

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“THE ESTABLISHED ORDER
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

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I have taken the title “The Established Order of the Kingdom of God” from a statement by the Prophet Joseph Smith as he was discussing the purpose of the ministration of angels and of spirits to men and women on the earth. His explanation was that heavenly messengers converse with mortals to teach them “the established order of the kingdom of God” and to bring those mortals “up to the standard of their [the angels’] knowledge.”¹ The “established order” is that which already exists in heaven. By their ministering, heavenly messengers raise the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual level of the mortals to a higher plane so that the order of heaven will become the order on earth.

Explanations by the Prophet Joseph Smith and by other prophets, along with many scriptural passages, shape and mold our understanding about the purpose of revelation and tell of the lifestyle and society of celestial culture. They give us a peek into what is meant by the salvation of mankind. The Lord is making it possible for us to become like Him. Salvation is an attainment—not alone what we *know* or what we *do* but what we *become*.

COMPLETENESS OF THE ETERNAL PLAN

Revelation gives us a feeling for the exactness and completeness as well as the ancient nature of the plan of salvation. It is called the

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new and everlasting covenant. The plan is eternal and thus is very old and everlasting, but each one of us learns it individually, and thus to us it is "new." The plan of salvation, with its promises and blessings, is not only what our Heavenly Father requires us to live by but also the same plan and system that He and other celestial persons live by. That gives particular meaning to the scripture in which the Lord says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15–16; see Leviticus 11:45; 19:2; 20:26). If we are to be comfortable in God's presence, then we must be as much like Him as possible. The revealed plan of redemption that we have in the Church, and which is spoken of in the scriptures, reflects the life and environment of the celestial kingdom.

EXALTATION AND REDEMPTION

Our Heavenly Father is infusing into our mortal, fallen environment the kind of life that He has as rapidly as we can absorb it. He has revealed the authority of the holy priesthood and the laws, ordinances, and family organization that exist in heaven. He does not force it upon us, but as we taste of the joy, the testimony, and the knowledge of the gospel, and of the Holy Spirit, we want more. It is natural to thirst for more knowledge. The transition from our mortal condition into celestial glory and holiness is so huge that it will take much time and effort. The change cannot be made casually or by osmosis. It is not accomplished by intellectuality or education alone. The change can come only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and by our faith, repentance, and obedience to the ordinances. It requires a mighty change of heart brought about by the cleansing power of the Holy Ghost upon us. Exaltation in the presence of God is redemptive—spiritual, intellectual, and physical. We are commanded to serve God with all our heart, might, mind, and strength. The gospel of Jesus Christ, with all its powers of change and upward mobility, is the only way that we can be prepared to return home and stand comfortably in the presence of God.

A DIVINE ORIENTATION

The plan of salvation, with its ordinances, commandments, and priesthood authority, is actually a divine pattern of celestial society superimposed upon our mortal condition. When the Lord calls a

great prophet or seer, He generally gives him a vision of the universe and of eternity to orient him so that he will know what is in heaven and can thus teach with conviction and authority. Adam, Enoch, the brother of Jared, Abraham, Moses, Peter, Paul, Nephi, and Joseph Smith had this orientation, as did many others. We receive an orientation, on a smaller scale, in the endowment of the temple. It shows us what God's plans are, and we receive some secrets of the universe. The principles and ordinances that saved and exalted the ancient prophets will save and exalt us.

ESTABLISHING A HEAVENLY COLONY ON EARTH

Heavenly messengers planting the gospel on the earth through conferring heavenly priesthood, doctrines, ordinances, and covenants upon mortal men, are establishing a colony, so to speak. It is like settlers coming from the old world of Europe to America, bringing their customs, ideas, and lifestyle with them. Thus we have *New York*, *New Jersey*, *New Hampshire*, *New England*, and *New Holland*; and in the South Pacific, *New Zealand*, *New South Wales*, and *New Guinea*, named and patterned after their origins. In like manner the Lord began a "colony" from heaven when he came to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove and later sent Moroni, John the Baptist, Peter, Moses, Elijah, and other heavenly representatives to establish the dispensation of the fulness of times. The little stone was cut out of the mountain, without human hands, and will eventually fill the whole earth (see Daniel 2:45).

