



"Adventure," Courtesy of Sasin Tipchai, Pixabay

Brother Joseph's charge to the Latter-day Saints is for us to hold tenaciously to what has been revealed to us and yet to love our religious "others" as our brothers and sisters, to love them as we hope they will love us, and, where possible, make of them friends and acquaintances.

God Grants unto All Nations

ROBERT L. MILLET

Robert L. Millet (robert_millet@byu.edu) is a professor emeritus of ancient scripture at BYU.

Address to the Society of Mormon Philosophers and Theologians, University of Utah, 15 March 2019.

Many years ago, I addressed a group of faculty and students at a university in New England. It was a fifty-minute presentation on “The Christ of the Latter-day Saints.” Questions and answers followed. One faculty member raised his hand and then made a comment: “I do have a question for you,” he said, “but first let me say that I have great difficulty taking seriously any religious group that dismisses out of hand two thousand years of Christian history.” His words jolted me at the time, and his choice of words still troubles me. His query brought to mind a host of issues: Do Latter-day Saints in fact dismiss the whole of Christian history as “apostate”? Is such a position necessary in light of a belief in a restoration of the gospel? Is it the case that “the lights went completely out” in AD 100 and did not come on again until 1820? Because of the poignance of the professor’s observation, I do not even remember the question he then asked.

Some years after that experience, I was in Pasadena, California, with a Protestant colleague to conduct an interfaith program. We had completed our conversation (about ninety minutes) before a large group of people and then invited questions from the audience. The group consisted of about 60 percent Latter-day Saints and 40 percent evangelical Christians. A Latter-day Saint missionary seated with his companion near the front of the chapel stood up and said: “My question is for Professor Millet. I simply want to clarify something. Doesn’t the Book of Mormon teach that there are really only two churches—the church of the Lamb of God and the church of the devil [1 Nephi 14:10]?” I replied that that is in fact what the book says. The missionary then followed up: “Now, to me that means that the Latter-day Saints are the church of the Lamb, while all other people are a part of the church of the devil. Is that correct?” I tried to be sensitive, to respond in a way that wouldn’t hurt feelings but would also correct what I believed to be a major misconception. I didn’t want him or, for that matter, seven hundred other people, to leave the building with a misconception.

Let me state my purpose at the beginning of this essay: my conviction is that God loves all his children, desires for them to receive all light and truth and understanding—especially of eternal matters—as they are prepared to receive them, and will find ways and means to lift individuals and whole nations to a higher light and a greater truth.

“Only True Church”: What It Does *Not* Mean

In the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, a revelation given to Joseph Smith in November 1831, the Church of Christ is referred to as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30). Admittedly, this is strong language, words that are offensive and even painful to persons of other faiths. Without question, it is a wedge that has been driven between Latter-day Saints and traditional Christians. It may be helpful to consider briefly what the phrase “only true and living church” means and what it does *not* mean. In what follows, I offer my own views—my own perspective. First, let’s deal with what the phrase does *not* mean.

1. It does not mean that Latter-day Saints are the only true Christians. We have no difficulty whatsoever accepting other persons’ affirmations that they are Christian, that they acknowledge Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God, their Lord and Master. Nor do we believe that Latter-day Saints are the

only ones entitled to divine guidance for their lives. C. S. Lewis put it well when he explained that “it is not for us to say who, in the deepest sense, is or is not close to the spirit of Christ. We do not see into men’s hearts. We cannot judge and are indeed forbidden to judge. It would be wicked arrogance for us to say that any man is, or is not, a Christian. . . . When a man who accepts the Christian doctrine lives unworthily of [the name Christian], it is much clearer to say he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian.”¹

2. It does not mean that we believe that most of the doctrines in Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant Christianity are false or that all of the leaders of the various world religions have improper motives or ambitions. Joseph Smith stated: “The enquiry is frequently made of me, ‘Wherein do you differ from others in your religious views?’ In reality and essence we do not differ so far in our religious views but that we could all drink into one principle of love. One of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.”²

Note that the Prophet did not state that we are in complete agreement with the teachings of other Christian groups or that there is no difference between what we teach and what other religious traditions proclaim. Rather, the differences between us—and, in some cases, very real differences—do not require that we cut all ties with them, avoid or exclude them, or even ignore them. Brother Joseph’s charge to the Latter-day Saints is for us to hold tenaciously to what has been revealed to us and yet to love our religious “others” as our brothers and sisters, to love them as we hope they will love us (see Matthew 7:12), and, where possible, make of them friends and acquaintances.

