, indeed, any standard of righteousness to be met under Lucifer’s proposal. Such a question is certainly germane to an analysis of agency, and it will be addressed below. It does not enter in at this point, however, because the fact is simply that many people interpret Moses 4:3 as saying that Satan was somehow going to compel all people to be righteous—that is, to commit no sin but choose the right always—and the analysis stops there. It is assumed that there would be a standard of righteousness to be met for salvation, even under Lucifer’s proposal.

14. For the purposes of this paper, I regard as current any curriculum material available through the Church’s official website, www.lds.org.


20. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, drawing on the writings of President Joseph Fielding Smith, has also said that “under [Satan’s] plan, . . . we would have been mere robots or puppets in his hands.” “Free Agency and Freedom,” 3.

21. A dramatic demonstration of this is found in Joseph Smith’s revealed account of Moses’ confrontation with Satan in Moses 1:12–19: “And it came to pass that . . . Satan came tempting [Moses], saying: Moses, son of man, worship me. And it came to pass that Moses looked upon Satan and said: Who art thou? For behold, I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten; and where is thy glory, that I should worship thee? . . . Now, when Moses had said these words, Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded, saying: I am the Only Begotten, worship me.”

22. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 357; *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 209. Although it is possible to give a more historically precise transcription of the records from which the version quoted here is derived, this account is sufficiently accurate for purposes of this essay.

24. John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 53–54, as cited in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 51; emphasis added. The fuller quotation in the *Discourses* seems to indicate a view on Brigham Young’s part that Lucifer would have adopted even the name Jesus Christ—or at least an identity as “Savior of the world”—and would have saved murderers who did no more than claim to repent and confess him.


29. “Know Then That Ev’ry Soul Is Free,” *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter Day Saints, Selected by Emma Smith* (Kirtland, OH: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), no. 1, verses 1, 2, and 5; emphasis added. A version of this same hymn is found in the current hymnal of the Church: “Know This, That Every Soul is Free,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), no. 240. The text is by an anonymous poet, Boston, ca. 1805.
Egyptian culture used symbols in monuments, artwork, writing, and ceremony. Here Egyptian symbols are conveyed through art.
RE: Running a computer search of the scriptures for the word “Egypt” brings up an amazing number of hits, starting in the Torah and continuing all the way through the New Testament. Why does Egypt get so much recognition in the Bible?

Muhlestein: There are at least two major reasons. First, Egypt in many ways is the birthplace of Israel as a nation. Certainly the covenant was established with Abraham, but once we get to Joseph, the story moves to Egypt. If the Exodus is the birthplace of Israel as a nation, then Egypt is the womb. Much of Israelite culture was affected by Egypt. Unfortunately, we often look elsewhere to understand ancient Israelite culture. We know so much about Egyptian culture, but we often do not look there for understanding the culture of the ancient world.

Second, Egypt is Israel’s closest major neighbor. There are many small kingdoms around Israel, but Egypt is the superpower next door. For thousands of years they have had interactions that have shaped the political events and sometimes hardships in Israel.
RE: It appears that Egypt is almost always just under the surface of the story, particularly in the Old Testament period. You do not find as many explicit references as you do for Babylon or Assyria, but Egypt is always there.

Muhlestein: I agree, especially in the winding-up scenes of the kingdom of Israel and of Judah from Isaiah’s day through Jeremiah’s day. Egypt was continually mentioned in the prophecies because it was influencing what Israel and Judah were doing in regard to Assyria and Babylon, but those references are under the surface. You have to dig to see what is going on.

RE: Egypt had great stability and continuity, unlike the other superpowers that arose. Assyria rose and then disappeared in the wake of a new superpower. Egypt had more continuity, probably because it was isolated with deserts on both sides. How long is Egyptian history from the time we have records?

Muhlestein: Around 3,500 years from the time of Egyptian culture as we know it develops until the introduction of Islam—that is really the end of Egyptian culture. China is the only other place in the world that comes close to rivaling that kind of stability and cultural continuity. Geographically Egypt was protected, and agriculturally they were blessed with the most stable and regular agricultural system the world had ever had.

RE: It seems interesting that we have Moses in Egypt, Joseph in Egypt, Jeremiah in Egypt, and Jesus in Egypt. What do you make of that?

Muhlestein: Egypt in the Bible plays a dual role. It is both a place of protection and refuge and also a place of wickedness and oppression. Abraham went to Egypt partially because of its agricultural stability, when things were difficult in Canaan. Often when there was a famine, the people went to Egypt. The same thing occurred in Joseph’s day. He was sold into Egypt, but when his brothers experienced famine, they went to Egypt. Similarly when Jeroboam needed political refuge from Solomon, he fled to Egypt. Jeremiah was an unwilling refugee in Egypt. When Israel and Judah were being destroyed, groups fled to Egypt for refuge. And so it was a safe haven, yet it was also a place where Israel was oppressed. Egypt is a great symbol of bondage in biblical literature. In prophetic literature, Egypt symbolizes the powers of the world that will ultimately fail us.

RE: When many readers think of Egypt, they visualize the modern political map with Cairo as the epicenter. When we read the word “Egypt,” what should be our mental map?

Muhlestein: There are two different stories for Old and New Testament times. In the Old Testament, the political landscape of Egypt was largely what
we think of for modern Egypt, at least the geographic boundaries. For quite a while, there was a significant period of time when the southern portion—what they would call Kush or Nubia or Ethiopia—was considered part of Egypt. The Kushites or Nubians were the kings of Egypt. For instance, in the miraculous rescue of Hezekiah during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, the Egyptians, under the Kushites, played a role. Taharka, a general who later became the Pharaoh, led an army up into Israel, and that was in part how Judah found relief. There was a miracle involved, and the Egyptians might have been a part of that miracle. It is difficult to tell exactly what went on, but the Lord used this army to rescue Jerusalem. So at that time period, the Egyptians were being ruled from the south of Egypt, but the center for them in many ways was Memphis, which is not too far from modern-day Cairo. However, for most of the biblical time period, we focus on the northern delta area and places like Tanis.

When we get to the New Testament, it is a completely different story because Egypt had become a special province of Rome and was almost sacred, protected territory. It was just reaching that status at the time of the birth of the Savior because of the events between Antony and Cleopatra and so on; it had become a special place that the emperor protected and treated differently, and that is part of why it worked nicely as a refuge for Joseph and Mary because others were a little reluctant to go there.

RE: The Nile River is so important to Egypt. Tell us about population centers. Did it always control where people built?

Muhlestein: Everything about Egypt revolved around the Nile. In the Bible the Nile played a pivotal role in Moses’ story. It is also their major mode of transportation. When you think of the wheel, you think of Mesopotamia. The wheel was not nearly as important in Egypt, because of the river. Furthermore, the land in Egypt is arable because of the flooding of the Nile. When you get one step beyond the flood zone, it is desert, and very inhospitable except for a few oases. Largely, the arable land is just along the Nile, and so, if there was a significant population center, it was close to the Nile though typically just a little ways away, because you do not want it to be completely flooded every year. For instance, one significant time period in Egyptian history is what we call the Hyksos period, where a group of people from the Syrian/Canaan area came down and controlled Egypt. And this is very likely the setting for the Joseph story. We cannot know for sure but it works chronologically and explains a lot in Joseph’s story. Their center was a
town called Avaris, and it probably became a center because it was a large port on one of the great branches of the Delta—the first one you would come to as you came down from Israel in the Syria/Canaan area. It became a trading port. There were so many Canaanites that eventually they were able to take over the country. So the ability to have transportation on the Nile always affects politics and settlement in Egypt, and even interaction with Israelite history.

**RE:** Tell us historically about where you think Sinai was, where Moses went with the Midianites, and where Jesus’ family was when they brought him down to Egypt?

**Muhlestein:** I really do not think we know. You can look at all the possible Exodus routes through the Red Sea or the Reed Sea, a marshy plain. I can find pros and cons to both of these arguments as various possible settings for Mount Sinai. I have not found a single conclusive argument for the route of the Exodus. I have not found one set of arguments for where Mount Sinai is or where the Midianites were that I have found to be completely convincing. They all have problems, and yet many of them are very plausible. I think we just do not know. I think of the traditional site, St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, where many people will hike up and have spiritual experiences. It is as good a candidate as any. As I look at it, it helps me think of the wilderness the Israelites went through and how trying this experience must have been.

**RE:** What about the site where Joseph and Mary went?

**Muhlestein:** I have not done much with that. If you read all the accounts of what Jesus supposedly did as a child, he lived in about two hundred different places up and down the Nile and I think with those accounts, we have even less of an idea than anything about the Exodus because we really have no good evidence. All we know is that they went to Egypt and then they came back. The traditions that arise are late enough and disconnected enough from what someone possibly could have known that I think we are just making things up. However, I do not find it harmful to pick a place and try to picture that place. Again, if that makes the story of the Savior’s flight to Egypt more real to you, then that is wonderful. As long as our testimony is not tied to a geographic location, I do not have a problem with that. But I approach all these things with a great deal of skepticism.

**RE:** When many people think of the term “Holy Land,” they think of Israel or the West Bank, but if we think of the term as referring to a land made holy by the righteous men and women—prophets and prophetesses and priests—who walked the land, would you consider Egypt part of the Holy Land?
Muhlestein: Certainly. If we use that definition, some places are more holy than others. In my mind, Mount Sinai has to be one of the holiest places in all of world history. The events that took place there and the theophanies—the experiences with God—are as significant as any we will ever find. I wish we knew more about how Moses came to understand God and his role, because there are probably some wonderful places in Egypt proper, along the Nile Valley, that would be sacred places. I do not believe we can precisely date when the Exodus occurred, but there is a fairly good chance Tanis was the royal city at the time of Moses’ birth. So maybe Tanis is a fairly holy site. If Joseph ever stayed with his father, Jacob/Israel, who was a prophet, in Goshen, then that would be a place where two incredible prophets were at one time. If he was really with the Hyksos, then Avaris was a place where Joseph had a lot of spiritual experiences. So if you are going to give it that definition, I think Egypt certainly has some wonderful significant places, but the problem is, for most of those, that we do not know where they are in Egypt.

RE: So we have the Old Testament connections of Egypt. We have the New Testament connections of Egypt. Egypt seems to be playing a pivotal role. In the Restoration period, all of a sudden Joseph Smith in Kirtland comes across some documents that came from Egypt.

Muhlestein: And in some ways it attests to the importance of that earlier period. Apparently, there were writings of Abraham and Joseph in Egypt. We will get up to the Restoration, but let’s start earlier. Most likely, there are several possible scenarios for how those documents end up in Egypt, and I am in the middle of research on this right now. Even if it came earlier, most likely these writings proliferated when there were large Jewish settlements in Egypt. From the time of Jeremiah on, Egypt increasingly became a place of the Diaspora (the scattering of Israel). There were serious significant Jewish settlements. There were Jewish synagogues all throughout Egypt, and they built a couple of temples there. They were the third-largest ethnic group in Egypt. The Egyptians were first, the Hellenes or Greeks were second, and the Jews were third. They had a significant presence in Egypt, and they kept not only what we have as the biblical books of the prophets but other books including the Book of Abraham and the Book of Joseph. Then the turn of world events just before the Restoration opened up Egypt, and for a short while there was an incredible flow of texts and monuments and other goods from Egypt. Then, although it is still trickling today, the incredible flow of artifacts stopped. It was a short window that opened right when the Restoration was
in need of more doctrinal clarification and revelation from the Lord. And it was during that short window that these artifacts came out and were there with the mummies that some of the first bits of Egyptian documents made their way to Joseph Smith. And I do not think it is a coincidence that they ended up in Joseph Smith’s hand just as the Church needed clarification on things like the Abrahamic covenant. It seems to me that the Lord moved spiritual treasures that Egypt had hidden from time, and they were brought to the Church right when it needed them. The Church already had a fascination with Egyptian things because the Book of Mormon was written in reformed Egyptian. America as a whole, the world as a whole, was interested in Egypt at this time period. So the Saints are not different in that way, but I think they had an added element in that they saw these religious ties coming through the reformed Egyptian, or at least a book written in Egyptian script. And then a few years later they found these papyri from Egypt, and they have the Book of Abraham, as well as the facsimiles. The facsimiles always fascinate students. They are the only canonized pictures that we have. I think they created in the early Church, and even today, an intense interest in Egypt.

We find the Lord moving on a large scale to create things that his kingdom needs at a given time, and Egypt has been a part of that more than once. We have talked about how that happened during the Restoration. I think it happened earlier in the history of Israel as well. That land, what we refer to as a “Holy Land,” was almost always controlled by one large power or another. If it was not the Egyptians, it was the Hittites or eventually the Assyrians and so on. There is only a short period of time where it is not controlled by someone else. For instance, when a group we call the Sea People came in and eclipsed these empires and caused all sorts of problems. There may have been some other catastrophic events going on, but all of these superpowers withdrew into their own areas for a short time, and a power vacuum was created during the period of the judges. This is exactly when, as a kingdom, Israel was able to flourish: when Egypt was no longer controlling that area, and neither were the Hittites, Assyria, nor the Mitanni. They were all gone and Israel flourished as a kingdom, but only for short period of time. As Egypt and Assyria became powerful again, they both started to squish Israel and eventually eclipsed Israel, and Israel disappeared as a nation again. But Israel had been brought out of Egypt during a short time when the Lord, in one way or another, moved things about so that they could become the kingdom that they needed to become. When Israel ceased to be righteous and rejected his repeated calls
for repentance, events did not continue to turn in their favor, and they disappo-
peared under these amazing powers that were around them.

**RE:** People have talked about Egypt as a symbol. When they think of the
courts of Egypt, they think of licentiousness, evil, wickedness. Why did Egypt get
that reputation? All the other nations were very similar in the political, economic,
and social way that they saw the world. I really cannot imagine that Egypt would
be that different from all the others. Why does Egypt have that imagery?

**Muhlestein:** I think it is because of the way it is used in the scriptures.
If we were to look at what we know to be their culture, Egypt is probably a
step above their surrounding neighbors. They were certainly brutal in warfare,
engaged in all sorts of slave trade. Contrary to what has been popular opinion,
we have been able to demonstrate very clearly that they engaged in human
sacrifice on occasion and in certain rituals. Yet, even with these practices, they
did not have the reputation that the Assyrian army had for ferociousness
and brutality. I think the Old Testament prophets, because of the political
role Egypt and Babylon play and the historical interactions they had with
Israel, used them as symbols of bondage and sin. And it makes perfect sense
considering Israel’s relationship with them. That is where they were: in bond-
age—and terrible bondage. Probably one of the reasons that Egypt has this
reputation is the horrible decree that “we will kill all the male children.” That
is as bad as it gets. So they have come to symbolize this bondage. Some of
this symbolic journey is Israel journeying to their promised land, making the
covenant on the way and turning their back on bondage. Symbolically, that
has come to represent turning your back on sin and licentiousness, as you
said. It would be the same thing with Babylon later: leave Babylon and turn
your back on licentiousness, as they came from Babylon back to the Holy
Land. These two countries have that reputation. The other way Egypt got the
reputation is from political circumstances that we talked about when Assyria,
and then Babylon, moved into Israel or had already controlled Israel, but their
presence wasn’t as strong. When this happened, Israel wanted to rebel, and
often they were encouraged by Egypt, which was competing with these super-
powers, and Israel was caught in between. But the Lord tells them, do not do
this; rely on me and my power. If they rely on Egypt instead, Egypt becomes
the prototypical symbol of relying on the power of man rather than the power
of God and will be called the broken reed and those kinds of things. Because
of those historical events, Egypt became a good symbol for sin, bondage, and
all sorts of terrible oppressive things.
**RE:** Ultimately, if you look at the Old Testament period and then the New Testament period and the Restoration, why is it important for us to know about Egypt in order to appreciate the Old and New Testament and Restoration periods?

**Muhlestein:** There are several reasons, but let me mention at least two. One is, as I mentioned earlier, I think we underestimate how much we can understand culturally about Israel by understanding Egyptian culture. As an example, the Israelites started building the Tabernacle very soon after leaving Egypt, and they were not a group of people who did not know how to build and then randomly started to build. The Lord chooses skilled artisans. How did they become skilled artisans? They were taught by the Egyptians how to build things. For example, the Ark of the Covenant—an ark that is carried around on staves built by their best craftsmen—is similar to things they had in Egypt. They had holy items that were supposed to symbolize the presence of the gods, and they would carry those things around on staves from one temple to another. People then could come and see the power of the gods there. Most likely, the artisans that built the Ark of the Covenant had built those items in Egypt, and while it was very different theologically, we can get a glimpse of how they would have looked. We have depictions of these Egyptian items, and we can get a good idea of them. It is the same with movable structures like the Tabernacle. They were building those structures in Egypt. Most likely, and we are talking about material culture here, they learned how to build this kind of building in Egypt, and the Tabernacle would have looked similar to the Egyptian structures.

Besides material culture, I think it would have influenced the way the Israelites would write and present information. For instance, from studying accounts of theophanies or of prophets seeing God—and anytime someone sees God—I think it is an experience so beyond what everyone else has seen that there are no words to describe it; you cannot describe it. The authors struggle with images and words to try and explain to an audience an experience that they will never be able to understand because they have not had it. Even given the wonderful realities that the author saw, they are going to turn to their culture to try and figure out how to explain it. If you study the Genesis accounts, the things that are pre-Egyptian experiences are more similar to the way the Mesopotamians will describe coming into the presence of a god. But after the Exodus, those accounts are more similar to the way the Egyptians describe how they see God. Now I am not suggesting that the way
God looks changes, but I think their cultural library, the way they were used to explaining things and writing things, was significantly changed in Egypt. And they brought from Egypt a literary and architectural culture and a million other things that influenced the way they wrote, the way they thought, and the way they built. I think we can understand those types of elements better if we understand Egyptian culture.

Second, if we are going to really understand the Bible, some of these historical events that we have already mentioned are important. I do not think we will really understand the prophecies of Egypt like “Are you going to rely on a broken reed like Egypt” unless we understand that at that time period, Egypt was having one dynasty take over another. Their armies were largely mercenary, so the army would make a promise to support them, and then Egypt would experience a dynastic change and the army would not honor the agreement. Or they were coming up to battle, and when the mercenaries saw the overwhelming numbers, they would leave because they did not have loyalty to anyone. So there are a few times when Egypt attempted to go help Israel and were not able to help, and that is why the Lord refers to them as a broken reed. It is also why he said, “Why would you rely on the strength of man, rather than on the strength of God?” If we are going to understand Josiah being killed by the Egyptians, and why Jehoiakim is put on the throne by the Egyptians instead of his brother, and why Babylon is coming down—or as they referred to it earlier, “the miraculous rescue of Jerusalem”—we have to understand how Egypt played a historical role. The more we understand what was going on historically, the better we will understand the subtext of the Bible. I think one can understand the major messages even without knowing the history of Egypt, but nuances will come when one is more familiar with the historical setting. Things that might not have been thought of before will be opened to the mind and give more tools that the Lord can work with as he tries to enlighten the student.

RE: Could you suggest two sources for a person who simply wants to know a little bit more about Egypt so that when they read the Old Testament, they can understand more?

Muhlestein: I will give you some sources on various levels. If you want to know just the basic history of Egypt in a very readable, interesting, and entertaining format, there is a great book by Erik Hornung, History of Ancient Egypt: An Introduction. Something that I think is of interest, and in particular to Latter-day Saints, that will help them understand a lot of these historical
events having to do with the fall of Israel and Jerusalem that we have just been talking about is called *Glimpses into Lehi’s Jerusalem*. It has several articles that talk about these things that will help people understand the nuances. If you really are interested in this kind of thing, and this would go beyond just Egypt, a really good book that is long and well-written with a lot of scholarship in it is by Kenneth Kitchen, called *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. He brings in all these Egyptian texts and Mesopotamian and Hittite and Moabite texts to help us understand how various things tie in to Israel. There is also a fun book by James Hoffmeier called *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* that I think is a really interesting one about the Joseph and Exodus stories. He is an Egyptologist and a good Biblical scholar and a good friend of mine. He does a great job.

**RE:** You talked about how if we understand Egyptian history and culture, it can help us elucidate what is going on because the artisans came from Egypt. Some people struggle with this, about influence, and how if a temple was organized in Mesopotamia, it can tell us what a temple looked like in Israel. They want the revelation to come in a vacuum. They think that there was no outside influence, that it came straight from heaven. Though it is so different from anything anyone has ever seen or heard before, we now know that virtually from the Old Testament to the New Testament period, these cultures influenced each other. This is not a modern understanding; we built our first temple in Kirtland and brought Artemus Millet down to help with the stonework. Well, he brought down his own skills, tools that he was using before there was ever a temple. He had an idea about how to do it. He brought these pattern books. Now obviously the Lord had inspired the command to build it and the Lord inspired some unique aspects of it, but nevertheless, he was using the same saw that would build a Baptist church. He was using the same nails that would build a congregational church or a city hall. How do you help people realize that we are not saying that they simply borrowed, but that what we have in the Bible is not simply a borrowing, but inputs? How do you draw that line?

**Muhlestein:** I think it is a great question. I have people ask this often. I use the example that you just used and two other examples from modern Church history. So, besides what you mentioned, we know that Brigham Young sent people out to study architecture of the world before he built the Salt Lake Temple. He wanted them to be familiar with architectural elements that were already being used, and when they came back he had some definite ideas about how the Salt Lake Temple should be built. There were
clearly inspired things that were different from any other building, and yet they have architectural elements from what these men had studied. Another example is one that Elder Perry mentioned in the October 2009 conference about the Manti temple. There were a bunch of Norwegian ship builders who were called to build the temple. They knew how to build ships, so the roof is basically an upside-down ship. It is a wonderful, unique temple, but they used the skills they had acquired doing something else and combined it with the inspiration of the Lord to build what God wanted built. And that seems to me to be very similar to what we probably see happening with the Israelites. They learned how to build, and then the Lord gave them directions on what he wanted the structure to look like. They knew how to do it because they had this experience in Egypt. My guess would be that the Lord put people in Egypt, in positions, to learn these crafts. Even when the Lord wants something built in a particular way, there are always going to be decisions you have to make on your own. I believe those decisions are going to be influenced by the experiences that you have already had. That is the kind of influence that I suspect we see as we have these wonderful artisans building something magnificent like the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle.

RE: Why do people have a problem understanding this influence in Old Testament times? Why do Latter-day Saints struggle with the idea that there might be some similarities?

Muhlestein: I am not sure I can answer that. I have never quite understood why we struggle with it. I think it might be partially because we want everything to be so directly from God that man could not influence it at all. This is even something Joseph Smith struggled with, trying to help people understand, “Yes, I am receiving revelation from God, but I am also a man, and these two things are going to combine in what we are doing.” That is the nature of life. We get inspiration and information from God, and we have to make it work in the way we are capable of making it work. For some reason, we do not like to see that in these grand stories of the Old Testament. Maybe that is part of the reason. They are grand and moving and almost epic. There really are epic stories in the Old Testament, and we may hate to see them sullied by something like a person’s experience, but I think for me it brings them to life. I understand that someone in the Old Testament was going through, in many ways, the same kind of struggles I am, and that the Lord was asking them to work in the same kind of way I am working. Then I will see someone like Gideon, who has his doubts, and his weaknesses, and yet the Lord works
with him and brings about amazing miracles. It makes me think maybe he
could do something with me as well. So for me it is a comfort to see that the
Lord worked with them using what they had, and they were able to bring
about marvelous things.

RE: If you only had one shot to come into a Gospel Doctrine class studying
the Old Testament and teach them one thing about Egypt, what would you say?

Muhlestein: One thing to know about Egypt that has helped me the
most in studying to understand the Bible is that the culture of Egypt was very
similar to Israelite culture in the way that they both looked to and used sym-
bols. And with Egypt, we have enough textual material and enough history
to understand something of the way they used symbols in monuments, in
artwork, in writing, and symbolic action as well. That information can come
into a mindset of looking for and understanding symbols. That is important
because the world of the Old Testament is saturated with symbols. Symbolic
action is one of the major messages in the Old Testament and one of the major
tools that prophets used to teach in the Old Testament. Yet, in our culture, we
have divorced ourselves from that kind of symbol so much that we just think,
“What a weird thing for Isaiah to do,” or “Why would the Lord have Ezekiel
do that with his hair?” or “Why would he have Jeremiah do that with his
swaddling cloth?” The Lord had these prophets teach through symbols both
by word of mouth and by action, and we struggle with symbols. I think that is
the number one difficulty people have in understanding Isaiah: understand-
ing the symbols he uses. And the more familiar we become with the world of
symbols, the more we will be able to extract those precious morsels from the
Old Testament. And Egypt is one of the cultures that can most easily help us
to learn to traverse the world of symbols.

My academic and career courses changed a little bit from my original
intent, I think in a good way, where I work a lot with the Book of Abraham.
My original intent, and something I still feel passionate about and one day
will get back to, is understanding the Exodus better. In my mind, the Exodus
is probably the greatest story in the Old Testament, and—besides the life of
Christ, and perhaps the story of the Restoration—one of the greatest stories
ever! So much of New Testament and Old Testament and Restoration imag-
ery hinges on the Exodus. To me, understanding the Exodus is one of the
most important things we can ever do if we are going to understand what
and how the Lord teaches us in the rest of the scriptures. So I think we can
understand the Exodus story better by understanding Egypt; and particularly,
when I can understand not only the large, moving, sweeping stories but how individuals play their parts in those stories, it helps me find meaning in my life and fit myself into what I think is a majestic, sweeping story we are in the middle of right now. I can identify more with Joseph and Moses, two of the greatest prophets in the history of the world, when I understand a little bit more about their lives, what they would have been doing, how they would have been living, and the kinds of things they would have had to overcome. That helps me understand the larger picture better and helps me understand how I fit into it better. As one example, I used to teach Old Testament even before I went into my doctorate program in Egyptology, so I was teaching here [at BYU] part time. People would ask, “So Joseph is in prison, and he is managing the prison and it is prospering; how does a prison prosper?” And I would say, “I do not know, maybe it means that everyone got their food on time?” Once I started to study a little bit on slavery in Egypt and so on, I came to realize that prisons were often mines. Prisoners were sent to a mine to work. Now that might have been something different for Joseph, but they were not just a place where you sit behind bars. If you were going to be punished by the Egyptians, they were going to get something out of you. Some of these mines were terrible experiences, often out in the Sinai or something like that. So, whether it was a mine or not, when I try to understand Joseph, I picture Joseph working in this terrible mine, and yet making this place work and making it prosper. And when it becomes that real to me, I can then identify with it more and apply it to my life a little bit more and suddenly that moving picture of Joseph saving all of Israel becomes more meaningful to me. Or the little things that Moses had to overcome and how that fits into the sweeping, wonderful story of the Exodus, becomes more real to me and I can feel more a part of their story and our story because of it.

RE: Did the Israelites build the pyramids?

Muhlestein: They were too late for that.

RE: Why, then, do you think it is a cultural thing associated with the Israelites?

Muhlestein: It is because they are the buildings that everyone is familiar with, and we know that they were built, at least partially, by slave power—although probably not as much as you would think. The pyramids are the buildings that everyone knows, and they were built by people who probably did not really want to be spending all their lives building those buildings, so we think of the Israelites. Even more fun is the reality. We can find, from
roughly the same time period as the Israelites, mud-brick structures of all kinds—palaces, walls, and so forth. For me it is even more exciting to be able to see the kind of things the Israelites very well may have built in some of these cities up in the Delta.

**RE:** I think we often think of modern Egypt as a place for tourism. What is the best way to get beyond the tourist Egypt as I read the Old Testament?

**Muhlestein:** That is difficult, and one of the greatest struggles my discipline has right now is what we call settlement archaeology as opposed to monumental archaeology. Settlement archaeology is more difficult because it did not survive as well for three reasons. First, they were building it out of brick instead of stone. Second, they were living closer to the water, and the water makes it so that things do not last as long. Finally, people still live in the places that were good to settle in, and for some reason they do not like for you to dig up their houses to see what is underneath. So it is difficult to get past that as a tourist or even as someone who looks at *National Geographic* specials or coffee-table books. However, in some ways, Egypt is still our best way to picture what everyday life was like for the Israelites, because if you can get away from the places where there are thousands of tourists on buses, sometimes even as you drive out to someplace like Saqqara, where the step pyramid is, you will go past the green fields where there are still people that are housing their donkeys in things they have built out of mud and straw with palm fronds for the roof. They are out there with their donkeys plowing the ground with a wooden harrow, and it cannot be too different from what it was like when Israel was in Egypt, and what it was like when Israel was in Israel. And those are the ways that we can see what life would have been like for our Israelite ancestors.

**RE:** So what is in the future for Egyptian studies for Latter-day Saints? What new areas are Latter-day Saint Egyptologists exploring? What are we expecting in the next five years?

**Muhlestein:** There is the continuing work on the excavation that I am part of and that Wilfred Griggs leads, and I think we are coming more and more to understand the advent of Christianity in Egypt, which I think is an important thing to understand. We are coming up with better data all the time, so I think we can understand Christianity in Egypt better. Egypt is an understudied yet important part of early Christian history. Egypt was a major player in early Christianity and kind of lost prestige to some degree. Also we have a pyramid on our site, so we are doing some really exciting work with that
Egypt in the Bible

pyramid that really is going to help us understand all the pyramids in general. By the time we are done with our studies of this pyramid, which is one of the earliest true pyramids, maybe even the first true pyramid ever, the publication and research will have to deal with other pyramids. It will be a monumental and groundbreaking work on pyramid studies, and people will not be able to write about pyramids without referring to it in the future, I believe. So those are a couple of the important things. The other branch of studies are helping us understand a little bit about Abraham in Egypt, about Joseph in Egypt, and the Book of Abraham in general. I think we are coming to understand better what Abraham may have done while he was in Egypt, what he and others were thinking about when they were teaching astronomy in Egypt, and how the writings of Abraham could have ended up in Egypt, in addition to what influence that may have had on the advent of Christianity. It is funny that in my two different studies I have been studying Egyptology in the Book of Abraham, and I have been studying the advent of Christianity in Egypt through our excavation. Recently, at a conference I presented at in Moscow, I began seeing these two areas of study come together and realizing that they are tied together. The history of the Book of Abraham is actually tied with Christians in Al Fayyum where we excavate, I think, in some interesting ways. And so I think we are going to find these things coming together so that we will have a better understanding of the Joseph Smith papyri and the history of those papyri, both ancient and modern. Another project we are working on is understanding the modern history of those papyri. We have some really big things going on with that and how all of that ties together with Abraham, thousands of years before. So it is one long, wonderful story, with lots of interesting twists, and we are finding a few twists as we go along.
Throughout the San Diego temple there are numerous patterns of overlapping squares that look like an eight-pointed star. Do these represent the “seal of Melchizedek,” or are they just an architectural detail?
Symbolism is the language of scripture and ritual. To be unversed in symbolism is to be scripturally and ritually illiterate. As one text notes, “Symbols are the language in which all gospel covenants and all ordinances of salvation have been revealed. From the time we are immersed in the waters of baptism to the time we kneel at the altar of the temple . . . in the ordinance of eternal marriage, every covenant we make will be written in the language of symbolism.”¹ While Latter-day Saints accept and utilize a number of symbols common to other religious traditions, we also have our own unique set of symbols foreign to most other faiths.²

In recent years Mormonism appears to have adopted a new symbol, one quickly growing in popularity. It is commonly referred to as the seal of Melchizedek and consists of two interlocked (or overlapping) squares, making what appears to be an eight-pointed star. This design, according to a growing number of Latter-day Saints, is the ancient symbol of the Melchizedek Priesthood³ and the act of making one’s “calling and election sure.”⁴ Its growing popularity among Church members is evidenced not only by its placement in or on a number of LDS temples³ but also by its presence in the Mormon
market, where one can readily purchase necklaces, tie tacks, or cufflinks sporting this newly adopted symbol.

The Development of the Lore

So how has this symbol made such inroads among Latter-day Saints? The story is a rather interesting one filled with both fact and fiction. The initial introduction of the seal of Melchizedek into LDS symbology came in 1992 with the release of Hugh Nibley’s book *Temple and Cosmos*. In the chapter entitled “Sacred Vestments” the following picture and caption (written by illustrator Michael Lyon) appear:
While the caption under this picture says much about the primary theme of the mural being depicted, the sentence that has caught the attention of so many Saints—almost to the exclusion of everything else stated in the caption or the text—is this: “The white altar cloth is decorated with . . . the so-called ‘seal of Melchizedek,’ two interlocked squares.” From this simple sentence has developed a symbol and a legend much bigger than anyone could have imagined when the line was initially penned by Michael Lyon, the illustrator of Temple and Cosmos.

According to the commonly repeated story, the architect of the San Diego California Temple, William S. Lewis Jr., was inspired to place the overlapping squares design throughout the temple without knowing what the symbol meant. Sometime after the temple was constructed, it was brought to his attention that the design was actually the “seal of Melchizedek” and that it was an ancient symbol for the Melchizedek Priesthood, thus showing that he had actually unknowingly been inspired in his architectural design.

