

Alfred Gantner, “Knocking at the Door,” in *Finding God at BYU*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Kaye T. Hanson, and James R. Kearl (Provo, UT: The Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 62–71.

*Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; and thus they become new creatures (Mosiah 27:25–26).*

### ***Knocking at the Door***

*Alfred Gantner*

*Alfred (Fredy) Gantner was born and reared in Switzerland, where he attended school, served in the Swiss Army, and completed his diploma from the Zurich Business School before he entered the MBA program in the Marriott School of Management at BYU. After graduation, he joined Goldman, Sachs, & Co., where he worked at assignments in New York and London before he transferred to Zurich. There he is cofounder and CEO of Partners Group, an international venture capital/private equity investment manager. Fredy and his wife, Cornelia, are the parents of four children.*

BYU is a very special place for me, as it is for many others. I did not find my spouse there. I did not even attend classes at BYU when I first came. But more important, I found God.

I first came to know the Church in Switzerland when I was fourteen. My older sister dated a member of the Church and started to attend meetings on Sundays. They married, and some time later my sister decided to get baptized. Occasionally I would attend sacrament meetings when my sister or my brother-in-law gave a talk. Although my parents belong to a Protestant church, our family did not attend church meetings regularly. However, my parents had taught their children about the existence of our Heavenly Father. I was probably one of the few students who enjoyed my religion classes in junior high school. I showed vivid interest in different religious denominations, and over time I investigated the Roman Catholic Church, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, some of the Free Churches, as well as the LDS Church. I found interesting aspects of truth in all of them. A good friend of mine was Muslim, and I had high esteem for him and his religious beliefs as well. In a German literature class in high school we read a German classic, *Nathan the Wise*, written by Gotthold E. Lessing during the period of the Enlightenment. While we will look more closely at this story later on, the basic message is that there is no true church, that all religions have some truth, and that the true church was probably lost a long time ago. I was very much impressed by this thought, and my own searching for truth seemed to confirm Lessing’s philosophy.

It was against this background that several missionary couples taught me. It was very interesting to hear about a restored gospel that seemed to offer more than the many different kinds of reformation that I had studied so far. I read in the Book of Mormon and had interesting discussions with the missionaries and members of the Church. I gained a favorable impression of the Church and had a very positive feeling when reading in the Book of Mormon and when discussing it with missionaries and members. Today I know about the fine, whispering voice of the Holy Ghost. But then I did not recognize it as such. I was still very liberal in my thinking. Many of the laws, such as the Word of Wisdom or the law of chastity seemed to be very old-fashioned and behind so-called modern times. Also, there were no people my age in the branch with whom I could associate besides the white-shirt/black-tie missionaries, who seemed to live such a different life. So for many years I was a friend of the Church but showed little interest in joining. Among the missionaries I was already known as a “professional investigator.” Nevertheless, the many hours of studying and teaching started to bear fruit. The priorities in my life changed as I began to understand gospel principles.

In my mid-twenties I was working as a trader at the Zurich Stock Exchange when I felt the need to deepen my business education. My brother-in-law suggested that I should consider the Marriott School of Management, which has an excellent reputation for its international business program. He sent my resume to a friend of his who is a faculty member at BYU, who in turn passed it to the business school. The response was very positive, and the faculty member suggested that I should consider the MBA program. The application procedure would only be a formality, since the MBA program had already expressed a strong interest in my admission. Based on this encouraging news and the prospect of attending a reputable two-year post-graduate program in business administration, I resigned from my job by the year’s end. Starting the following January, I had to serve another four months of military duty as a lieutenant in the Swiss Army. But I had only two weeks of service left when a rather devastating letter from BYU arrived.

I was told that I could not be admitted into a graduate program at BYU since my educational background would not fulfill the necessary requirements. Great! Two weeks of service left, no job anymore, no apartment, luggage packed,

ticket bought to Salt Lake City. I decided that I might as well just go there anyway and discuss this mess with the people who caused it.

I had been invited to stay with friends of my brother-in-law, the Barrus family, which was a fantastic experience. For the first time in my life I experienced the blessing of the priesthood in a home and the wonderful bonding experience of regular family prayers. This family is still an example to me. After two weeks I found housing in an apartment complex called King Henry. I shared rooms with three other students who all became my great friends. The first Sunday they invited me to church and then took me along for the ward prayer in the clubhouse that same evening. I was more than amazed by these young people. There were only single students attending the ward, and all the different callings (except the bishopric) were carried by the students themselves. I witnessed powerful sacrament and testimony meetings, and interesting and spiritual Sunday School and priesthood classes. Especially the ward prayers touched me deeply every time. I felt the love and care those young people had for each other. Nobody forced them, nobody told them, nobody supervised them. They truly did serve each other out of an inner conviction that they are all brothers and sisters in Christ. What a powerful experience for somebody who grew up in a country where the wooden church benches are empty on Sundays, people under sixty-five are rarely seen at mass, and no young men can be found to fill the vacant priest positions.