“Perhaps the Lord needs [persons] on the outside of his Church to help it along,” Elder Orson F. Whitney declared. “They are among its auxiliaries, and can do more good for the cause where the Lord has placed them, than anywhere else. . . . *God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of his great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous for any one people.*” Elder Whitney then pointed out that we have no warfare with other churches: “They are our partners in a certain sense.”³

3. It does not mean that the Bible has been so corrupted that it cannot be relied upon to teach us sound doctrine and provide an example of how to live. President M. Russell Ballard, in speaking of “the miracle of the Holy Bible,” observed, “It is a miracle that the Bible literally contains within its pages the converting, healing Spirit of Christ, which has turned men’s hearts

for centuries, leading them to pray, to choose right paths, and to search to find their Savior.” Further, “It is not by chance or coincidence that we have the Bible today. Righteous individuals were prompted by the Spirit to record both the sacred things they saw and the inspired words they heard and spoke. Other devoted people were prompted to protect and preserve these records.”⁴

In the words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie to religious educators, “We cannot avoid the conclusion that a divine providence is directing all things as they should be. This means that the Bible, as it now is, contains that portion of the Lord’s word” that the present world “is entitled to and able to receive.”⁵ Unlike many in the conservative Protestant world, Latter-day Saints are not yoked to a position of biblical inerrancy. The Bible need not be free of error of either translation or transmission for us to recognize it as the word of God, accept it as one of the scriptural books within our canon, love and revere it, study it, and live by its inspired principles. While we do not believe that one can derive divine authority to perform the saving ordinances or sacraments from the scriptures, we do say that the Bible (1) teaches of groups of people in the past who enjoyed the full blessings of the everlasting gospel and (2) teaches (especially in the New Testament) the good news or glad tidings of redemption in and through the atoning work of Jesus Christ (see 3 Nephi 27:13–21; Doctrine and Covenants 76:40–42).

4. It does not mean that everything our Father in Heaven intends to make known has been made known. In spite of all that God has seen fit to reveal through latter-day prophets, in spite of so many precious truths that have come to the Saints concerning so very many religious matters, we do not possess all truth yet. The Restoration is an unfolding revelation, and we receive things, as both Isaiah and Nephi pointed out, line upon line and precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:9–10; 2 Nephi 28:29–30).

Some years ago, five of my Latter-day Saint colleagues and I were engaged in an intense discussion with six evangelical Christian scholars on the topic of the Trinity/Godhead. We had been meeting as a group for several years at this point and had covered a good many doctrinal subjects (Fall, Atonement, authority, scripture/revelation, even deification/theosis). We had purposefully placed the topic of the person and nature of God and the Godhead on the shelf for a while, sensing that it would be a difficult conversation. And it was. There was no argument, no debate, no acrimony whatsoever, but there were deep and probing questions with which we were engaging.

After we had spent a day and a half discussing this matter, Professor Richard J. Mouw, at the time president of Fuller Theological Seminary, spoke up. He looked over the group carefully, smiled, paused for about ten seconds, and said: “At this point in our dialogue, could I ask my evangelical associates a question? It’s this: Are we so certain that we understand the nature of God so completely, so thoroughly that we are able to state categorically that the Latter-day Saints have it wrong and are therefore worshipping a god that does not exist?” The room went quiet. No one moved or said anything for at least thirty seconds. It was a stunning question, a moment that mattered, a call, if you will, to humility, to an acknowledgement that perhaps not everything pertaining to God and the Godhead has been revealed and thus made clear. My impression is that the Latter-day Saints were as taken aback as were our Protestant friends. Though in future dialogues we needed to be reminded periodically, that sobering inquiry affected what we said and how we said it for years.