One website dedicated to the discussion of Latter-day Saint temples tells the story as follows:

As we stood there looking at the temple, Brother Williams—or Williamson, the missionary, told us that he heard an interesting story about the symbol that appears all over the temple. He said the architect, who is a current temple sealer, gave a fireside not too long ago. He said that the symbol that appears all over the temple in the stone, the glass, even the fence surrounding the temple, was just an architectural design. He said he thought it would be nice to have a recurring design that ties the temple together. He worked on the simple design, for about six months, toying with different designs. He finally decided on the design, two interlocking squares turned 45 degrees from each other—sometimes containing a circle in the center, sometimes not. He put it in almost every stone wall, every glass window, and even the ornamental iron fence around the temple grounds. . . . I think the missionary said that someone (I don’t know if it was a general authority or someone else from
SLC) asked the architect at the temple open house where he got the design and what it means. The architect said that it was just an architectural design and didn’t mean anything. The person said something like, “Oh I think there is more to it than that.” The person came back to SLC, and some time later the word came back that the design was known as the seal of Melchizedek. I asked the missionary who it was in SLC that told them it was the seal of Melchizedek. He said it was Hugh Nibley. He said the architect said that if it is the seal of Melchizedek it would have saved him a lot of time if the Lord had just revealed it to him instead of the tinkering that he did to come up with it.9

According to some versions of this popular story, the architect “saw the symbol in a dream” and for that reason placed it throughout the temple.10 Others have said that President Gordon B. Hinckley asked Hugh Nibley to confirm that this symbol was indeed the seal of Melchizedek, an ancient token of the Melchizedek Priesthood.11 One member of the Church is reported as saying Hugh Nibley told him “something like, ‘Oh sure, it is the seal of King Melchizedek. . . . It was a symbol of Melchizedek’s power, kingdom, and . . . a type of name of Melchizedek, like a seal in wax.”12

It is certainly not the purpose of this paper to call into question what various individuals say Dr. Nibley told them. There have been others who have reported conversations with Nibley on the subject wherein he said the opposite of what he apparently told the aforementioned individuals. For example, Robert J. Matthews, former dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University and a colleague of Professor Nibley, asked him about this symbol and received a very different response than those represented above. Dr. Matthews indicated that Nibley “had little information about it as far as sources, other than the mural.” Nibley thought the parallels between the San Diego temple and the mural were “simply coincidental.”13 Another close associate of Nibley’s, Michael Lyon (who has illustrated a number of Nibley’s books), said, “Nibley was aware of [the eight-pointed star or interlocking square design], and his general sense of the design was this: ‘It is a very interesting thing. But don’t get too excited about it.’”14 Thus some who knew Nibley well relate a much different story about the symbol than others who inquired of him regarding it.

Of course, it is possible that Professor Nibley was not consistent in what he said or that he was misunderstood. Indeed, this—rather than dishonesty on the part of those who have reported conversations with Nibley—likely explains the strong contradiction between the various reports of his interpretation of the symbol. After all, Nibley himself stated, “As knowledge increases,
the verdict of yesterday must be reversed today.” In other words, the more I know, the more I am compelled to change my mind. Hence his classic statement: “I refuse to be held responsible for anything I wrote more than three years ago.” Nibley was not ashamed of the fact that his views changed over time. He saw it as evidence that he was learning. Of course, we cannot say dogmatically that Nibley changed his mind on this matter; though if we take the word of those who spoke with him about it, it seems the logical conclusion. What does seem evident is that, because of the inconsistency in his comments—and the lack of any written or public statement on this issue by Nibley—placing much credence in the varying and contradictory reports of his views on this matter is probably unwise. If we are to unravel the meaning of this symbol, we simply need to look beyond these reported comments for and against a connection to Melchizedek.

As to the design having been revealed in a dream, Lewis (the architect) has indicated that this did not happen. He noted that he and his architectural associates were working hard to find a common symbol, module, or pattern to give continuity to the design, or to give a certain character to the temple. They started with a square, but they thought that was too plain and boxy. Then they started chamfering the square’s corners which brought it to an 8-sided figure. When they extended the lines it became two overlapping squares. They thought that worked well and so they started using it more and more in the design of the temple. He said the more they used it the better and better it worked. Some people asked about the symbolism of the design, and he told them he didn’t know if it had any particular symbolism.

On another occasion Lewis reported, “The Lord didn’t show me anything. . . . In designing the temple the Lord expected us to do everything we could to get it right. . . . I spent a lot of time in fasting and prayer. . . . all through the project, simply to make sure I was getting it right. And then after you’ve done all you can do. . . . I think the Lord begins to respond if you’re getting in trouble.” Lewis also pointed out that “when the design was shown to the General Authorities in Salt Lake, . . . they didn’t say anything about the interlocking squares symbol.” Thus there is no evidence that any of the presiding Brethren knew it to be a symbol of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Indeed, according to Bryce Haymond, “Once the temple was finished, Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles escorted the media through the temple. . . . Someone from the media asked him what the symbol was and what it represented, and Elder Haight. . . . said that it was probably just an architectural detail.”
The Origin of the Term

One fact consistently overlooked by those who circulate the story of the seal of Melchizedek is that Nibley was not the original source for that phrase. While the comment appears in his book Temple and Cosmos, the author of the caption (to which the legend can be traced) was Michael Lyon, the book’s illustrator.22 Lyon thought he had once seen the design in a book on Catholic symbolism, but he doubted the legitimacy of the name or title. In Temple and Cosmos, he used the term “so-called” to suggest caution about putting too much stock in the name or the seal’s connection with Melchizedek.23 I asked Lyon if Nibley approved his caption and the use of the phrase “seal of Melchizedek” under illustration 25 in Temple and Cosmos. Lyon told me:

Over the years of submitting illustrations and captions for his approval, Bro. Nibley varied in his level of interest. Sometimes he read every caption, rarely making changes and at other times he said he didn’t want to be bothered. . . . For Temple and Cosmos I remember him telling me to go ahead and write the captions and he would look through them. I left them with him and later picked them up hoping for some editorial changes but there weren’t any. . . . I remember Sis. Nibley . . . thanking me for making the captions sound as much like his writing as we . . . could manage.24

Thus it seems likely that Nibley never actually examined or approved the caption, though he likely had been introduced to the mistaken connection between the symbol and Melchizedek through Lyon’s innocent passing remark.

So what can we conclude thus far? There are a number of intriguing stories regarding why the architect of the San Diego temple placed the design (now commonly known as the “seal of Melchizedek”) in and on the temple. Some of these stories misrepresent what Lewis himself has indicated actually happened. There are also conflicting stories as to what Dr. Nibley is said to have told various people when asked about this design. As previously noted, we know that Nibley never wrote the phrase “seal of Melchizedek” in any of his books or articles, including Temple and Cosmos. And we know that Michael Lyon was the source for the now-in-vogue phrase, though he personally doubts its legitimacy.25 With that said, if we set aside the caption to figure 25 in Nibley’s book and the accompanying stories that have become so popular, what, if anything, can we establish about the actual meaning of the symbol from historical and scholarly sources?
Associations with Melchizedek

There is nothing in the mural that connects the symbol with the man Melchizedek. Indeed, if this figure was a standard ancient symbol for Melchizedek, or his priesthood, one would expect this emblem to appear with frequency in the imagery and art of Judaism or Christianity or both. Yet the design is basically absent in traditional Jewish iconography, architecture, and symbology. While it appears occasionally in Christian art (mostly Byzantine), it would be unfair to say that it is a common Christian symbol. And where it does appear in Christianity, definitions of its symbolic meaning are inconsistent, though we can state dogmatically that they never have anything to do with Melchizedek or the Melchizedek Priesthood.26

One source, which has done much to add to the popularity of the “seal of Melchizedek” among Latter-day Saints, noted that “so far we have been unable to find any non-LDS scholars who have referred to this symbol as the ‘seal of Melchizedek’.”27 Nor will they, because there is nothing ancient or scholarly to support such a connection. The only academic source that ever associates this design with Melchizedek is Lyon’s passing comment, and even he in no way suggests that the design represents the priesthood or the temple, as a sizable number of Latter-day Saints claim. One might argue that Nibley is a second academic witness to this interpretation. However, as we have noted, his inconsistent and apparently contradictory private comments on the matter require us to place limited emphasis on these claims.

What is more significant is that, if one examines the San Vitale version of this mural28 and the other murals found in that same church in Ravenna, this symbol is found nowhere on the clothing of Melchizedek. The so-called seal appears elsewhere, on the clothes of at least two people—namely, a woman (who has the symbol on her cloak) standing immediately to the right of Theodora in her entourage and a man (who has what appears to be this same emblem on his shoulder) standing immediately to the left of Justinian in his procession.29 If this symbol represented the man Melchizedek, it would not make sense to place it on the clothes of other individuals depicted in the church’s murals but not on Melchizedek himself. And if the design represents the Melchizedek Priesthood, it makes no sense that it does not appear on Melchizedek’s clothes but does appear on the clothing of a woman.

Having established that there is nothing in scholarly or ancient sources to support the interpretation that this symbol represents Melchizedek or his priesthood, we must look at what else it might possibly represent. There are
five potential symbols in this design: (1) the gamma or right angle, (2) the square, (3) the number eight, (4) stars, and (5) the eight-pointed star. We will look at each of these respectively.

The Gamma

There is reason to question the claim that the design found on the altar cloth is indeed an eight-pointed star in the form of two interlocked squares. Note that the focus of the portion of the chapter (of Nibley’s book) in which the design appears is the ancient use (on liturgical clothing and items) of the square or right angle (also occasionally referred to as an upside-down gamma). Lyon’s illustration,30 copied from one of the original Ravenna murals, has some fourteen squares, right angles, or gammas clearly depicted in it. The illustration was included in the book specifically to highlight the use of that symbol (i.e., the right angle), as do illustrations 23, 24, 26b, 27a, b, and e, and 28 of that same chapter. There is no discussion in that chapter, or anywhere else in Nibley’s book, regarding the design, nor is it the subject of illustration 25. Knowing that the symbol being illustrated is the right angle, it is possible that the pattern commonly interpreted as two interlocked squares or an eight-pointed star may actually instead be eight right angles arranged in a circular pattern.31 It is thus possible that the design on the altar cloth may only be an attempt by the mural’s artist to increase the number of gammas or right angles in the scene.

On a related note, Michael Lyon has suggested that the design, rather than being a star, may actually be nothing more than a rosette that “enhances [the] architectural design.” He noted that the “geometric shape . . . is easier to put . . . onto a wall or stone frieze” than is a flower.32 If that is the case, then another fascinating connection can be made. It has been suggested that
rosette designs may carry the same symbolic meaning as a series of gammas in a circle, as lexicographers note “the great variety of forms in which the mark [of the square] could appear.” Curiously, a recently discovered Egyptian undergarment dating from the Greco-Roman period has “small rosettes . . . woven into the material in particular locations. There is one rosette over each breast and one on the right leg near the knee, but there is no corresponding rosette on the left leg. Across the lower abdomen, the material also has a hemmed slit about six inches long.” Thus the design in the middle in the San Vitale mural, which has come to be known as the “seal of Melchizedek,” may instead be a rosette design made of gammas or right angles, specifically tying the design into the fourteen other gammas prominently displayed on the altar cloth. Hence, while we have no historic connection of the gamma with Melchizedek, its symbolic meaning has numerous connections with Christ.

The Square

Because a variety of meanings can be found associated with the square (or box shape) as a symbol, it is rather difficult to speak dogmatically about. In some cases it is juxtaposed with the circle (a symbol for the heavenly or the eternal), and therefore the square sometimes represents the mortal, the fallen, the earthly, or that which is limited. None of these connotations seem applicable to the message of the Ravenna mural. On the other hand, one commentator noted that squares “in Christian tradition . . . symbolize a firm foundation.” They can also symbolize honesty, perfection, dependability, integrity, morality, protection, and unchangingness, all attributes of Christ. One Latter-day Saint text notes that “interlaced squares signify man’s regeneration,” suggesting Christ’s gift of resurrection. Elsewhere it is stated that the square can symbolize “the fixation of death as opposed to the dynamic circle of life and movement.” In this regard it also has connections with Christ, who died that we might live. Thus the square can quite logically be seen as a Christocentric symbol.

The Number Eight

The number eight is a very developed symbol in ancient and modern Christianity. It is traditionally associated with the concepts of resurrection, new beginnings, rebirth, renewal, and baptism. Because of its association with these aforementioned ideas, it is sometimes also seen as the number of Christ. Indeed, one text notes, “Eight is the dominical number, for everywhere
it has to do with the Lord. It is the number of His name, ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, Jesus,” which totals 888 in Greek gematria.\(^4\) This same source indicates that “other Dominical Names of Jesus are also marked by gematria and stamped with the number eight as a factor”—titles such as Christ, Lord, Savior, Emmanuel, or Messiah.\(^4\) In reference to the symbolism of eight in the Resurrection, one author wrote, “Christ rose from the dead on ‘the first day of the week,’ that was of necessity the eighth day.”\(^4\) Additionally, for all of those born in the covenant, baptism is to be performed at the age of eight (D&C 68:27). The intricately connected symbols of baptism, new beginnings, resurrection, Christ, and the number eight are natural and appropriate. In each case, Christ is the source.

In antiquity, baptismal fonts were commonly eight sided to represent new beginnings, rebirth, renewal, resurrection, and Christ. Of this fact, one source notes, “The octagon draws on the symbolism of the number eight, emblematic of renewal. Eight-sided forms were felt to mediate between the symbolism of the square, representing earthly existence, and the circle (standing for heaven or eternity).”\(^4\) Of course, Christ is the great mediator between heaven and earth—between man and God. Thus the number eight is best seen as a symbol of Jesus and that which he has done for those who seek to follow him.\(^4\)

The Star

Anciently, stars were common symbols for angels.\(^4\) Indeed, this is exactly how John the Revelator, Abraham, and Isaiah use the word *star* (see Revelation 1:20, 9:1, 22:16; Abraham 3:17–18; Isaiah 14:12–13; see also Numbers 24:17)—and quite possibly how Matthew intended the word to be understood in his gospel (see Matthew 2:2–10).\(^4\) In the book of Revelation and in the Pearl of Great Price, Jesus is symbolized by a star. Harold Bayley, the noted early-twentieth-century Scottish scholar of language and symbolism, indicated that stars were common symbols for deity in many ancient cultures and religions and that the eight-pointed star is one of many star-symbols that represent the unity of the members of the Godhead.\(^4\) Drawing on the book of Revelation, Bayley adds that “Christ . . . is described as the Bright and Morning Star.”\(^4\) Of the use of stars in art and architecture, the *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* states, “To the Greeks and Romans the stars were divinities, a belief derived from the ancient religions of Persia and Babylon. . . . In a symbolic form the idea was absorbed by Christianity: Christ described
as the ‘bright star of dawn’ (Rev. 22:16).” Thus, more often than not, in religious symbolism stars are associated with the divine—sometimes angels, but often Christ.

As noted, the eight-pointed star in Christianity is sometimes symbolic of the Godhead and the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. For the Egyptians it was also a symbol of divinity or of God’s influence. One Catholic text noted, “The eight-pointed star symbolizes regeneration. The number eight is traditionally associated with the idea of regeneration or baptism.” Paul declares in the book of Romans that baptism is a type for the death, burial, and Resurrection of Christ—and the promise of resurrection or renewal for all who faithfully engage in that rite (see Roman 6:3–5). Thus one Latter-day Saint author wrote, “The eight-pointed star signifies man’s regeneration.” The combination of the number eight (a symbol we have shown to be closely linked to Christ) and the symbolism of a star (also strongly tied in scripture to Jesus) suggests that the eight-pointed star is most likely a representation of the Savior.

The Sacrifice of Christ

When one takes all that is known from ancient and scholarly sources about the various symbolic elements of the so-called seal of Melchizedek, it appears in all cases to be Christocentric rather than Melchizedek-centric. At Revenna it is not found on Melchizedek but rather on the altar, which is a symbol for Christ’s sacrifice. It can represent honesty, perfection, dependability, integrity, morality, protection, and unchangingness—all attributes of Christ but not explicitly stated to be attributes of Melchizedek. It has strong ties to the number eight, which foreshadows resurrection, new beginnings, rebirth, renewal, and baptism. These are all symbols of Jesus but not of Melchizedek (or any mortal man). The “seal” appears to many to be a star (and an eight-pointed star, at that)—a common scriptural symbol for the divine or for Christ but never for Melchizedek. Thus symbolically everything points to Jesus, but nothing really points to Melchizedek. Indeed, even the life of Melchizedek typologically points us to Christ.

As we examine the murals from the churches at San Vitale and Sant’ Apollinare, it becomes evident that the focus is not Melchizedek but rather Christ. In the murals at both churches, the symbol is found on the altar cloth, not on the individuals surrounding the altar. In Christianity, altars suggest the presence of God, sacrifice, and union with God. They imply the passage
from death to life and from time to eternity, which God offers to the faithful who approach the altar to sincerely worship him.\textsuperscript{59} As one expert in symbolism noted, “The altar represents both the tomb and the resurrection, death transformed into life, the sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist [or sacrament] and Christ as the Son of Righteousness. [When an altar is made of wood,] the wood is [a symbol of] the cross, [and when it is made of stone,] the stone [is] the rock of Calvary and the raised altar is [a symbol of] both [Christ’s] ascension and Christ’s suffering on [Calvary’s] hill.”\textsuperscript{61} Thus the placement of the symbol on an altar is a definite sign to the viewer that the symbol is about Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf and not about the man Melchizedek.

In the San Vitale mural, Abel stands at the left side of the altar offering a lamb to God (see Genesis 4:4). God’s hand is seen extended from the sky above the altar, implying both the focus of the offering and also God’s acceptance of the same. To the right of the altar, rather than behind it, Melchizedek also makes a sacrificial offering, which is directed toward the extended hand of God. His sacrifice in the mural is a clear reference to Genesis 14:18, where Melchizedek is depicted as offering up the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Though the so-called seal is present in the mural, it is associated with neither Abel nor Melchizedek but instead with Christ and sacrifice.

In the Sant’Apollinare mural (illustrated in Nibley’s book), the symbol of sacrifice is extended. Abel still offers up his lamb and Melchizedek is found
offering up the sacrament, but Abraham is added to the mural, offering Isaac as an additional type of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf (see Genesis 22). Once again the hand of God is depicted as evidence of his divine acceptance of the sacrifices offered.

While the San Vitale mural has the names of both sacrificers prominently displayed above their heads, the Sant’Apollinare mural, because of the veil to the left and right of the altar, is much more crowded. The prominent display of Melchizedek’s name across the top gives the impression that the scene is specifically about Melchizedek. However, the symbolism makes it clear that, though Melchizedek is in the center of the picture, he is intended to be seen as one of several types for Christ. Indeed, though the Temple and Cosmos illustration shows Melchizedek’s name across the top of the drawing, it deletes an important feature of the mural found underneath the altar. Written across the bottom of the mural in rather corrupt Latin is a descriptive caption which, though damaged, clearly sports the names of both Abel and Melchizedek.

From what can be read of the damaged caption, we learn that the picture is intended as a typological scene, illustrating the reality that several biblical figures typify Christ, including Abel and Melchizedek, and, in light of the mural above the caption, Isaac also. Indeed, those who know the stories of the lives of Abel, Isaac, and Melchizedek know that each stand as an intricate typological foreshadowing of the offering or sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The parallels between these three types are significant and sundry, and it is for this reason that the artist of the mural has depicted them together at the altar offering their respective typological sacrifices. The entire mural is a scene of sacrifice in honor of, and typification of, Christ’s ultimate sacrifice.

One expert on the Sant’Apollinare mural wrote,

> Noteworthy is the fact that Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek are specifically mentioned in one of the solemn prayers of the Roman canon of the Mass: “Upon which (viz., the eucharistic offerings) do thou vouchsafe to look with a propitious and serene countenance, and to accept them, as thou wert graciously pleased to accept the gifts of thy just servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our Patriarch Abraham, and that which thy high priest Melchizedek offered to thee, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.” . . . The representation of the three mystical antitypes of Christ’s priesthood
in San Vitale is striking evidence of the importance of the liturgical theme in this church. . . . It must not be forgotten . . . that since apostolic times, the events narrated in the Book of Exodus were looked upon as allusions to the events of redemption. . . . The events narrated in the Book of Exodus are to be understood as “shadows and types” of the salvation of mankind.  

This same source notes that the architectural shape of the church at San Vitale was designed to suggest to the mind of the observer that the church is a tomb—it is Christ’s sepulcher, per se. Sacrifice is the ultimate symbol of the building and the mural in question, as is suggested by the lamb, the bread, and the boy Isaac, as well as by the sacrificial lives of the three men offering their gifts to God.

The Evolution of Symbols

Not surprisingly, symbols sometimes evolve in their meaning and use. For example, in the two millennia since the founding of Christianity, the cross has become the universally recognized symbol of the worldwide body of believers in the divine mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the fact is, the cross as a symbol predates Christianity. One noted expert in symbolism referred to it as the “universal symbol from the most remote times” and as “a cosmic symbol par excellence.” The Babylonians saw it as a symbol of the four phases of the moon. To the Syrians it represented the four great gods of the elements. In pre-Columbian America it was a fertility symbol. In Egypt it was associated with Maat and in India with Agni, but in Scandinavia it was a symbol for the fertilizing power of Thor’s hammer. In addition to the cross’s nearly universal acceptance as a symbol, crucifixion was practiced for many centuries before the common era by many peoples. The Phoenicians, Greeks, Babylonians, Persians, and Romans all used it, and there is evidence that others such as the Celts, Germans, Carthaginians, and Britons also employed it as a form of capital punishment. Thus, as a symbol and as an instrument of death, the cross is pre-Christian in origin. Today, however, for Christians it has a rather distinct and well-established meaning, though such meanings would have stood as contradictions to the actual ancient meanings of the symbol in the Christian era.

The Star of David is another example of a symbol that has evolved in its meaning over the centuries. One text suggests that the modern Jewish Star of David is most likely a descendant of the ancient rosette, which was connected to royalty. Before the medieval period, it was not used within Judaism, and
when it finally did find its first use in Jewry, it was the mystics or Kabbalists who utilized it. For them, it was not a symbol of Judaism or even of King David. Rather, it was a sign of protection placed on their amulets or good-luck charms. Only in recent times has the Star of David become a distinctive Jewish symbol. For millennia it not only had no particular significance to Jews, but was completely absent in all things Jewish. The seven-branched menorah was the traditional symbol of Judaism and even appears on the official seal of the State of Israel. The popular use of the Star of David in mainstream Judaism only started in the nineteenth century, when Jews of that period were looking for a symbol they could use “in contradistinction to the Christian use of the cross.” While adopted only recently by Jews, the Star of David was used by various societies as early as the Bronze Age. It was present in Mesopotamia, India, the Iberian Peninsula, and Britain. Its initial use in Judaism was entirely decorative or ornamental, and it is absent in Jewry during Hellenistic times. During the Middle Ages, Muslims and Christians used the Star of David. It is seen in a number of medieval European churches and in some early Byzantine structures. Thus, like the cross of Christianity, the Star of David of Judaism is a symbol that was borrowed from ancient societies and reinterpreted to suit the needs of a more modern people who were looking for a symbol to represent an idea important to them. Hence a “new” symbol was born.

So what of the so-called seal of Melchizedek? There is no question that the two overlapping squares (or eight-pointed star) is an ancient design. However, it has no strong connection to Judaism, and its connections to Christianity are mostly in the octagonal layout of various buildings, not in symbology. The design does appear sporadically from antiquity through modernity in various religions and cultures, but with no consistency in meaning and often as a purely aesthetic device. For example, the pattern erroneously called the seal of Melchizedek appears frequently in the art of Islam, with no defined meaning. It was commonly used as a marker for the end of a chapter in Arabic calligraphy and is known as the rub al-hizb. It is customary in a number of Arabic texts, including older versions of the Qur’an.

The symbol is often simply an architectural design, as the architect reported it was intended to be on the San Diego temple. In predominantly Muslim cities it is commonly found on Mosques, votive objects, fobs, and even key chains. Similarly, in the Khirbet Kanef synagogue of Palestine there are two overlapping squares carved into one of its walls which, according to
one expert, likely symbolize a rosette, thus again an aesthetic design with no specific meaning. The overlapping squares appear as a pattern on the floor of the lobby of the House of Lords in the British House of Parliament, simply utilized for aesthetic appeal. A number of flags and coats of arms employ the symbol of the eight-pointed star. For example, the Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan coats of arms employ it, as do the flags of Azerbaijan and the Azat (or “freedom”) party of Kazakhstan. Until recently, the Iraqi Boy Scouts and Girl Guides employed the eight-pointed star as part of their official logo. Each of these utilizes the symbol for its own reasons and without any cross-cultural meaning.

The glory of Christ is often represented in Eastern Orthodox iconography as “eight rays of light emanating from the body of Christ.” A common way for that glory to be depicted in Orthodox art is through “two superimposed concave squares” forming an octagon. In Hinduism the symbol sometimes known as the “star of Lakshmi” is an eight-pointed star, made of two superimposed squares. It symbolizes the many kinds of wealth offered to us by God, specifically the goddess Lakshmi. While we could continue to list examples, it is evident that the pattern of two overlapping squares (or an eight-pointed star) is common in a variety of cultures. But there is no consistency in use or symbolic meaning, and certainly none of these faiths or cultures see the symbol as a representation of the man Melchizedek or of priestly authority.

Repeated motif on the San Diego temple gate.
Conclusion

Weighing all of the evidence presented above, it seems clear to this author that the Ravenna murals made so popular by Nibley’s *Temple and Cosmos* have utilized the design in question either as an aesthetic pattern, a means of multiplying right angles, or a symbol for the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, we will never be able to identify the true intention for sure, as the unknown artist of the murals left no known explanation of his objective.

What we can say for sure is that the design is not an ancient symbol of Melchizedek or priesthood authority (at Ravenna or in any ancient source). We know that it is primarily an aesthetic rather than religious design and that when it was used ancietly, it never had a defined meaning.

By popularizing this image, a handful of Latter-day Saints have created a new symbol—a modern Star of David or cross. The pattern of interlocked squares or eight-pointed star has been endowed with religious meaning, and an entire folklore has developed around it to show that divine origins have been behind the symbol and its employment on certain temples. Through a simple misunderstanding of a caption under a picture in a book, Mormons have unintentionally created a symbol that has erroneously been connected with Melchizedek and his priesthood.

Given that the interlocked squares (or eight-pointed star) is *not* an ancient symbol for the Melchizedek Priesthood and that the proper ancient name for this design is *not* the seal of Melchizedek, we are left with the question, is it appropriate for modern Latter-day Saints to take an unaffiliated design, such as dual overlapping squares, and turn such a design into an official symbol for the Melchizedek Priesthood or for the act of making one’s calling and election sure? Because this article is unlikely to end the popular practice among Mormons of claiming the aforementioned design as the ancient seal of Melchizedek and a symbol for the higher priesthood, I leave it to readers to decide whether to embrace or reject the symbol. For this author it matters little—though frankly, if we as a people are to adopt this symbol, it would be more appropriate to interpret it as a representation of Christ rather than as a symbol of one whose life typified him.

Notes

1. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 1; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt

2. Examples of symbols found in non-LDS traditions but also utilized by Latter-day Saints include white as a symbol of purity, victory, and happiness; the elements of the sacrament as representations of Christ’s slain body and shed blood; the use of olive oil as a token of the Holy Ghost; the laying on of hands as a sign of conferral; and so forth. Examples of symbols unique to Latter-day Saints include statues of the angel Moroni, the CTR crest, sacred clothing associated with the temple and its rites, presidencies as symbolic mirrors of the Godhead, and so on.


5. This design has been reported to appear in various places in the San Diego, Newport Beach, Redlands, Bountiful, Nauvoo, Salt Lake, Draper, and Albuquerque temples. See Bryce Haymond, “The Seal of Melchizedek—Part 3.”


8. See Brinkerhoff, *Day Star*, 2:156.


11. See Haymond, “The Seal of Melchizedek—Part 4,” *Temple Study: Defending and Sustaining the LDS Temple*, http://www.templestudy.com/2008/09/11/the-seal-of-melchizedek-part-4. See also Brinkerhoff, *Day Star*, 1:61. Val Brinkerhoff recounts a conversation he had with Bill Lewis on this matter (see *Day Star*, 2:61). Elsewhere he quotes Lewis as saying, “And so I wrote President Hinckley . . . and said now you’re too busy to respond, but just for your interest, for your information. And sure enough, a week later he responded very nicely. And [I] found out later, he called Brother Nibley and checked on it, talked with him about it.” Val Brinkerhoff, “LDS Symbology Series: Interview of Bill Lewis and checked on it, talked with him about it.” Val Brinkerhoff, “LDS Symbology Series: Interview of Bill Lewis, Private Architect of the San Diego, California LDS Temple” (unpublished manuscript in author’s possession, 2006), 28; emphasis in original; transcribed by Jennifer Olson. Lewis indicated that President Hinckley did not tell him personally that he had spoken to Nibley about this, but Lewis heard through the grapevine that President Hinckley talked with Nibley at some point about the symbol. From his oral interview it is unclear what exactly President Hinckley explicitly conveyed to Lewis and how much Lewis learned through some secondary source or drew as a conclusion from nonexplicit statements. Lewis never states in his interview that President Hinckley personally told him he had called Nibley or that President Hinckley informed him of what Nibley said about the symbol.
12. See Haymond, “Seal of Melchizedek—Part 4.” Another source reports that a member of the Temple Construction Department “became curious about the motif and asked Hugh Nibley (a professor at BYU at the time) if any ancient meaning was attached to the symbol. Nibley is said to have explained that in antiquity the 2 interlaced squares... is typically referred to as the Seal of King Melchizedek.” Bill Lewis, in Brinkerhoff, *Day Star*, 2:156; see also 2:160 n.1; 1:60–61. While Nibley may have said this, there is no support for such a claim in antiquity.


17. Brinkerhoff reported that Bill Lewis, the architect of the San Diego temple, told him, “Some in the academic world refute the meaning and its title. What is clear is that Hugh Nibley believed that it had connection to the ancient high priest and apparently Pres. Hinckley believed him.” Brinkerhoff, *Day Star*, 1:61. As we have shown, it isn’t clear at all what Nibley believed on this matter. It appears that he contradicted himself when he spoke to various people who inquired of him regarding the symbol. Unfortunately, because he is no longer living and thus cannot explain what he really said or believed, it seems wise to (1) trust the witness of those who knew Nibley and (2) more importantly, look at what scholarly sources tell us. In the end, Nibley may or may not have believed that this symbol was associated with Melchizedek. If he did, he may have been wrong. When one surveys ancient and scholarly sources on the matter, all evidence points to the fact that this design has absolutely nothing to do with Melchizedek or his priesthood. Every claim of its ancient connections to Melchizedek can be traced back to a one-on-one conversation with Nibley or to Michael Lyon’s caption in Nibley’s book. There is nothing else to support the bold declaration that this is some ancient symbol of King Melchizedek and his priesthood. Thus, even if Nibley did believe the design was associated with Melchizedek, there is not a scrap of evidence to support such a belief. By this I mean no offense. I am simply trying to let the sources, ancient and modern, speak for themselves.


21. See Haymond, “Seal of Melchizedek—Part 4.” Bill Lewis reported this same experience as follows: “Elder Haight was down, to usher the media through and answer questions, and so when they came back and they were asking questions, that was the first question that one of the reporters asked, ‘What’s that symbol mean? What part of the Church?’ And it caught Brother Haight off guard I think. And he said the right answer in my opinion, he just said, ‘Well, that’s the architectural symbols they use.’” Bill Lewis, in “LDS Symbology Series,” 27; emphasis in original.

22. Brinkerhoff has pointed out to me that some who have reported Nibley’s comments about the symbol being somehow associated with Melchizedek say they spoke with Nibley
prior to the actual publication of his book Temple and Cosmos. However, it should be noted that Nibley’s book was being written, illustrated, and edited for a significant time prior to its publication in 1992. Consequently, Nibley had already likely been introduced to the so-called seal of Melchizedek by Michael Lyon well before his book reached the bookstore shelf and long before the April 1993 dedication of the San Diego Temple. Brinkerhoff’s oral interview with Bill Lewis actually implies that the conversations with Nibley about this symbol came shortly after the temple open house and therefore well after Nibley’s book was in print. See “LDS Symbology Series,” 27–28. Time and again, those who suggest a Melchizedek connection to the symbol attribute it to Nibley and cite his book as evidence of the interpretation. While I am willing to concede that Lewis and a handful of others may trace their understanding to Nibley, since he never used that phrase in any of his writings, it is likely that he was influenced by Lyon’s comment. And certainly the vast majority of those I have encountered who believe the symbol is associated with Melchizedek cite Lyon’s caption as their source (though they attribute the caption to Nibley).

23. Conversation with Michael Lyon, January 16, 2009; see also Haymond, “The Seal of Melchizedek—Part 2,” Temple Study: Defending and Sustaining the LDS Temple, http://www.templestudy.com/2008/09/09/the-seal-of-melchizedek-part-2. Lyon told me that though he has tried on numerous occasions to find the book in which he thought he had seen the symbol, he has been unsuccessful in locating it or any other text that connects the eight-pointed star with Melchizedek or that calls that design the seal of Melchizedek. In a conversation with Lyon in the year 2000, he indicated that he did not know whether the interlocking squares on the altar cloth were a deliberate construction of the artist of the mural or just an interesting shape that enhances the design. Lyon suggested that often the symbol of two interlocked squares was utilized as a representation of a flower because it would have been “easier to put onto a wall or stone frieze” than to carve a flower. Damron, “Melchizedek: A Personal Study,” 8. More recently, Lyon told me that “the eight-pointed star in the Ravenna mural may be nothing more than a pleasing design [with no particular meaning], developed by the mural’s creator.” Michael Lyon, conversation with the author, January 16, 2009; see also Allen H. Barber, Celestial Symbols: Symbolism in Doctrine, Religious Traditions and Temple Architecture (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1989), 154, 168–69.