I remember one Saturday morning when two of my roommates were called by sisters of the ward to give a sick sister a blessing. I was invited to go along, and I was again more than impressed. I felt the spirit and the faith of the people who had gathered in that room to ask the Lord in a very direct way for a very specific blessing. I also participated in many fun ward activities and in the weekly family home evening program. While there were no members my age in the branch back home, I was now able to affiliate with many young Latter-day Saints from different parts of the United States and from other countries all over the world. Most of them had come to BYU to receive a good education. But equally important, they came to grow spiritually through the values taught and practiced at the University and among the student body itself. Who would believe that more than thirty-thousand young people voluntarily commit themselves to a very stringent moral and ethical behavior code in order to be admitted to a university? More important, most of those students do not live those values for the rules' sake but out of a deep religious conviction. What an incredible testimony of the restored gospel! What force could move so many young hearts to forsake many of the great temptations of modern society? BYU and its students are an enormous living testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ and his restored Church on the earth.

After about two months of pondering the Book of Mormon and other Church literature, uncountable hours of discussion with friends, and many intense personal prayers, I was baptized and ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood in November 1991. After three months at BYU, I was asked to tell my conversion story in a sacrament meeting the day before my departure back to Switzerland. The following is the talk I gave on that occasion. I think that it best reflects the feelings of my heart about how I found God at BYU.

Many of you have served a mission. You went from door to door, talked with people in the street, and taught them the gospel. I met my first missionaries about seven years ago in Switzerland through my sister and brother-in-law who are members of the Church. They and other missionaries taught me a long time and with a lot of patience. I often felt a good and even a strong feeling, but I struggled to accept the gospel. Nevertheless, I started thinking about my life and the purpose in life. I realized that my job as a stock-exchange trader gave me a nice salary and earthly comfort, but not a real personal satisfaction. Finally, I decided to quit my job and go back to school to try to go through an MBA program. My choice was BYU. I wanted to find out more about these strange people who had such an important influence on my life.

When the plane was landing over Salt Lake City and I saw the mountains, it was a little bit like a coming home. This feeling has not left me from that moment on. I have been amazed at how many friendly and helpful people I have met in this valley. I have never felt as a stranger because of the spontaneous help and love of a lot of people. Again I was deeply touched by the way the members of this Church are and live.

In ninth grade in high school we read a play with a religious background. It is called *Nathan the Wise*, written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who lived in the eighteenth century and is one of the most important German philosophers of the Enlightenment. A wise Jewish man named Nathan is called by the Sultan, a Muslim, who gives him a test by asking the question, "Which religion—Jewish, Muslim, or Christian—might be the right one?" Nathan answers this question with a tale that has become famous in German literature as the Ring Parable:

In days of yore, there dwelt in eastern lands  
A man who had a ring of priceless worth  
Received from hands beloved. The stone it held,  
An opal, shed a hundred colors fair,  
And had the magic power that he who wore it,  
Trusting its strength, was loved of God and men . . .  
At last this ring, passed on from son to son,  
Descended to a father of three sons;  
All three of whom were duly dutiful,  
All three of whom in consequence he needs  
Must love alike. . . .

And so to each  
He promised it, in pious frailty.  
This lasted while it might.—Then came the time  
For dying, and the loving father finds  
Himself embarrassed. . . .

He orders two more rings, in pattern like  
His own, and bids him spare no cost nor toil  
To make them in all points identical. . . .

In glee and joy he calls his sons to him,  
Each by himself, confers on him his blessing—  
His ring as well—and dies. . . .

. . . What ensues is wholly obvious.—  
Scarce is the father dead when all three sons  
Appear, each with his ring, and each would be  
The reigning prince. They seek the facts, they quarrel,  
Accuse. . . .

The sons preferred complaint;  
And each swore to the judge, he had received  
The ring directly from his father's hand.—  
As was the truth!—And long before had had  
His father's promise, one day to enjoy  
The privilege of the ring.—No less than truth!—  
His father, each asserted, could not have  
Been false to him; and sooner than suspect  
This thing of him, of such a loving father;  
He must accuse his brothers. . . .

Thus said the judge: unless you swiftly bring  
Your father here to me, I'll bid you leave  
My judgment seat. Think you that I am here  
For solving riddles? Would you wait, perhaps,  
Until the genuine ring should rise and speak?—  
But stop! I hear the genuine ring enjoys  
The magic power to make its wearer loved,  
Beloved of God and men. That must decide!  
For spurious rings can surely not do that!—  
Whom then do two of you love most? Quick, speak!  
You're mute? The rings' effect is only backward,

Not outward? Each one loves himself the most?—  
O then you are, all three, deceived deceivers!  
Your rings are false, all three. The genuine ring  
No doubt got lost. To hide the grievous loss,  
To make it good, the father caused three rings  
To serve for one. . . .

