
Part 3

Preparing the Way

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

Part 3 of this volume is largely historical and deals with themes in the period up to the Restoration of the gospel and since then that reflect the guiding influence of the Lord in the unfolding of modern history. Prominent among those themes are the rejuvenation of European thought in the Renaissance at the end of the medieval period, the divinely appointed discovery of America, the spadework of successive European developments such as the Reformation and the development of parliamentary government in Britain, and finally the rise of freedom in America, all in preparation for the Restoration. Equally important have been the providential rise and spread of freedom elsewhere, which has prepared the way for the preaching of the gospel across the world. In complementary fashion, the technological and scientific development of the modern era has provided additional means for the accomplishment of the Church's mission of taking the gospel to the entire world.

Historians generally agree that the vast changes in Europe, which marked the transition from "medieval" to "early modern" at the end of the Middle Ages, laid the basis for later European development. The movement known as the Renaissance, which included the rebirth of ancient learning, the rise of humanistic studies, and the flowering of art, literature, and architecture, was crucial to this transition. This "Renaissance" or "rebirth," which spanned two centuries from approximately 1350 to 1550, began in Italy, and spread over much of the rest of Europe, bringing a redefinition of European culture and values. The quest for knowledge and the taste for discovery of the age, coupled with technological developments, such as the compass and better sailing ships, and the rising power of the new nation-state monarchies, laid the foundation for the great oceanic discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Gutenberg's invention of movable-type printing in the mid-fifteenth century was a

key development of the period, which allowed for the dissemination of knowledge to a much broader range of people, making possible the subsequent religious Reformation and the rise of modern science.¹ Modern prophets and apostles have indicated that the Spirit of the Lord had already begun to move on the people at the end of the Middle Ages, hastening subsequent developments, to prepare the way for the Restoration of the gospel.²

De Lamar Jensen, internationally recognized scholar of the Renaissance and the Reformation, breaks new research ground in his chapter, "Renaissance: The Beginning of Religious Reform." In exploring the reflections of Petrarch, Valla, and other Italian humanists on such topics as "human dignity, freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul," Jensen demonstrates that their approach was not secular, as often depicted, but focused on the dignity and perfectability of man. Historians have recognized that as the Renaissance moved northward across the Alps, it was transformed in that the northern humanists, more concerned with theological and religious matters than their southern counterparts, turned from the study of classical secular texts to the study of the Bible and early Christian texts. But Jensen, in addition, links the early Rhineland and Dutch "Brethren of the Common Life" and similar movements, whose emphasis was on a return to the Christian living of the New Testament, with the concepts of important Christian humanists such as Erasmus and others. He has thus identified underlying concepts and exciting new relationships in what he has called the "Religious Renaissance," which preceded and shaped the Reformation, providing evidence that the hand of God was already preparing the way for the later movement.

Latter-day Saint prophets have affirmed that the Reformers were inspired by God in their attempt to regenerate the Christian Church, and as such, served as precursors to the Restoration.³ De Lamar Jensen, in his second paper, "Reforma-

tion and Pre-Restoration," shows that Martin Luther, Calvin, and other well-known reformers developed ideas that partially resembled those of the Restoration, but he has noted an even more striking resemblance in concepts developed by the Anabaptists and Spiritual Reformers. Catholic reformers such as Gaspar Contarini and Gian Matteo Giberti also produced a rejuvenation of Catholic thought and practice. The many similarities in various of these movements with the ideas of the Restoration lend credence to the view that God reveals to each generation all the truth "that he seeth fit that they should have" (see Alma 29:8). But the fact that the Anabaptists were hunted out by their fellow Protestants and massacred leads Jensen to believe that the Restoration was not possible until the establishment of freedom in America.

The expansion of Europe to other shores in the great Age of Discovery changed forever the course of European history, and that of the continents brought under European domination—most notably the Americas. In the chapter entitled "Columbus: Man of Destiny," Arnold K. Garr, specialist in Columbus studies and Latter-day Saint history, highlights the pivotal role of Columbus in the discovery of America. Drawing on the spiritual record of scriptural and prophetic statements and on Columbus's record of his proceedings, Garr affirms that the great discoverer was divinely inspired in his first voyage to the Americas. The fortuitous choice of route and change of course at crucial moments bear witness to the providential nature of his endeavor. Columbus's discovery of America laid the basis for all later New World development, and even though the indigenous population, the children of Father Lehi, would be sorely chastened, they would ultimately be the recipients of divine blessings in fulfillment of ancient covenants.

The importance of the rise of freedom in Europe and America as part of the divine plan can hardly be overemphasized, especially when

one considers that in 1350, at the dawn of the modern era, not a single European state, except those under the rule of Islam, had religious toleration.⁴ The development of freedom in America, which modern prophets and apostles have affirmed paved the way for the Restoration, nonetheless, had its roots in European developments. In the next chapter, Robert R. Newell, Carma T. Prete, and Roy A. Prete trace the “European Origins of Freedom in America” from early Greek and Roman foundations, through the first intellectual glimmers of the Middle Ages, to its religious underpinnings in the Reformation, to the philosophical formulation of liberty in the Enlightenment. They then detail the British heritage of representative and constitutional government, individual rights and liberties, and the rule of law, to which the American colonist fell heir prior to the Revolution. The American founders were much influenced by the concepts of John Locke and his emphasis on the social contract, which justified the Revolution. The legal and constitutional practices of England, coupled with the ancient heritage and the ideas of the Enlightenment, thus provided the foundation for the development of freedom in America.