25. Again, Nibley may well have shared Lyon’s idea with a select few—perhaps even President Hinckley. But the general popularity of the symbol has come (in the opinion of this author) not from comments by Nibley to a couple of individuals, but rather from the widely seen and cited caption written by Lyon in Temple and Cosmos.

26. Michael Lyon stated, “The design is found in many Byzantine contexts where it does not seem to have any special meaning.” Personal correspondence with author, November 19, 2009.

27. See Haymond, “Seal of Melchizedek—Part 2.”

28. There are two historic basilicas in the northeastern portion of Italy: San Vitale (in Ravenna) and Sant’Apollinare (in Classe). Construction on the San Vitale edifice began in AD 526. Upon completion, the building was dedicated to the martyrs of the city of Ravenna. Construction on San Vitale’s sister basilica, Sant’Apollinare, began in AD 532. This second basilica was dedicated to Classe’s first bishop. Sant’Apollinare is a more modest undertaking than its counterpart and predecessor. And the second of these two basilicas borrowed heavily from the motifs of its forerunner in San Vitale, including imitating and adapting its art work. Indeed, one scholar noted that the mural in Sant’Apollinare which is so heavily connected with the “seal of Melchizedek” myth is “unquestionably an adaptation of the two mosaics in
San Vitale. . . . The three antitypes of Christian priesthood [Abel, Isaac, and Melchizedek] have been brought together in one scene." Otto G. Von Simson, Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 59. Upon their completion, both basilicas were dedicated by Bishop Maximian of Revenna—San Vitale in AD 548 and Sant’Apollinare in AD 549.

29. Note that both of these individuals are political rather than religious figures.
30. See Nibley, Temple and Cosmos, 109, fig. 25.
31. As to the meaning of the gamma, square, or right angle, one authoritative text on Jewish symbols notes that in antiquity the square symbolized the hope "for immortality" by the wearer. Erwin R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period (New York: Bollingren Foundation, 1964), 9:163. In LDS writings we find interpretations such as the following: "An angle of a square . . . forms the sign of the square ‘L’ . . . which signifies moral rectitude." M. Garfield Cook, Restoration In Geometric Symbolism, 2nd. rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: M. Garfield Cook, 2004), 38. A square or right angle "is a symbol of justice and upright-ness, to act uprightly, justly and truthfully; . . . and [it is] an emblem of morality, which taught the initiated to square their lives and actions according to the laws of God." Barber, Celestial Symbols, 36. One non-LDS text suggests that the square symbolizes staying "within . . . proper limits." Robert Macoy, A Dictionary of Freemasonry (New York: Gramercy Books, 2000), 674. Elsewhere we read, "The square was an emblem of morality, which taught them to square their lives and actions by the unerring laws of God’s word, and to regulate their conduct according to the doctrine laid down by their divine Creator, to preserve a lively faith in his holy gospel, and taught them to live in charity with all mankind." George Oliver, The Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry (Silver Springs, MD: The Masonic Service Association, 1932), 249, cited in E. Cecil McGavin, Mormonism and Masonry (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 60. The square is "the implement of proof. ‘Prove all things, hold fast that which is good’ [1 Thessalonians 5:21]." Robert Morris, The Poetry of Freemasonry (n.p.: The Wrener Company, 1895), 119.
32. Michael Lyon, conversation with the author, January 16, 2009; see also Damron, “Melchizedek: A Personal Study,” 8; Barber, Celestial Symbols, 9:164.
35. One source notes that "in mediaval times it was the gammadion [that was] used to symbolize Christ." J. C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 166. One expert on the evolution of symbols likewise suggested that "the gammadion . . . sometimes [takes] the place of the Cross of Christ" and that in certain cultures "the gammadion . . . [is a] representation of . . . god." Count Gobler d’Alviella, The Migration of Symbols (New York: University Books, 1956), 45, 50; see also 50–51, 71. He also says that for the Aryans, for example, the gammadion was a symbol of "the omnipotent God of the universe" or the "Heavenly Father" of subsequent mythologies (74, 75). One LDS source suggests that gammadia may be a "figure of victory" or “hoped for immortality," Welch and Foley, "Gammadia on Early Jewish and Christian Garments," 255. Indeed, “victory . . . commonly appears as a symbol of immortality.” Goodenough, Jewish Symbols, 9:163, as cited in Welch and Foley, "Gammadia on Early Jewish and Christian Garments," 255. There is evidence that gammadia were “used . . . to ornament the garments of certain priestly personages” in the
fourth century and that, in fact, they are constantly found on altars and priestly vestments in various cultures and religions. D’Alviella, *Migration of Symbols*, 35, 44.


43. Bullinger points out that, if spelled out in Greek gematria, “Christ” totals 1,480 (8 × 185); “Lord” totals 800 (8 × 100); “Our Lord” totals 1,768 (8 × 82); “Son” totals 880 (8 × 110). Additionally, in gematria “the names of the Lord’s people are multiples of eight” in most cases. *Number in Scripture*, 203, 204, 205–7.

44. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, 200; see also Cook, *Restoration in Geometric Symbolism*, 41.


46. One expert on the church at San Vitale noted that the building’s eight-sided design is Christocentric in its meaning. He wrote, “In Christian architecture the octagonal plan is an image of the Easter sepulcher. Liturgically and mystically, a martyr’s sanctuary is both his tomb and Christ’s sepulcher; and early Christian theology conceived the dignity of martyrdom as the martyr’s mystical transfiguration into Christ. The architecture of San Vitale, evoking
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this relation of the death and resurrection of the titular saint to the death and resurrection of Christ, is a significant tribute to the Christlike dignity of St. Vitalis.” Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 4; see also Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, 111. Thus the structure of the very building in which the mural is found is Christocentric, sending a message to the mural’s viewers as to what the architect and artists involved in constructing the building had in mind as the ultimate symbolism of the building and its art, including the so-called seal of Melchizedek.

47. Some might question our drawing a connection between eight-pointed stars and dual overlapping squares. Encyclopedias of symbolism do not always distinguish between these two symbols and their potential symbolic meanings. We have no way to tell what was intended at Ravenna, so we will treat here the eight-pointed star in case the artist intended his design to be perceived as such.

48. My interpretation of a star as a symbol for an angel is based on several early Christian infancy narratives that suggest that the “star” that the “wise men” followed was actually an angel. “There appeared to them an angel in the form of that star which had before been their guide in their journey; the light of which they followed till they returned into their own country.” “The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ,” 3:3, in William Hone, comp., The Lost Books of the Bible, trans. Jeremiah Jones and William Wake (New York: Bell Publishing, 2004), 40; see also “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour,” 8:406, verse 7, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Anti-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), which reads basically the same: “There appeared to them an angel in the form of that star which had before guided them on their journey; and they went away, following the guidance of its light, until they arrived in their own country.”


50. See Bayley, Lost Language of Symbolism, 2:96.


53. One text states that “the ancient seal of King Melchizedek [is] found in antiquity in many Christian contexts.” Brinkerhoff, Day Star, 1:152. The reader should be aware that, while Christian churches occasionally display eight-pointed stars (☀) in their art and architecture, the overlain or interlocked squares (☀) that appear to form a type of eight-pointed star (being called by some Latter-day Saints the “seal of Melchizedek”) are quite rare in Christianity—and are never referred to as the “seal of King Melchizedek,” nor are they ever associated with Melchizedek. Thus, connections often made between stars in various churches and the design this article is examining are forced, as they are very different in appearance and meaning. See Brinkerhoff, Day Star, 2:131–81, particularly 157–58.


56. Barber, Celestial Symbols, 30. Another penned this: “An eight-pointed star is symbolic of the way to heaven”—Jesus Christ being “the Way.” Cook, Restoration in Geometric Symbolism, 40.


58. Little is known about Melchizedek’s early life, just as little is known about Jesus’ early life. Melchizedek manifested gifts of the Spirit in his youth (see JST, Genesis 14:26), as did
Jesus (see JST, Luke 2:41–52). Melchizedek bore the title “King of Righteousness,” which Jews associate with their Messiah, and Jesus was the “King of Righteousness” and the Jewish Messiah. Melchizedek is one of very few figures depicted in scripture as having offered the Lord’s Supper (see Genesis 14:18–20; JST, Genesis 14:17–20). Jesus offered the Lord’s Supper as the fulfillment of the Pascal feast (see Matthew 26:26–28). Scripture draws parallels between Christ and Melchizedek (see Hebrews 7:14–16; Psalm 110:4). Both were famous for preaching repentance to their hearers (see Alma 13:18; Matthew 4:17; D&C 18:22; 19:15–20), and for administering salvific ordinances for the remission of sins (see Alma 13:16; JST, Genesis 14:17; JST, John 4:1–3). The priesthood is called after Melchizedek’s name (see D&C 107:3–4), whereas it used to be called after Christ’s name, even the “Priesthood after the order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3–4). Melchizedek is said to have reigned “under his father” (Alma 13:18), just as Christ reigns “under His Father” (see John 5:19). Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem (see Genesis 14:18; Psalm 76:2), and Jesus, by right, should have been king of the Jews and Jerusalem (see Matthew 1; 2; 5:35). Both were known for their miraculous powers (see JST, Genesis 14:26). Just as Melchizedek was called the “king of heaven” by his people (JST, Genesis 14:34–36), Jesus is the King of Heaven and is acknowledged as such by those who are his true followers (see 2 Nephi 10:14; Alma 5:50). Both were known as the “Prince of Peace” (JST, Genesis 14:33; Hebrews 7:1–2; Alma 13:18; Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6; see also John 14:27). Of Melchizedek it was said that no high priest was greater (see Alma 13:19), and Christ is the Great High Priest (see Hebrews 3:1; 9:11). Melchizedek is said to have overcome the world (see JST, Genesis 14:33–34), typifying that Jesus would overcome the world (see John 16:33).

59. Of the San Vitale mural, one expert wrote, “The scene on the right depicts Abel, Melchizedek, and Abraham on the three sides of an altar upon which they are offering their sacrificial gifts: Abel the lamb, Melchizedek the bread, and Abraham his son Isaac. The composition is unquestionably an adaptation of the two mosaics in San Vitale... the three antitypes of Christian priesthood have been brought together in one scene.” Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 59.

60. See Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, 11.
61. Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, 111.
62. In San Vitale, next to the mural of Abel and Melchizedek is a mural of Abraham and Isaac. Thus, it appears that the artist of the Sant’Apollinare mural simply combined the two separate murals of San Vitale into one singular motif.

63. Because the Latin caption is incorrectly written, the best we can offer is a rough translation. But it appears to say, “Melchizedek illustrates, as Scripture demonstrates, of Christ, [unintelligible], similar to/more so than Abel.” In other words, “As Scripture attests, Melchizedek is a type or symbol of Christ, as was Abel” or “even more so than was Abel.” I express appreciation to Drs. Eric D. Huntsman and Jeffrey R. Chadwick for looking at this inscription and offering their interpretation of its meaning.

64. For example, Abel was a shepherd (see Moses 5:17) like Christ, the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11). Abel offered an acceptable offering, which consisted of a male lamb, without blemish, of the first year (see Moses 5:20), just as Christ’s offering was accepted by God and was typified by the slaying of a male lamb, without blemish, of the first year. Abel’s offering involved the shedding of blood (see Moses 5:20), and Christ’s offering involved the shedding of his own blood (see Moroni 5:3). In making his offering Abel was opposed by his brother (see Moses 5:21). So also, in making his offering and atonement Jesus was opposed by his brother Lucifer (see Abraham 3:27–28). Scripture informs us that Abel walked in holiness before God (see Moses 5:26), as did Jesus (see 2 Nephi 3:17; 3 Nephi 11:7).
65. As an example, Isaac was the birthright son of a righteous father (see Genesis 21), as was Jesus (see D&C 93:21). Isaac’s birth required a miracle (see Genesis 11:30; 17:15–22), as did Jesus’ (see Luke 1:26–38). In his mid-thirties Isaac was offered as a sacrifice by his father. Jesus was offered up by the Father apparently sometime during his thirty-fourth year of life. Genesis Rabbah 56:8 suggests that Isaac was somewhere between thirty-five and thirty-seven years of age; see also Victor P. Hamilton, Handbook on the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), 108; Bruce R. McConkie, The Mortal Messiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81), 1364. The attempted sacrifice of Isaac took place on Mount Moriah (see Genesis 22:2), the same location at which Jesus was crucified (see Mark 15:22). Isaac carried the wood to which he would be bound up to the top of Mount Moriah (see Genesis 22:6) just as Jesus carried the wooden cross on which he would be bound to the top of Golgotha’s hill (see John 19:17). An angel ministered to both Isaac and Jesus during their hour of sacrifice (see Genesis 22:11; Luke 22:43). It is traditionally understood that Isaac willingly went to his place of sacrifice trusting his father’s judgment and decision, just as Jesus willingly went to his place of sacrifice trusting in his Father’s judgment and decision (see Abraham 3:27; Moses 4:2).

66. See note 58.

67. Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 25, 26; see also William J. Hamblin and David Rolph Seely, Solomon’s Temple: Myth and History (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 53, 111.

68. See Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 4, 15.

69. See Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 25. Because the emperor who commissioned the building of the church was trying to associate himself with Christ (and thus, by default, with Abel, Melchizedek, Isaac, and Abraham), these standard symbols of Christ are used in the Church’s murals as symbols of the Emperor too; see Von Simson, Sacred Fortress, 31.

70. Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, 45.

71. See Tresidder, Symbols and Their Meanings, 146–47; see also Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, 45–46.


73. See Goodenough, Jewish Symbols, 2:198.


78. As we noted above, the so-called seal may not actually be two overlapping squares or an eight-sided star. It may only be eight gammas arranged in a circular pattern.

79. Indeed, after looking at literally dozens of books on symbolism, including some of encyclopedic length, I could find only one text that presented this exact design and then
offered a specific definition of its meaning. Though the text did not give a name to the design, nor did it indicate whether it was intended to be viewed as an eight-pointed star, two interlocked squares, a rosette, or a series of gammas arranged in a circle, it did offer the following definition: “Material generation through the interaction of two opposing principles.” Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 122. What does this definition mean? In less than clear language, it appears to be suggesting that the symbol represents reproduction or the generating of some temporal thing through the interaction of two opposites. But the symbol in the singular definition available to researchers is not connected to Melchizedek, to priesthood authority or power, or to anything innately religious.


81. One of my colleagues pointed out that “the symbol is so frequent in Islam that it is even represented in Microsoft Word’s symbol cache for Arabic!” Jeffrey R. Chadwick, personal correspondence with author, October 21, 2009.

82. See Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, 2:198; see also volume 3, fig. 547.


85. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 228, 230. Other divine or angelic beings also have their glory depicted through the use of the two interlocked squares. See, for example, Yaroslav School, *John the Theologian*, ca. 1820, in S. Kent Brown, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, and Dawn C. Phyesey, *Beholding Salvation: The Life of Christ in Word and Image* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 44, fig. 43.

86. These kinds of wealth are gifts such as prosperity, good health, knowledge, strength, posterity, and power.

87. I wish the reader to be aware that I do not accuse the temple’s architect (Bill Lewis), Professor Val Brinkerhoff, or illustrator Michael Lyon of creating the folklore of the “seal of Melchizedek” that I hear from various members of the Church at least once a month. Rather, lay (and I believe, well-intending) members have glommed onto bits of truth and popularly told sensationalized stories and combined these into a tale beyond anything Nibley could have imagined—a tale which circulates as well as any faith-promoting rumor since the dawning of the Restoration.

88. While I once again acknowledge that Nibley’s inconsistent comments on this issue have added to this, I remind the reader that the vast majority of Latter-day Saints remain unaware of his handful of personal comments to various people. Lyon’s caption in Nibley’s book has been a major catalyst in the advancement of this tradition. On a related note, President Boyd K. Packer said, “Instruction vital to our salvation is not hidden in an obscure verse or phrase in the scriptures. To the contrary, essential truths are repeated over and over again.” *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 286. Obviously, the seal of Melchizedek is not essential to our salvation. Nor is it a symbol discussed or taught publicly by the presiding Brethren, employed in the salvific ordinances of the temple, or found in the holy scriptures.

89. As one who feels it is appropriate to create our own modern symbols, Val Brinkerhoff wrote: “We as Latter-day Saints can take a motif and apply our own meaning to it. . . . If we want this historic motif to represent the Melchizedek Priesthood in the late 1980s or now
(no matter what it may have represented for others), then so be it.” Personal correspondence, July 13, 2010; emphasis in original.

90. It is worth noting that while Brinkerhoff is an advocate of calling the design in question the “seal of Melchizedek,” he does rightfully see this symbol as strongly connected to, and representative of, Christ and his saving acts and ordinances. He is less dogmatic than some and offers several interpretations of the design, though the most common interpretation found in his writings being the “seal” explanation. Consequently, while he and I disagree on the symbol’s connection to Melchizedek, we are in agreement on the Christocentric nature of the symbol. See Brinkerhoff, Day Star, 2:131–81, specifically 2:132, 138, 145, 160.
The Great Creator himself had come to earth to be lifted up upon the cross as a redemptive offering so that all humanity could be lifted up in a resurrected state and be declared guiltless if they became committed disciples.
The statements of Jesus Christ in 3 Nephi 27:13–21 regarding “the gospel” are unique in scripture. Nowhere else in sacred writ does Jesus personally define the term with such power, clarity, and simplicity. Nowhere else does he declare personal ownership or authorship of the gospel he preached and explain it as the carrying out of his Father’s will. And nowhere else in scripture does he connect so directly and succinctly his Father’s will with the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Final Judgment, and link them to the universal salvation offered to humankind. In this passage Jesus ties together the relationship between true discipleship, adherence to the ordinances of salvation, and his offer to stand as everyone’s personal intercessor to the Father. He starkly states that the absolute purity required for entry into the kingdom of heaven is directly and unequivocally related to the visceral image of washing one’s garments in his blood. In addition, 3 Nephi 27:13–21 might be described as a succinct tutorial on the nature of justification and sanctification. It stands at the doctrinal apex of Jesus’ post-Resurrection visit to the New World. It is a discrete unit, beginning and ending with the phrase “my gospel.” It is the culminating discourse of his other New World teachings on the nature of the gospel.
Setting

The setting for this capstone instruction was Jesus’ appearance to his disciples, who were “united in mighty prayer and fasting” after traveling and teaching the things they had previously witnessed and heard (3 Nephi 27:1). This is consistent with other Book of Mormon examples of the stunning results that come from mighty prayer. Nephi the First (see 1 Nephi 18:3), Enos (see Enos 1:4), Alma (see Alma 8:10), the sons of Mosiah (see Alma 17:3–4), and Nephi, son of Nephi (see 3 Nephi 1:11–12), are only a few of the many other witnesses that affirm the validity of this spiritual law. Mighty prayer is a conduit of power. It opens the gates of heaven.

The spiritual power generated by these disciples derived from their unity of purpose and united actions. They were following the precepts and example of their Master. At the end of his life, Jesus himself offered his great high priestly prayer, blessing his disciples that they would “be one, even as we are one” (John 17:22). Significantly, Jesus likewise prayed for his disciples in the New World, “that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23; emphasis added). Much later, Jesus would emphasize the necessity of unity to his latter-day disciples: “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). This is a kind of unity and oneness that some of us may not yet have fully grasped, but which is a non-negotiable requirement for existence with God—“the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:4).

So it was that, as a direct result of their united fasting and prayer, Jesus showed himself to the New World disciples. He answered their direct questions and laid the foundation for the doctrinal watershed and spiritual feast that would come in verses 13 through 21. The disciples learned that, in addition to bearing the proper and authorized name, the Church of Jesus Christ would be correctly identified because it would also be built upon his gospel (see 3 Nephi 27:9) and would display the works of the Father, which he would “show forth . . . in it” (v. 10). The name of the Church, the gospel it teaches, and the works of God the Father found in it are all inextricably linked. The Church of Jesus Christ constitutes the repository of salvation on earth.

“My Gospel”

After testifying that his Church was founded on his gospel, the resurrected Lord proceeded to provide definitions so that there would be no misunderstandings:
Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.

And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. (3 Nephi 27:13–16)

These verses constitute an arresting first-person discourse on the nature of the gospel by the very source of good news himself. Latter-day revelation defines the gospel as “the glad tidings” (D&C 76:40), and even “glad tidings of great joy” (D&C 79:1). This squares perfectly with ancient conceptions of the term. Modern scholarship notes that “the modern English word gospel is derived from the Old English gódspel, a combination of gód (good) and spel or spiel (news, tidings). . . . The original English word, however, was a proper translation of the Latin transliteration (evangelium) of the original [New Testament] term euangelion, ‘good news.’”¹ This surely is the sense in which Jesus used the word with his New World Israelites as recorded in 3 Nephi. For what better or more supernal news could have been delivered to them than that the Great Creator himself had come to earth to be lifted up upon the cross as a redemptive offering so that all humanity could be lifted up in a resurrected state, overcome physical death, and be declared guiltless if they became committed disciples?

One of the greatest contributions of 3 Nephi 27:13–21 is almost simple enough to be overlooked: it is that Jesus knew and used the term “gospel,” as a noun, in his own preaching, teaching, and exhortation. Though the noun euangelion is found in the New Testament gospel accounts,² some scholars believe it is “improbable that Jesus himself should have used the [Greek] noun or its Semitic equivalent,”³ which is basorah. Rather, authorities have attributed the first use of the Christian term “gospel” to the Apostle Paul.⁴ Certainly Paul spoke often of the message of salvation as “good tidings” and felt its impact deeply. The noun euangelion appears sixty times in his writings—in every one of his letters. But the fact remains that the Synoptic gospels say that Jesus used the term euangelion—“glad tidings” or “gospel”—when talking about..
his own mission and message, and it takes a lot of argumentation to explain why we should not take the gospel writers at face value. Thankfully, 3 Nephi 27:13–21 clarifies the picture and prevents error.

But more than confirming the use of the term euangelion, or whatever cognate he used when addressing his New World disciples, Jesus unequivocally declared in 3 Nephi 27 that he is the author of the glad tidings of salvation. It is “my gospel,” he said, and this stands as a stark differentiation between his and other glad tidings or messages of “good news.” We know that other “good tidings” did circulate during the period roughly contemporaneous with Jesus’ mortal existence. For instance, a Priene calendar inscription dated to around 9 BC speaks of the birth of the emperor Caesar Augustus (emperor during the first fourteen years of Jesus’ life) as “the beginning of good tidings” to the world. It is interesting to compare how Mark introduces his gospel account: “The beginning of the gospel [good tidings] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). His introduction serves to announce to his readers that the good tidings of his report are different from anything else being noised about, including earlier reports of glad tidings such as the coming of a secular imperial ruler. The fact that he appeals immediately (v. 2) to the forecasts of messianic prophets to validate his message of good news indicates that he desires to have readers understand the covenantal significance of the real “gospel” and its link to Israel’s ancient authorities.

Generally, scholars seem to acknowledge that we depend mostly on Mark when we study the personal sayings of Jesus that contain the noun euangelion, “glad tidings.” Of the five instances in Mark, Matthew omits the word “gospel” in three of them, and “Luke (like John) does not use the noun [euangelion] at all in his gospel,” preferring the verbal form euangelizesthai, “preach the gospel.”

By declaring that the gospel he taught to his New World disciples was his gospel, Jesus also forestalled any possible attempts by imposters, false messiahs, or false teachers to try to offer another version of the gospel or another plan of salvation. This very thing apparently happened in the Old World. No less a figure than Gamaliel, the eminent doctor of the law, mentioned two such messiah figures (Theudas and Judah the Galilean) when he gave his speech before the Sanhedrin advocating tolerance toward the new Christian movement (see Acts 5:34–39). Jesus had even warned, while delivering his Olivet discourse the last week of his life (see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22–25), of other false Christs who would deceive the very elect.
Jesus’ miraculous appearance to the Nephites, with its attendant miracles and manifestations, was proof enough of his authentic messiahship and divine sonship. His subsequent declaration that the gospel he was teaching was *his* gospel, that he was its author, was then sufficient certification of the gospel’s truthfulness and effectiveness. Additionally, there was no better way to teach the disciples that they must not deviate from his prescribed gospel and follow another. (Even with his declarations in place, many did deviate from his gospel several hundred years later.) The Apostle Paul would similarly warn disciples in the Old World that only Christ’s own gospel, the glad tidings of the true Messiah, were valid, even though others might teach a different one. Said he, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. . . . But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:8, 11–12).

In effect, Paul was saying that the gospel he preached was Christ’s gospel, not authored or established by anyone but Jesus Christ. Had Jesus given Paul’s speech, he might well have said, “It is *my* gospel that I gave to Paul and not anyone else’s. He preached it directly unto you without modification.” In this way, Paul’s warning to the Galatians parallels Jesus’ own declaration to the Nephites. It is *his* gospel and not another’s. He is its author and finisher. For this simple insight alone 3 Nephi can be appreciated.

**Origins**

The New Testament writers’ use of *euangelion*, “glad tidings,” and certainly Jesus’ use of it, should not be thought to have derived from a familiarity with classical Greek literature. This neuter singular Greek noun “is rarely found in the sense of ‘good tidings’ outside of early Christian literature.” Rather, as Millar Burrows has convincingly argued, Isaiah is “the main source for the Christian use of the term ‘gospel.’” This is not startling, given the Lord’s preference for Isaiah in both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, as evidenced by the many direct quotations he used from the great prophet as well as his endorsement of Isaiah in 3 Nephi 23.

A pivotal episode that helps us to understand the origin of the early Christians’ use of the term *gospel*, “glad tidings,” and particularly the disciples’ almost immediate grasp of its significance (without receiving any reported
And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:16–21; emphasis added)

Some disciples, if not all, were probably acquainted with Isaiah 61:1–2 and recognized it to be a powerful messianic prophecy. Jesus looked in every way to be its fulfillment, the very one who was preaching the gospel in a day of triumph. In addition, there were other well-known passages from Isaiah that used the term “glad tidings,” which had to do with a coming deliverance of God’s people, a messianic triumph, and a glorious future for Zion (see Isaiah 40:9; 52:7). These passages resonated with spiritually prepared, attuned Jews and caused them to expect a fulfillment of prophesied “glad tidings” of redemption and deliverance. Thus, when Jesus used the term, no great explanatory discourse was needed. What eventually did prove to be surprising, maybe even temporarily incomprehensible, to the disciples was that the “glad tidings” of deliverance and redemption came not by way of military might or the overthrow of existing imperial power, but through the ignominious death of the very one who preached the “glad tidings.” That aside, it seems that the New Testament disciples’ understanding of the term “gospel” emerged soon after Jesus applied the prophecies of Isaiah to his own life and ministry.

The Father’s Will

After claiming authorship of the gospel he had been teaching, Jesus described its essence, its core, as carrying out the will of his Father. “This is the gospel which I have given unto you,” he said, “that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13). By carrying out his Father’s will, he acted as his Father’s agent, seeking only to satisfy his Father’s desire and plan. He had said this very thing earlier during his
mortal ministry: “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). The constant and consistent picture presented by the scriptures from beginning to end is of Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son, seeking only to carry out the will of the Father.

In the grand council held before the world came into being, the premortal Jesus offered to become the executor of the Father’s plan, “even the messenger of salvation” (D&C 93:8). On that occasion he said, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2). This selfless offer set him at odds with the “angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God” (D&C 76:25), who sought to carry out his own will and ultimately rebelled against the Father and the Son to become Satan (Hebrew “adversary”) (see D&C 76:25; Moses 4:1–4).

During his earthly mission, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ plea was to have the bitter cup removed if possible. “Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). Even as the intensity of Gethsemane’s experience became acute, his prayer was the same: “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. . . . and [he] prayed the third time, saying the same words” (Matthew 26:42, 44; see also Luke 22:42).

During the very last moments of his life, and literally with his dying breath, Jesus proclaimed his fulfillment of the promise made in the premortal council of heaven. “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, saying, Father, it is finished, thy will is done, yielded up the ghost” (Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 27:50).

As the resurrected Lord, when he first made his appearance to the people in America, Jesus chose to introduce himself by declaring his obedience to the Father’s will: “And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:9–11; emphasis added).

In a powerful, Atonement-centered revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in March 1830, the Savior again proclaimed his identity to the leader of this new and final dispensation by making reference to the Father’s will: “I am Jesus Christ; I came by the will of the Father; and I do his will” (D&C 19:24).
The scriptural record is impressive; in Jesus’ every thought and action is found the consistent and singular theme of the fulfillment of the Father’s will. The gospel of Jesus Christ, then, as Jesus himself declared to his New World disciples, consists of one basic, fundamental, overriding principle: doing the will of our Father in Heaven, subordinating one’s own will to his, and having one’s desires “swallowed up in the will of the Father,” just as it was prophesied of the Son long before he entered mortality (Mosiah 15:7).

We have been told that the tangible expression of doing the Father’s will in our day consists of living by the plan of salvation and participating in its ordinances. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained it this way:

Salvation does not come to those who merely confess Christ with their lips, or even to those who go about doing good works (as men generally view good works). It is reserved for those who do the very things which constitute the will of the Father, namely: (1) Accept and believe the true gospel, thus gaining faith in Christ, and thus believing in the prophets sent by Christ to reveal his truths, Joseph Smith being the greatest of these in this dispensation; (2) Repent; (3) Be baptized by a legal administrator who has power from God to bind on earth and seal in heaven; (4) Receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, also by the authorized act of a duly appointed priesthood bearer; and (5) Endure in righteousness and devotion to the truth, keeping every standard of personal righteousness that appertains to the gospel, until the end of one’s mortal probation.

Not coincidentally, these are the very same tenets the risen Christ taught in the New World. For the disciples of Jesus, the Father’s will centers on the first principles and ordinances administered by the Church of Jesus Christ. For the Son himself the Father’s will centered on carrying out the great and last sacrifice in order to put into effect the terms and conditions of the Father’s plan.

The Cross

The “gospel,” then, in its most basic and pared-down definition, consists of the Son fulfilling the will of the Father, which culminated on the cross. “I came into the world to do the will of the Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross” (3 Nephi 27:13–14). Some six hundred years beforehand, Nephi saw in vision that the Messiah “was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world” (1 Nephi 11:33). Even before that, the brother of Jared was told to “write the things which he had seen,” but that “they were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that [the Lord] should be lifted up upon the cross”
(Ether 4:1). And the great prophet Jacob desired “that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross” (Jacob 1:8).

Perhaps it is an irony of the modern theological world that one of the most noted and distinctive teachings of LDS theology is its emphasis on the central role of Gethsemane as a place of redemptive suffering. Yet the keystone of our religion emphasizes the cross, though such emphasis does not seem to receive much press or, at the very least, is misunderstood. One writer tells the story of a woman who asked a Protestant pastor engaged in ecumenical outreach how he could associate with Mormons, who “don’t believe that Jesus died on the cross.” When the pastor asked where she thought Latter-day Saints believed Jesus died, she responded, “Oh, I don’t mean that, I mean, they don’t believe he died for our sins on the cross.”

Jesus starkly and powerfully corrects such erroneous notions about LDS doctrine in 3 Nephi 27:13–21. In these verses the Savior boldly emphasizes the singular importance of the cross. Because we adore and worship Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we revere the image, symbol, and metaphor that is the cross. This does not in any way diminish the importance of Gethsemane. We must never lose or even downplay our knowledge of Gethsemane as a place of redemptive suffering. Historically, the last we hear of such a notion seems to be when the Church father Irenaeus wrote a tract about AD 180 entitled Against Heresies, wherein he said that Jesus “sweated great drops of blood, . . . tokens of the flesh . . . bearing salvation to his own handiwork.” But, on the other hand, we must never diminish the monumental importance of the cross. Thankfully, its significance is reenthroned in the unforgettable narrative of 3 Nephi 27.

Both Gethsemane and the cross constitute the awful, terrible suffering and sacrifice that was the Atonement. Elder B. H. Roberts instructed: “If it be true, and it is, that men value things in proportion to what they cost, then how dear to them must be the Atonement, since it cost Christ so much in suffering that he may be said to have been baptized by blood-sweat in Gethsemane, before he reached the climax of his passion, on Calvary.” On the cross, “all the infinite agonies and merciless pains of Gethsemane recurred.” Perhaps the Savior chose to emphasize the cross during his New World discourse precisely because it represents the climax of his passion, his suffering. As President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “He worked out [redemption] in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross of Calvary which made his gift immortal, universal, and everlasting.”
It is instructive that during his post-Resurrection ministry among his original disciples in the Old World, Jesus also emphasized the cross by referring to the wounds left in his hands by the Crucifixion. Luke reports that the risen Lord proved to his disciples “by many infallible proofs” that he was the same being who had been crucified earlier (Acts 1:3). The language of the King James Version obscures the true significance of Luke’s remark. “Infallible proofs” is derived from the Greek tekmeriois, meaning literally “sure sign” or “token.” It was the tokens in his hands and feet that provided positive proof that Jesus’ crucifixion and death, unlike the thousands of others carried out in the Roman Empire, ultimately ended in resurrection. Thus, the Greek of Acts 1:3 might more directly be rendered, “To them [the Apostles] he showed himself to be alive after his great suffering, through many sure signs or tokens.”

Jesus will also identify himself to the Jewish people as the once crucified but now risen Messiah by means of those wounds, those sure signs or tokens left by the nails of the cross. “And then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet? Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God. And then shall they weep because of their iniquities; then shall they lament because they persecuted their king” (D&C 45:51–53).