All three he loved; and loved alike;  
Since two of you he'd not humiliate  
To favor one.—Well then! Let each aspire  
To emulate his father's unbeguiled,  
Unprejudiced affection! Let each strive  
To match the rest in bringing to the fore

The magic of the opal in his ring! [\[1\]](#)

I asked myself: Did I just find some of that magic of the opal ring among the members of this church? This question stayed in my mind, and I found it again in the Book of Mormon, Moroni 7:5: “For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.” After some more time there was no doubt in me that this church had an amazingly positive influence on people, that it had the magic of the opal. Or was it even the true ring that had been found again?

After my first two weeks in Provo I made an important decision to live in the King Henry apartments. That gave me the chance to know all of you and to share the wonderful Forty-fifth Ward. I want to let you know that I feel a deep love for you in this ward. I thank you for your friendship and for the wonderful time that you have shared with me. Your way of living and your love for each other let me understand what the word charity—the opal of the ring—means. I know that it is caused by the power and influence of God through your strong faith in Jesus Christ. But I was still looking for my personal testimony. Sometimes on Sundays I felt awkward in church because everybody would share his testimony, and I seemed to be the only person who could not figure out that the Church was true. I had really tried hard to find the truth when, about four weeks ago, everything seemed to turn against me. There was almost no hope anymore of being admitted to the BYU MBA program, I had problems finding housing (fall semester had started), and I had a lot of unanswered questions. I knelt down and started to pray to Heavenly Father for him to give me a clear sign. I was waiting for thunder, and nothing happened.

Today I know that he answered my prayers in a much more powerful way. The next day I met a wonderful person and we started to talk extensively about the Church and my concerns. From our conversation I took the assignment to read Alma 32 the next day. I want to read verses 17, 18, and 21 with you: “Yea, there are many who do say: If thou wilt show unto us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. Now I ask, is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it. And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.”

I realized that it was wrong to wait for thunder, for a miracle, for earthly proof. The next day we read Moroni 7:26, and for the first time I started to really trust God that I would receive an answer to my prayers. Some days later I had an appointment with our bishop, who is an extraordinary man, followed by a personal blessing. We read Moroni 10:4–5 together: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.”

I had struggled for two years and finally found the truth in just three short weeks when I started to trust in God. I am so thankful for all the many people who helped me to make the most important decision of my life. I will stay close to them my whole life through deep gratitude, love, and prayers for them. All of you have had an

influence on my decision through your daily examples. You can see through my experience that your work is not done after your missions. You are missionaries your whole life long. I felt the gospel in you and through you. You have been wonderful missionaries. I thank you with my entire heart and I want to let you know that there will be a friend of yours in Switzerland.

I am proud to stand in front of you and testify that I know with certainty that this church is the true and only true Church upon the face of this earth and that the gospel has been restored through Joseph Smith, a modern-day prophet of God. You have testified of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Mormon has testified of you, my friends. I testify to you that this book is holy scripture and is another witness of our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The next day I flew back to Switzerland and began to understand just what it was my Father in Heaven had in mind for me. I began to see why I had not been admitted immediately to BYU's MBA program, and I began to see that I was being prepared for a most marvelous blessing.

First, I registered in school to take some additional classes so I would fill BYU's requirements for entry into graduate school. Second, I began attending my home branch. While I had been in Provo, Cornelia had moved to our Swiss branch. We got to know each other, fell in love, and were married six months later. The Lord had prepared me at BYU to meet her, but she had to get to the right place for that to happen. We got married on a beautiful day in May and left for Utah in August of 1992.

In the spring of 1994 I graduated from business school and Cornelia, my wife, finished her bachelor's degree in broadcast communication during the following summer. I was offered a job by Goldman, Sachs & Co.—an American investment bank—and was trained in New York and London before being transferred to Zurich in 1995. In 1996, two of my colleagues and I left Goldman to establish our own venture capital/private equity investment company.

Some years have passed since we left Utah Valley. Cornelia has given birth to three boys and one girl. We both serve in our branch in Switzerland. Cornelia is the Young Womens president and seminary teacher, while I am currently serving in the branch presidency. I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for the opportunity to serve in his Church and for all the many blessings that I have received over the past few years, especially for my wonderful wife and our children.

We spent two wonderful years at BYU. I think of many positive classroom experiences that expanded beyond academic matters, including social and spiritual aspects of business and life in general. Many of the campus devotionals with Church leaders will be memories of a lifetime. But most important, we met many wonderful people who share with us a common vision about building up the Lord's kingdom upon this beautiful planet earth. Today I know that he is everywhere, but it took going to BYU to find it out. BYU is more than an educational institution. It is a most important place where young people can grow strong in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was a great privilege for me to study and grow spiritually at the school of the Lord. I hope that BYU students never forget that they enter to learn and go forth to serve.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise: A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts*, trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1955), 75–79.