THE GRAND RULE OF HEAVEN

One of the firmly established orders of heaven is taught in the Joseph Smith Translation of Amos 3:7: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, until he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." In explaining this matter, the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "The grand rule of heaven was that nothing should ever be done on earth without revealing the secret to his servants the prophets."² He added, "The prophet says that God will do nothing but what he will reveal unto his Servants the prophets consequently if it is not made known to the Prophets it will not come to pass."³

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME LIKE GOD

In the King Follett Discourse, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that until we know something about the character of God, we do not comprehend ourselves. When God proposed to save His children, He proposed to make them precisely like Himself, in character, attributes, glory, and happiness. Complete salvation is for each person to be clothed in a perfect, resurrected, physical body, organized into a family with eternal increase of children, kingdoms, and worlds.

KNOWING OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

President Ezra Taft Benson tells of our closeness to God because of our pre-earth life: "Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father and how familiar His face is to us."⁴

If we connect that with Doctrine and Covenants 130:1–2, we get a clear picture: "When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves. And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy."

In our mortality we have temporarily forgotten what we once knew, but by the revelations from heaven we learn again that our earth life is an extension of the sociality we knew in heaven, before we were born on earth.

President Joseph F. Smith explained: "Things upon the earth, so far as they have not been perverted by wickedness, are typical of things in heaven. Heaven was the prototype of this beautiful creation when it came from the hand of the Creator, and was pronounced 'good.'"⁵

ONE DIVINE PLAN

Everything in the gospel of Jesus Christ, from premortal life, to earth life, to postmortal life, to resurrection and eternal judgment, is one package; each segment is based and built upon the same format, the same goals, the same plan, and the same purposes as every other segment. And every human being will go through all of these steps. A man who had served a mission in Australia seventy years ago told me that to cross the continent of Australia by rail in those days required three different railroad companies. Each went only part of the distance,

and each one had a different width of track, so one company's train could not run on another company's track. You could ride one train as far as it went, then change to the other company, and so forth. No unity, no continuity. Contrast that with the plan of salvation that God has for the human family. One plan comprehends the entire trip from newborn spirit child to exaltation. One plan fits all places, all persons, all conditions. It is correlated, unified, and divine, and is the plan of God our Father, made available to us through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is adapted to the needs of every person through the love, mercy, and grace of God. It is the new and everlasting covenant, and everything in the plan is done in the name of Jesus Christ.

The reason we have an established order in the Church is that this great, eternal plan was worked out and established before the foundations of the earth were laid. In fact, this earth, and all the other planets and stars and moons, were created in harmony with, and because of, the more ancient plan of salvation. We learn much about the system from the explanation by the Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 132:5, 6, 8–11:

All who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.

And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God. . . .

Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.

Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name?

Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed?

And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?

FIXED AND IMMOVABLE PRINCIPLES

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "God has made certain decrees which are fixed and immovable." He went on to say that one

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of those fixed principles is that baptism by immersion is the only way to obtain remission of sins; another fixed principle is that after baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost can be obtained only by the laying on of hands. He said that God will not acknowledge any other way and that these principles were decreed before the world was made.⁶ The Prophet further explained: "We are only capable of comprehending that certain things exist, which we may acquire by certain fixed principles. If men would acquire salvation, they have got to be subject, before they leave this world, to certain rules and principles, which were fixed by an unalterable decree before the world was."⁷ In like manner the holy priesthood existed before the world was. It is called the "holy order after the order of the Son of God" and has existed forever and will exist forever. What we have on earth in the Church is a little twig of the priesthood tree that exists in heaven. I quote from Elder Orson Pratt:

There are authorities in heaven as well as upon the earth, and the authorities in heaven are far greater in number than the few who are upon the earth. This is only a little branch of the great tree of the Priesthood—merely a small branch receiving authority from heaven, so that the inhabitants of the earth may be benefited as well as the inhabitants of the eternal world; but the great trunk of the tree of the Priesthood is in heaven. There you will find thousands and millions holding the power of the Priesthood.⁸

The Prophet Joseph Smith said marvelous things about priesthood and described it as a "channel":

[The Melchizedek Priesthood is the] grand head, and holds the highest authority which pertains to the priesthood, and the keys of the Kingdom of God in all ages of the world to the latest posterity on the earth; and is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.