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the cross in LDS theology. The cross is one of those universal symbols of God’s love and salvation that we share and cherish with the rest of the Christian world. We rejoice in the cross because of what it represents and are truly educated by passages like 3 Nephi 27:13–21, which tell us how our risen Lord felt about the cross and how important it is in the Father’s great plan of redemption. These passages teach us that Christ was raised up upon the cross so that all may be raised up to a newness of life. We also appreciate the eloquent expressions of other Christians about the cross. A. W. Tozer penned such a sentiment, which summarizes some of the teachings of 3 Nephi 27 as well as other Restoration scriptures.

The cross is the most revolutionary thing ever to appear among men. The cross of Roman times knew no compromise; it never made concessions. It won all its arguments by killing its opponent and silencing him for good. It spared not Christ, but slew Him the same as the rest. He was alive when they hung Him on that cross and completely dead when they took Him down six hours later. That was the cross the first time it appeared in Christian history. . . .
The cross effects its ends by destroying one established pattern, the victim’s, and creating another pattern, its own. Thus it always has its way. It wins by defeating its opponent and imposing its will upon him. It always dominates. It never compromises, never dickers nor confers, never surrenders a point for the sake of peace. It cares not for peace; it cares only to end its opposition as fast as possible.

With perfect knowledge of all this, Christ said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” So the cross not only brings Christ’s life to an end, it ends also the first life, the old life, of every one of His true followers. It destroys the old pattern, the Adam pattern, in the believer’s life, and brings it to an end. Then the God who raised Christ from the dead raises the believer and a new life begins.

This, and nothing less, is true Christianity . . . .

We must do something about the cross, and one of two things only we can do—flee it or die upon it.14

And so the meaning of the cross for us personally comes down to this: we can ignore it or we can embrace it and die upon it—meaning we can be transformed by it, crucify the natural man, and yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit (see Mosiah 3:19). The Apostle Paul put it this way: “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24). This was Paul’s personal experience; he stated, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Thus, committed disciples “crucify the natural man” and undergo a transformation on a regular, consistent basis. They do this by participating in that weekly priesthood ordinance called the sacrament, which focuses on the free-will offering of Jesus’ flesh and blood that culminated on the cross. It seems no accident that the discourse in 3 Nephi 27:13–21 came after Jesus had personally administered the sacrament at least twice to his New World disciples (see 3 Nephi 18:1–10 and 20:3–7). In these instances the sacrament seems to have served as preparation that would enable the disciples to understand the deep meaning of the relationship between the gospel, the cross, and the ordinance of remembrance.

The sacrament is the most oft repeated ordinance for us personally in mortality. Other ordinances of exaltation, such as baptism, confirmation, temple endowment, and sealing, are performed for us personally only once in our lifetime. But all worthy persons may participate in the sacrament in a personal, intimate way as often as it is administered by those who are authorized. This is exactly the pattern Jesus demonstrated for his American Israelites. We
are told that “the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days,” but “he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them” (3 Nephi 26:13; emphasis added). It seems ironic that the link between the sacrament, the cross, and the gospel is conveyed so strongly in LDS scripture, and yet so many in the world misunderstand the theology of the modern Church of Jesus Christ and its practices.

Just as the cross can transform us, it can also comfort us. Contemplation of what happened on the cross can help us cope when tragedy strikes or times get very bad. Knowing that God himself suffered unjustly and infinitely helps us bear our afflictions with greater patience and faith, giving us hope that we can be exalted because of the things that we suffer (see Hebrews 5:8–9). Making Jesus’ example of suffering on the cross our model can help us to “submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon [us]” (Mosiah 3:19). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland observed that, although we may not understand why certain things happen as they do, obedience and submission to God (whether physically or spiritually) to the very end of our lives “are the key to our blessings and our salvation. In the suffering as well as in the serving, we must be willing to be like our Savior.”15 In a moving comment, writer Richard Mouw gave this insight: “We admit we can’t understand the mysteries of God’s purposes. But we can go to the cross of Jesus Christ. We can see that, at the cross, God took upon Himself abandonment, abuse, forlornness, depth of suffering. Christ Himself cried out from the depths of His being, ‘My God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ When we see what God did through Jesus Christ we can say, ‘There is a safe place in the universe, in the shelter of the Almighty, in the shadow of the Most High.’ That place is Calvary.”16

**Lifted Up to Draw All to Him**

So in times of sorrow and suffering, the Atonement draws all serious truth-seekers to Jesus Christ. This is confirmed by the author of Hebrews, who said we do not worship a distant, uncaring God, who “cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” Rather, we can “come boldly unto the throne of grace . . . obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16).

But the Atonement also draws to Christ all those who contemplate the seriousness of their sinful predicament. The power of the Atonement will draw all men and women to the Savior because his sacrifice, culminating on the cross, is the only way anyone can escape the ravages of this fallen, sinful
world. That is really what the Atonement is—a remedy to the Fall. It is a way, the only way in fact, to fix that which is broken, the only way to restore wholeness. The remedy is so great because the sickness is so pervasive. Writing on the nature of man’s mortal, fallen condition, Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French mathematician and philosopher, said, “The Incarnation shows man the greatness of his misery by the greatness of the remedy which he required.” The infinite suffering of Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross is the remedy. And this was what Jesus is trying to teach when he said, “I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:14).

Because he was lifted up, Christ is able to offer an escape from any permanent damage caused by a fallen world. It is a compelling offer. It draws us to him. It invites us, nay, entices us, to accept the terms and conditions of an offer so great that it results not only in a lighter burden for the moment, but also in “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Jesus taught the doctrine of being “lifted up” during the last week of his mortal life, using much of the same language found in 3 Nephi 27:14–15, when the voice of the Father was heard. “Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (John 12:30–33). That Jesus repeated this instruction to his Nephite disciples indicates its importance.

Furthermore, in the New World Jesus used the language of being “lifted up” to parallel and emphasize the “lifting up,” or universal resurrection, made possible by his sacrifice and his being “lifted up.” He stated that just as he had been lifted up, so all men would “be lifted up by the Father, to stand before [him], to be judged of their works” (3 Nephi 27:14). A final judgment for all humankind follows their resurrection. But note the following verse, wherein Jesus taught that both the Resurrection and the Final Judgment are brought to pass by the power of God the Father: “And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works” (v. 15).

The great powers of God the Father include the power to give life (see John 5:21, 26), the power (and the right) to judge (see John 5:22), and ultimately the power to raise up his children to his station and to glorify them
(see Moses 1:39). During his earthly ministry, Jesus taught of his Father’s life-giving power and how it extended to the Son: “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. . . . For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:21, 26).

Jesus also taught that, while all judgment rightfully belongs to the Father, the latter delegated all judgment to the Son (see John 5:22–23). In other passages in the New Testament, we learn that not only has the Son been given responsibility for judgment, but that he has, in turn, delegated that task to the original Twelve (see Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). Such delegation of responsibility for judgment did not end with the Twelve in Palestine. An indispensable doctrine of the Book of Mormon confirms the continued delegation of responsibility for judgment. Later on, during this same discourse we have been examining (3 Nephi 27), Jesus reconfirmed his Father’s role in judgment, and then delegated judgment to the Nephite Twelve for their own people in the New World: “And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged. And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, according to the judgment which I shall give unto you” (3 Nephi 27:26–27). More than three hundred years after Christ’s visit to the New World, the prophet Mormon summarized this doctrine of the delegation of judgment specifically for the people of the latter days:

Yea, behold, I write unto all the ends of the earth; yea, unto you, twelve tribes of Israel, who shall be judged according to your works by the twelve whom Jesus chose to be his disciples in the land of Jerusalem.

And I write also unto the remnant of this people, who shall also be judged by the twelve whom Jesus chose in this land; and they shall be judged by the other twelve whom Jesus chose in the land of Jerusalem.

And these things doth the Spirit manifest unto me; therefore I write unto you all. And for this cause I write unto you, that ye may know that ye must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, yea, every soul who belongs to the whole human family of Adam; and ye must stand to be judged of your works, whether they be good or evil. (Mormon 3:18–20)

Thus, it seems there will be a whole hierarchy of judges who will act under Jesus Christ to judge all the posterity of Adam and Eve. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Under Christ, selected agents and representatives shall sit in judgment upon specified peoples and nations. Scriptural intimations indicate that there will be a great judicial hierarchy, each judge acting in his own
sphere of appointment and in conformity with the eternal principles of judgment which are in Christ. When John wrote of that day of judgment incident to the Second Coming of our Lord, he said: ‘I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.’ (Rev. 20:4).”\footnote{18}

Since no one will be able to ignore or escape the Final Judgment, over which Jesus Christ will preside, all people will be drawn to the Savior in this way as well. Judgment will be based on “their works” (v. 15). And as we learn from a vision given to Joseph Smith, the Lord also “will judge all men... according to the desire of their hearts” (D&C 137:9).

Justification Taught

Having taught his disciples the nature of his gospel, its unique connection to the will of the Father, the concomitant purpose of his atoning sacrifice on the cross, and the subsequent inescapable Judgment, Jesus once again brings his discourse back to focus on what he earlier called “my doctrine” (see 3 Nephi 11:30–40), namely, obedience to the ordinances of salvation. An indispensable part of the Savior’s gospel is comprehended in the first principles and ordinances, as the fourth article of faith states. Earlier in his three-day ministry among his New World disciples, Jesus even called these principles and ordinances the rock foundation against which the gates of hell would not prevail (see 3 Nephi 11:39–40).\footnote{19} Now, in this culminating discourse, the Savior declares that those who repent, are baptized, and endure to the end “will [he] hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Nephi 27:16). It is most significant that he says he will hold these covenantors “guiltless.” It is not that they are completely sinless and perfect at that point, but rather that Jesus applies his atoning blood to them so that a verdict of “not guilty” is rendered in their behalf on the Day of Judgment.

Only Jesus’ atonement and advocacy in their behalf puts them (us) back into a right relationship with Deity. This is the doctrine of justification, and it stands behind the graphic scene of advocacy portrayed by Jesus to Joseph Smith:

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—

Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;

Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. (D&C 45:3–5)
This is the apex of the good news or glad tidings that Jesus authored. All who comply with the Father’s will are absolved of the guilt and punishment associated with each broken law. This is done by the simple decree of the Sinless One, who paid for all guilt and punishment and whose right it is, according to divine justice, to set free or require payment. The soul or inner being of the person being absolved may not, indeed likely is not, completely purified. But that makes no difference. He or she is still put back into a right relationship with God and set on the path that will ultimately bring the person to a state or condition of total purity. This is one of the messages of Mormon’s summary found in Helaman 3:28–30 and 35:

Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.

Yea, we see that whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked—

And land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out. . . .

Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.

Complete salvation, which is exaltation, is a process by which we grow stronger and stronger in righteous power and become purer and holier. Justification, or being declared guiltless, precedes sanctification. The latter is a continuing process by which we are cleansed over time through the power of the Holy Ghost to make us more and more like God. By being put back into a right relationship with Deity through the Atonement of Christ, we enter that state of grace by which our inner natures are actually and entirely changed. The Apostle Paul spoke much about both justification and sanctification as separate but related aspects of complete salvation. Using the writings of Paul, author John MacArthur has described in modern terms both the nature of justification and sanctification. He points out their difference, but also their inseparability, in a way that helps emphasize the magnitude of what Jesus taught in 3 Nephi 27. MacArthur wrote:

In its theological sense, justification is a forensic, or purely legal, term. It describes what God *declares* about the believer, not what He *does to change* the believer. In fact,
justification effects no actual change whatsoever in the sinner’s nature or character. Justification . . . changes our status only, but it carries ramifications that guarantee other changes will follow. . . .

In biblical terms, justification is a divine verdict of “not guilty—fully righteous.” It is the reversal of God’s attitude toward the sinner. Whereas He formerly condemned, He now vindicates. . . . Justification is more than simple pardon; pardon alone would still leave the sinner without merit before God. [But] when God justifies He imputes divine righteousness to the sinner (Rom. 4:22–25). Christ’s own infinite merit thus becomes the ground on which the believer stands before God (Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9). So justification elevates the believer to a realm of full acceptance and divine privilege in Jesus Christ. . . .

Justification is distinct from sanctification because in justification God does not make the sinner righteous; He declares that person righteous (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). Justification imputes Christ’s righteousness to the sinner’s account (Rom. 4:11b); sanctification imparts righteousness to the sinner personally and practically (Rom. 6:1–7; 8:11–14). Justification takes place outside sinners and changes their standing (Rom. 5:1–2); sanctification is internal and changes the believer’s state (Rom. 6:19). Justification is an event, sanctification a process. The two must be distinguished but can never be separated. . . . Both are essential elements of salvation.20

The twofold doctrine of justification and sanctification is comprehended in Jesus’ discourse in 3 Nephi 27. Notice what he says after he promises a decree of guiltlessness (v. 16) to those who receive authorized ordinances and endure to the end: “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end. Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:19–20).

Purity is the requirement of heaven. As we immerse ourselves in the doctrine of the Atonement, and practice the principles that derive from this central act of the Father’s plan, we become spotless. We wash our garments in the rich red blood of Jesus Christ, and yet they become white. In literature this is called an antinomy, an apparent contradiction. But its graphic nature points us to a sure reality. Only the Atonement of Christ and our obedience to its interconnected ordinances will allow us to enter the kingdom of God.

Justice of the Father

As one might expect in this gospel-defining discourse in 3 Nephi 27, Jesus also touches upon the “justice of the Father” (v. 17)—something that
he understood exquisitely from personal experience in Gethsemane’s garden and on Golgotha’s cross. If there was any doubt that the principle of justice ultimately issues from God the Father, Jesus resolved the question.

The justice of the Father requires payment for all the broken laws, wickedness, and depravity from the time of Adam to the end of the present mortal world. Jesus suffered the demands of God’s justice and therefore suffered the wrath of God the Father. To be clear, Jesus absorbed the full force of the punishment deserved by each one of us, though he himself deserved no punishment. The full force of God’s justice and God’s wrath was not slackened for him, as the scripture states: “When he shall deliver up the kingdom, and present it unto the Father, spotless, saying: I have overcome and have trodden the wine-press alone, even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God” (D&C 76:107). Elder Neal A. Maxwell elaborated upon this awful reality: “Jesus always deserved and always had the Father’s full approval. But when He took our sins upon Him, of divine necessity required by justice He experienced instead ‘the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God’ (D&C 76:107; 88:106).”21 Those who will not submit to the purifying power of the Atonement through the ordinances found in Jesus’ Church, nor endure to the end, will essentially experience the demands of “the justice of the Father” for eternity—“whence they can no more return” (3 Nephi 27:17).

Jesus elaborated on the requirements of divine justice to the Prophet Joseph Smith in a very personal revelation, using language so stark as to sound almost brutal. But, it is not so much the stark phrasing one remembers as much as Jesus’ first-person description of the price he paid for all those who repent and embrace his suffering as an intimate gift of self.

Therefore I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I;

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (D&C 19:15–19)

This is not easy doctrine; it is not cheap grace; it is not warm and fuzzy “believe-ism.” It is a frank portrayal of the Atonement’s exacting cost to Jesus
and the Atonement’s requirement of each disciple. It is an eyewitness account of the great and last sacrifice by the very participant himself. It seems very much as though Jesus, by recounting the experience, is plunged back into it with such perfect recollection of every detail of the exquisite pain that he simply cannot continue with the description beyond a certain point. And that point is symbolized by the dash at the end of verse 18: “and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.”

Yes, Jesus understands the Father’s justice. He has tried to show his disciples a better way; he has offered mercy for justice. Those who will not accept the gift, or, more precisely, those who will not continue in the gift and endure to the end, will be “cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father” (3 Nephi 27:17).

Conclusion

One cannot help but marvel at both the doctrinal profundity as well as the rhetorical and literary power of the Savior’s gospel-defining discourse in 3 Nephi 27, particularly its doctrinal core in verses 13 through 21. This is a unique passage; there is nothing like it in all of scripture. Verses 13 and 21 are bookends, discernible by the phrase “my gospel,” used by Jesus to identify personally the essence of the plan of salvation. Nowhere else in scripture do we find the connections that Jesus made on that occasion for his audience. There is a compelling persuasiveness to the simplicity and succinctness of his words. We see once again how the Master has the incomparable ability to boil things down to their fundamental aspects, define expectations, point us to his Church, and leave us to choose. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

As we contemplate this verse in our quiet moments we hear the Savior summarize for us all his teachings in 3 Nephi: “You now know what the gospel is; you know it is found in my church; you know what you must do; you know that it is only my gospel that will allow you to be with God and be like God.” In commentary both elevating and instructing, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said,

Viewed from our mortal position, the gospel is all that is required to take us back to the Eternal Presence, there to be crowned with glory and honor, immortality and eternal life. To gain these greatest of all rewards, two things are required. The first is
the atonement by which all men are raised in immortality, with those who believe and obey ascending also unto eternal life. This atoning sacrifice was the work of our Blessed Lord, and he has done his work. The second requisite is obedience on our part to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Thus the gospel, is, in effect, the atonement. But the gospel is also all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys needed to save and exalt fallen man in the highest heaven hereafter.22

Jesus “closed his visit to the Nephites as he began it, with the fundamental declaration that he had come into the world to do the will of the Father.”23 He then urged all to do likewise: “Therefore, what manner of men [and women] ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27). Where his gospel is concerned it is all a matter of “will”—whether we choose to follow God’s or our own. This is the heart of the issue. The former way leads to glory; the latter to misery. This was the message of Jesus’ gospel-defining discourse in the New World. This is truly good news. RE

Notes
2. The surprising exception is John. He does not mention it.


19. Both the Articles of Faith and the Savior’s teachings in 3 Nephi indicate that the Savior’s “gospel” and his “doctrine” are not exact equivalents. Article of Faith 4 defines faith, repentance, baptism, and receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost as the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. His “gospel,” as he defines it in 3 Nephi 27:13–21, seems broader than his “doctrine” described in 3 Nephi 11:30–40. His gospel touches upon matters of central importance not explicitly laid out in 3 Nephi 11. It might be said that what Jesus gives to us in 3 Nephi 27:15–17 is the law of the gospel (as mentioned in other holy places), that is, his personal assurance of our being held guiltless if we follow the path of faith, repentance, baptism, receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end in righteousness. For a different view, namely that his “gospel” and his “doctrine” are equivalents and interchangeable, see Noel B. Reynolds, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets,” *BYU Studies* 31, no. 3, (1991), 31–50.


The Apostle Paul wrote, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).
The scriptures teach that all the creations under heaven are eternally indebted to the Savior. King Benjamin illustrated this point when he taught the Nephites, “He doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:24). The Atonement of Jesus Christ gives life and purpose to all of God’s creations. Remove Christ and his Atonement, and we are nothing. We can never repay the Father and the Son for the Atonement and the blessings that flow from it. Therefore, unlike the typical debtor-creditor relationship, no amount of righteousness, good deeds, or holiness can ever settle our account with the Savior. Rather, the more we attempt to credit our account with the Savior, the more indebted we become.

Yet, in seeming tension with our inability to repay the Savior is the scriptures’ exhortation to suffer for his sake. At least eight times in the Bible, the Saints are told they will suffer for his sake, and they are told at least thirteen times they will suffer for his name’s sake. For example, the Apostle Paul says, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him,
but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29; emphasis added). Of course, suffering for his sake does not settle our debts with the Savior, because the Atonement is a gift to all mankind that infinitely keeps giving. Because we cannot settle our accounts with Christ, there must be another meaning of “suffer for his sake.”

Examining Philippians 1:29 in Greek helps us understand how we suffer for Christ’s sake. The word “sake” is a translation of the Greek word “ὑπέρ,” which means “on behalf of” or “in support of.” This renders the translation as “suffer on behalf of Christ” or “suffer in support of Christ.” This suggests that through suffering we act as a proxy for the Savior to further his work and name.

**Preaching the Gospel May Lead to Suffering**

We may suffer to support Christ as we spread his message, despite persecutions and afflictions that may follow. Christ’s message is most powerfully spread through ambassadors who know through experience something of his redeeming power. Experiences with the Atonement can originate from trials and opposition or through the process of becoming sanctified and holy.

For instance, missionaries are not sent out simply to convey information; anybody can get that from a book or the Internet. Missionaries are sent out because of who they are and what they have become. They are firsthand witnesses of God’s interactions with men and the power of the Atonement. Extraordinary missionaries are found in humble disciples who use their own lives as a model to bear pure, personal testimony of the power the Atonement. Such missionaries produce an environment where investigators not only hear the gospel but also see it and feel it.

The Lord commanded that the gospel be preached by the Comforter and not by some other way (see D&C 50:17–20). As a disciple uses the power of the Atonement, he or she has a greater capacity to bear testimony of that power. In an article directed toward future missionaries, President James E. Faust taught, “You cannot convert people beyond your own conversion.” Conversion is the process of transforming the natural man into a man of holiness. It requires great mental exertion to harmonize our motives and will with his through faith and repentance. In such environments, the natural man suffers and the spirit is enhanced with light and experience. Thus suffering for Christ’s sake is not always physical suffering but the suffering of the natural man’s appetites in the conversion process.
Saul of Tarsus’s life demonstrates how both physical suffering and the suffering of the natural man empower a missionary. Saul began his ministry as a Pharisee who used persuasion and deception to gain followers. Then an angelic visit initiated a change in Paul that was accompanied with years of obedience and sacrifice. Both Paul’s physical suffering and putting off of the natural man converted him from a teacher founded on secular knowledge into Paul the leader who taught with the Spirit and not men’s philosophies.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians illustrates this change: “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:1–2). Saul renounced his past habits and crafty methods to become a renewed and cleansed Paul. He no longer desired the praise of men but rather the praise of God (see 1 Thessalonians 2:4–6). He put off selfish intentions and motives and aligned his mind with Christ. Paul declared, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:5–6; emphasis added). Through both physical suffering and great mental exertion, Paul successfully submitted his will to God’s. His teaching became more enriched because of who he had become and what he stood for despite the great affliction that accompanied him. Thus Paul taught for “Jesus’ sake” not only by suffering persecution but also by suffering internally as he mentally struggled to discipline his will.

Paul radiated the light of Christ and became a living testimony and proxy for the Savior. He continued to labor in behalf of the Master of the vineyard, planting the seed of Christ in the hearts of all those who would receive it. Through Paul and other missionaries, the voice of Christ was not hushed after the grave but grew exponentially as converts hearkened to the Savior’s plea, “Come, follow me.”

Similarly, members of the Church are required to take his name upon themselves and become “ambassadors for Christ” to the entire world (2 Corinthians 5:20). Such ambassadors must become converted by removing the cloak of secularism from their spirit and becoming a light set on a hill. At times, physical suffering will accompany this journey, but the natural man will always be our companion in mortality and will nag at us to take an opposing course. It is overcoming this internal struggle of carnal appetites
that is central in representing Christ and his doctrine. As we do so, Christ is resurrected anew in the lives of those with whom we come in contact.

Suffering for the Value of Christ

With the gospel’s restoration, true followers could once again take his name upon themselves and labor on his behalf by proclaiming the good news. However, with the Restoration came renewed persecution and suffering. Such has always been the case for the followers of the Savior. In the words of Paul, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). By necessity the Saints must suffer to take righteousness upon themselves. “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one” (2 Nephi 2:11).

For anything to qualify as being righteous, there must be something opposing it. Therefore, it would also seem that the greater the opposition to that righteousness, the more righteous it becomes. Trials, temptation, and suffering create an environment where we can qualify as righteous. If our purpose is to be like God, we should not be surprised that this involves opposition.

The Savior taught the blessings of suffering for his sake in the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matthew 5:10–11; emphasis added). In the LDS King James Version of the Bible, a Greek footnote is attached on the phrase “for my sake” and renders the translation as “on account of me.”

The Greek word translated as “sake” can also be translated “value.” If “value” is used in place of “sake,” it seems the Savior is saying, “You suffer persecution for my value.” There are two implications with this interpretation. First, as Saints endure afflictions, the value of the Savior’s name and ministry increases in their lives and those around them. Second, as the Atonement is applied, the value of Christ and his sacrifice grows in glory and honor.

Suffering Transforms Us

The more opposition a person is willing to suffer for the name of Christ, the more worth and significance his name and ministry has to him or her. The Apostle Peter says, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye;
for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil
spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14; emphasis added).
Suffering is a catalyst in the spiritual metabolic process. It can induce the
proper environment for us to reach the design of our creation, thus glorifying
the Creator.

However, the concept of suffering can be misunderstood. For example,
Medieval Christian monks would inflict pain on themselves to rid evil from
their body, all done in the name of Christ. This practice completely overlooked
the meaning of suffering for his sake. The actual suffering does not glorify God;
rather, it is the transformation induced by the suffering that glorifies God.
Suffering can draw us closer to eternal truths. Suffering provides an opportunity
to stand as a witness of Christ by sacrificing the natural man and transforming
oneself into a being of righteousness. God is not interested in how much pain
has been tolerated, but rather how much the suffering has placed his image into
your countenance. Paul taught, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mer-
cies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto
God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world:
but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is
that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1–2).

Every day the natural man and the spirit struggle to place the other on
the altar of sacrifice. This offering has the potential to be a sweet savor to the
Lord or a foul stench. Either the natural man’s heart is broken and filled with
the light of the Atonement or the spirit is filled with selfishness and doubt.
This sacrificial experience reveals our true character and what we value and
love most. If the natural man is sacrificed, doubt and selfishness are burned
from the soul and replaced with faith and charity.

Becoming like Christ requires tremendous effort. It is the amount of
sacrifice put into that effort that gives value to the experience. For example,
when missionaries return home, they often claim that their mission was the
best time of their lives and yet also the hardest. They treat their mission as an
experience of the highest value or, in other words, a sacred experience. It was
not the call alone that made the experience sacred, but the effort put into
it. The more the missionary sacrificed and worked, the more memorable and
valuable their mission became. If eternal life is the greatest experience one can
achieve, why should we expect it to come without any effort?

The Apostle Paul demonstrated the value of the Savior in his life by con-
secrating everything to the Lord, even to the point of death. Each time the
spirit won the struggle over the natural man, Paul’s conviction grew and the life of Christ was made manifest through him, “for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:11; emphasis added). Through Paul’s sacrifice and obedience, the Savior’s credibility became amplified in his life and the lives of those whom he taught.

Suffering Strengthens the Power of Testimony

The false perception exists that Christ always removes challenges, weaknesses, and trials from our lives. Even Paul petitioned the Lord three times to remove “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), a request that was never granted. Many times trials are not removed; rather, there comes a further empowerment of faith and capacity to bear those burdens. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a ‘healing’ cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are ‘healed’ by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us.”4 It is only by opposition that we come to recognize and feel the power of the Atonement in our lives. After all, it is only because of hunger that we can fully know the power and pleasure of food. If all opposition were removed, how could anyone exercise their faith in Christ and come to know the power of the Atonement?

The Apostle Peter also explains that suffering is not a strange phenomenon among Christians. He teaches that there is a union of suffering and blessings: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Peter 4:12–14; emphasis added).

The joining of afflictions and blessings is illustrated in the ordinance of marriage, in which the problems and blessings of different parties are merged. Two individuals figuratively become one entity with one name. In such marriage covenants, we do not think it strange that the problems of one become the problems of the other; on the contrary, we expect it. We know a marriage will never reach its full potential unless both parties are selfless and willing
to support the other. Marriage strengthens both individuals and brings far greater happiness than if they were left to their own efforts. Together their burdens become lighter as each is empowered by the other with the tenacity to carry on. However, such relationships are fully ripe only after a period of testing in which each partner demonstrates true love for the other.

This marriage covenant is not much different than the covenant made at baptism to bear the name of Christ. Baptism is a ceremony in which one receives the name of the Bridegroom (see Matthew 25:1–13). As this relationship develops, the concerns of one become the concerns of the other. When the relationship has truly matured, both parties will have developed a unity of purpose. They each stand as a witness for the other and glorify each other. Because of our baptismal covenant with Christ, he bears the burden of being a witness for us before the Father, and we bear the burden of becoming witnesses of Christ to our fellowmen.

Can we stand as witnesses for someone if we don’t have the slightest idea about what that individual went through? A judge would disregard the testimony of any witness who did not have some form of experience with the event. In fact, the strength of a witness’s testimony is dependent upon his or her experience. The more active role a witness has in an experience, the more weight their testimony will carry. Christ has asked that we be witnesses of him and yet the climax of his life is found in Gethsemane to the Garden Tomb. In spite of this, people continually plead to have the tiniest afflictions removed, or they flee from any form of persecution. A true witness of Christ experiences a minute part of what the Lord went through by spending time in their own personal Gethsemane. Consequently, the individual gains further experience of Christ’s redemptive power and thus enhances the power of their testimony. Those who endure such challenges with faith prove stronger witnesses of Christ because they are firsthand participants of his life and Atonement.

As testimonies become stronger and more numerous, the evidence of a living Christ becomes greater. Those who hear these testimonies are persuaded to investigate, and many are converted. Thus, through the development of testimony, we suffer so that we may come to know him and further glorify him by bringing others to him.

**Suffering Edifies the Body of Christ**

The Prophet Joseph Smith and other Church leaders suffered for Christ’s sake, which strengthened the members’ faith. They set examples of how a
disciple should be willing to endure for Christ. Joseph lost five children; he was tarred and feathered, imprisoned, and eventually martyred. However, his story is not necessarily peculiar among the prophets. All of them suffered for Christ’s sake. James says, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (James 5:10). It might seem peculiar that such righteous men have had to suffer so much. Yet when we look back on their lives, we gain a greater measure of hope and faith. The triumphant suffering of the prophets builds a reservoir of faith from which Church members can draw to give them faith to endure their own trials.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul explains why he endured being imprisoned, beaten, and ridiculed: “I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Colossians 1:23–24; emphasis added). Paul did not endure affliction for his own instruction but to tutor the Saints in discipleship.

In Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians, he further teaches that members become unified in one body by compensating for each other’s weaknesses, “that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25–26). This single body resembles a Zion society where all members benefit one another and behave as one entity.

In this kind of relationship, the problems and the trials of one become the problems of the whole body; thus if one member needs strengthening, it is up to the stronger members to strengthen him or her. Paul says, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). A perfect example of bearing infirmities for the weak is the Savior. He did not suffer for mankind’s sins to please himself but acted out of pure love for the Father and for us. He is the strongest member of God’s family, yet he took an infinite burden for our sake. He could have gained salvation without us, but instead he endured an infinite punishment to provide us with strength, faith, and ability. It is reasonable that his followers would be asked to go and do likewise. Among his followers, prophets, in their unique role, often experience trials not for their own benefit but for the strengthening of other members. These prophets’ commitment and sacrifice allows them to stand as models for all the Saints to follow.
A true leader cannot ask anything of someone that he himself is not willing to do. Joseph Smith could not stand at the head of this dispensation and expect others to follow him if he had not taken the lead, not only in responsibility but also in enduring persecution. By dying as a martyr, he exemplified the ultimate price of discipleship. He did not deny his teachings or his ministry even when death was imminent. Joseph’s death sealed not only his own testimony but also the testimony of the entire Restoration. It gives authenticity to the truth spoken by all the Saints who were, are, and will be martyred for the truth. Without the death of the founder, the credibility and strength of all the martyrs’ testimonies would be weakened.

A founder is the spring of strength and direction from which all followers draw. Joseph suffered for Christ’s sake so that he might be a model and a source of comfort for those who would follow him. Just as Christ died to establish his Church, it would require the death of his servant to reestablish his Church. This meant it had to be built on a foundation of strengthened apostles and prophets. If such a foundation were not laid, it would be like a steel frame on sandstone footings. A strong storm would rip the columns from the foundation and the structure would fail. The walls and appendages of the Church cannot bear a larger load than the foundation can tolerate. The testimony and commitment of members cannot rest on a frail slab. The foundation of the Church must be built on unyielding leaders, with Christ as the chief cornerstone to support those who would follow.

To the extent that members are willing to give their life for Jesus Christ, they amplify his name. His name has greater meaning and purpose to all who hear it because they see Christ in the lives of his followers. C. S. Lewis put it this way: “He works on us through each other. Men are mirrors, or ‘carriers’ of Christ to other men . . . usually it is those who know Him that bring him to others. That is why the Church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another is so important.” Thus, any Saint who suffers tribulation for the body of Christ fortifies the members by demonstrating the power of the Atonement. As different members recognize this power, faith is reinforced and the whole body of Christ grows a little closer to reaching its full potential as a Zion society.

**Suffering Further Glorifies God**

“Sake” can also be translated as “value.” In this context, the more the Atonement is applied, the more Christ’s sacrifice is infused with glory, joy, and honor. The
Atonement is like an infinite account that we can draw upon. However, the great irony of this account is that the more it is used, the more it appreciates. As the Atonement is applied, Christ’s sacrifice augments in glory and in honor because more souls are brought back to the Father. Thus, the Atonement increases in value at an ever-increasing rate as more and more people use this gift.

During Christmas, many people put great thought and effort into finding a perfect gift that will bring a loved one great joy. They spend hours running to different stores, flipping through catalogs, and conversing with others. On Christmas Day their sacrifice creates feelings of joy when the receiver looks up with the smile of pure delight, love, and appreciation. This feeling increases as the giver sees the gift being used. However, not all gifts are received in this way. They may end up in an old storage closet, never to be looked at again, or in the garbage can with the torn wrapping paper. When the giver discovers his gift was neglected, his heart aches. The gift represented the giver’s love demonstrated by sacrifice in time and money. The greater the sacrifice of the giver, the more it hurts to see the gift esteemed as something of naught.