What It *Does* Mean

What, then, does the revelation mean when it states that the restored Church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth”?

1. “The word *only*,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written, “asserts a uniqueness and singularity” about the Church “as the exclusive ecclesiastical, authority-bearing agent for our Father in heaven in this dispensation.” He continued. “When the Lord used the designation *true*,” Elder Maxwell pointed out, the Lord implied that “the doctrines of the Church and its authority are not just partially true, but true as measured by divine standards. The Church is not, therefore, conceptually compromised by having been made up from doctrinal debris left over from another age, nor is it comprised of mere fragments of the true faith. It is based upon the *fulness* of the gospel of him whose *name* it bears, thus passing the two tests for proving his church that were given by Jesus during his visit to the Nephites (3 Nephi 27:8). When the word *living* is used,” Elder Maxwell continued, “it carries a divinely deliberate connotation. The Church is neither dead nor dying, nor is it even wounded. The Church, like the living God who established it, is alive, aware, and functioning. It is not a museum that houses a fossilized faith; rather, it is a kinetic kingdom characterized by living faith in living disciples.”⁶

Living things react, respond, adjust, and change. Recent developments within the restored Church—whether curriculum, structure and length of

meetings, and temple language—certainly attest to the fact that change is an ongoing part of a living faith and way of life.

2. In “the only true and living church,” doctrinal finality must rest with apostles and prophets. One New Testament professor at an evangelical Christian seminary remarked: “You know, Bob, one of the things I love about my way of life as a religious scholar is that no one is looking over my shoulder to check my doctrine and analyze whether I’m teaching the truth. Because in my faith there is no organizational hierarchy to which I must answer, I am free to write and declare whatever I choose. And my colleague two doors down from me may address that same subject and come to a very different conclusion.”

I have thought since then that what my friend perceives to be a liberating freedom can result in doctrinal chaos. It can become license to interpret, intuit, or exegete a scriptural passage in a myriad of ways, resulting in interpretations as diverse as the backgrounds, training, and proclivities of the persons involved. There are simply too many ambiguous sections of scripture to let the Bible, as some say, “speak for itself.” This was, in fact, young Joseph Smith’s dilemma: “The teachers of religion of the different sects,” he explained, “understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling [his religious question] by an appeal to the Bible” (Joseph Smith—History 1:12).

“At some level,” Richard Bushman has suggested, “Joseph’s revelations indicate a loss of trust in the Christian ministry. For all their learning and their eloquence, *the clergy could not be trusted with the Bible. They did not understand what the book meant.* It was a record of revelations, and *the ministry had turned it into a handbook. The Bible had become a text to be interpreted rather than an experience to be lived.* In the process, the power of the book was lost.”⁷

In writing of *sola scriptura* as a tenet of the Reformation, American religious historian Randall Balmer observed that “Luther’s sentiments created a demand for Scriptures in the vernacular, and Protestants ever since have stubbornly insisted on interpreting the Bible for themselves, forgetting most of the time that they come to the text with their own set of cultural biases and personal agendas.” Balmer continues:

Underlying this insistence on individual interpretation is the assumption . . . that the plainest, most evident reading of the text is the proper one. Everyone becomes his or her own theologian. There is no longer any need to consult Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther about their understanding of various passages when you yourself are the final arbiter of what is the

correct reading. This tendency, together with the absence of any authority structure within Protestantism, has created a kind of theological free-for-all, as various individuals or groups insist that *their* reading of the Bible is the only possible interpretation.⁸

The “More” of the Restored Church

Latter-day Saints should really not be singled out as being exclusionary or even arrogant because of our belief in the “only true church.” Is this not the same position taken by the Roman Catholic Church? Doesn’t denomination A believe they have a better insight into this or that doctrine than churches B, C, and D? Doesn’t this group or movement feel strongly that their beliefs and practices more closely mirror those of the church established by Jesus in the first century? Weren’t Hus and Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and Wesley convinced that their efforts to reform the mother church or spiritually enliven the Church of England were inspired and heaven-directed and that their reforms and teachings brought them closer to what the Master had intended from the beginning?