Its institution was prior to "the foundation of this earth," . . . and is after the order of the Son of God. . . . It is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing His glory at the beginning of the creation of this earth, and through which He has continued to reveal Himself to the children of men to the present time, and

through which He will make known His purposes to the end of time.⁹

He added, "Ordinances, instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles."¹⁰

"A HOUSE OF ORDER"

The Prophet Joseph Smith proclaimed, "The great thing for us to know is to comprehend what God did institute before the foundation of the world."¹¹ This declaration places much importance on the pre-earth decisions of God. From Joseph Smith's teachings we learn that not only were pre-earth appointments and foreordinations placed upon various persons, such as Jesus Christ and the prophets, but also that there were decrees and directions concerning every necessary factor in the salvation of the human family. Included in those pre-earth councils were decrees concerning priesthood powers, keys, ordinances, covenants, dispensations, the gathering, revelation, Church organization, salvation for the dead, the restoration of all things, the Fall of Adam, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, resurrection, final judgment, the laws governing blessings, and every important matter.¹² In addition, the Lord has held certain things in reserve, keeping them hidden and secret, to be revealed only in the dispensation of the fulness of times, such as the details regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Millennium, the New Jerusalem, and related things. These secrets are yet to be revealed in this dispensation.

The Lord decreed that every dispensation should be governed by the same priesthood law, and that "all things pertaining to [the dispensation of the fulness of times] should be conducted precisely in accordance with the preceding dispensations."¹³ Thus, there is an established order in the Church and kingdom because all these things are set up and governed by provisions decreed by the Father and the Son before the world was.

Among the explanations by the Prophet Joseph Smith are the following:

1. The Lord revealed the entire gospel plan to Adam and set him

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to be at the head, and Adam "presides over the spirits of all mankind."¹⁴

2. The Lord decreed that salvation in every age of the world could only be administered in the name of Christ and through the gospel and ordinances of Christ.¹⁵

3. Therefore, the Lord "set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever, and set Adam to watch over them, to reveal them from heaven to man, or to send angels to reveal them. . . . These angels are under the direction of Michael or Adam, who acts under the direction of the Lord."¹⁶ "Whenever [priesthood keys and ordinances] are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam's authority."¹⁷

4. "There are no angels who minister to this earth except those who do belong or have belonged to it" (D&C 130:5).

5. "There has been a chain of [priesthood] authority . . . from Adam to the present time."¹⁸

6. The law of common consent must apply to all administrative operations in the Church.¹⁹ There are to be no secret ordinations. A man must "come in at the gate" (D&C 43:7) and be regularly ordained by those who are known to have authority in the Church.

7. The president may receive revelation for the Church, and every person may receive revelation for his or her responsibility and personal guidance, but none receive revelation or direction from God for those higher in authority than themselves.²⁰

8. "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated" (D&C 130:20–21).

All of the foregoing, and more, reflect the established order, and show that the Lord's "house is a house of order . . . and not a house of confusion" (D&C 132:8).

ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

When we find in the scriptures, and in the teachings of the prophets, phrases and terms such as "the holy order of God," "new and everlasting covenant," and "before the foundation of the world," we are talking about *absolute truths* revealed from God to us because He wants to bring us up to His standard. I know that some things are relative, but fundamental gospel truths are absolute because they

were decreed in the grand council before the world was organized. I heard a person declare with great finality that there are no absolute truths, and that everything is relative. If that were so, then his own statement could not be true, because he was making an absolute statement. Be assured that there *are* absolute truths: they come from God, are the “fixed principles” that are essential to our eternal progress, and were in existence before this world was formed. There is comfort in knowing that salvation operates on the basis of permanent truth.