Similarly, Christ gave all of us a perfect gift. Just as the rejection of a Christmas gift brings tears to the giver, so does the rejection of Christ cause the Father to weep (see Moses 7:28–33). But the opposite is also true; the Lord receives joy and glory by seeing his children receive the gift of his Son. The more that receive this gift, the more the value it has. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33). What does it profit the Father and Christ if their gift was never used; it would be as if their sacrifice were in vain. As we use the Atonement and its sanctifying power in our lives, Christ and the Father receive greater glory for their sacrifice.

Conclusion

When Jacob records his testimony of the Savior on the gold plates, he mentions that it is for Christ’s sake: “And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ’s sake, and for the sake of our people” (Jacob 1:4; emphasis added). Jacob and his people “labored diligently . . . that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:7–8). Jacob, his people, and those who would follow
thereafter would echo a common theme of captivity and deliverance through their Savior. These tangible testimonies of faith and suffering would eventually be compiled into a book that would bring millions of people into the light of the Atonement. The sufferings recorded in scripture not only converted and sanctified the people but also became an inspiration to us to further his work and glory for future generations.

Similarly, the scriptures continue to be written today in the lives of those who take his name upon themselves and suffer for his sake. Whether that suffering is an actual affliction or the challenge of changing the natural man into a Saint, the life and mission of Jesus Christ is expanded through those individuals. They become a living testimony that the Savior lives and that his ministry continues among God’s children today. Perhaps this is another interpretation of what John meant when he said, “There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). Everyone writes their interactions with God in their own Book of Life. Some individuals write hundreds of pages filled with tremendous stories of faith, and others may only write a few words because of their neglect. Yet all the accomplished books bear a miraculous and common theme of change—redemption and love.

Collectively these accounts further Christ’s purpose and role as the Savior by inviting more souls to come unto him and be saved. Thus the evidence of Christ continually grows as more come to know their Creator “till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”

Notes

We are given vaccines to prevent disease in our bodies; similarly, Heavenly Father gives us the Holy Ghost to sanctify us and prevent spiritual disease in our lives.
“The Unspeakable Gift of the Holy Ghost”

P. SCOTT FERGUSON

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Bacteria, viruses, and other germs threaten our bodies every day. Our spirits, like our bodies, are also susceptible to harmful elements. When a disease-causing microorganism enters the body, the immune system mounts a complex defense to fight off the invader. When our spirits come in contact with harmful influences, the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost help us find protection to combat these evil forces. Regarding this spiritual protection, President Boyd K. Packer observed: “Spiritual diseases of epidemic proportion sweep over the world. We are not able to curb them. But we can prevent our youth from being infected by them. . . . We can inoculate them. Inoculate: In—‘to be within’ and oculate means ‘eye to see.’ We place an eye within them—the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.”

The goal of the immune system is to prevent illness by destroying a foreign invader before it causes harm. Through the tandem gifts of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we are strengthened in our fight against those forces that would harm our spirits. By observing the way the body combats harmful invaders, we gain spiritual insights into how the Holy Ghost helps us achieve immunity over evil. We can overcome our sinful natures without experiencing
the effects of every sin—the Holy Ghost can teach us “to prize the good” (see Moses 6:55). Through the enabling power of the Atonement, the Holy Ghost “will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

**Spiritual Immunity**

Our bodies build immunity to bacteria, viruses, and other germs in two ways. The first way in which our bodies build immunity is by coming in contact with a disease, becoming ill, and fighting the invader until we become better. We call this natural immunity. The second means of building immunity is through vaccines. This method, known as vaccine-induced immunity, enables the body to have power over the intruder without having to confront it.

We likewise overcome sin in two ways: First, by coming in contact with sin and experiencing its ill effects, repenting, and being cleansed. We call this redemption from sin. The second way involves the Holy Ghost enabling us to confront carnality in such a way that the sting of sin is ineffective.

Unlike our bodies, which are usually sick for only a few days, our souls can take much longer to heal. And, in fact, just as physical ailments can kill the victim, untreated spiritual wounds can end in spiritual death. Sin is a wound to both body and spirit—“the spirit and the body are the soul of man” (see D&C 88:15).

Once we have immunity to a disease-causing organism, our bodies are better protected from becoming ill from that pathogen. Likewise, through the repentance process, we are no longer affected by our former sins. In scripture, this is known as justification. That is, in our imperfect but repentant state, we are declared righteous through the blood of the Lamb. “And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true” (D&C 20:30). But what we desire is immunity to all sin as we overcome the natural man. This vaccine, like immunity to the natural man, comes to us through the sanctifying power of the Atonement through the influence of the Holy Ghost. “Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, . . . could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:12). What we truly seek is sanctification, to “look upon sin . . . with abhorrence” and to be clean and pure always.

Through the enabling power of the Atonement, we are fortified against evil to do good works otherwise impossible if left to our own. As we are sanctified, we are inoculated against the desire for sin. “And we know also,
that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31).

Spiritual Immunity Is Achieved through the Holy Ghost

Resistence develops after we have been exposed to a certain organism. Our immune system mounts a defense to prevent us from getting sick again from that particular type of virus or bacterium. Once we have been exposed to a specific virus or bacterium, the next time we encounter it, these defenses go to work. They immediately react to the organism, attacking the disease before it can develop and spread. Our immune system can recognize and effectively combat thousands of different organisms.5

So it is with the Holy Ghost. When we have been cleansed from sin (the equivalent of natural immunity), the Holy Ghost goes to work to remind us of the godly sorrow associated with the sin and strengthens our resolve to stand firm in resisting sin in the future. Through a conscious effort on our part and with the aid of the Holy Ghost, we can stand strong. When we are sanctified, we avoid sin and “touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30), like vaccine-induced immunity. There is sufficient evil in the temptation alone for the Holy Ghost to inoculate us against that evil in the future; and because we qualify, the Holy Ghost triggers a response that enables us to resist the sin because it is abhorrent to us, and we “give place no more for the enemy of [our] soul” (2 Nephi 4:28).

This enabling power is available to us because we resisted evil in the first place. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.”6 Alma taught, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and call on his holy name, and watch and pray continually, that ye may not be tempted above that which ye can bear, and thus be led by the Holy Spirit” (Alma 13:28).

The Holy Ghost Acts as a Refiner’s Fire

Much as sterilization removes impurities, so the Holy Ghost can purify us. We read in the Bible Dictionary: “The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to have, whenever one is worthy, the companionship of the Holy Ghost. . . . It acts as a cleansing agent to purify a person and sanctify him from all sin. Thus
it is often spoken of as ‘fire.’” The Bible Dictionary also teaches, “The process consists in the application of great heat, . . . hence the term ‘refiner’s fire.’”

John the Baptist taught, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11).

Nephi reminds us to “do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; . . . and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17). The Savior, speaking to the inhabitants of the Americas after his crucifixion, alluded to this fiery characteristic of the Holy Ghost when he taught, “And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 9:20).

The early elders of this dispensation were told to sanctify themselves, that their “minds become single to God” (D&C 88:68) to prepare them for that which lay ahead in the School of the Prophets; and because they were obedient, they received many wonderful spiritual manifestations, including visits from the Father and the Son.

We are, in our day, expected to prepare ourselves for such levels of righteousness. We are best served when the refiner’s fire burns in our own hearts. President Brigham Young observed, “Let the fire of the covenant which you made in the House of the Lord, burn in your hearts, like a flame unquenchable.”

The Holy Ghost Enables us through the Atonement of Christ

The Holy Ghost helps us to remember past experiences that will aid us in the present and the future: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26). This promise can be a powerful reminder, strengthening our resolve not to participate in sin when it is presented to us. As part of the instruction given to the Twelve on the eve of the Crucifixion, the Savior taught the role of the Holy Ghost as a teacher and refresher of memory: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, . . . he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26).

Not only does the Holy Ghost remind us of teachings that have faded over time, but he can help us remember the sorrows and joys associated with living or not living those teachings. The Holy Ghost, as our friend and constant companion, also brings to our remembrance sins for which we have yet to
repent, that we might more fully prepare for the Judgment. The Lord taught, “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness” (Ether 12:27).

As powerful as these reminders are, there is yet a greater power available to those who seek sanctification. The Apostle Paul taught the Saints at Thessalonica, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In our day, Elder David A. Bednar described the process of obtaining sanctification:

The gospel of Jesus Christ encompasses much more than avoiding, overcoming, and being cleansed from sin and the bad influences in our lives; it also essentially entails doing good, being good, and becoming better. Repenting of our sins and seeking forgiveness are spiritually necessary, and we must always do so. But remission of sin is not the only or even the ultimate purpose of the gospel. To have our hearts changed by the Holy Spirit such that “we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:12), as did King Benjamin’s people, is the covenant responsibility we have accepted. This mighty change is not simply the result of working harder or developing greater individual discipline. Rather, it is the consequence of a fundamental change in our desires, our motives, and our natures made possible through the Atonement of Christ the Lord. Our spiritual purpose is to overcome both sin and the desire to sin, both the taint and the tyranny of sin.10

All too often our repentance is limited only to the remission of sin, which is what Elder Bednar refers to as the taint of sin—the equivalent of obtaining natural immunity. More is expected of the Latter-day Saint who has access to the gift of the Holy Ghost. Our repentance should include a desire to be immune from the desire for sin, or the tyranny of sin.

Our repentance must be unto sanctification through the vaccine-like aid of the Holy Ghost. The Savior reiterated this teaching when he came among the Nephites following his death and resurrection: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, ... that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20; emphasis added).

Until we are first cleansed from sin, and second, inoculated against the desire for sin, we will find ourselves continually repenting of the same sins, saying “I’m sorry” over and over for the same behavior. Why don’t we seek this enabling power with greater effort? Why do we allow ourselves to repeat the same sins, especially when we know it is wrong? Could it be that we fear the work and commitment of total discipleship? Do we desire the companionship of the natural man over the companionship of the Holy Ghost? It is through surrendering and seeking the enabling power of the Atonement
that we are able to keep our covenants made at the waters of baptism and in holy temples and are fortified in the battle with sin. President James E. Faust observed: “There is . . . an ample shield against the power of Lucifer and his hosts. This protection lies in the spirit of discernment through the gift of the Holy Ghost. This gift comes undeviatingly by personal revelation to those who strive to obey the commandments of the Lord and to follow the counsel of the living prophets. . . . All who come unto Christ by obedience to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel can thwart Satan’s efforts.”11 As we yield to the influences of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we develop resistance to our natural-man tendencies.

The Holy Ghost Enables Us to Overcome the Natural Man

“The natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). That is, the natural man is at odds with God; he behaves in ways that God would never act. We know that “no unclean thing can dwell with God” (1 Nephi 10:21). Therefore, the natural man within each of us must be subdued.

This is the work of the Holy Ghost, to prepare us and seal us up unto godhood. Our purpose for coming to earth is to acquire and train a physical body. We cannot do the work of the eternities, creating spirit children and earths for them to inhabit, without a physical body. Through the Holy Ghost we are taught and given the power to overcome the natural man.

As mortals, we are naturally inclined to selfishness. We are in a continual search for comfort—food, water, air, love, acceptance, personal happiness, and just plain old feeling good. Weaning the mortal man from selfishness is a complicated matter. (There is a multibillion dollar industry in self-help books and seminars targeted to empower the natural man, including self-assertiveness training, self-love, and securing wealth, to mention just a few.) C. S. Lewis notes this about the weaning process:

The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self—all your wishes and precautions—to Christ. But it is far easier than what we are all trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call “ourselves,” to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be “good.” We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way—centered on money or pleasure or ambition—and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do.12

Satan distracts us with counterfeit comforts and pleasures, but participating in his counterfeits leaves us empty, frustrated, and comfortless. The Lord,
on the other hand, is desirous that we have joy (see 2 Nephi 2:25). We receive joy as we yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and [put] off the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19).

**King Benjamin’s Formula for Overcoming the Natural Man**

In King Benjamin’s address we find the formula for achieving sanctification and happiness in this life and joy throughout the eternities. Unlike our search for mortal comfort, the formula for eternal happiness is not complicated in the least; King Benjamin taught that we must first yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, second, put off the natural man, third, become a saint through the Atonement of Christ the Lord, and lastly, become as a child—submissive and meek (see Mosiah 3:19). King Benjamin’s formula for conquering the natural man is helpful in assessing where we are in the process (see chart).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repentance/Redemption—putting off the natural man</th>
<th>Sanctification—putting on the enabling power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This part of King Benjamin’s formula requires us to heed invitations from the Holy Spirit designed to help us put off the natural man.</td>
<td>This part of the formula requires us to surrender as we seek the enabling power of the Atonement—it comes after we have expended our best efforts.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit</th>
<th>Put off the natural man</th>
<th>Become a Saint—put on righteousness</th>
<th>Become as a little child—put on righteousness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Repent</td>
<td>· Seek to make greater changes</td>
<td>· Actively overcome sins of omission</td>
<td>· Submit to divine tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Feel impressions</td>
<td>· Seek to overcome addictions</td>
<td>· Serve others</td>
<td>· Seek a divine nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Forsake evil</td>
<td>· Avoid sins of commission</td>
<td>· Make temple covenants</td>
<td>· Find God in the temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Respond with change</td>
<td>· Actively seek to avoid carnality</td>
<td>· Serve in the temple</td>
<td>· Seek meekness and humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Become spiritually stronger</td>
<td>· Put gospel structure in place</td>
<td>· Desire to have temple covenants go deep within self</td>
<td>· Do all that the Father asks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this process of overcoming the natural man, when we yield to the Spirit and put off the natural man, we use the Atonement and the Holy Ghost mostly for reparation—the equivalent of natural immunity. Whereas in the
second half of the chart we see that the act of becoming a Saint and becoming as a child calls upon the Atonement and Holy Ghost as an enabler. We choose, by our willingness to submit, whether the Holy Ghost will act as a purging agent or as an enabling power. The condition of our hearts determines the amount of assistance we receive from the Holy Ghost. Marcus J. Borg, author of *The Heart of Christianity*, noted: “The Bible speaks of this condition [of our hearts] with a rich collection of synonymous metaphors. Our hearts can be ‘shut.’ They can be ‘fat,’ as if encrusted within a thick layer. They can be ‘proud,’ puffed up and enlarged. They can be ‘made of stone’ rather than made of flesh. They are often ‘hard.’ The Greek word for this condition is *sklerokardia*: we have sclerosis of the heart.”

Resistance to the Holy Ghost causes regression toward the natural man and constitutes a rejection of the enabling power. Yielding our hearts to God opens the door to greater instruction and, ultimately, sanctification. The scriptures refer to this as exercising a soft or a hard heart. The greater our desires for righteousness, the less likely we are to experience the effects of the natural man and the enticements of Satan, for “he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion. . . . And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion” (Alma 12:10–11).

Ahard heart invites selfishness and sin, thus feeding the natural man. A soft heart seeks and embraces the enabling power of the Atonement, in essence starving the natural man. Alma taught, “Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; . . . if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34:31; emphasis added). With the Holy Ghost as an enabler, we live with higher purpose—we live as Christ lives, outside ourselves, for others, “for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you” (Mosiah 2:24; emphasis added).

King Benjamin’s four-part formula helps us overcome the natural man. To a degree we all have experienced the ill effects of rejecting the Holy Ghost as we choose to indulge the natural man. If our sin is serious, we may have become “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45). We may have been “taken captive by the devil; . . . this is what is meant by the chains of hell” (Alma 12:11). Only sincere repentance rescues and reverses the effects of the addiction and captivity that plague the natural man. Even though there are many times in our lives we wish the Holy Ghost would save us from making foolish mistakes, agency
dictates otherwise. The Holy Ghost enters our hearts only by invitation; we need to regularly reinvite this honored guest into our lives.

Redemption from Sin—Putting Off the Natural Man

King Benjamin’s invitation is for bad people to become good and good people to become better, to give heed to the light of Christ. This part of King Benjamin’s sermon is an invitation to overcome the bad within us. The Lord says, “And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man” (D&C 1:33). These strivings of the Light of Christ should not be mistaken for the enabling power which comes to us through the Holy Ghost. Through yielding to the Spirit and putting off the natural man, we prepare ourselves to receive the enabling power of the Atonement. Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Our understanding of the Light of Christ is limited. But we do know . . . that it strives with all men (the Holy Ghost testifies but does not strive) unless and until they rebel against light and truth, at which time the striving ceases, and in that sense the Spirit is withdrawn.” As we yield to the Light of Christ, we are taught how to diminish the natural man. President Joseph F. Smith taught that this Spirit of Christ “strives with . . . men, and will continue to strive with them until it brings them to a knowledge of the truth and the possession of the greater light and testimony of the Holy Ghost.”

What about King Benjamin’s admonition to [yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit? Is this a reference to yield to the Light of Christ or the Holy Ghost? President Boyd K. Packer reminds us, “The Light of Christ is also described in the scriptures as the Spirit of Jesus Christ (D&C 84:45), ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18; see also Mosiah 25:24), ‘the Spirit of truth’ (D&C 93:26), ‘the light of truth’ (D&C 88:6), ‘the Spirit of God’ (D&C 46:17), and ‘the Holy Spirit’ (D&C 45:57). Some of these terms also refer to the Holy Ghost.”

Elder Bednar reminds us that the Holy Ghost will tarry with us to a point. He taught:

The standard is clear. If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. . . . I recognize we are fallen men and women living in a mortal world and that we might not have the presence of the Holy Ghost with us every second of every minute of every hour of every day. However, the Holy Ghost can tarry with us much, if not most, of the time—and certainly the Spirit can be with us more than it is not with us. As we become ever more immersed in the Spirit of the Lord, we should strive to
recognize impressions when they come and the influences or events that cause us to withdraw ourselves from the Holy Ghost.  

As we participate in activities that are harmful to our spirits, we estrange ourselves from the influence of the Holy Ghost. I wonder, when the Holy Ghost leaves us, what power and protection do we enjoy in its place? Perhaps the strivings of the Light of Christ coupled with the tarrying of the Holy Ghost are sufficient in aiding us to put off the natural man, but it takes the gift of the Holy Ghost to qualify for the greater assistance needed to become a saint and child of God.

Yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit. When we repent, we are in a position to feel and hear spiritual impressions that before went unheeded. With softened hearts we feel the effects of living in a fallen world; we are still recovering from the spiritual wounds of the adversary’s fiery addictive darts (see D&C 27:15).

Healing can be a slow process, but as we build immunity through the repentance process, we find strength over sin, which gives us power to resist evil with greater confidence. Spiritual impressions come more frequently, and to the degree that we act in accordance with these promptings, we gain spiritual strength. We now desire to put off the natural man.

Put off the natural man. Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed: “Christ’s Atonement . . . involves some arduous isometrics—the old man working against the new spiritual man. That natural man, as you know, will not go quietly or easily. And even when he is put off, he has a way of hanging around, hoping to throw his saddle on us once again.” 18 Unlike the father of King Lamoni, who was willing to “give away all [his] sins” (Alma 22:18), we may have only caged the natural man, keeping him alive with the occasional serving of our favorite sins. We fear saying good-bye once and for all because the natural man will not leave without a fuss. C. S. Lewis observed, “The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier.” 19

While trying to dismiss the natural man, we may become spiritually complacent. Building immunity to sin through repentance is challenging work, but it is not as hard as the work of seeking the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost to overcome the desire for sin. We want to be sin free, but discipleship does not come easy. We may fear the commitment of discipleship. This hesitancy to enter into greater covenants of discipleship, sacrifice, and
consecration keep us from tapping into the enabling power of the Atonement. “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added).

Our past repentance and yielding to the Spirit create greater opportunities for service in the kingdom, but this service requires willing hearts and minds (see D&C 64:34). The natural man resists such surrender, and we find ourselves nostalgically longing for our old self. Life was easier then; but living in a self-centered state does not bring joy—it is a shallow existence devoid of lasting satisfaction. Repenting of our sins but failing to become Saints certifies us for a glory that “surpasses all understanding” (D&C 76:89) but falls short of the celestial glory, wherein “we are made equal in power, and in might . . . with God” (D&C 76:95).

The work of allowing the Atonement to change our dispositions, hearts, and natures is a challenging work indeed. But we must not despair; we are readying ourselves to experience the enabling influence of the Atonement to become as a Saint.

Sanctification from Sin—Putting on the Enabling Power

Participation in this part of King Benjamin’s formula qualifies us for the enabling power of the Holy Ghost. Yielding and putting off the natural man constitutes “all we can do.” But there is still much work to be done. It is in our total surrender and seeking Christ’s grace that we become as a Saint and a child. Submission is the fare required to receive the enabling power of the Atonement, and full fare we must pay.

Become a Saint. Having overcome complacency and the fear that is an inherent part of the natural man, we are finally ready to put him or her off. We shift our efforts from putting off to putting on—putting on the full armor of God (see D&C 27:15–18; Ephesians 6:11). We seek a divine nature. Elder Joe J. Christensen said, “It is not only the thoroughly genuine desire to live in harmony with the will of God at all times, as guided by the Spirit, but also the ability to surrender totally and willingly to this guidance—and thus to do that which the Spirit whispers. To be truly spiritual is to walk with God.”

Do we fully understand the resource that is available to us through the gift of the Holy Ghost? President Brigham Young taught, “God’s people . . . may have the Spirit of the Lord to signify . . . his will, and to guide and to direct . . . in the discharge of [their] duties, in [their] temporal as well as [their] spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect, we live far beneath our
privileges.” Christ’s “grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to [claim all the blessings and privileges of the Holy Ghost] after they have expended their own best efforts.”

By tapping into this enabling power, we approach the final frontier of mortal imperfection, acquiring a new disposition and becoming a Saint. This part of King Benjamin’s formula tests our resolve to forsake the natural man even in the crucible of affliction. Can we act like Christ in the face of life’s injustices, when the natural man cries out for fairness and equity? This is the true measure of our charity. Speaking of this part of the process of perfection, Elder Maxwell observed, “Mortality presents us with numerous opportunities to become more Christlike. . . . Our customized trials such as experiencing illness, aloneness, persecution, betrayal, irony, poverty, false witness, unreciprocated love . . . greatly enlarge the soul.”

Our ever-enlarging souls—our saintliness—are not measured best by our standing in the community, church, or workplace alone. Rather, it is measured in our homes, where saintly behavior comes at a higher price. This is where the true cost of becoming as a Saint is dearest. How saintly am I to those with whom I live in closest proximity? It is our intimate relationships that hold the greatest capacity to cater to the natural man or to sacrifice as Saints. And because there is a tendency to gratify the natural man, the more intimate the relationship, the more likely we are to wound one another and to be wounded ourselves. Catherine Thomas notes that it is in family relationships where we unwittingly are provided the opportunity to develop a divine nature:

As in my own experience, many of us carry from our childhood some consequences of our own parents’ spiritual infirmities which we unwittingly visit on our children. Of course, these imperfect family conditions are a function of a fallen world—an imperfect world of ignorance and weakness. Yet in its imperfection, this world provides a perfect learning environment for this phase of our eternal development. Perhaps this is one of the most important views of life to learn—that this life consists, among other things, of tutorials designed to give us experience, to develop our divine nature, and to draw us to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Master Teacher.

Our efforts to become even as a child are measured by our willingness to make our most fragile, intimate relationships our best relationships—the ones we handle with care. To succeed in this endeavor, we need the enabling power of the Atonement. When enabled, charity is possible even in our most challenging roles. Indeed, most marriages can work where at least one partner is charitable. Just think of the possibilities that abound when both pursue this divine gift—exaltation and eternal lives—endless unions!
**Become as a child.** Actively seeking to change our natures by overcoming personality traits and dispositional characteristics that haunt us into our adult lives is ironically the work of becoming as a child. These acquired characteristics (either premortal or mortal) constitute that part of the natural man that “will not go quietly or easily.” The meekness required of being a Saint in congested traffic or crowded parking lots and long lines, or in submitting to a demanding coworker, oftentimes pales in comparison to the congestion of family life or the demands of a needy spouse or fellow ward member.

A cursory glance at King Benjamin’s list of childlike qualities most certainly highlights the challenges associated with conquering the natural man once and for all—becoming “submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things” (Mosiah 3:19). Elder Maxwell taught, “Thus within the discipleship allotted to us, we are to overcome the world.”25 As we submit to our divine tutorials, we become what God intended all along—his sons and daughters, “children of the covenant” (3 Nephi 20:26).

**Conclusion**

Most of us are familiar with the estrangement from God that results from catering to the natural man. This is an inherent risk of living in a fallen mortal world. The brother of Jared prayed, “We know that . . . we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires” (Ether 3:2).

Our desires to surrender and embrace discipleship qualify us for the enabling power of the Atonement. Again, it is from one of the great disciple-leaders of this dispensation, Elder Maxwell, that we are taught, “[As] you submit your wills to God, you are giving Him the *only* thing you *can* actually give Him that is really yours to give.”26 As we submit to the dual influence of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, we are enabled through the Atonement of Jesus Christ with greater spiritual power to become a Saint and as a child. This is one of the central messages of the Book of Mormon. Consider a few of the many examples found in the Book of Mormon such as Enos, who sought forgiveness of sins and was granted the desires of his heart (see Enos 1:5, 27); Alma the Elder, who was sealed up unto eternal life (see Mosiah 26:26); those who were sanctified to the point they found sin abhorrent (see Alma 13:12); the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who buried their weapons deep in the earth so they would never repeat former sins (see Alma 25:15–19);
Nephi, the son of Helaman, who was “blessed forever” and granted the sealing power (see Helaman 10:4–7); and the brother of Jared and Moroni, who saw Christ face to face and were sealed up unto eternal life (see Ether 3:6–13, 38–39). Moroni adds, “And there were many whose faith was so exceedingly strong . . . who could not be kept from within the veil, but truly saw with their eyes the things which they had beheld with an eye of faith, and they were glad” (Ether 12:19).

Whether it is groups like the people of Ammon or individuals like Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, we are taught in the Book of Mormon by principle and example that we can experience “a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). It is Moroni, our final tutor and prophet of the Book of Mormon text, who teaches us with a series of if-then statements how this is accomplished:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33; emphasis added)

It is through the cleansing and enabling power of the Holy Ghost that we overcome, “yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26)

Notes
3. A vaccine is designed to get the body to recognize an attack from an intruder before it causes an illness. In our fallen and mortal state, we brush against evil every day. I propose that as members of the Church who possess the gifts of the Light of Christ and the Holy Ghost, our encounter with and resisting of evil does two things: first, we avoid the ill effects of participating in the particular evil; second, in our brief encounters with temptation, there is sufficient germlike evil for the Holy Ghost to teach us and vaccinate against future encounters. There are many sins which are simply not appealing to us because we have participated in the process of spiritual vaccination. The Holy Ghost uses these moments to build immunity to future temptation. This is why it is so important that we resist sin in the first place. When we give into
temptation, we use the Holy Ghost not as a vaccinator but as a purifier—a fuller’s soap. When we resist sin, the Holy Ghost serves as a vaccinator or a refiner.

17. David A. Bednar, “That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with Us,” Ensign, May 2006, 30.
Oscar and Vivian McConkie's faith focused the direction of their children and the lives of all their descendants.
A House of Faith

MARGARET MC CONKIE POPE

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My father, Oscar W. McConkie, grew up in Moab, Utah, and he remembers passing the sacrament in overalls, often barefooted. Dad was raised on a diet of faith, which was the only thing his family had plenty of. Consequently, it was his desire to raise his children on the same diet. He became a mighty man of God, and my mother, Vivian, was a strong but gentle woman of profound faith. Their faith focused the direction of my life and the lives of all their descendants.

Desire for Gospel Knowledge

My five brothers and I grew up in a home where the Spirit of the Lord resided. Some of my earliest memories are of listening as Dad related some of his spiritual experiences. He was a great scholar; I would treasure up his words in my heart. He planted the seed in my heart to desire to know the Lord. He was, as my brother Bruce stated in the dedication to *Mormon Doctrine*, “a pillar of spiritual strength, a scriptorian and theologian.”
Dad believed that spiritual experiences should be shared, for the most part, with one's children, assuming that they were worthy, believing children. Sharing such experiences would teach children that the gospel is real and not just something that we talk about. Their faith would be built up. My siblings and I all had an honest desire to study and have spiritual growth, and we all grew to know and love the scriptures. I often received, through the Spirit, a burning witness of the truth of what I was reading. This encouraged me to keep reading, that I might experience the same burning again and again. I was thrilled as I read and hungered after knowledge.

Once while I was reading in the Book of Mormon as a teenager, I stopped and pondered for a long time on 1 Nephi 10:17. I read it this way: “I, [Margaret], having heard all the words of my father, concerning the things which he saw in a vision, and also the things which he spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, which power he received by faith on the Son of God—and the Son of God was the Messiah who should come—I, [Margaret], was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is the gift of God unto all those who diligently seek him, as well in times of old as in the time that he should manifest himself unto the children of men.” This scripture has been a guiding star for me. And it works! My soul has been filled with a great joy and wonder because of it.

Dad promised us that if we would continue to study and apply gospel principles to our lives, our understanding would reach to the heavens. We grew up believing that no blessing was too great for us, that no knowledge was too great for us to receive within the bounds of our stewardship. The Prophet Joseph said, “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what he will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.” In our Hobble Creek home, my husband, Bill, and I have this and other favorite scriptures printed in an old-style typeface on the wall above the bookshelves. This is another reminder to our children of where our heart is.

When I was fourteen years old, I discovered a postcard with a quote from Abraham Lincoln that immediately touched my heart: “I will study and get ready, and perhaps my chance will come.” I put it in the side of my dresser mirror. It was there until I left home to be married in the temple. Dad had implanted in each one of his six children's hearts the desire to become a gospel scholar, and each of us would someday have the opportunity to teach in a gospel class. Of course my children would need to be instructed, but I wanted
to also teach the youth of the Church in a seminary class. The reality of the time in which I lived was that women were never called to such a position. But I loved the scriptures and I made up my mind that I would become a scholar. Knowledge is never wasted. I determined to be prepared for Church service and family responsibilities, and my greatest joy was in teaching my children.

I taught in BYU Religious Education for twenty-seven years. I was the first female teacher in Religious Education. When I was called to teach, it was a Church calling. No salary.

I agreed to teach if I could be home when our children left for school and when the first child returned home. It worked out well and proved to be a thrilling experience for me. I worked very hard. Each semester there was at least one nonmember who joined the Church or an inactive member who became active. Often they finished the class and headed for a mission.

I taught my ward’s Gospel Doctrine class for forty-two years, and I was on the Church committee that wrote the lessons for the Book of Mormon classes. Whatever knowledge I had served me well.

**High Standards and the Blessings of Obedience**

My brothers and I were blessed with parents who taught us to be faithful. They set high standards. They taught us that the rewards from the Lord were so great that we did not need to desire anything else. We knew early that there was a promise attached to every single ordinance and commandment of the Lord.

One thing that was never allowed in our home was criticism of the Brethren or of our bishop. I can remember that when a guest in our house said something derogatory about one of the General Authorities, Dad said, “We do not talk that way in this house.” On another occasion, he said, “I never
indulged the deceitful hope that I could win God’s favor while I, at the same time, opposed him in any particular.”

Dad served as a district judge for eighteen years, having been told in his patriarchal blessing that he would be called on “to protect the innocent and to judge the unrighteous.” Some people criticized my family as I grew up, saying, “Just wait until Judge McConkie’s children get out from under his strict discipline. They will rebel.” None of us did. Was Dad firm? Yes. Did I realize at the time how firm he was? No.

Dad was a master psychologist. One Sunday afternoon as I was lying on the floor in front of the radio listening to a program, he said to me, “Margaret, it is almost time for sacrament meeting.”

“Do I have to go?” I asked.

“No. You want to go. Run and choose which dress you want to wear.”

I had been outmaneuvered, but I still had a choice. I still remember the sunny sky and the cool breeze as our family walked the mile to church. Years later I think how those simple spiritual lessons I learned as a child have guided my life.

My mother also taught us a high standard of obedience. I have fond memories of my mother’s two favorite and predictable sayings. If someone...
had been offended, she would say, “Live above it; think what they should have said,” and if someone was not standing straight, “Stand up straight and put your shoulders back.” Coincidentally, my brothers grew up to be six-foot-plus.

My parents taught that it is not age or position but personal righteousness that qualifies us for the gifts of the Spirit. Of this I am sure—our faith cannot exceed our obedience and our knowledge of the saving principles of the gospel. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this principle. Do we want to be where the action is, or are we content to read about others’ experiences? The great gift of perfect faith is not appended to an office or calling or age. Each one of us can live in such a way that we have the power to call down the blessings of heaven, if we are striving to keep all of the ordinances, commandments, and covenants and if we petition the Lord for help. My father had the ability to call down the blessings of heaven, and in our home I witnessed many miracles. Although they did not create faith by themselves, they strengthened the faith we already had.

“Just This Once!”: Standards Put to the Test

Many of us have been taunted by friends. I know I have. I’ll never forget when such an experience challenged my tender young faith.

There was a sharp chill as we left East High early-morning seminary. Wayne Snow drew in his breath and said, “How about a date for New Year’s Eve? The fellows have it all planned. We will all go to the 10:00 p.m. show and then have a late supper at Bob’s house.” I was thrilled to accept. This was going to be a special date. Six weeks passed. In those days, boys asked girls on special dates far in advance. One week before New Year’s Eve, Wayne telephoned and said, “The fellows have decided to have dinner first and then take in the midnight show.”

My heart sank. New Year’s Eve was on a Saturday, and Sunday shows were not allowed at our house.