Our God is the God of all creation, an infinite, eternal, and omni-loving Being who will do all that he can to lead and direct, to bring greater light into the lives of his children, to save as many as will be saved. He is the only true God and thus the only living Deity who can hear and respond to the earnest petitions of his children. He is the God of the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, the Protestants, and all those who seek to know and love and offer praise and adoration to the true and living God. I have been a Latter-day Saint all my life, but I do not in any way believe the Almighty loves Latter-day Saints any more than he loves Anglicans, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Adventists, Unitarians, Jews, Muslims, or atheists. He loves us all and is pleased with any and every halting effort on our part to learn of him, serve him, and be true to his light within us.

Well then, are the Latter-day Saints universalists? No, not if that means that all men and women will eventually be saved in the highest heaven. No, in that we believe, with our Christian brothers and sisters, that salvation is in Christ and in Him alone. That is, no man or woman will inherit the highest glory hereafter who does not accept Jesus as the Christ, the Savior and Redeemer, including his gospel, with its requisite covenants and ordinances. We do, however, believe that all except the sons of perdition will receive salvation in a kingdom of glory hereafter. In describing the revolutionary nature of the vision of the degrees of glory (Doctrine and Covenants 76), Richard Bushman pointed out that “the most radical departure of ‘the Vision’ was not

the tripartite heaven but the contraction of hell. . . . The doctrine recast life after death.” In this vision, “A permanent hell threatened very few [the sons of perdition]. The question was not escape from hell but closeness to God. God scaled the rewards to each person’s capacity.”⁹

What troubles Nicene or traditional Christians most about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not our focus on family, our health code, or our style and standard of living. Rather, it is what a Christian friend of mine calls “the extra stuff,” what I call our “value added”—our distinctive offering to the religious world. In the words of Brigham Young, “We, the Latter-day Saints, take the liberty of believing more than our Christian brethren: we not only believe . . . the Bible, but . . . the whole of the plan of salvation that Jesus has given to us. Do we differ from others who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? No, only in believing more.”¹⁰

The “more” of the restored gospel would include doctrine and practices that may be unknown to or little understood by persons of other faiths, such as a belief in a Father in Heaven who has a body of flesh and bones, premortal existence, foreordination, a veil of forgetfulness, the Savior’s redemptive suffering in Gethsemane, family history and temple worship, eternal marriage and families, the nature of life and activity in the postmortal spirit world, baptism for the dead, preliminary appearances of the Savior before his Second Coming in glory, kingdoms of glory in the world to come, and many more. These are the “more” of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the “value added” by the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

Boldness, Gentleness, and Respect

Is it the case that “the lights went completely out” in AD 100 and did not come on again until 1820, some seventeen centuries later? President John Taylor explained that there were persons during medieval times who “could commune with God, and who, by the power of faith, could draw aside the curtain of eternity and gaze upon the invisible world. . . . There were [persons] who could gaze upon the face of God, have the ministering of angels, and unfold the future destinies of the world. If those were dark ages I pray God to give me a little darkness, and deliver me from the light and intelligence that prevail in our day.”¹¹

Latter-day Saints cannot in good conscience ignore what we believe to be the language of the Lord to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove (Joseph Smith—History 1:19), or in modern revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30), in order to avoid offending those of other faiths. We cannot relinquish

the reason we have for being. “Could we not use the words *better* or *best*” in speaking of our Church’s position in the religious world, President Boyd K. Packer asked. “The word *only* really isn’t the most appealing way to begin a discussion of the gospel. If we thought only in terms of diplomacy or popularity, surely we should change our course. But we must hold tightly to it even though some turn away.” President Packer continued by observing: “We know there are decent, respectable, humble people in many churches, Christian and otherwise. In turn, sadly enough, there are so-called Latter-day Saints who by comparison are not as worthy, for they do not keep their covenants. But it is not a matter of comparing individuals. We are not baptized collectively, nor will we be judged collectively. . . . Yield on this doctrine [of the “only true church”], and you cannot justify the Restoration.”¹²