AN ABSOLUTE TRUTH

The great plan that God has revealed for us to follow is absolute and is the same plan that enabled Him to become who He is. The Prophet Joseph Smith said:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God.²¹

INHERITANCE OF REAL ESTATE IN ETERNITY

Another vital factor of the established order of the kingdom of God is the *reality of physical things* in eternity. Elder Lorenzo Snow said: “[If the Saints will consecrate] they will eventually be exalted to possess all that is desirable—the land, the houses, the vineyards, the cattle, the gold, the silver, and all the riches of the heavens and of the earth. The Lord says, All these things are mine; and because of the willingness of my people, all will be restored back to me; and then I will put them in possession of all the riches of eternity.”²²

And Elder Orson Pratt explained: “Heavenly riches and earthly riches are of the same nature; only one is glorified and made immortal, and the other is in a fallen, unglorified state. If we are not willing to be governed by the law of equality in regard to that which is of the least value, who shall entrust us with all the riches of eternity?”²³

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Both of these Brethren used the phrase “riches of eternity” in speaking of physical things. This phrase is used three times in the Doctrine and Covenants. Look at Doctrine and Covenants 38:18–20, 39, and notice that the Lord is talking about real substance—actually it is real estate, a land inheritance—both on earth and also in heaven. Here are the words:

And I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, even a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord cometh;

And I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts.

And this shall be my covenant with you, ye shall have it for the land of your inheritance, and for the inheritance of your children forever, while the earth shall stand, and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away. . . .

And if ye seek the riches which it is the will of the Father to give unto you, ye shall be the richest of all people, for ye shall have the riches of eternity; and it must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give.

The *physical nature* of eternity is one of the riches of eternity. It is the established order of heaven that the Saints will possess landed property. Jesus said, “The meek . . . shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5; see also D&C 88:17). He really meant it.

GENDER IS AN ETERNAL AND ABSOLUTE PRINCIPLE

Another of the great realities of eternity, both on earth and in heaven, is that gender—maleness and femaleness—is an eternal principle. In the “Proclamation to the World” about the family, we read the following in paragraph two: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”²⁴ You notice that the proclamation states that every human being “is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.” The scope of the family in the proclamation includes God’s extensive *family*, as well as our individual earthly families. The proclamation says that gender is an *eternal identification* and an *essential characteristic* and has an *eternal*

purpose. This is a very sacred doctrinal declaration and lays the groundwork for eternal marriage, for a mother in heaven and everlasting families. Gender is the established order of the kingdom of God.

In the seventh paragraph of the proclamation we read: "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan."²⁵ It is basic doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ that eternal marriage, as performed in the temple, is necessary for us to obtain a fulness of God's glory. The logic is unmistakable. We have in the Church the *pattern* of the celestial family—to enable us to become precisely as our heavenly parents are. If marriage for eternity is necessary for *us* to become like our heavenly parents, it must have been necessary for them also. The physical nature of eternity requires a literal bodily physical resurrection of flesh and bone (see D&C 93:33–34). Hence, God has a body of flesh and bone.

A MATERIAL EXISTENCE

The plan of salvation is the established order of heaven transferred to the earth. Elder Orson Pratt said it well:

A Saint who is one in deed and in truth, does not look for an immaterial heaven, but he expects a heaven with lands, houses, cities, vegetation, rivers, and animals; with thrones, temples, palaces, kings, princes, priests, and angels; with food, raiment, musical instruments, etc., all of which are material. Indeed, the Saints' heaven is a redeemed, glorified, celestial, material creation, inhabited by glorified material beings, male and female, organized into families, embracing all the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, where sorrow, crying, pain, and death will be no more. Or to speak still more definitely, this earth, when glorified, is the Saints' eternal heaven. On it they expect to live, with body, parts, and holy passions; on it they expect to move and have their being; to eat, drink, converse, worship, sing, play on musical instruments, engage in joyful, innocent, social amusements, visit neighboring towns and neighboring worlds; indeed, matter and its qualities and properties are the only beings or things with which they expect to associate.²⁶

Elder Pratt also said:

The dealing of God towards his children from the time they are first born in Heaven, through all their successive stages of existence, until they are redeemed, perfected, and made Gods, is a pattern after which all other worlds are dealt with. . . . The creation, fall, and redemption of all future worlds with their inhabitants will be conducted upon the same general plan. . . .