“I’ve never been to a show on Sunday. This is something I will have to clear with my dad.”

“Margaret, this is New Year’s Eve! Everybody else can go. Bob’s dad is a bishop. My dad is on the high council. They’ve said, ‘Well, it is New Year’s Eve. Just this once won’t hurt.’”

Dad and I had a conference. It ended with him saying that the choice was mine. I called Wayne and said, “I’m disappointed and sorry, but I cannot go.”
The next day when I went to school, it seemed as though everybody that I met had already heard that I had broken my date. No one seemed to understand why. But I knew it was because I did not want to let my dad down.

**A Legacy of Faith**

My brother Bruce believed that faith could be inherited, that our father inherited the faith of his mother, Emma Somerville, and that Bruce, in like manner, had inherited the faith of his mother and father. As a young girl, my constant prayer was that I would find a good man who would be the head of the house as my dad had been, and, as evidence that prayers truly are answered, I found one, Bill J. Pope. My own family inherited my parents’ faith; now, in like manner, my children have inherited the faith of Bill and me.

My parents’ descendants now number around eight hundred. They have served as leaders in the Relief Society, Mutual, and Primary, on Church general boards and the Church writing committee, and as bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, patriarchs, temple presidents, and members of the Quorum of the Twelve. None have left the Church. All of them who are married were married in the temple. It would be a mistake to assume that serving the Lord in our lives has always been easy and that blessings have flowed without faith. Not so. We have had our trials and seasons of testing. But we have come through active in the Church.

I remember once wondering how my parents were able to establish such a house of faith. As I lay on the carpet in front of our front room fireplace pondering this question, I remember the sun streaming through our picture window. The Spirit whispered to me, “Your parents told their children, daily, that they loved them.” There were many ways in which we were reminded how much they loved us. For example, during family prayer, while Mother or Dad prayed we often heard, “Thank you, Father, for sending us these choice spirits whom we love so much.” Mother and Dad taught us by their actions that they loved each other and each one of us, and also that they loved the Lord; they truly loved keeping the commandments, and they taught us it was our privilege to keep them as well. These are things that all parents can do.

My parents’ example of love, faith, obedience, and thirst for gospel knowledge gave us a pattern for how we wanted to live and serve, and has blessed their posterity for generations to come.
Notes


Garry and LaNell Moore enjoyed more than forty years of association with Seminaries and Institutes of Religion.
Barbara Morgan: How did you get started in Seminaries and Institutes (S&I)?

Garry Moore: It was the result of a series of unusual events. During my last three years as an undergraduate student at BYU, I worked at the LTM (Language Training Mission, precursor to the MTC). I started as a teacher and was then called as a counselor to Ernest Wilkins, the first LTM president. Being a counselor was an unusual assignment in that it was both a job and a calling: a job because I was a paid employee who was responsible to hire and train teachers, and a calling because I was the ecclesiastical leader for the missionaries (there were no branch presidents at that time).

One day another counselor and I took a missionary with serious emotional problems to Salt Lake City to meet with D. Arthur Haycock to decide whether the missionary should continue his mission or receive professional help. On the return trip, the other counselor and I were having one of those “What are you going to do when you grow up?” talks. At one point he asked me, “Have you ever thought of teaching seminary as a career?” I said, “I don’t know what that is.” My exposure to S&I at that point was almost nonexistent.
I had no idea what released-time seminary was, and I surely did not know you could have a career teaching seminary.

I think this other counselor must have talked to Marshall Burton, who was in charge of hiring for S&I at the time, because a couple of weeks later I got a call from Brother Burton saying, “I would like to talk to you.” I met with Marshall, and shortly thereafter he offered me a job.

That left me perplexed. I really liked what I was doing at the LTM, and I was also ready to start a master’s degree in public administration. After careful consideration, LaNell and I decided to decline the S&I offer but told Marshall we would reconsider S&I at a future time. Around Thanksgiving that year, Brother Burton contacted me again and told me that one of their teachers had been drafted into the military and again offered me a job. At that time I was spending about sixty hours a week at the LTM, carrying a full class load in my master’s program, and LaNell was expecting our second child in a couple of weeks. After giving it prayerful consideration and finding out it was possible to switch my master’s degree classes to night classes, we felt we should give S&I a try.

My first assignment was teaching seminary at Bonneville High Seminary in Ogden, replacing Roger Fluhman (Brother Fluhman is currently the secretary to President Boyd K. Packer and the Twelve), who had been drafted into the military. To my knowledge the first time I ever set foot in a seminary or institute building was when I walked in to the Bonneville Seminary that day as a new teacher. I did not have the benefit of any preservice training only my experience as a missionary and as a teacher at the LTM. I taught at Bonneville Seminary for the rest of that school year and drove to Provo for my night classes. We went back to Provo for summer school. I taught the next year at Bonneville and again returned to Provo for summer school.

A note of possible interest: the S&I administrator was at that time known as “president,” and all of the administrative offices were located on BYU campus. Shortly after we arrived on campus the summer of 1968, under the direction of William E. Berrett, president of S&I, I and three or four other teachers were asked to go to various parts of the United States to implement a new home-study seminary program. The home-study program had been piloted in the Midwest by Don Bond during the previous school year and it had been decided to expand to other parts of the U.S. My assignment was to establish home-study seminary in the eastern part of the U.S. It was suggested that we might want to live somewhere near Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania. The home-study seminary was completely unknown to members and priesthood leaders in the area; therefore it would be necessary for us to move to the East quickly and spend most of the summer contacting and training priesthood leaders and parents so the program could be ready to start in the fall.

I accepted the assignment but now had a challenge. I was right in the middle of my master’s program, and it became apparent that I would need to drop all of my summer classes and probably discontinue my master’s degree program at BYU, since finishing the degree from back East did not seem like a realistic possibility. On the other hand, if I continued my classes that summer, I would need only one more summer to finish the degree, and coming to Provo from the East for one summer seemed viable. I discussed my dilemma with the administrators. They wanted me to finish the degree, so they suggested that we use a person back East to help me contact parents and priesthood leaders and that I fly back and forth a few times during the summer to make sure things were organized and ready to go in the fall. It sounded like a viable solution. Unfortunately we were never able to locate the person who was to help me back east.

As time passed it became increasingly difficult to know what to do. We again consulted with President Berrett and the S&I administrators. We all finally agreed that it did not appear things would work out for the program or for us, so it was decided someone else would be asked to fill the assignment and we would stay in Ogden. It was a hard decision because LaNell and I were excited about being a part of this new program. In fact, LaNell was in Ogden packing our few possessions in preparation for our move when I called and told her it had been decided we were not going east and to start unpacking. Before she could finish unpacking, I was asked to take an assignment in the institute program located adjacent to the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. I called LaNell and said, “Honey, you may not want to unpack since we’ve been asked to go to Canada instead.”

We accepted the assignment, and after summer school classes were completed, we and our two little boys headed for Calgary pulling a U-Haul trailer behind our old car. When we got to the Canadian border, we spent many hours trying to get into Canada. Nobody had told us that we needed a visa to take up residence there.

We loved Calgary. We had lots of great students and a brand new building, and I was called as the elders quorum president of one of the student
wards. I loved teaching the institute students, but it was an interesting experience because many of them were older than I was.

The next summer we headed back to BYU so I could finish my master’s degree. Partway through the summer we felt a strong impression that there was something else we needed to be doing in the fall. That created a very difficult situation because we had really enjoyed our year of institute in Calgary. We were in no way unhappy with S&I, but we felt we needed to accept a job offer in business that took us to Los Angeles and meant leaving S&I. We had no interest in trying to raise our little boys in Los Angeles, but that is what we felt we needed to do.

LaNell Moore: Garry’s patriarchal blessing says that he would administer over many people. We assumed that would have to be in business. He had finished his master’s degree that summer. S&I had been a great experience and we had thoroughly enjoyed it, but in our minds at that point S&I had not been a permanent career choice.

Garry Moore: It was very difficult to do, but I resigned from S&I, and we moved to Los Angeles, where I began work in the corporate offices of my new employer, located in the tallest building in downtown LA. Shortly after arriving I was called into the bishopric of our ward in Covina. As a bishopric we could not find a teacher for our early-morning seminary class, so I volunteered to do that as well. I had a large class, about thirty-five as I recall, and I loved it. Phil Harris, who was my S&I coordinator, and Frank Hirschi, the area director, kept talking to me about coming back into S&I. I kept telling them that I loved S&I but that we were doing what we felt we were supposed to be doing and that life was good.

LaNell Moore: Garry was being advanced at work, and we just assumed that is what we would do for the rest of our lives.

Garry Moore: At one point, however, after Frank or Phil had talked to me again, I thought, “You know, I probably should give more prayerful consideration to this situation.” Therefore, one night after bishopric meeting I asked the bishop if I could talk to him. I explained to him that I had just been promoted at work and that my superiors wanted me to make an important career decision regarding my role in the organization. I also explained that S&I had again offered me a job. After explaining my dilemma, I asked the bishop if he would give me a blessing since my step-father was not a member. In the blessing the bishop in essence said, “You should resign and go teach institute.” And I thought, “Wow, really?”
LaNell Moore: When Garry came home, I asked, “So what did the bishop say in the blessing? He replied, “We are supposed to resign and go teach.” I said that was fine, but I knew it might cause some disturbances.

Garry Moore: The General Authority who interviewed me for reentry into S&I told me that my stake president was upset because he felt that the bishop had overstepped his bounds and had no right to tell me what I should do in the blessing. The stake president had never said anything to me about the blessing but had apparently talked to the General Authority before he interviewed me. The stake president was probably right about the principle. Nevertheless, I knew what I had felt when the bishop said I should go teach. A desire for clear direction was why I had asked the bishop to give me the blessing in the first place, and I had received it. It did not make the decision easy, but I recognized it was what I needed to do. In the interview I asked the General Authority how he felt I should handle things. In essence, he said, “Well, I cannot tell you what to do, but we would sure be happy to have you back.”

Having received the desired guidance, I resigned my position at work. The executive vice president over my part of the organization called me in and said, “OK, how much are they offering you?” When I told him (it was about half of what I was currently making), he said something like, “Are you that...
unhappy here?” I said, “I am not unhappy at all. I really like it here.” He said something like, “Will you please help me understand what you are talking about?” He spent a long time with me trying to understand why I would walk away from something that was paying me a lot more money than I would get from S&I and that had the potential to pay me much more throughout my career. Although it did not make financial sense to the executive vice president (or to my parents or to us, for that matter!), when I left his office he commented that he did not understand why I was leaving, but assured me it was nice to see someone doing what he felt was right rather than doing something just because it paid more money. He also assured me that if I ever wanted to come back, he would help find a position for me. We have never looked back and have been blessed in every way, beyond our ability to express, including financially!

I must say, however, that those two years working in business in LA have proven extremely helpful to me. The experience of working in the head office of a large corporation helped me begin to learn how to see things from a broad perspective, how to analyze and do things on a large scale, and many other things which were very significant preparations for me personally and much-appreciated experience for the over thirty years of administrative assignments I was asked to fill in S&I. It is just amazing to me how the Lord does things with our lives if we listen and trust him.

I am obviously not a very good example of a typical S&I employee, but that is how I got started and ended up making S&I a career—through both the back and the side doors. I really did not have any idea what S&I was when I started, but what a marvelous forty-plus-year experience it has been, one I would not trade for any amount of fame or money. We are so grateful for the guidance we received early in our life that allowed us to have this incredible experience.

LaNell Moore: At age fourteen or fifteen, Garry announced to his mom that he was going to quit the Church because the Sunday School superintendent had asked him to give a two-and-a-half-minute talk. He was much too shy and lacking in confidence to stand in front of a group to talk. Miraculously, he gave that talk, and through the Lord’s tender guidance and rich experiences, such as a full-time mission, he ended up spending his life teaching and giving talks.

Barbara Morgan: Working in S&I has traditionally been viewed as an occupation requiring sacrifice. What sacrifices did you make in choosing to work in S&I?
Garry Moore: If there was any sacrifice, it has certainly brought forth the blessings of heaven. You hear people talk about the financial sacrifice required to work in S&I, but I do not think it has been much of a sacrifice for us. Undoubtedly, we would have had a much higher salary and earned a lot more money over our career had we stayed in the business world. Nevertheless, I ask myself, how much has it been worth to me and my family to be able to work in the wonderful atmosphere and with the kind of people and students we have worked with in S&I? How much has it been worth to have the Spirit be a daily requirement for my work and to be able to study and teach the scriptures? If there has been any financial sacrifice—and again I emphasize I do not feel there really has been—it has certainly been worth it!

When we started in S&I, I think our first year’s salary was a little over five thousand dollars. That obviously was not a lot of money, but we have always had sufficient for our family. At certain periods there was none to spare, but there was sufficient. On the salary we received we were able to raise nine children, and LaNell has never worked outside the home. In the beginning years, our salary was based on the nine months of teaching during the school year, but we were allowed to have it paid over twelve months. That way we got a check every month, but by spreading nine months of pay over twelve months it made for a smaller monthly income. During those first years I never had a part-time job during the school year, but I did find summer work to help supplement our income. During those summers I worked in oil fields, did roofing in Arizona, delivered mail parcels, and so forth. As S&I expanded across the world, assignments began to require a twelve-month rather than a nine-month work year. For example, the S&I coordinator position, such as I was offered back East, requires significant summer work or there is no program in the fall. The year-round requirements of many S&I positions along with other factors eventually led to a proposal to the Board of Education for an eight-week summer employment option. This option was approved and allowed us to devote our year-round efforts to enrolling students, preparing lessons, and so forth. This greatly blessed the work, and it was also a great financial blessing from the Brethren to us. The extra eight weeks of pay made it so that I no longer sought temporary summer jobs.

My S&I assignments were never an eight-hour-a-day, forty-hour-a-week job. There were many years of teaching night classes, early-morning seminary supervision, weekend and night institute activities, student recruitment, and so on. During the last twenty-four years in the central office, my assignments
required me to travel, often for weeks at a time, normally working fourteen-to-eighteen-hour days and often seven days a week. I never thought of my assignments as a forty-hour week but rather whatever time it took to get the job done. Trying to do my best in my S&I assignments, fulfill demanding Church callings, and raise a large family left no time nor desire to have a second job. Frankly, I worry about those who try to be successful in their S&I assignment and have another job on the side. I also worry about the increasing number of S&I wives with children still at home who are working outside the home. I fear both take a toll on them, their families, and their S&I assignment.

Being able to do S&I work during the summers and be compensated for it has, in my observation, blessed our students, our programs, and our S&I personnel immensely. After a few years we proposed to the Board that the summer option be replaced with regular twelve-month compensation. This was approved. The change has allowed teachers to receive the same amount of pay each month, making it easier for them to qualify for home loans, better meet monthly obligations, and have paid annual leave. There were some who misunderstood the change to a twelve-month commitment and thought that their vacation time had been taken away. The reality was that the supposed summer vacation time was free time, but it was really leave without pay. I hope S&I teachers today appreciate how generous the Brethren have been to us and will devote their year-round efforts to such important tasks as contacting and enrolling more students, improving teaching, having programs better prepared, and so forth. I hope all realize what a blessing it is not to have to seek summer jobs or have a second job, and what a blessing the extra weeks of pay are to our families!

Going through the retirement process in preparation for our temple assignment, I have more fully realized how wonderful the benefits provided to us really are. We have much better benefits and retirement programs than most people in the United States and certainly the world. As I said at the beginning, if there has been any element of sacrifice on our part, the blessings and the benefits we have received over our career in S&I far, far exceed any sacrifice.

LaNell Moore: We and our children have also learned a great deal by not having too much money. Necessity is the mother of invention. For us, real income was multiplied as capacities and talents were developed. In the process of trying to improve our situation, the Lord improved us.

Garry Moore: And I believe the Lord has always provided us with more than sufficient for our needs, and we have been able to live well. Eight of our
nine children have served missions (our youngest daughter graduated from college at age twenty and married before she was old enough to serve). We never paid for our children’s tuition or living expenses. That was not a decision caused by a lack of money. We believed the children would get a great practical education and would be blessed by learning to do it on their own. The basic principles of the welfare program—work, self-reliance, and staying out of debt—are important for our children to learn early in their lives. We tried to teach our children to save money for their missions, and the seven boys, through early-morning paper routes (which sometimes just about wore me out) and summer work, had all or most of the money saved to do so. Then without them knowing we were doing it, we paid for their missions. When they returned home we were able to say to them, “Here is the money you saved for your mission; now get your college education.” Our kids did pay (through scholarships, savings, and part-time work) for their own education, and eight of the nine (our oldest daughter married before finishing her degree and helped put her husband through law school and start a family) have graduated with at least a bachelor’s degree, and several have master’s and doctorates. Almost all of them graduated with no school loans to repay. Financially, I do not think we or they have suffered or really sacrificed. I don’t share any of this to brag or to sound like we had all of the answers. Every family has challenges, and we certainly had ours. However, the work environment, wonderful associations with colleagues and students, and even our finances have protected, enriched, and blessed our lives in ways that all the money in the world could not buy.

One thing that some might view as a sacrifice is that most of the S&I assignments we were asked to take necessitated a move. We lived a year and a half in Ogden, followed by a year in Canada. When we came back into S&I we moved and spent four years in Santa Maria, California, where I started a full-time institute program. Santa Maria was a wonderful place to raise a family. When we were asked to move back to LA to be the institute director at Long Beach City Institute and then the director at the Cal State Long Beach institute, it caused us some soul-searching. We went from a very nice home in Santa Maria to a very small home—about 1,200 square feet and no basement, with one bathroom for us and our seven kids. We had to be creative, so we cut an opening in the ceiling in one room and put in a pull-down staircase, put plywood over the rafters in the attic for flooring, and created a bedroom where the two oldest boys slept. The attic was not tall enough for an adult to
stand up or to put in a real room with walls, but the boys loved it. They were having a Tom Sawyer experience.

During that time I was called as bishop and also started my doctorate in higher education at the University of Southern California (USC). We loved our time in LA and in California. At the time we thought we were sacrificing to leave Santa Maria and move to Long Beach. In retrospect, our four years in Long Beach were a great blessing to us and our children. The Lord knew what he was doing even when we were a bit doubtful.

Our next move was from Long Beach to Washington DC. I was assigned to be the area director for the eastern half of the United States and the eastern half of Canada. This meant literally moving from coast to coast. We lived in Virginia for five years and absolutely loved it. We would have stayed there forever if we had not been asked to move to the central office in 1984. I guess I should just say that we loved each place we served and cried when we had to leave. I think it is very safe to say that we probably never would have ventured out nor made these moves on our own. The Lord was so good to us and our family. Each new assignment and location brought wonderful new friends and experiences. In California I had served in a bishopric, on two high councils, and as a bishop. While living in DC, I served in another bishopric, as bishop of two different wards, and in the stake presidency. I traveled all over the eastern U.S. and eastern Canada working with more than forty coordinators and institute directors. We also added child number eight. The Lord was so kind to provide wonderful growing experiences for us.

While in Virginia I was able to finish my doctorate, which was an absolute miracle! I had taken all my coursework at USC while working full-time and serving as a bishop, but I had not taken my oral and written exams nor written my dissertation before we moved east. I had no idea how I was going to pass my written and oral exams on courses that I had taken so long ago, or how I was going to be able to be on campus at USC, or write my dissertation, with us living in Virginia. I had pretty well concluded that I was going to end up as another ABD (all but dissertation).

Again the way was provided. As area director I had to fly to Salt Lake City twice a year, once for a budget review and once for the area directors’ convention. I “accidentally” found airline flights that allowed me to fly to SLC via LA for only ten to fifteen dollars more than a direct flight to Salt Lake City. With the permission of the central office I flew to LA, worked with my chairman and committee for two or three days at a time, then flew to my meetings.
in Salt Lake. I still have a hard time believing I was able to pass my exams and get my dissertation finished without slighting my other responsibilities. I am very aware that it would have been impossible without the love and support of LaNell and the Lord's help. There is also no question but that the Lord helped me and us in more ways than we understand even today. One obvious example of his help—tuition at USC was extremely high, and in those days S&I did not provide the tuition assistance they offer today. When I tried to pay my final tuition bill at USC, which was a large amount, the bursar's office informed me, “You have already paid it, probably with your credit card.” I insisted that I had not paid it. I checked with the credit card company, and there was no tuition charge. I again told USC that I had not written a check and that the credit card company had verified that I did not pay the tuition with a credit card, to which they said, “Our records show that you did pay the tuition, and as far as we are concerned the matter is settled.” I told them where I could be reached when they realized their mistake and that I would pay what I owed them. I never again heard from USC, other than the alumni association inviting me to annually contribute to the alumni fund, which I have done for many years.

**LaNell Moore:** By the time he got his doctorate, we had eight children. These were not sacrifices; they were improvements.

**Garry Moore:** Each time we moved, we and our children had to leave our home, our callings, and dear friends behind. This was always hard, but each time we soon realized that the move also brought great blessings. We retained our old friends and made new ones. We received new callings, and our new home was often better than the previous one. Even more important, each move gave us a chance to cut off all our outside influences and regroup as a family. In the process of the move, our family unity and interdependence was strengthened. Even though there were challenges, I really do not believe our moves were sacrifices; rather they proved to have a positive impact on the family. When we moved from Virginia, our oldest son left on a mission about ten days after we arrived in Utah. Our second son was entering his senior year, our third son was beginning high school, and our fourth son was in his last year of junior high. The move could have been traumatic for them. Though not easy at first, it all worked out very well. We have been more blessed than anyone deserves to be blessed by every aspect of our career in S&I.

**LaNell Moore:** These moves shaped our family tremendously. With each move we learned to grow where you are planted and with each move we grew
closer together! Our move to Spain was our twenty-first.

**Garry Moore:** The Lord was very kind to us. As we moved from place to place a way was provided (not without some stretching, belt tightening, and leaps of faith) to afford housing in our new location. The timing of the moves was not always what our wisdom would have said was ideal, but it all worked out. For example, in 1984 we had sacrificed and bought new carpet for our home in Virginia which was in our garage ready to lay when Stan Peterson called and asked me to be a zone administrator and move to Salt Lake City. The new carpet undoubtedly helped us sell our home more quickly and at a better price, even though we never got to enjoy it! Neither LaNell nor I are from Utah, and we had no extended family in Utah, so moving to Utah was not on our wish list of places to live. In fact we had decided the DC area, even though it was completely across the country from our parents, would be our home indefinitely. When we moved to Utah, the only house we could feel good about had only one of the three things we really wanted. Nevertheless, it has been a wonderful home and location for our family for the past twenty-five years. Not too many years after moving into our Utah home, through making some extra monthly equity payments, we were able to pay off the remainder of our home loan. Not having a monthly house payment for several years helped us with missions and more.

Our moves also provided opportunities for Church callings that we may not have experienced had we stayed in one spot. Every experience and location provided a foundation for the next set of challenges and blessings. These were not sacrifices. I have been overwhelmed with the blessings of the Lord in these callings and assignments. I spent almost thirty of my forty S&I years as a Central Office administrator or area director. I enjoyed these assignments, but I also loved teaching and the day-to-day interaction with the students.

**Barbara Morgan:** What were your assignments for S&I after leaving the field and going to the Central Office?

**Garry Moore:** When Bruce Lake was called as a mission president, I was asked to replace him as a zone administrator in the early spring of 1984. I spent the next few months before our move to Utah as the area director in the East and commuting to the Church Office Building for a couple of weeks at a time in my new zone administrator assignment. In those days each of the five zone administrators had responsibility for some domestic released-time areas, some domestic non-released-time areas and some international areas. My first international assignment as zone administrator was over Asia. I had lived with
my parents in Japan for two years when I was young, so going back to Japan as part of my assignment in Asia was exciting. I supervised Asia for four wonderful years. The next few years I was over the Pacific, which included twenty-six (now eighteen) Church schools. This was a whole new experience and one I enjoyed. It was not, however, without lots of new and difficult challenges and extra hours and days of work. I was involved in the closing of our school in Jakarta, Indonesia, and some of the elementary schools in Samoa. Those were very difficult, emotional experiences for all involved. My work with the schools proved to be a very important preparation for what I was later asked to do as an administrator.

The next two and a half years I was blessed to work with South America. It was while I was working with South America that I was called to serve as mission president in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 1994 to 1997. I haven’t really done a careful count, but I think I have been in sixty to seventy countries in my S&I travel. That undoubtedly sounds very exotic, and it was wonderful. Nevertheless the weeks away from family and callings, the jet lag, the fourteen-to-eighteen-hour days for days at a time, and the challenges of a growing international program certainly were not easy. During the ten years from 1984 to 1994, I also enjoyed working with our wonderful colleagues in most of the U.S. and Canada.

Barbara Morgan: What have been your major assignments over the last ten years in the Central Office?

Garry Moore: About five months before the end of our three-year mission in Argentina, Stan Peterson called me. I was at the time conducting a mission zone leaders conference, so I did not have much time to talk with him. As I recall Stan said something like, “I have really given prayerful consideration to the assignment I want you to take when you come back.” Obviously lots of wild scenarios suddenly raced through my mind. Stan then invited me to come into the Central Office not as a field zone administrator but as a zone administrator to manage the Central Office departments. This is the assignment I had until I became the associate administrator in 2001 and later the administrator.

One of the biggest responsibilities I had in those assignments was to work closely with other Church departments in developing what has become known as shared services. Around the time we returned from Argentina, President Henry B. Eyring challenged S&I to find ways to have other Church departments provide services for us rather than doing everything ourselves, as
we had been doing for years. I feel he wanted us to be able to focus more of our time and effort on our core objective. Trying to make that happen became one of my major responsibilities over the next ten or eleven years. Frankly, it is one of the things that I feel most satisfied with. I think that the future, the growth and the changes that lie ahead for S&I, would have been much more cumbersome and difficult without the shared services transitions that have been put in place over the past few years.

For many years S&I was often jokingly referred to by other Church personnel and departments as “the other church.” This was in part because we were doing all our own physical facilities, HR, audiovisual work, computer programming, and so forth, and had few cooperative efforts or relationships with other Church entities and personnel. When S&I was a small western United States program, doing everything ourselves was acceptable and probably even necessary. However, as S&I enrollments, personnel, and programs expanded and scattered all over the world, it became increasingly obvious that changes needed to be made. For us to continue to try to adequately and economically meet the needs of our multinational faculty, our 700,000-plus students, and our 40,000-plus volunteer teachers, and to provide buildings, curricular materials, and compensation and benefits programs for faculty in more than 140 countries from one central location was no longer practical nor economical. I believe President Eyring, having been both the commissioner and a member of the Presiding Bishopric, was uniquely qualified to see the need for a change and thus his challenge to us. It has been an interesting and exciting challenge to establish shared services with other Church departments and also to not have them see us as “the other Church.”

Let me illustrate why this new shared services way of operating became critical. If we had a computer problem at one of our schools in Tonga, we sent S&I people from Salt Lake or from Australia or New Zealand to work on it. The Church also had a temple, Presiding Bishopric offices, and ecclesiastical offices in Tonga. When one of these entities had a computer problem, employees from one of those departments were sent to fix it. So there were two or more people from S&I and personnel from other Church departments on the same island sent from various parts of the world, working on similar kinds of problems often almost in the same room. That obviously is neither efficient nor cost effective. Having the Church department responsible for computers handle our needs (shared services) helped everyone.

We made similar changes in how we handle S&I facilities. Throughout
the world our S&I facilities, including our elementary and secondary schools, are now being built, cleaned, and maintained by Church Physical Facilities Management groups. Under President Hinckley’s direction, shared services was expanded to include shared use. We were asked to find ways to share buildings as well as services. I remember going on a trip and visiting three or four released-time seminary buildings. At each I asked, “How far away is the closest chapel to this facility?” The farthest chapel from any of them was two blocks from the seminary building. I realized the Church had to buy two pieces of property and build and maintain two buildings, one of which would be full during the day, vacant at night and on the weekends, and the other full on the weekends, but vacant during weekdays. During Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas week, S&I teachers often want to have a devotional, assembly, or activity that requires a larger room. Most seminary buildings do not provide this type of space, and it is very costly to provide it for a very few times a year it is needed. However, when a new meetinghouse is being built, if it is located by the school and a separate seminary facility is incorporated into the floor plan, the chapel and the cultural hall are readily available to us for these special times. Also, by having the seminary or the institute space as a separate but internal part of the building, our wonderful classrooms can be made available to the wards on Sunday or at night when they most need them for classes, choir practice, and so forth. The shared use concept has reduced facility funding and increased correlation and cooperation between S&I and the ecclesiastical units immensely. Through this approach all Church programs and members are better and more economically served.

Several years ago we helped create a Churchwide contract for the purchase of computers. The increased purchasing power allowed us and other Church departments to get better equipment at a much better price than when we were all buying on our own.

We have, over the last ten years, transferred close to four hundred full-time equivalent employees to other Church departments, and through the efficiencies of shared services returned probably 130 or 140 more to the Church. Besides saving money and increasing efficiency for the Church, it has helped us eliminate or at least significantly diminish the idea that S&I is the “other church.” It has given me a new understanding of the principle “if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). Shared services has helped us better concentrate our time, resources and efforts in getting more students enrolled, increasing the quality and effectiveness of our teaching, and developing better
priesthood relationships. I believe this is in part what President Eyring envisioned when he gave us the challenge. Certainly we have not finished the effort, but significant progress has been made.

Shared services has helped tie S&I more closely to the priesthood and to other Church programs. Even though we work with the same young people as the Young Women, the Young Men, the Sunday School, the YSA leaders, and so on, there has often been a lack of awareness of what each organization was doing and emphasizing. Not only is this not efficient, but it is not helpful to the young people or to the families we are all trying to serve. As part of this shared cooperation, we started doing such simple things as inviting the general presidencies of the auxiliaries to our broadcasts and having periodic meetings with them. Young people and families have been and will be increasingly blessed by this type of correlated effort.

We are seeing and will continue to see the General Authorities and local leaders given increased authority for all Church departments and programs, including S&I. As the Church grows, it is impossible to administer everything from Salt Lake the way it used to be. Decentralization of Church departments and programs with increased involvement and oversight by local priesthood leaders, including area presidencies in international areas, is occurring and must occur.

Changes in our curriculum and media are another example of shared services. For years we kept our media and curricular materials as exclusive use items, or in other words we asked that they not be used for anything other than for S&I purposes. I am reminded of something else President Eyring taught me. He said we must understand and remember that our job is not to build a kingdom, it is to build the kingdom. When we had exclusive use of our wonderful materials, we were in some ways building a kingdom. The new Old Testament DVD is a good illustration of how things are changing. This Old Testament DVD was a joint project by S&I and other Church departments and was designed for use in S&I, the family, the auxiliaries, or any other Church departments or meetings. It will help build “the kingdom.”

Significant changes have occurred with our curriculum as well. Several years ago the Brethren instructed all Church departments to find ways to reduce and simplify the quantity of printed material each produced. Seeking inspiration as to how to reduce and simplify S&I curricular materials led to very significant changes, such as using the scriptures, instead of manuals that talk about the scriptures, as our curriculum. With that decision readily and
happily approved by the Brethren, our manuals were reduced and simplified, resulting in a dramatic reduction in our page count for materials produced. Rather than printing stories of others’ experiences to help teachers illustrate gospel principles, we began inviting teachers and students to share and testify of their own experiences. This not only reduced the size and cost of curriculum, but it strengthened teachers and students.

We subsequently went from teaching topically to teaching the scriptures sequentially and then to focusing more on principles and doctrines and how to help students know how to read, identify, and apply the principles and doctrines found therein. Unfortunately some of our older materials still in use do not reflect all of these changes. We hope to get approval to update these materials in an electronic format so they can be more easily and less expensively updated in the future. Concerning curricular materials, in my opinion, less has been better than more in many unexpected but very significant ways.

**Barbara Morgan:** You have mentioned the importance of student learning and the Teaching Emphasis. What is the background of the Teaching Emphasis?

**Garry Moore:** One afternoon, two members of the Twelve, both of whom were serving on the Board of Education and on the Executive Committee of the Board, came to our offices and asked to meet with us. As I recall, the focus of their visit was to share a critical concern. They expressed a great need to get gospel doctrine and gospel principles more firmly planted in the mind and heart of students so they would remain faithful and be better prepared for missions and for service in the Church. They asked what we could do to help make that happen. Incidentally, when a member of the Twelve comes to meet with you after you know they have just finished a meeting with the Twelve and the First Presidency, it is critically important to listen and to be ready to go to work. When two come together, it gives even more emphasis.

These two Brethren explained that the Church needs young people, including missionaries, who know how to live and teach by the Spirit, who understand, believe, and can explain gospel principles and doctrines in their own words, and can testify of their truthfulness from their own personal experiences. They were asking us, in essence, “How are you going to help us prepare that kind of young person, that kind of missionary, that kind of future leader?” For the next period of time, we worked very carefully under their inspired direction. They were at the same time overseeing the development of *Preach My Gospel*. As a result of much prayerful effort by many people, a list of basic principles of teaching (which became known as the Teaching
Emphasis) was developed. The Teaching Emphasis principles were presented to the Twelve and to the Board of Education for their input and approval before being introduced to S&I.

The Teaching Emphasis should not be viewed as a program or a teaching gimmick. It is, in my opinion, a list of principles of effective gospel teaching and learning. It is well understood that students learn better through participation rather than listening to lectures or presentations and that when you teach someone a truth and testify of its truthfulness, you understand and believe it even more firmly yourself. The emphasis really modifies the role of both the teacher and the student in the learning process.