A modern revelation instructs us that “unto whom much is given much is required” (Doctrine and Covenants 82:3). We have indeed received much, and it is thus required of us to make known to the world the singular status of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And yet surely there is a way to do so with gentleness and respect for our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Respected New Testament scholar N. T. Wright rendered this passage as follows: “Sanctify the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to make a reply to anyone who asks you to explain the hope that is in you. Do it, though, *with gentleness and respect*.”¹³

President Gordon B. Hinckley remarked:

The Lord said that this is the only true and living Church upon the face of the earth with which He is well pleased. I didn’t say that. Those are His words. The Prophet Joseph was told that the other sects were wrong. Those are not my words. Those are the Lord’s words. But *they are hard words for those of other faiths. We don’t need to exploit them.* We just need to be kind and good and gracious people to others, showing by our example the great truth of that which we believe.¹⁴

The counsel President Hinckley presents here has been taught by many latter-day prophets and is well illustrated by the words of Joseph Smith: “We don’t ask any people to throw away any good they have got, we only ask them to come and get more.”¹⁵

Unto All Nations

I am fully persuaded that Jesus Christ, who is the perfect embodiment of love and mercy and every godly attribute, will do all that is appropriate to inspire,

lift, edify, and encourage individuals, families, communities, and whole nations. It was to Nephi that Jehovah spoke on this matter:

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and *I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?* . . . For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; *and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.* (2 Nephi 29:7, 12; emphasis added)

Alma explained that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8). Elder B. H. Roberts offered the following expansive insight:

While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is established for the instruction of men; and is one of God’s instrumentalities for making known the truth yet [God] is not limited to that institution for such purposes, neither in time nor place. God raises up wise men . . . of their own tongue and nationality, speaking to them through means that they can comprehend . . . but always giving that measure of truth that the people are prepared to receive. Mormonism holds, then, that all the great teachers are servants of God; among all nations and in all ages. They are inspired men, appointed to instruct God’s children according to the conditions in the midst of which he finds them.

Brother Roberts continues:

Wherever God finds a soul sufficiently enlightened and pure; one with whom his Spirit can communicate, lo! he makes of him a teacher of men. While the path of sensuality and darkness may be that which most men tread, a few . . . have been led along the upward path; a few in all countries and generations have been wisdom seekers, or seekers of God. They have been so because the Divine Word of Wisdom has looked upon them, choosing them for the knowledge and service of himself.

While it is . . . taught by the very revelations of God themselves, that there is but one man . . . who is entitled to receive revelations for the government and guidance for the Church . . . it is nowhere held that this man is the only instrumentality through which God may communicate his mind and will to the world.¹⁶

It is but reasonable, therefore, that elements of truth, pieces of a much larger mosaic, should be found throughout the world in varying cultures and

among diverse religious groups. Further, as the world has passed through phases of apostasy and restoration, relics of revealed doctrine remain, albeit in some cases in altered or even convoluted forms. Persons lacking spiritual insight and the faith that derives from a knowledge of Christ's eternal plan of salvation may tend to cast doubt on the true gospel, may point to legends and traditions of creation epics or flood stories that presumably predate the Pentateuch, may eagerly note similarities between ordinances of the temple and practices in pagan cultures, and may thereby suggest that Christianity has but copied from the more ancient sources. President Joseph F. Smith had much to say to those who seek to upstage Christianity. The Savior, he taught, "being the fountain of truth, is no imitator. He taught the truth first; it was his before it was given to man." Further, "If we find truth in broken fragments through the ages, it may be set down as an incontrovertible fact that it originated at the fountain, and was given to philosophers, inventors, patriots, reformers, and prophets by the inspiration of God. It came from him through his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, in the first place, and from no other source. It is eternal."¹⁷

Remnants of the Faith

Knowing what we know concerning God our Father—that he is a personal being, that he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as our own, that he is an exalted and gloried being, and that such understanding was had by many of the ancients—should we be surprised to find legends and myths concerning gods who have divine power but human attributes and passions? Knowing that Adam and Seth and Enos and Cainan and Mahalaleel and others of the antediluvians spoke of the coming of the Messiah and that the Messiah would come to earth as a man but be possessed of the powers of a God, is it not likely that they also knew that he would be born of a virgin? Should we be surprised to find pagan traditions of virgin births and divine humans?