The Father of our spirits has only been doing that which His Progenitors did before Him. Each succeeding generation of Gods follow the example of the preceding ones. . . . [The same plan is carried out] by which more ancient worlds have been redeemed.²⁷

If we believe these statements, we will see that earth life is a reflection of what exists in heaven. Our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ have given us the divine pattern to enable us to become like them. Because it exists in heaven, it is therefore the established order in the Church on earth, which is the training ground. Because we belong to a church that practices the heavenly pattern, it is almost like having one foot already in heaven. It was possibly this relationship that prompted President Brigham Young to say that “the Latter-day Saints have the most natural faith and belief of any people on the face of the earth.”²⁸

Mortals cannot comprehend all the things of God. We scarcely understand the system, but the Holy Spirit tells us that the gospel plan foreshadows our eternal progress.

INDEBTEDNESS TO THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH

President Brigham Young expressed great appreciation for the Prophet Joseph:

I never saw any one, until I met Joseph Smith, who could tell me anything about the character, personality and dwelling-place of God, or anything satisfactory about angels, or the relationship of man to his Maker.²⁹

What is the nature and beauty of Joseph’s mission? You know that I am one of his Apostles. When I first heard him

preach, he brought heaven and earth together; and all the priests of the day could not tell me anything correct about heaven, hell, God, angels, or devils; they were as blind as Egyptian darkness. When I saw Joseph Smith, he took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission.³⁰

What a delight it was to hear Brother Joseph talk upon the great principles of eternity; he would bring them down to the capacity of a child, and he would unite heaven with earth, this is the beauty of our religion.³¹

And President Gordon B. Hinckley eloquently testified:

How great indeed is our debt to [Joseph Smith]. His life began in Vermont and ended in Illinois, and marvelous were the things that happened between that simple beginning and tragic ending. It was he who brought us a true knowledge of God, the Eternal Father, and His Risen Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. During the short time of his great vision he learned more concerning the nature of Deity than all of those who through centuries had argued the matter in learned councils and scholarly forums. . . . Through him were restored the keys of the holy temples, that men and women might enter into eternal covenants with God and that the great work for the dead might be accomplished to open the way for eternal blessings.³²

LIFE WITH A VIEW

Several years ago I visited Niagara Falls and marveled at the size and the noise of that spectacle. We had reservations in a very tall hotel on the river's edge, and many in the group hoped for a room with a view of the falls. Executives, moguls, and schoolteachers all want offices and homes with a view. Even in the scriptures, "upper rooms" have priority. Most of us will probably not have a home on a hilltop or an office or penthouse with a view of the city. The Book of Mormon describes the earth as "a dark and dreary wilderness" (1 Nephi 8:4). That is the lonely world we live in if we do not have the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we participate in the ordinances

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of salvation, we become acquainted with the established order of heaven. We have a light for our path, we get a glimpse of eternity while still on earth, and we have more than just a room but a *life* with a view, and we begin to see the established order of the kingdom of God.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 320, 325.
2. *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1842, 905.
3. Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 181.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, "Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations," *Ensign*, December 1988, 6.
5. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 7th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1946), 21.
6. Smith, *Teachings*, 197–99.
7. Smith, *Teachings*, 324.
8. Orson Pratt, "Elijah's Latter-day Mission," in *Masterful Discourses and Writings of Orson Pratt*, ed. N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: N. B. Lundwall, 1946), 259.
9. Smith, *Teachings*, 166–67.
10. Smith, *Teachings*, 308.
11. Smith, *Teachings*, 320.
12. From unpublished research in which I identified seventeen topics that are declared to have been decreed before the world was created.
13. Smith, *Teachings*, 168.
14. Smith, *Teachings*, 157–58, 167.
15. Smith, *Teachings*, 168.
16. Smith, *Teachings*, 168.
17. Smith, *Teachings*, 157.
18. Smith, *Teachings*, 191.
19. Smith, *Teachings*, 75, 108; see D&C 28:13.
20. Smith, *Teachings*, 111.
21. Smith, *Teachings*, 345.
22. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 5:65.

23. Orson Pratt, "The Equality and Oneness of the Saints," in *Masterful Discourses*, 596–97.
24. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
25. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," 102.
26. Pratt, *Masterful Discourses*, 60.
27. Orson Pratt, "The Pre-existence of Man," in *The Seer*, September 1853, 134–35.
28. Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, ed. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1946), 125.
29. Young, *Discourses*, 458.
30. Young, *Discourses*, 458–59.
31. Young, *Discourses*, 459.
32. Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Season for Gratitude," *Ensign*, December 1997, 2.