After implementing the Teaching Emphasis, we invited the Church Research Information Division to do an independent evaluation to determine if it was having any measurable impact on student learning and attitude. The findings surprised even the researchers. They found that when the principles of the emphasis were correctly applied, the results were extremely positive. The data also showed that the positive results were not dependent on whether the teacher was old or young, male or female, professional or volunteer. The positive results were simply dependent on properly applying the principles of the Teaching Emphasis, or in other words, when correct principles are applied, you get positive results regardless of who applies them. A short time after the Emphasis was implemented, Elder Richard G. Scott, in his Evening with a General Authority talk, in one of the most challenging teaching settings—a worldwide multilanguage video broadcast—used a student in an unrehearsed setting to demonstrate some of the key principles of the emphasis. In my opinion, it was his way of showing how strongly he felt about these principles. We know that the stand-and-deliver model of teaching is pervasive in public education across the world. In fact, in some countries, student participation is not only not encouraged it is considered inappropriate. I believe Elder Scott was trying to model how to use these principles regardless of the prevailing educational approaches throughout the world or how we individually may have been teaching for years.

As a mission president, I saw the missionary that got off the plane and the changed missionary that got back on the plane a year and a half or two years later. I have often asked myself what causes the significant change that occurs during the mission experience. Is it just the mantle? Is it just the fact they wear a missionary badge? I think it is much more than either of these. Missionaries study the gospel on their own and with another person every day. They share
what they learn with their companion, teach others, answer questions, and testify of the truthfulness of what they teach. They do all this under the influence of the Spirit. These things, in my opinion, are the essence of what causes the change in a missionary and also what happens to students when the principles of the Teaching Emphasis are properly used in a classroom setting.

**Barbara Morgan:** If the Teaching Emphasis was meant to help prepare missionaries, is it to be used for returned missionaries as well?

**Garry Moore:** Absolutely! I feel strongly that applying these principles with returned missionaries keeps them growing as they were doing during their mission. When a pre- or post-mission student explains something or shares an experience or testimony regarding a gospel doctrine or principle, there is a deepening of understanding and testimony. All students, including returned missionaries, need these types of experiences. I think we would all agree that the teacher generally learns more than the student. If you can have the student become part of the teaching process, then students are learning more than if they passively sit and listen. A teacher who has done years and years of research can give students valuable information and insights. Giving information and getting the gospel and the principles of the gospel into the mind and heart of the person, however, can be two different things. They do not have to be mutually exclusive, but they can be if we are not careful. A student can be strengthened by hearing someone else’s testimony, but having a chance to share an experience or bear a testimony with another student, regardless of whether or not they are a returned missionary, strengthens their own testimony in the process. President Packer has said, “A testimony is found in the bearing of it” (“The Candle of the Lord,” *Ensign*, January 1983, 54). I believe that giving students the opportunity to share their feelings and experiences in a classroom setting can have a very positive impact on their testimony.

The last year and a half before our call to Spain, LaNell and I were called by our stake president to team teach a night institute class. A significant percent of our students were returned missionaries. In our opinion, the Teaching Emphasis principles worked well with all of the students in the class. Instead of telling my missionary experiences, I often said to RMs, “Elder (or Sister), you have been on a mission. Tell us about your experience with this principle or scripture.” There was a different spirit and electricity in the room when they spoke instead of us. They shared some powerful experiences. Not only was it good for the class, but it allowed some of the returned missionaries,
who had not been sharing their testimony very often since returning home, to get back to testifying by the Spirit. Their experiences and our observation as to how the principles of the teaching emphasis were working in the classroom often brought tears to our eyes. I personally believe that the correct principles of the emphasis even apply to teaching us old high priests!

Barbara Morgan: What has been your process of becoming a leader, and what leadership advice can you give to others?

Garry Moore: It has been fascinating to look back and see how the Lord has provided callings and assignments that exposed me to many great leaders. It has been humbling and extremely valuable to work closely with and learn from the Brethren. It has been absolutely phenomenal to watch them in action. I feel very strongly that if we in S&I will keep our eye on what the Brethren are doing, how they are doing it, and what they are trying to have happen, we will be far more successful as a system and as individuals. It has been a phenomenal experience to be called over by members of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, the Presiding Bishopric, or the Seventy and to see how they lead and what they do. Such training has been life changing for me.

There are many key leadership principles I have learned over my career. First, I believe what the Savior said about his work being to bring about the eternal life of each of us (see Moses 1:39). In my opinion, the purpose of leadership is not just about organizations, programs, or buildings. None of these things are going to be exalted and are therefore only a means to an end. Individuals and families and their progress toward exaltation are the essence of leadership in the Church. If an organization runs smoothly, but the individuals that should be served by that organization are not being blessed the way they should be, then the organization is not fulfilling its purpose even though the budgets are all in place, and the buildings and programs are great. On the other hand, poor administration diminishes the ability and the effectiveness of the leaders and the organization to serve the individual and the family. I am saddened by the attitude reflected when I hear S&I personnel refer to administrative responsibilities as “administrivia.” As I watch the Brethren, they focus on the individual and the perfecting of the Saints but are also very careful and exacting with their administrative duties. I guarantee you an administrator does not want to go to the Board of Education meeting without making sure all of the t’s have been properly crossed. When I would review reports sent to the Central Office that were incomplete and
inaccurate, but which had been signed by one or more S&I administrators, it was obvious that the report was viewed as administrivia rather than as a meaningful administrative tool. I had a very embarrassing experience when I was reviewing an area S&I enrollment report (which I had not been able to review beforehand because I was substituting for another administrator) with a member of an Area Presidency. He was a very experienced business executive who, after looking briefly at the numbers in the report, asked me a simple question: “How do you get more people enrolled than you have potential as shown in this report?” I am sure his confidence in any information given to him by us in the future was low and probably should have been.

Order, thoughtful analysis, and long-range planning will help us be more successful in our core purpose of getting students into class and positively impacting their lives. I believe the Lord’s instruction to “organize yourselves” and “prepare every needful thing” (D&C 88:119) is a key principle of administration and should be reflected in every aspect of how we lead and teach.

It is important to remember that this Church is and must be priesthood directed. If we try to operate on our own and do not involve or listen to the priesthood, general or local, we will be like the children of Israel and wander around in the wilderness for a long time. If the children of Israel had been willing to really listen to Moses, they would have gotten to the promised land much faster than they did. We in S&I are to be a resource to the priesthood. We need to know what they want us to do, and they need to be aware of and approve how we propose to accomplish it. No two priesthood leaders are alike; therefore, we need to find out how best to assist each one and not try to make them adjust to our style and wants. We need to make sure they are aware of and have approved what we are doing, and we need to do it as well as we possibly can. We need to be responsive to the Board of Education and to the Brethren, and we also need to work under the direction of our local priesthood leaders. They hold the keys and have the ultimate responsibility for our students.

Communication is critical in leadership. I have heard one of the Brethren say more than once, “Councils are not as understood as they should be. Councils can help provide the means for revelation.” In our leadership meetings with the assistant administrators, we tried to follow the principle taught by the Brethren and the scriptures regarding counseling together. It is fascinating to observe what happens when people with different backgrounds and experiences share their feelings and insights on a particular issue. In the
process of listening to the counsel and perspective of others our own thinking becomes more clear and concise, and sometimes a totally new idea or solution emerges. At the very least, the best decision becomes clearer. We should continually counsel with our colleagues and with the priesthood leaders under whose direction we work.

Listening to the insights and recommendations of individual teachers in the field is an important part of communication and leadership. Some of the great programs of the Church, such as the welfare program, came from individuals and local leaders trying to help meet a need. One of the things I wish I had done better and which I hope can be improved in the future is to have better communication between the Central Office administration and the field. I tried such things as podcasts, hoping to be able to communicate with those in the field. It was an attempt to say, “I cannot sit down with all of you, so let’s just sit down technologically and share some things.” I realize that getting input from a worldwide organization is not as easy as doing a podcast. Communicating with and listening to people are, in my view, key elements of successful leadership.

President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership” (“How to Be a Teacher When Your Role as a Leader Requires You to Teach,” General Authority Priesthood Board meeting, February 5, 1969). If a person stops teaching when they are doing administrative tasks, then they are really not leading. A leader or administrator just has a different set of students and often must teach in a nontraditional setting.

In my opinion, Exodus 18 contains some great principles of leadership. In this chapter, Jethro observes that Moses is meeting with the people all day trying to solve their problems. Seeing this, Jethro asks Moses, “What is this thing that thou doest to the people?” (v. 14; emphasis added). I might have said “for the people,” but Jethro says “to the people.” It appears that Moses was trying to do everything himself and not involve other people in the leadership process. He was not only being overwhelmed himself, but what he was doing to the people was not good.

Jethro then teaches Moses three things he should do as a leader. First, “be thou for the people to God-ward” (v. 19). In other words, you have got to know what it is God wants to have happen. You have got to have the vision. Where there is no vision on the part of the leader, the people perish. Vision can come to a leader from the Lord, from his prophets, from his direct leaders (S&I and priesthood), from his colleagues, and from those over whom he
presides. Second, Moses was told he was to teach ordinances and laws and then show the way wherein his people must walk and the work they must do. Again, we see the importance of the leader teaching and showing by precept and example what must be done and how it should be done. Third, the leader has to put personnel and organizations in place. Select and train people and then let them do their job, just as Doctrine and Covenants 107:99 instructs.

I believe these are some aspects of the leadership style of the Savior—ones we need to emulate in our individual life and in our S&I assignments.

**Barbara Morgan:** How have the current trends in education both domestically and internationally affected S&I?

**Garry Moore:** President Thomas S. Monson talked about change in the October 2008 general conference. As the Church grows and as conditions change, the Church changes policies and procedures, and so must S&I. Let me use some history to illustrate. When I first started in S&I, it was basically a western U.S. released-time seminary program with a few large western U.S. institute programs.

S&I programs follow the school calendar of the local area, and when I started, everything started in September and ended in June. All our curriculum, in-service training, and budgets followed that schedule. Now we have over 700,000 S&I students in more than 140 countries. S&I programs now start somewhere in the world every month except November and sometimes December. That means it now takes an eighteen-month cycle from the time a new seminary course of study is started somewhere to when it finishes in the last area across the world. There are countries which, generally due to climatic differences, have two different school calendars, and therefore the S&I coordinator has to adapt his schedule, in-service plans, and so forth to two different school years simultaneously.

All curriculum and supplemental materials now have to be translated into a multitude of different languages and be ready to start with the various school calendars. The content of the curriculum also has to fit different cultures and languages. For example, students and teachers in many countries may not understand a drive-in restaurant or relate to stories about baseball. To meet the needs of an international church, curriculum, media, reports, and in-service materials had to change.

Domestically, we are seeing lots of changes in education. A few months ago, at their request, I made a thirty-minute presentation to the Twelve in their weekly quorum meeting. They wanted an update on released-time
In the presentation, I focused on how changes in education, such as increased graduation requirements, A-B and trimester schedules, charter schools, and so forth have impacted traditional daily released-time seminary. Obviously, when schools change to an A-B or trimester schedule, a daily released-time seminary class for each student is no longer possible. I pointed out that the number of minutes a student is in seminary during a year in an A-B or trimester schedule may remain basically the same, but students in these programs are no longer in a traditional fifty-minute seminary class on a daily basis. Instead they have a seventy- to ninety-minute class two to three times per week. So far the increased graduation requirements have not affected released-time seminary enrollment very much, but they have increased the number of students needing or desiring to attend “zero hour” or after-school seminary classes. During the presentation, one of the Twelve asked me, “What do you do for a student who feels they are unable to attend seminary during the regular school schedule?” My response was that our desire is to meet student needs, not maintain programs or seminary schedules, and we therefore offer seminary classes before and after school as needed. It was obvious to me that they were very desirous that we be willing to adjust and meet student needs. Some of our S&I personnel have been somewhat resistant to zero hour classes, apparently feeling that if zero hour classes have to exist, they should only be for those with credit problems and where possible should be taught by a volunteer teacher. I wish those who feel that way could have been with me as I stood in front of the quorum that morning and watched the facial reaction when I said we will provide the classes that meet student needs and give them the best experience possible. I think any doubt about zero hour classes and who should teach them would be erased.

The growth of charter schools in released-time areas is impacting released-time seminary. In the state of Utah alone, some 40,000 students are now enrolled in charter schools. Charter schools bring a whole new set of challenges for released-time seminary. Charter schools, unlike private schools, are publicly funded, and therefore no seminary classes may be held in school facilities. Students in charter schools come from scattered wards and stakes, and therefore determining the potential number of students from year to year is challenging. We typically receive priesthood direction for each released-time program through a local board of education composed of stake presidency representatives from the stakes whose students attend that school and seminary. With charter schools, the composition and leadership of the
local board is often difficult to determine since students come from so many different wards and stakes. Another challenge is that charter schools may or may not end up being permanent and are often established in nontraditional buildings and locations such as industrial parks, old bowling alleys, and other isolated areas. This makes it difficult for us to provide facilities to hold released-time seminary. As a result, far too many students at charter schools do not currently have easy access to released-time seminary. I noted that we were taking steps to address these challenges so the students at charter schools will have better access to released-time seminary, but the related issues are not easily solved.

Another significant challenge facing released-time seminary, which I highlighted in the presentation to the Twelve, was the declining potential of LDS students of seminary age. Our released-time enrollments over the past few years have been on a steady decline. However, our percent of potential enrolled has remained basically constant. The declining number of potential students creates serious problems and difficult decisions regarding personnel and facilities. A good example would be the impact of declining potential in small, isolated, rural towns, of which there are many in Utah, Idaho, and, to some extent, Arizona. At what point do you pull out the full-time teacher and replace him or her with a part-time local teacher? What do you do with a facility that once housed a vibrant released-time program but now only has ten or fifteen students?

My message to the Brethren was that released-time seminary is alive and well, but we have had to adapt and will need to continue to adapt in the future as public education programs and schedules change. It was a very positive experience to be with these inspired Brethren. They are very appreciative of what has been and is being done to help each individual student, regardless of where they live or what type of educational program they are attending.

The nature of our traditional institute programs is also changing. Even at our large institutes along the Wasatch Front, our daytime student enrollments are declining, and our evening class enrollments are increasing. More and more of the students need evening institute classes due to their school and work schedules. That makes it necessary for our institutes to offer more and more evening classes. Some full-time faculty have been reluctant to teach early-morning or evening classes and have relied on volunteer teachers to cover these nontraditional classes. We must be prepared to teach classes at times that meet student needs. I am very aware that these types of classes are
not as convenient and complicate family life and callings nevertheless that is our job. During my years teaching institute, I taught lots of early-morning and evening classes.

Another significant change is that the number of students enrolled in institute in other countries now exceeds that of the U.S. and their enrollments are growing faster. In many parts of the world, daytime institute classes are often impossible to hold due to school schedules, the geographic dispersion of students in a large city, and so forth. This affects where institute facilities are located and the work schedule of our full-time teachers. For example, a full-time S&I employee in Brazil would probably visit and supervise early-morning and perhaps afternoon or evening seminary classes, train volunteer teachers in the evening or on Saturday, teach institute classes a couple of nights a week, and teach institute classes most of the day on Saturday. That is certainly not a traditional work schedule. We want our colleagues to have time for their family and Church callings, yet this varied schedule is increasingly becoming the nature of our student programs in many areas of the world. The institute building in this type of area might also best be located closer to where students live rather than close to the university, which is a change from our traditional approach.

There are some significant differences between our job descriptions and responsibilities and those of the public school teacher or the university professor. One of the most significant is that we cannot stay in our buildings researching and preparing and wait for students to come to be taught, as public or university teachers can. We must, under priesthood direction, be out contacting and enrolling individual students. This is not an optional activity. It is a vital part of what we are expected to do. It is not a new requirement, and will, in my opinion, continue to be an increasingly important requirement for S&I personnel everywhere.

Barbara Morgan: What are some of the challenges you have seen in S&I?

Garry Moore: One of the most interesting challenges has been learning how to effectively provide S&I programs and personnel for the growing worldwide Church. The New Testament teaches, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens” (Ephesians 2:19). As the Church has become a global organization, we have had to shift our thinking. What we are used to doing along the Wasatch Front or in the United States has been great, but we have had to learn to ask ourselves, how will that proposal effect students and families in the more than 140 countries in which S&I currently
has programs and personnel? We know God is concerned with all his children, regardless of their culture, language, or circumstances, but learning to make administrative decisions with that in mind was not something we were used to doing. When President Eyring was the commissioner, I heard him say many times, “I cannot tell you how often President Hinckley has put his finger into my chest and said, ‘What are you doing for the have-nots?’” In other words, what are you doing for those students scattered across the world who do not have all the fancy equipment, programs, and buildings we have here?

Our charge from the Brethren is to help students everywhere and do so at a time and location that best meets their needs. It is fascinating to meet with teachers and students whose meetinghouse or classroom is a tin roof with four wooden posts and no walls, a kitchen table, or a garage. Their faith and desire to learn and feel Heavenly Father’s love for them are strong. They do not complain that they do not have a plasma screen for watching a video, that their sound system does not have the latest audio technology, or that the light switches are not where they would like them. Why? Because they do not have most or any of these things. I have learned that S&I must evaluate proposed changes in technology, curriculum, audiovisual materials, etc. with a global perspective. We also need to be very careful not to succumb to the temptation to do as the people referenced in 3 Nephi 6:12, wherein “people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches [or opportunities] for learning.”

We very much want to take advantage of the latest technologies but we must also remember our responsibility to assist those who currently have limited access to all these wonderful inventions. It is generally much easier to keep adding to the haves because meeting the needs of the have-nots is so much more challenging. Teaching correct doctrine and principles using the scriptures as our curriculum is still what we must not compromise anywhere.

What we have traditionally called early-morning seminary is another example worth noting. It is now being called daily seminary. Why? Because depending on local circumstances, a daily seminary class may be held at 5:00 a.m., noon, 4:00 p.m., or 8:30 at night. I have attended wonderfully successful seminary classes at 8:30 on a Friday night. That would not work along the Wasatch Front, but it does in that country and culture.

I have observed over the years how the Brethren so very carefully evaluate the potential impact of a change on individual members scattered across
the globe. I have observed the Brethren contemplating the future and asking questions like, “How will we administer the Church when there are fifty or a hundred million members?” “How do we keep the doctrine and ordinances pure in the diversity of cultures and languages, and with increasingly large numbers of converts, especially in areas of the world where leadership is so new?” Those same types of questions must be very carefully studied by S&I. We must stay close to and follow the Brethren, who are indeed watchmen on the tower. The Lord will point the way through them and our local leaders, and the kingdom will continue to roll forth throughout the world.

President Packer teaches that principles are eternal and do not change, but programs, policies, and procedures do and must change. I think that is a very important concept for us individually and collectively to learn and to remember. When the Church changed the Sunday meeting schedule to a three-hour block, they did not change the principle of getting together oft to remember and to strengthen members; they only changed the program or procedure. I think sometimes we can get too locked into traditional policies, programs, and procedures. Change will and must continue to occur in S&I processes and procedures as the Church continues to grow and as world conditions change. Some changes, such as the name change from CES (Church Education System) to S&I, do not impact day-to-day operations but serve other important purposes that may not be clear to a given individual in the field. Other changes like sequential scripture teaching or Teaching Emphasis have a much greater impact on our personnel and programs. I do not think the purposes and the principles of S&I have really changed, but policies and procedures have been and will continually need to be modified.

Satan’s tactics and tools are constantly changing. His influence and power to destroy our teachers and students continue to increase. His intent is not any different, but he continually uses new and more powerful tools to accomplish his evil designs. Satan can now bypass all of the traditional security systems that we have relied on to protect us and our families with the flick of a button, a DVD or a computer. He can thus infiltrate and destroy much faster. We absolutely must continue to improve our individual and collective teaching and administrative abilities, get more students into class, teach them with increased power and effectiveness, and evaluate and modify our programs and policies as needed. Satan is not going to keep the status quo, and we must not either! Satan is constantly looking for new and more effective ways, and so must we.
Barbara Morgan: After working for S&I for over forty years, what advice can you share with the rest of us?

Garry Moore: You may be sorry you asked me that question, because I do have some things I would like to share with the colleagues I love so much.

I would first say that the nature of our type of teaching requires the constant assistance of the Holy Ghost. Therefore we cannot be any better as teachers than we are as people. Our work is not just to impart information. It requires us to create a learning atmosphere where the Holy Ghost can teach and testify. If we are not worthy to have the Spirit with us, then we will be neither happy nor successful. We must avoid involvement in anything (such as movies, music, dress, language, Internet, video games, anger, speculation, debt, etc.) that will reduce our ability to have the constant companionship of the Spirit. When Doctrine and Covenants 42:14 says, “if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach,” it is not just a wise saying; it is a literal, daily reality for our work.

Next I would say, constantly look for and help the one. Salvation is achieved person-by-person and one-by-one. I believe there are many like Alma the Younger who are in our classrooms but are not participating or are doing all they can to destroy the class. There is also the shy student who sits in the back of the room and never says anything, but who, in his or her anonymity and silence, cries out for help. Someday each of them can be a missionary, a parent, or a teacher of one of our grandchildren. Heavenly Father loves each of them as much as he does me and my family. We need to make sure that we do not get so focused on teaching lessons or even focusing on the easy-to-teach students or in using the latest and greatest technology that we overlook the needs of any student in our classes or any who could and should be there.

Third, I would say enjoy every single day. Your career will pass more quickly than you realize, and all too soon the chance to be with the students and to have the wonderful association of S&I colleagues will be gone.

Fourth, remember teaching is a profession where you usually do not see immediate results. If you are in business, you can easily know how many cars you sold or what your profit was. But in teaching, the impact of a principle taught, a testimony shared, a kindness shown, or an expression of love may not be known for a long time, if at all in this life. The father of Enos probably wondered if his teaching had any impact on his son. Nevertheless, at a critical time Enos did remember the teachings of his father. Even though I was not a classroom teacher for the last many years of my career, I continue to run into
former students who tell me about the impact of things I do not even remember saying to them. Your love and the spirit of what you teach students will bear fruit long after you are gone. Please keep giving your very best effort to each lesson, each student, and each opportunity to testify of true principles.

Be appreciative each day for the work environment and the benefits provided to us. Can you think of a career with a better work environment than we enjoy? I have sometimes heard complaints about our benefits programs. As I have seen high-level studies comparing our benefits to others, even the blue-chip corporations, I am almost embarrassed at all the Brethren provide for us. S&I and the Church have worked very hard and continue to do so to provide the very best benefits possible. Unfortunately, local benefit practices make it difficult for all of our colleagues throughout the world to receive all of the same benefits. Wouldn’t it be nice to be in a Zion society now so that all differences could be eliminated completely?

Please trust the S&I leaders. In my almost thirty years in S&I leadership, I have observed firsthand the love, dedication, and desires of these wonderful leaders. The senior administrators work under the direction of the Brethren and try to follow their leadership and guidance. It is not always possible to explain or in some cases even know all the whys of decisions. Sometimes we just have to trust. Anyone who has been a bishop, stake president, etc. knows what it is like to be criticized for decisions that you know are right but which you cannot explain in enough detail to satisfy everyone. As an administrator I have tried to be as open as possible and to share as much as possible so that those affected by the decisions felt trusted by their leaders. I know I didn’t succeed, but I tried. One of the deadliest things that can happen within any organization is a lack of unity and mutual trust. We cannot let that happen in S&I. This work is much too important, and what Satan cannot do through other temptations and means, he can do through internal criticism, distrust, and disunity. As 4 Nephi teaches, we must not have any -ites in S&I. We must not let the them-versus-us mentality infiltrate in any way. We cannot permit differences between teachers and administrators, seminary versus institute, domestic versus international, to divide us. “If ye are not one ye are not mine” is a true principle that applies to each of us.

Trust and follow local priesthood leaders. The Brethren are giving more responsibility to Area Presidencies and to local leaders. This has to happen. First, this is a priesthood-directed Church and, second, as the Church continues to grow, fewer of the day-to-day details can be directed from Salt Lake...
City. Maintaining sufficient uniformity throughout the worldwide Church while allowing more and more local application of correct principles will be an effort that will require everyone’s best effort and support.

Be willing to change personally and organizationally. It has been an unbelievable experience to be a part of the tremendous changes that have occurred in the Church and in S&I during my career. To see a relatively small western U.S. program become a 700,000-plus program in over 140 countries is to me a modern-day miracle. What will the next forty years bring? What will you see during your career? I do not know the details of the future, but I am sure you will see much change and growth. There will in the future continue to be what Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to call “high adventure.” Instead of resisting the changes that must be made, help make them happen. The Lord is in control and will direct his leaders and his work. The Old and New Testaments serve as great reminders of how difficult it is to get people to change. Be one who helps accelerate growth and change and never an anchor that has to be dragged along by the organization or the leaders.

LaNell and I firmly believe in the Lord’s promise in Doctrine and Covenants 82:10. We have seen it fulfilled over and over in all aspects of our lives. We have come to realize that the counsel of the prophets to live within our means and to stay out of debt is a must, not a suggestion. It is our personal experience and witness that if we faithfully pay our tithes and give generous offerings, the Lord will do his part. It has been so for us. It is not always easy, but it does always work. LaNell has been very resourceful and has done so much to make things work. One small example of a multitude of things she has done will illustrate—LaNell has always cut my hair and that of our nine children. It seems like a small thing, but we once tried to calculate what that one small thing saved our family finances over the years. It was an amazing figure.

When we returned from presiding over the mission, we had little savings left (you do not save when you have no income and only a modest living allowance for three years), but again the loaves and the fishes being multiplied took place. It was not as instantaneous or dramatic as it must have been that day in Palestine, but the end result was that we had sufficient to meet our needs.

**Barbara Morgan:** Is there anything else you would like to share?

**Garry Moore:** Yes. I was thinking yesterday, “What if I had not made the decision to go on a mission or if I had not married LaNell, or if we had decided to only have two children? What would our life be like if the other seven children had gone to another family or if we had not returned to S&I?”
We have to trust that the Lord will help us make more of our life than we ever could alone. We must be responsive to the Lord when He calls, and we must be willing to change and to continue to learn.

I had one of the Brethren teach me an interesting lesson. He said, “The Brethren are sometimes reluctant to have to say no to you when you ask for approval for something that you obviously really want to do. However, if you ask them, ‘What would you _like_ done?’ their reply may be quite different than yes. I think Heavenly Father is probably much the same.

I am still learning to be able to try and say, “What wouldst _thou_ like me to do? What do I need to do next?” rather than, “Please approve what I want to do.”

I have a very firm witness that this Church is led by revelation and that the leaders of this Church at every level receive inspiration and guidance. I believe the same is true of S&I leaders. I also have a strong witness of the importance of family and of my responsibility as a husband, father, and grandfather. All the other positions and responsibilities, including Church callings like temple president, come and go but families can be eternal.

I am learning that the Lord has given the scriptures to provide guidance for us. I once had one of the Brethren say to me, “When you get a new calling, you might consider getting a new set of scriptures and then reading them from the perspective of your new calling.” Though I have not been very consistent at buying new scriptures, I have tried to read my scriptures from the perspective of my current responsibilities, and I have received some very interesting and valuable insights. I will just share an example from when I was serving as a mission president. One day I was reading through the first part of Nephi about the different approaches Lehi’s sons who were sent back to Jerusalem used to try to get the plates from Laban. All of a sudden, I thought, “Wait a minute. That is how some of our missionaries operate.” Some missionaries knock on a door and say, “Here I am. When do you want to get baptized?” Then they are surprised when they get thrown off the front step. Other missionaries have goodies in their pocket or play soccer or whatever else to try to buy their way into getting what they are after. Then, finally, there is the missionary who is “led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [they] should do” (1 Nephi 4:6). I had never thought of those verses having application to missionary work. The scriptures are so amazing!

The Lord has taught me important principles through the callings or the experiences I have received in life. I have a firm testimony that the Lord
knows each of us individually and has marvelous ways of teaching each of us. The challenge is to be teachable. It is such a wonderful thing to be a part of the Church and S&I. I also have an ever-increasing testimony of the importance of marriage. I could never have experienced what I have experienced or done what I have been privileged to participate in without my wonderful sweetheart, LaNell, who has never complained and has always supported. She was willing to be led by the Spirit and has been very patient with me and with the many years of shouldering the major burden of the family due to my schedule, travel, and callings. Lastly, we want to express our deep love and appreciation to you our beloved colleagues, your spouses and families, and the amazing students throughout the world. The experiences and love we have shared together have created memories that we will relive and cherish in the years and eternities to come. The Savior and the Atonement are at the center of all that is good in our lives, and, oh, what great blessings we enjoy! Thanks to him and to each of you.

Barbara Morgan: Your efforts in following the Savior’s example as leaders and teachers have blessed the lives of many throughout the world both collectively and individually. You have led and taught with your “face toward Zion.” Thank you again for all you have done and continue to do.
Richard O. Cowan is a professor of Church history and doctrine. He has entered his fiftieth year of teaching at BYU.
**Half a Century of Teaching**

**SUSAN EASTON BLACK AND RICHARD O. COWAN**

Susan Easton Black (susan_black@byu.edu) and Richard O. Cowan (richard_cowan@byu.edu) and are professors of Church history and doctrine at BYU. This fall Dr. Cowan entered his fiftieth year of teaching.

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**Black:** *When did you first discover that you had a visual problem?*

**Cowan:** When I was still very small, my parents asked each other, “Why doesn’t he look at us?” and “Why does he stare at the lights?” To get answers to these and related questions, various specialists examined my eyes. I was diagnosed with atrophy of the optic nerve, with the likelihood of my eyesight becoming progressively worse. Decades later, my condition was identified as retinitis pigmentosa. This disease has steadily reduced my vision, causing it to fade from vague outlines in my youth to near complete loss of sight in recent years. But it should be noted that my blindness has been only an inconvenience, not a debilitating problem. Of course, I would like to see perfectly well and enjoy the beauties of nature and the smiles of loved ones, but I am content.

**Black:** *Do you feel that visual impairment has brought you closer to your Father in Heaven?*

**Cowan:** Growing up with a visual problem, I often wondered what my life’s work would be or even could be. Would I become a helpless beggar standing on street corners asking for alms? Was there an alternative?
Involvement in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and my study of the scriptures gave me a more hopeful perspective and outlook toward life. Perhaps out of necessity, I came to rely more and more on the Lord for direction and support. Two favorite passages from scripture that have helped me are Moroni’s explanation that “weakness” can help us grow (see Ether 12:27) and the Lord’s promise to lead us “by the hand” if we are humble and prayerful (D&C 112:10).

Black: Do you have advice for students who experience physical limitations?

Cowan: It’s important to develop skills and tactics to work around the disability. Although independence has its place, be willing to receive help from others. Be sure you really can’t do something before you decide you can’t do it. Make certain that you keep as many doors open as possible. Don’t give up. Pray to the Lord for his guidance and help. Rather than demanding opportunities, I felt that I needed to earn them.

Black: Through the years, you have become well known for your speaking ability. Has speaking to large groups come naturally to you?

Cowan: The Church provided opportunities for me to speak publicly. After I gave my first two-and-a-half-minute talk at age seven before the grown-ups in senior Sunday School, the person conducting remarked I was a “future Orson Haynie”—a respected gospel teacher in my ward. This was quite a compliment. So I got off to an early start.

Black: When did you discover you had a talent for writing?

Cowan: In the eighth grade, I won a gold medal from the American Legion for an essay, “America’s Contribution to World Peace.” In junior high, I also had the unusual experience of writing a humor column in Spanish (obviously with my teacher’s help) for our school newspaper. In my later teens, I wrote articles for the California Intermountain News, a small privately published newspaper serving Latter-day Saints in Southern California. My regular beat dealt with elders quorum news. At the time, I had not yet been ordained to that priesthood office.

Black: What do you consider to be the first spiritual turning points in your life?

Cowan: When I was fifteen years old, my mother took me to the home of Orson Haynie, our stake patriarch and the speaker to whom I had been compared years before, so I could receive my patriarchal blessing. I felt spiritual power as he placed his hands on my head. Certain passages of the blessing
caught my attention. The promise I would be sealed in the temple to “one of the fair daughters of Zion for time and all eternity” was of particular interest. I wondered at the meaning of his words, “You shall raise your voice and wield your pen in declaring salvation and exaltation to our Father’s children who live upon the earth.” I was grateful for the affirmation that “the Lord loves you and is mindful of your condition in life” and the assurance that “your influence shall not be dimmed nor your usefulness curtailed because of physical handicap or disability.” The blessing gave me courage and hope as I anticipated the next chapters of my life.

The second turning point occurred in 1952 when I was a freshman in college. President David O. McKay, during a visit to Southern California, gave me a blessing in which he said, “The Lord is near you, and he will continue to be at your side and bless you with powers beyond your natural ability to accomplish much good. You will fill a fine mission, a mission of service to your fellowmen, and you will have a life of happiness and joy.” While this blessing was being pronounced, I was very conscious of the presence of a spiritual power.

Black: Did you serve the promised mission?

Cowan: I was called to a Spanish-speaking mission, which at the time covered the states of Texas and New Mexico. It was the only “foreign mission” within the boundaries of the United States. I had many great experiences and some humorous ones as well. For example, on one occasion a minister demanded scriptural citations on a given topic. I inconspicuously slipped my hand into the small binder in my lap, reading Braille notes, and gave him more references than he had anticipated. When he complimented me on my knowledge of the scriptures, I simply replied, “I have them at my fingertips.” I had earlier resented needing to learn Braille but on this occasion concluded that there had been value in doing so. The highlight of my mission was meeting my eternal companion, Dawn, who was also serving as a missionary in Texas.