Adam heard the heavenly voice saying, "I am God; I made the world, and *men before they were in the flesh*" (Moses 6:51; emphasis added). That is, men and women in the earliest ages knew of a first estate, a premortal existence. Therefore, is it any wonder that several religious traditions are wedded to an idea of past lives? Inasmuch as the doctrines of rebirth, regeneration, resurrection, and the immortality of the soul were taught to Adam and his posterity, why should we flinch when we discover the misshapen doctrines of reincarnation or transmigration of souls in such traditions as Hinduism, Jainism, and

Sikhism, or when we encounter a people like the ancient Egyptians who are almost obsessed, not with death (as some suppose), but with life after death?

Of particular interest to Latter-day Saints is the resemblance between what goes on in our own temples and things that transpire in sacred structures of other faiths. In many cases, those resemblances may originate with earnest truth seekers who act without authority, even as did Pharaoh, great-grandson of Noah: “Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father” (Abraham 1:26–27).

Professor Hugh Nibley spent a lifetime studying such parallels. He wrote, “Latter-day Saints believe that their temple ordinances are as old as the human race and represent a primordial revealed religion that has passed through alternate phases of apostasy and restoration which have left the world littered with the scattered fragments of the original structure, some more and some less recognizable, but all badly damaged and out of proper context.” More specifically, Nibley asked:

But what about the Egyptian rites? What are they to us? They are a parody, an imitation, but as such not to be despised. For all the great age and consistency of their rites and teachings, which certainly command respect, the Egyptians did not have the real thing, and they knew it. . . .

The [Latter-day Saint temple] endowment . . . is frankly a model, a presentation in figurative terms. As such it is flexible and adjustable; for example, it may be presented in more languages than one and in more than one medium of communication. But since it does not attempt to be a picture of reality, but only a model or analog to show how things work, setting forth the pattern of man’s life on earth with its fundamental whys and wherefores, it does not need to be changed or adapted greatly through the years; it is a remarkably stable model, which makes its comparison with other forms and traditions, including the more ancient ones, quite valid and instructive.¹⁸

And what is true of sacred practices and beliefs throughout the ancient non-Christian world is also true in today’s modern Christian world. We believe that divine priesthood authority was withdrawn by God and that many plain and precious truths were taken away or kept back following the deaths of the meridian Apostles (1 Nephi 13:20–40). This does not mean, however, that Protestants or Catholics or Eastern Orthodox have no truth or that any scriptural interpretation from them is automatically suspect, incorrect, or corrupt. As noted earlier, elements of enlightenment, remnants of truth, and aspects of

the faith of the former-day Saints may be found in modern Christianity. The Lord loves his children, all of them, and he delights “to honor those who serve [him] in righteousness and in truth unto the end” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:5). “Have the Presbyterians any truth?” Joseph the Prophet asked in 1843. “Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists etc., any truth? Yes, they all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up or we shall not come out pure Mormons.”¹⁹

Conclusion

Everyone has access to some measure of light and truth from the Almighty, what Latter-day Saints know as the Light of Christ, or Spirit of Jesus Christ (Doctrine and Covenants 84:44–48; 88:6–13; Moroni 7:12–19). This is similar if not the same as what the Protestant or Catholic world calls *general revelation*, and the fruits and divine assistance that flow from this light are “common grace.” President Brigham Young thus declared that there has never been “a man or woman upon the face of the earth, from the days of Adam to this day, who has not been enlightened, instructed, and taught by the revelations of Jesus Christ.”²⁰

On another occasion, President Young pointed out that God “gives his Spirit when and to whom he pleases. . . . I never passed John Wesley’s church in London without stopping to look at it. Was he a good man? Yes; I suppose him to have been, by all accounts, as good as ever walked on this earth, according to his knowledge.” And then, speaking of Wesley in the postmortal spirit world, Brother Brigham asked, “Has he obtained a rest? Yes, and greater than ever entered his mind to expect; and so have thousands of others of the various religious denominations.”²¹ The prophets teach that if people will be true to the light and understanding they have, they will be led to greater and higher light, both here and hereafter (Doctrine and Covenants 84:46–48).²²