In his chapter, “The Rise of Freedom in America,” Milton V. Backman, a noted expert on the religious history of the United States, shows that the progress of religious freedom in America made its greatest strides in the revolutionary era, giving rise to the disestablishment of traditional religions and the development of a new attitude of religious toleration. He also details the recognition by George Washington of divine providence in the success of the revolutionary armies against far stronger forces, and notes that some framers of the Constitution recognized the influence of a kindly providence. Backman identifies as divine preparation for the Restoration not only the rise of freedom in the new republic, but the availability of an unoccupied territory as a potential place of refuge.

But the advance of freedom was not limited to the United States. Indeed, one of the remarkable developments of Western society has been the rise of freedom generally and its extension in a variety of forms to the peoples of many parts of the earth. Drawing on his expertise as a longtime professor of modern European and diplomatic history, Louis B. Cardon traces important aspects of that development in a trilogy of chapters for three “Champions of Freedom in the Modern World”: Britain, France, and the United States. In these chapters, he emphasizes the providential role of each of these great democracies in the rise and spread of freedom over the last three centuries. In the chapter on Britain, he discusses the remarkable development of parliamentary government and liberal democracy in Britain and its dissemination in the imperial domains and also the role of Britain in maintaining the European balance of power, preventing any one power from establishing a hegemony on the continent. In the chapter on France, he explains how the French revolutionary tradition has provided an alternate model for the quest of freedom, inspiring many nations who lack long democratic roots. In the final chapter, he focuses on the providential role of the United States, which, through a succession of policies, has evolved from an isolationist small power to a superpower, committed to the defense and spread of freedom. While God has no perfect instrument on earth for the accomplishment of His purpose, these three nations, Cardon argues, have made remarkable strides in the development of freedom and its extension across the earth in the modern era.

The extension of freedom across the world has been a necessary preparation for the preaching of the gospel. The happy result in the modern era, despite all the violence and suffering, is that now approximately two-thirds of the world’s population lives under a system of religious toleration. A comparison of a map of those countries that have meaningful religious freedom

with a map of those areas to which the gospel has been taken shows them to be almost identical.⁵

The advance of technology has been a very powerful force in the modern world. Taking up the theme of the divine role in the disbursement of technical knowledge as a preparation for the preaching of the gospel, Thomas L. Erikson, chair of BYU's School of Technology, has contributed an important chapter, "Preparing the Way: Technology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." Defining technology as the practical application of knowledge, including those systems that develop and manage it, he has given as an example of the latter the U.S. Land Grant Colleges, which have made a powerful contribution to the agricultural revolution of America. Erikson then focuses on the development of modern transportation and communication systems, including the current information technology, which have facilitated the Lord's work of preaching the gospel and administering an ever-expanding church. The role of the computer in hastening the work of redeeming the dead by facilitating family history research has surpassed all expectations.⁶

One of the truly amazing discoveries when we try to identify the hand of God in human activities is that, on occasion, we can observe three different kinds of testimonies related to His interposition. The first is that of the prophetic statements from the scriptures and modern prophets and apostles; the second is that of the person or people involved as to the divine influence which they felt; and the third is that of the events themselves and their impact. Columbus is a impressive example of this phenomenon. Notable examples of this phenomenon in the rise of freedom in America are George Washington and some of the framers of the U.S. Constitution. In the case of scientific and technological advance, in addition

to prophets and apostles having identified divine intervention, several key scientist and inventors, including Johannes Kepler, James Watt, and Albert Einstein, have recorded receiving flashes of insight and even dreams, as in the case of James Maxwell, in making their discoveries. There can be little doubt that God is at the helm as events significant to His purposes unfold.

NOTES

1. For further reading, see Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) and De Lamar Jensen, *Renaissance Europe: Age of Recovery and Reconciliation*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1992). On the debate challenging the traditional concept of the Renaissance in the development of early modern Europe, see *The American Historical Review* 103 (February 1998): 51–124.

2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 197–98; Mark E. Peterson, *The Great Prologue* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); Gordon B. Hinckley, "At the Summit of the Ages," *Ensign*, November 1999, 73.

3. Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind, February 15, 1978, cited in James E. Faust, "Communion with the Holy Spirit," *Ensign*, May 1980, 12–13; Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 31.

4. See John P. McKay and others, *A History of World Societies*, vol. 2, *Since 1500*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 647.

5. See maps in the chapter by Robert S. Patterson and E. Dale LeBaron, "Preparing for Preaching the Gospel Worldwide since 1945," in this volume.

6. See Merrill J. Bateman, "The Dawn of a New Millennium," BYU Devotional Address, January 11, 2000, <http://speeches.byu.edu/devo/99-00/MJBatemanW00.html>.