Black: When did you decide to become a teacher of religion at Brigham Young University?

Cowan: As a missionary, I attended a district conference on March 7, 1954, in Las Cruces, New Mexico. I met Elder Clifford E. Young, an Assistant to the Twelve, who asked me how I felt about my missionary service. I spoke of loving everything about the work and expressed the hope of serving in the Church throughout my life. I then had the opportunity to ask Elder Young a
few questions about the gospel. As he answered them, I had the distinct feeling that I wanted a career that would provide this type of contact with General Authorities. The impression I received was, “Teach religion at Brigham Young University.” As a result, this became my goal.

**Black:** To reach your goal meant much study at the university level. How did you handle all the work involved in furthering your education?

**Cowan:** With the help of readers who were fellow students in my classes, as well as my mother, I worked to complete my bachelor’s degree at Occidental College in Southern California. My hard work paid off. At the beginning of my senior year, I was elected a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the leading national scholastic fraternity. The election entitled me to wear the coveted gold key, although I have hesitated to do so for fear of appearing boastful.

**Black:** Did you enter graduate school immediately after completing your undergraduate degree? If so, how did you finance your further education?

**Cowan:** I was fortunate enough to be awarded a Danforth Fellowship, which covered tuition and all living expenses through the three years it took me to complete my master’s and PhD in American history at Stanford University. I believe one reason that I received this scholarship was because the Danforth Foundation promoted teaching of religion at the college level. They were looking for applicants with a good academic record, interests in religion, and an aptitude for teaching. I also received from Recordings for the Blind of New York City, one of four $500 scholarships given to visually impaired students. The award was presented to me by President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the White House. He greeted each of the four recipients in the famed Oval Office. I recall that he asked each of us what we planned to do following graduation. I replied, “I would like to teach Latter-day Saint Church history at Brigham Young University.” “Very fine,” the president said.

**Black:** Were you encouraged to pursue teaching religion as a profession by administrators in the Church Educational System?

**Cowan:** In December 1959, a top CES administrator frankly advised me that my future did not lie in the classroom. He did not think that a visually impaired person could relate effectively to students. I viewed his discouraging comments as a challenge that I needed to meet, so I just moved forward with my endeavors.

**Black:** Then who encouraged you to join the BYU faculty?

**Cowan:** Each year the Danforth Fellows held a weeklong conference in Michigan. It was there I met Daniel H. Ludlow, who encouraged me to
apply for a position at BYU. He encouraged his colleagues at BYU to give me a chance. David H. Yarn, dean of the College of Religious Instruction, told me that there was a need for a faculty member with my specialty. My most positive assurance came, however, from Elder Harold B. Lee. As he was interviewing me for a faculty position, he explained that building faith was the only reason for Church schools and asked me if I could strengthen the testimony of students. I assured him that this was my desire. Following the interview, on January 25, 1961, one day after my twenty-seventh birthday, I received a formal letter offering me a position as an assistant professor in religion. I promptly wrote a letter of acceptance.

**Black:** What do you believe is the appropriate role of a faculty member in Religious Education at BYU?

**Cowan:** Any university professor needs to be a scholar, researching and publishing. In Religious Education, they should also be excellent teachers; this doesn’t mean just academic excellence, but the ability to build faith and encourage students to strengthen their own testimonies.

**Black:** Is it important to convey your testimony of the restored gospel to students in a classroom setting?

**Cowan:** I have two teaching objectives in the classroom—spiritual and academic. Spiritually, I try to reflect Elder Harold B. Lee’s emphasis to build
testimony. Academically, I try to help my students master the subject. I think it is important for students to know that there is no conflict between being a respected scholar and being an active member of the Church who has faith in the gospel.

**Black:** Have you enjoyed your associations with other faculty members in Religious Education?

**Cowan:** As a junior faculty member, I looked up to scholars like Hugh Nibley and Sidney B. Sperry. Now as a senior faculty member, I enjoy the association of younger colleagues. Each one has talents that bless the lives of students.

**Black:** Have you seen a change in students through the years?

**Cowan:** I believe they are better prepared than ever before; seminary has become increasingly effective in teaching students to use the scriptures. Although there are always a few exceptions, students seem to be more motivated than ever.

**Black:** How have you been recognized for your outstanding teaching?

**Cowan:** Near the end of my fourth year at BYU, on May 13, 1965 during an assembly in the Smith Field House, I was surprised to hear that I had been voted the professor of the year. In 1979 I received the Karl G. Maeser Excellence in Teaching Award and in 1983 Continuing Education's Outstanding Teacher Award. In 2001, I was recognized for helping make the campus a friendly place for those with disabilities, and two years later was chosen to give the annual Phi Kappa Phi lecture. In 2008 my colleagues in Religious Education gave me the Robert J. Mathews Teaching Award.

**Black:** What led you to focus on twentieth-century Church history?

**Cowan:** Dean David Yarn encouraged me to become an expert in some specific area of research. After talking about my graduate study and interests, we concluded together that I should focus on twentieth-century Church history. This decision has proved to be a blessing to me. Some may wrongly suppose that such a study would undermine my faith. Just the opposite: my faith is stronger because of it. As I discovered that Church leaders were human and had all the limitations of our mortal condition, it has caused me to marvel all the more when I consider their inspiring leadership, insightful teachings and remarkable accomplishments. This has given me a certain knowledge that the gospel is true and that our Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ are directing this Church.

**Black:** What led to your particular interest in temples?
Cowan: It has been a lifelong interest. My love of temples goes back to my youth, when our stake in California sponsored excursions to the St. George and Mesa temples. These were choice experiences I shared with other youth who had the same ideals and interests. Then I attended the dedication of the Los Angeles Temple by President McKay. This occurred only days after returning from my mission. As a new BYU faculty member, I enjoyed meetings in the Manti Temple in which Hugh Nibley talked with the faculty about temples and temple worship. About a decade after coming to BYU, I enjoyed attending the Provo Temple dedication and have enjoyed many others since that time.

Black: As a prolific writer of Church history, what has been your main objective?

Cowan: An important objective in my writing has been to build faith. To this end, I have sought to include faith-promoting stories where relevant. Over the years, I have learned the importance of checking these accounts thoroughly to be sure that the facts are accurate. I don’t want questionable facts to become an excuse for doubting a story that was intended to bolster one’s faith.

Black: Have you had opportunities to share your writing talents in Church publications?

Cowan: I have had many opportunities to write articles for Church magazines. The privilege has expanded beyond that, however. Beginning in 1965, I was called as a writer for Church manuals. I was invited to write a history of the Lamanite program for Elder Spencer W. Kimball, a review of priesthood programs for the Correlation Committee, and a two-volume history of the Missionary Training Center. For over a decade I was chairman of the Gospel Doctrine writing committee. I believe that these Church callings were partial fulfillment of my patriarchal blessing, which promised that I would “wield [my] pen in declaring salvation and exaltation to our Father’s children.”

Black: Which of your personal writings do you view as the most significant?

Cowan: I have now written or coauthored sixteen books. In retrospect, I believe Temples to Dot the Earth may have had the broadest impact. The Latter-day Saint Century and several books on the Doctrine and Covenants have also found a large audience.

Black: You have had many opportunities to personally interact with the leaders of the Church. Is there one experience that stands out above the others
you’ve had in recent years?

Cowan: While working on our book The California Saints, I arranged to be present at the dedication of the San Diego temple. President Thomas S. Monson, who was conducting the session, without any prior notice announced, “We would now like to hear from someone who sees things a little differently than most of us, Brother Richard O. Cowan.” “Oh wow!” I thought in total shock. In my remarks I explained how we leave the world behind as we enter the temple. I then noted that the unusual height of the San Diego temple’s celestial room ceiling “reminds us of ascending or being lifted up into the presence of God.”

Black: Have you held any administrative assignments at BYU?

Cowan: From 1994 to 1997, I served as chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine. I enjoyed working with my colleagues and supporting their teaching and scholarship. Being a member of the Administrative Council gave me the feeling of being a part of and a contributor to decisions affecting Religious Education.

Black: What other experiences have been significant to you at BYU?

Cowan: In 1989 I taught at the Jerusalem Center. I found it spiritually exciting to walk where Jesus walked. Then on April 3, 2007, I had the great privilege of speaking at the campus devotional in the Marriott Center. That same month, I began teaching spring term at BYU–Hawaii. I gained a new appreciation for how BYU–Hawaii is building bridges with countries in East Asia, including mainland China.

Black: How have you changed over the years?

Cowan: I believe I am less dogmatic about things that don’t matter. At least when I look at exams written years ago, I realize that I am not as sure about certain facts or interpretations as I once was. I find it much easier now to be humble yet certain about truths I do know.

Black: You are beyond the traditional age of retirement. What has kept you at the university?

Cowan: I had assumed that I would retire when I turned sixty-five. About ten years before that time, however, I learned that the university had adopted a new policy that did away with the mandatory retirement age. I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of continuing my service at BYU.

Black: Are you happy with the contributions you have made to religious scholarship?
Cowan: Probably most of us feel that we haven’t accomplished all we would like and wish we could do more. Still, I am grateful for the many opportunities afforded me as a faculty member at BYU, and I hope I have made some contributions. Yet I am more excited about the opportunities that are ahead.

Black: What does the future hold?

Cowan: I look forward to finishing my first half century of teaching. I have a wonderful family that cares about me. My wife, Dawn, our six children, twenty-two grandchildren, and a new great-grandson bring me much joy. Another joy began on January 19, 2008, when I was called to be a stake patriarch. Realizing the impact my own patriarchal blessing has had on my life, it is now my great opportunity and awesome responsibility to give such blessings to others.
Being released from a calling can bring with it mixed emotions. If we go into the calling knowing that it will be temporary, the release will be easier to accept. We must keep in mind that the Lord has need for us to serve in new ways and learn new things throughout our membership in his church.
A former bishop reflected upon his release, “I hope I have made a difference in the lives of the members of my ward. I hope I have helped bring them to Christ. I have tried my best and learned a lot; I have loved serving. But this is not my ward—it is the Lord’s. I am now happy to take my place in the congregation and follow the counsel of our new bishop.”

A former stake president said, “[Being released] was difficult for a few weeks. I went from the phone ringing off the hook at all hours of the day and night, to nothing—almost instantly. No phone calls, no crises or emergencies that I needed to take care of. It was easy to feel forgotten, even unappreciated for the work I had done. . . . I know that is the way it works in the Church, but it was hard for a while to feel that I was ‘put out to pasture’ and was not needed anymore.”

Many of us, upon being released from a Church calling, have felt similar emotions. Sometimes we feel like the former bishop, thankful for the chance to serve and eager to accept whatever calling the Lord may have in store for our future. Other times we feel like the former stake president, suddenly unneeded and perhaps a bit unappreciated. This range of emotions highlights a unique characteristic of God’s kingdom on earth, one that distinguishes the
Lord’s church from the rest of the world and even from other churches. The Lord calls us to serve with all our heart, might, mind, and strength—and then, after a time, he calls someone else.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell put it this way:

It should be clear to us with regard to various callings and assignments that just as soon as we are sustained and set apart the clock begins running toward the moment of our release. How vital it is to manage our time and talents wisely from the moment a task begins! Later, when we have devotedly invested much of ourselves in a particular calling or assignment (and especially when it has been satisfying and we have made a real difference), we may feel the release when it comes, but that, too, is part of our schooling as disciples. Being released gives us experience in patience and humility, as well as a fresh reminder of our non-essentiality."

Rather than feeling ennui about a call we know is temporary, we can feel inspired to give our best efforts and serve diligently for as long as the opportunity to serve lasts. Just as surely as the Lord will magnify our righteous efforts to serve in a calling, he will also strengthen us as we transition through the release and into a future calling.

Those transitions can be difficult, but perspective is important. If we go into the calling knowing that it will be temporary, the release will be easier to accept. As members of the household of faith, we have countless opportunities to serve and to sustain, to lead and to follow, to teach and to be taught. We thereby reap the spiritual growth and joy that come from consecrated and reciprocal service. Our various callings can bring us closer to the Savior, individually and as a Church.

Granted, sometimes we may feel relieved and happy to be released from a calling. Perhaps the call was demanding, consumed lots of time and energy, or required late hours and significant sacrifice from the whole family. When such a calling ends, we may experience feelings of relief and contentment along with a sweet sense of satisfaction that we did our best and fulfilled our duty. We may look forward to future opportunities to serve in new capacities.

But what if the release comes when we are not quite ready to give it up? What if we have so enjoyed the opportunity to serve and be involved that we feel empty, even lost, when we are released? What if others who take our place seem to do a better job than we did? And what if the next calling feels less fulfilling or rewarding?

No one is indispensible in the work of the Lord. This marvelous work will roll forth with or without us, unhindered and unstoppable, until it has “penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and
sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”4 In no way should that make us feel unneeded, unwanted, or nonessential in the service of God. The Lord and his Church require our willing, consecrated efforts. We develop the attributes of godliness as we put our shoulders to the wheel, rub those shoulders with fellow citizens in the household of faith, and consequently magnify our discipleship. What we are called to do matters not if we serve with devotion and sincerity, for the Lord will bless our efforts. As President J. Reuben Clark Jr. so memorably taught, “In the service of the Lord, it is not where you serve but how. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called, which place one neither seeks nor declines.”5

That is different from the world’s way, and maybe that is one reason accepting a release can be so difficult at times. In most organizations, a person is usually relieved of responsibilities because he or she is not doing a good job. Someone who performs well, on the other hand, often expects to advance to a position of even more responsibility or prestige.

By contrast, in the Lord’s kingdom, all callings are important—even those that seem to involve less responsibility or less visibility. This is true for at least two reasons: (1) each calling comes with a sacred responsibility and opportunity to serve others, and (2) each calling provides opportunities to grow spiritually and develop Christlike qualities. One may be a chorister one week and a bishop the next. One may be a Gospel Doctrine teacher instructing adults one week and a few weeks later be teaching a class of seven-year-old Primary children. This does not mean that the chorister is being rewarded for a job well done or that the Gospel Doctrine teacher is being punished for underperformance. It simply means that the Lord has need for them to serve in new ways and learn new things.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks noted how this pattern conflicts with the traditions of the world:

In the world, we refer to the up or down of promotions or reductions. But there is no up or down in Church positions. We just move around. A bishop released by proper authority and called to teach in Primary does not move down. He moves forward as he accepts his release with gratitude and fulfills the duties of a new calling—even one far less visible.

I saw a memorable example of this a few months ago in the Philippines. I visited a ward in the Pasig stake, near Manila. There I met Augusto Lim, whom I had known in earlier years as a stake president, a mission president, a General Authority, and president of the Manila temple. Now I saw him serving humbly and gratefully in his ward bishopric, second counselor to a man much younger and much less
experienced. From temple president to second counselor in a ward bishopric is a beautiful example of the gospel culture in action.6

The Lord honors and will magnify our sincere efforts all along life’s changing course. Even so, sometimes a release from a calling can leave a void, a feeling of emptiness, especially when we have given our heart and soul to the calling that has now come to an end. But, to coin a phrase, better to have loved and served with wholehearted devotion and then be released than to have never served at all. The degree of our feeling of loss, in some ways, may be commensurate with our dedication to the call and our love of the people we have served.

Three vital principles may help ease the transition from a release to a new calling in the Church:

1. Beware of pride and all of its subsidiaries. Always providing fertile soil for resentment and bitterness, pride may be manifest as self-pity if we feel that our service was not appreciated or acknowledged enough. Pride may rear its ugly head as we compare ourselves to others who we may think have not served as well as we did, who seemed to have served better, or who have “higher” or “lower” callings in the Church. Pride whispers in our ears when we hold too tenaciously to a calling, feeling that somehow it is ours, that we own it and cannot give it up to let others serve. The pride manifested by coveting or rejecting a calling drowns out the sweet promptings of the Spirit.

The Lord said that we are called to the work “if we have desires to serve God” (D&C 4:3), not desires to gain status or recognition or supposed emblems of our worth. When we serve the Lord, we are on his errand, doing his will, and serving at his pleasure. We must resist the urge to take credit for the Lord’s work or to relish the title, position, or information a calling may bring.

Speaking to the priesthood brethren, Elder M. Russell Ballard taught:

A priesthood office is bestowed not for status but for service. You and I are fellow servants in the Church of Jesus Christ.

In addition to holding an ordained office in the priesthood, most priesthood bearers also are called to a specific position in their ward or stake. For example, you priesthood brethren may be called to serve in a quorum presidency, as a teacher in a Sunday School or Primary class, as a member of a ward or quorum committee, or as a stake officer. In each of these callings, you will serve for a time and then be released to give another an opportunity to serve where you have labored. You then will receive other opportunities for further service. Your callings may change, but the need for your constant and committed service in some Church capacity
will continue. Remember, brethren, your responsibility to honor and magnify your priesthood is an eternal obligation.

As we serve together, we must serve in humility, always being kind and considerate of one another. . . . We do not covet positions. . . . Perhaps this is part of what Alma perceived when he declared, “Why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?” (Alma 29:6.) Remember the admonition given by the Savior: “And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:44).7

2. **Be thankful that you were able to serve.** Service in the Church is filled with opportunities for spiritual and emotional growth, for strengthened relationships and deeper gospel understanding, for development of leadership skills and the virtues of patience, compassion, long-suffering, and gentleness. And because service enlarges and educates our soul, it is an important part of our journey toward exaltation.

One woman who had served as a Primary president shared these thoughts: “I knew a few months before my release that my time as a Primary president was coming to an end. I had learned the things I was supposed to learn and felt other women needed this opportunity for their spiritual growth. My first feeling was one of complete loss. . . . I thought of how rejuvenating Primary was for me. I was really sad to know I would be missing sharing with the children that special witness of Jesus Christ and God’s divine plan on a weekly basis. But I knew the Lord would bless another to teach the children well.”8

Blessings attend those who serve the Lord. Some of our sweetest memories can come as we reflect on serving in a calling, especially if we did our best and served with diligence. Most of us probably feel that we could have done more or been more diligent or handled a situation better, but peace can come from the feeling that the Lord has accepted our offering. Many home teachers and visiting teachers can attest to the truth that serving and getting to know someone as part of their calling blesses both the giver and receiver. Home teachers who really care about assigned individuals and families know that lasting friendships can be built. Visiting teachers who are diligent in their service know the joy that comes of close relationships. As we consider our work in the Church, we notice the great reciprocal blessings that always accompany sincere service. We truly can count ourselves blessed that we are able to serve.

Ardeth Kapp, former Young Women general president, reflected on the feelings of gratitude that can accompany a release:

> At the time a call is made, there is inherent in the call the pending date for release. We usually are not given the exact day. It may not happen when expected, and it may
not be easy when it does happen. It will usually come after we have formed close relationships, shared wonderful experiences, prayed together with associates in the work, and learned to serve and love. And we may think, Why couldn’t it have been just a little longer?

My mind goes back to the time when President Gordon B. Hinckley informed Sister Patricia Holland that, after serving only two years in the Young Women general presidency, she was to be released. The prophet, of course, was aware of many other important things she was to do, but it seemed untimely to me. In response to our feelings, he counseled, “Don’t be sad that it hasn’t been longer. Be grateful that it happened at all.” We must not look back, but always forward. We must not live in the past, for there is work to be done.9

3. Fill your heart with the spirit of service. “Our baptism is a call to lifelong service to Christ,” said President Boyd K. Packer.10 When we are baptized, we agree to stand as a witness that we have entered into a covenant with the Lord and that we will serve him and our fellowman and thereby enjoy an outpouring of the Lord’s Spirit upon us (see Mosiah 18:8–10). Certainly we can and should serve others always, informally and without any specific calling, but with a desire to help and because we care. The calling to bless others is a lifelong calling that we can render all our days. We keep our covenants as we reach out in love and kindness to all people, regardless of our Church calling. Formal Church callings that come to us are part of the same covenant we make with Christ. As a stake president said upon his release, “I was happy to accept the call to serve as stake president, and I am equally happy to accept my release. I did not serve just because I was under call. I served because I am under covenant. And I can keep my covenants quite as well as a home teacher as I can serving as stake president.”11

Those who have entered a covenant with Christ and seek to emulate his example know the opportunities for service are endless. Of course, our most important callings are in our home, as husbands and wives, as fathers and mothers—callings from which we can never be released. As President Harold B. Lee taught, “The most important of the Lord’s work that you will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home.”12 But we are also called to be good neighbors at all times and in all places, to be examples of the believers (see 1 Timothy 4:12) and to strive to follow the Savior in daily Christlike living. Informal opportunities to serve are all around us: visiting the sick and the lonely, extending the hand of friendship, attending the temple, and reaching out to others in charity and compassion. No one needs an official Church calling from the bishop to be a good neighbor and friend when he or she is filled with the spirit of service. President Marion G.
Called to Serve for a Season: Church Callings and Releases

Romney said, “Service is not something we endure on this earth so we can earn the right to live in the celestial kingdom. Service is the very fiber of which an exalted life in the celestial kingdom is made. . . . Oh, for the glorious day when these things all come naturally because of the purity of our hearts. In that day there will be no need for a commandment because we will have experienced for ourselves that we are truly happy only when we are engaged in unselfish service.”

Some years ago, I was asked to speak to retiring Church Educational System faculty across the Church. The person who asked me to speak gave me some background information that I found both useful in my speech and poignant in its tone. It has also given me a new perspective on releases from Church callings. He said that a few of these retiring teachers were struggling with the transition to retirement—just as some struggle with being released—because they felt that in some way they had not measured up to their potential. These were people who loved the gospel and the Church with all their hearts, people who had a pure and fervent love for the Lord. But now that their time in CES was at a close, they wondered if they had truly made a difference. The hearts of these good CES employees were most likely already filled with the spirit of service, but perhaps their desires to serve the Lord had been somewhat clouded by the very mortal aspiration to do “some great thing” (2 Kings 5:13) when in fact their lifelong errand of teaching and serving really was “some great thing,” and it would not end with retirement.

Perhaps something similar happens to us when we are released from our Church callings. We worry that we have not done enough, that our offering was too small to be acceptable to the Lord. We look back on our service and, with our limited perspective and perception, fail to see how our service could have possibly contributed to the Lord’s great work.

But the Lord sees what we do not. Who could ever measure the impact of a devoted seminary or institute teacher who reaches deep into the hearts of the people he or she teaches? Who could ever forget a Relief Society or youth leader, a bishop or Sunday School teacher, a home teacher or visiting teacher who truly loves and serves people? All—both the giver and receiver—will forever carry in their heart feelings of affection and gratitude that they were brought together for a moment in time.

The seasons of our callings change over the years, but our sincere service and our earnest desires remain ever unchanging, ever needed, to the end of our days—and throughout eternity.
Notes

1. Conversation with author.
2. Conversation with author.
New Publications

To purchase any of the following publications, please visit www.byubookstore.com and search by book title or ISBN number or call the BYU Bookstore toll-free at 1-800-253-2578.

The Voice of My Servants:
Apostolic Messages on Teaching, Learning, and Scripture

The Religious Studies Center (RSC) at BYU has regularly published landmark scholarship on Latter-day Saint scripture, doctrine, history, and culture. What is sometimes overlooked is that more than seventy significant essays by General Authorities have appeared in its collection of publications. This book contains selections from that collection, authored by prophets, seers, and revelators and published by the Religious Studies Center over the past thirty-five years.

Seasoned by time and coupled with an endowment of spiritual light, the prophets and apostles of our time offer messages with special meaning for all who seek gospel insight.

As the Lord said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.”

Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff

Wilford Woodruff was different from his predecessors in the Church presidency in one particular way—he left an incredibly detailed handwritten record, spanning over sixty years, of just about everything he did and experienced.

He was a man of diversity—miller, farmer, outdoorsman, rancher, horticulturist, diarist, educator, and civic leader. He complemented these skills with deep faith and religious devotion as a missionary, Apostle, Church historian, temple president, and President of the Church.

Through his skillful, inspired leadership and direction, he helped bring about accommodation and change, leading the Church into the social, cultural, and religious mainstream of American society.

This book is a compilation of presentations from the annual BYU Church History Symposium, which was held to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for him and celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of his birth.


Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints

The pattern of keeping records dates back to the earliest days of the Church, when Joseph Smith, the Church’s founding prophet, announced the divine decree, “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). Leaders of the Church have strived to obey that command. Contemporaneous records were kept of revelations received by the Prophet, the calling and interaction of early leaders, missionary assignments, the building of temples, and much more.

The Latter-day Saints continue to be a record-keeping people. In fact, there may be no other people on earth of comparable size who have a richer record-keeping tradition than the people nicknamed Mormons. It is a part of the Church’s administrative system, reaching from small committees to the Church’s general conferences and from new members to the most senior
leaders. Because of this tradition, scholars can readily evaluate Latter-day Saint history from a wealth of primary documents.

*Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults*

This book emerged out of the authors’ efforts to provide scientific evidence that shows how religion plays a significant role in the lives of LDS youth. The authors undertook a groundbreaking study that spans seventeen years and three countries. Truly the first of its kind, this study demonstrates how LDS youth with a high level of religiosity are not only less likely to participate in harmful delinquent activities but also more likely to have healthy self-esteem, resist peer pressure, and excel in school.

Each chapter of the book examines a different aspect of youths’ religiosity and how it affects other aspects of their lives. It shows that religion is indeed a meaningful and positive force in the lives of LDS teens and young adults. This important study can help provide our youth with the tools they need to fashion a shield of faith.

*Within These Prison Walls: Lorenzo Snow’s Record Book, 1886–1897*

While incarcerated in the Utah territorial penitentiary for polygamy, Lorenzo Snow preserved his outgoing correspondence in a leather-bound record book. The record book’s significance lies in three areas. First, the record book sheds much-needed light into the thoughts, personality, and personal life of Lorenzo Snow. The deftness with which he puts his thoughts into verse, his vocabulary, and his humor and compassion all reveal facets of Snow’s intellect and character unfamiliar to many Church members today. Second, the record book is significant
for its doctrinal content—particularly Elder Snow’s teachings concerning the pre-earth life.

Finally, it is an important primary source for students of the antipolygamy crusade. His poems and letters are invaluable for understanding how the Saints viewed their persecutions, justified their resistance to the laws, and found the nerve and the will to carry on despite increasingly difficult circumstances.  


Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer

Since the beginning of the Restoration, many individuals have collected the Prophet’s teachings and attempted to tell his story. Yet the task of reconstructing the life of Joseph Smith is fraught with difficulties, as it is with telling the story of anyone who lived in the past.

Amid the publication of the Joseph Smith Papers, this book adds poignant context to his writings and revelations. Drawing from a lecture series held at Brigham Young University entitled “Joseph Smith’s Prophetic Ministry,” the leading scholars and educators on Joseph Smith shared their wealth of knowledge on his life and history.

These scholars look at Joseph Smith with fresh eyes, mining both old evidence and new discoveries to show who the Prophet was, what he accomplished, and why his life matters. As a result of these efforts, in some ways we may know more about the Prophet than did those who lived during his lifetime, given the intimate look we have into his personal diaries and letters.

Each chapter focuses on a specific period of his ministry from 1830-1844, providing an overview of the major events in Church history and discussing a major doctrinal or historical topic related to that period. This exciting and thorough treatment will lift people’s understanding of the Prophet Joseph and the gospel to new heights.


BYU RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER

Website
A Resource for Gospel Students, Teachers, and Scholars

- Scholarly insights from Church leaders & BYU scholars and educators
- List of available new publications
- Free database of past books & articles
- News of upcoming conferences
- Blog posts
- Links to additional resources

To reach out to a worldwide community, our website includes or will soon include selected articles translated into these languages:
- Español
- Português
- Deutsch

See for Yourself

Take a look
rsc.byu.edu

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
In 1975, Religious Education dean Jeffrey R. Holland formed the Religious Studies Center (RSC) to facilitate religious study and serve not just the university but the entire Church. Now, as the RSC turns thirty-five, let’s review the RSC’s impact on the university and the worldwide Church.

**Conferences**

The RSC helps sponsor important conferences and symposia at BYU. In addition to the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, the RSC has added the Religious Education Student Symposium, the BYU Easter Conference, and the Church History Symposium. These are held annually and are free to the public.

**Research and Publications**

The RSC funds research and publication of scholarly research, regularly publishing about ten books a year, a journal titled the *Religious Educator*, and a biannual magazine, the *Religious Education Review*. “While many people do not recognize the RSC by name,” says Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, publications director, “they recognize many of the books we have published” (see http://rsc.byu.edu/recent).

**Global Impact**

A major step in establishing a global audience was the creation of the RSC website (rsc.byu.edu). This site offers a blog of recent events, news of upcoming conferences and symposia, a list of our most recent publications, a searchable database of past articles, and translations in Portuguese and Spanish. The RSC is committed to sharing its resources with a worldwide audience.

**The Future of the RSC**

While serving as president of BYU, President Holland said, “With the horizons expanding at an unprecedented rate for the study of what is ancient and what is modern, it is fitting for us to look to the resources, scholarship, and leadership of the [Religious Studies] Center.”
Upcoming Conferences

The Thirty-Ninth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium
Scheduled for October 29–30, 2010, the topic of the Sperry Symposium will be “The Sermon on the Mount in Latter-day Scripture.” The keynote speaker will present in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium Friday, October 29, at 6:30 p.m.

Student Symposium
The 2011 Religious Education Student Symposium will be held Friday, February 18, 2011, in the Wilkinson Center on BYU campus from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Church History Symposium
The 2011 Church History Symposium, sponsored by Religious Education and the Religious Studies Center, will be held Saturday, March 5, 2011, in the Harmon Building on BYU campus. The Brigham Young University Church History Symposium was established to explore annually a topic of special interest in the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each year historians meet to share the fruits of their research with each other and with a general audience of interested Latter-day Saints and friends. The symposium has become the premier symposium for scholarship on Church history. Selected papers from each symposium are published in a book by the Religious Studies Center. Hundreds of people attend each year to be enlightened and edified. This symposium is free to attend, and registration is not required.

The BYU Easter Conference
The 2011 Religious Education Easter Conference will be held on Saturday, April 9, 2011, in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium on BYU campus at 9 a.m. Presenters will speak about the Savior, his life, his mission, the Atonement, and his influence in our lives today. The conference will feature notable Church leaders, historians, scholars, educators, and authors. The conference also features special instrumental and vocal presentations. Attending the BYU Easter Conference is an ideal way to celebrate Easter Sunday. Visit http://easterconference.byu.edu for more information.
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Thomas R. Valletta and his wife, Charlene, have been married thirty-eight years. They have five children and thirteen grandchildren, with at least one more on the way. Both Tom and his wife are converts to the Church. Tom received his bachelor’s degree in political science and a master’s degree from BYU. His doctorate was awarded by Northern Illinois University. Tom has been with Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) since 1976, where he currently works as director of S&I Curriculum Services. He has authored a number of articles and books on scripture, doctrine, and Church history. He has served in a variety of callings, including bishop and mission president. Currently he serves as a member of the Correlation Materials Evaluation Committee.

Student Editorial Intern

Laurie Rane Mildenhall is a senior from Encinitas, California. After graduating from high school, she spent several months in Guatemala volunteering for HELPS International, a nonprofit corporation that provides medical care, education, and housing to people in impoverished countries. She then studied business and advertising at BYU before deciding to pursue graphic design. Laurie was married to Nicholas Mildenhall in December 2009 in San Diego. After she and her husband graduate in April, Laurie plans to pursue a graduate degree in graphic design while her husband attends medical school.

Student Intern

Rachael Moore is a junior from Provo, Utah. She is studying home and family living at BYU. While growing up in Provo, Rachael enjoyed participating in outdoor activities and attending BYU sporting events with her family. She enjoys playing the piano, singing, reading, hiking, and playing football. Rachael is currently working toward spending a semester studying abroad in Madrid, Spain. She loves school and, upon graduation next December, hopes to pursue a graduate degree family studies. Rachael currently works as a student assistant for the Religious Studies Center.
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Submission Guidelines
The Religious Educator serves the needs and interests of those who study and teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ on a regular basis. The distinct focuses are on teaching the gospel; publishing studies on scripture, doctrine, and Church history; and sharing outstanding devotional essays. The contributions to each issue are carefully reviewed and edited by experienced teachers, writers, and scholars. The beliefs of the respective authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Complete author guidelines, including suitable topics, are provided at tre.byu.edu. All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to rsc@byu.edu. Hard-copy submissions are accepted but not encouraged. Send hard-copy submissions to the editorial office at the address listed below.

Manuscripts must be word processed in double-spaced format, including quotations. A minimum of embedded word-processing commands should be used. Authors should follow style conventions of The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, and the Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3rd edition, as reflected in a recent issue of the Religious Educator.

Those manuscripts that meet all criteria and appear to fill current needs will be peer reviewed and will receive a friendly, but careful, review. Authors will then be notified of the decision about publication. This process generally takes four to six months, and publication will generally occur within a year after acceptance has been received.

If an article is accepted, authors will be notified and asked to provide photocopies of all source materials cited, arranged in order, numbered to coincide with endnotes, and highlighted to reflect the quotations or paraphrases. Photocopies of source material must include title page and source page with the used quotations highlighted.

Editorial Questions
For questions or comments, e-mail us at rsc@byu.edu or write to Religious Educator, 167 HGB, Provo, UT 84602-2701.
“The Lord . . . emphasized the need of spirituality as a part of effective communication.”

—President Thomas S. Monson