The longer I live and the more God-fearing people I encounter, the more clearly I see God working through noble people throughout the earth. Professor Richard J. Mouw, a valued friend and colleague and a very devout Calvinist, wrote: “While I am no universalist, my own inclination is to emphasize the ‘wideness in God’s mercy’ rather than the ‘small number of the elect’ motif that has often dominated the Calvinist outlook. I take seriously the Bible’s vision of the final gathering-in of the elect, of that ‘great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,’ who shout the victory cry, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb’ (Revelation 7:9–10).” Now, note

these words: “For all I know—and for all any of us can know—*much of what we now think of as common grace may in the end time be revealed to be saving grace*. But in the meantime, we are obligated to serve the Lord in accordance to patterns he has made clear to us.”²³

Gaining a broader perspective on God’s tender regard for all his children has changed my life. After three decades of interfaith endeavors; after reading scores of books and articles to better understand colleagues and associates of both Christian and non-Christian denominations; after spending hundreds of hours in intensive, probing conversations on doctrinal matters from Adam to Zion—after all this, I have never been more committed to the restored Church than I am right now. The fruits of the Restoration have never been sweeter to my taste. At the same time, I have felt a deeper sense of love, admiration, and respect for marvelous women and men whose beliefs are somewhat different from mine, but whose desire to seek out truth and gain deeper understanding has been akin to mine.

In addition, I have been blessed to see and experience the love of God for all of his children; I have come to sense, more than ever before, that the Almighty is working through men and women of various religious persuasions to bring to pass the marvelous work and the wonder foreseen by Isaiah. I cannot count the number of times that in bringing to a close the two-day interfaith discussions and while listening to dear friends offering their closing remarks, I have felt the reality of the Savior’s words to his Apostles that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

The Prophet Joseph Smith demonstrated his elevated prophetic perspective, coupled with his breadth of soul, when he asked: “If I esteem mankind to be in error shall I bear them down? No! I will . . . lift them up. . . [And] if I cannot persuade [them] my way is better? . . . I will ask no man to believe as I do.”²⁴ **RE**

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 10–11.
2. “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” 1666, The Joseph Smith Papers. See also Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 229.
3. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1928, 59; emphasis added. See also B. H. Roberts’s discussion of who (and what) constitutes the “Church of Christ” and who represents the “church of the devil” in Conference Report, April 1906, 14–15.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “The Miracle of the Holy Bible,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 80.

5. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Bible: A Sealed Book," address at the Eighth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium, August 1984, in Mark L. McConkie, ed., *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons & Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 280.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, *Things as They Really Are* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 45–46; emphasis in original.
7. Richard Lyman Bushman, "A Joseph Smith for the Twenty-First Century," *Brigham Young University Studies* 40, no. 3 (2001): 167–68; see also Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 274.
8. Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24.
9. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 199.
10. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards & Sons, 1851–86), 13:56.
11. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:197.
12. Boyd K. Packer, "The Only True Church," *Ensign*, November 1985, 80–81; emphasis in original.
13. N. T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament: A Contemporary Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 475; emphasis added.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, in regional conference, North Ogden, Utah, 3 May 1998, cited in "Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley," *Church News*, updated 20 June 2000, <https://thechurchnews.com/archives/2000-06-03/messages-of-inspiration-from-president-hinckley-87-118920>; emphasis added.
15. "History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843] [addenda]," 6 [addenda], The Joseph Smith Papers.
16. B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 1:512–13; see also the First Presidency's official statement, "God's Love for All Mankind," First Presidency Letter, 15 February 1978.
17. John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 31, 395, 398–400; see also Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 15:325.
18. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), xii–xiii.
19. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," 1681, The Joseph Smith Papers; see also *Words of Joseph Smith*, 234.
20. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:139.
21. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:5.
22. See also Widtsoe, *Gospel Doctrine*, 67–68; and Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 260–61.
23. Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 100; emphasis added.
24. "Discourse, 9 July 1843, as reported by Willard Richards," 302, The Joseph Smith Papers.