

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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Have you ever read something you or someone close to you prepared decades ago and have been struck by the feeling that it is still sound, useful, and fundamentally true? Perhaps you have had the opposite and more common experience of reading something you or someone else wrote that once excited and moved you but now you find that the impact you originally felt is no longer there and, in fact, the writing strikes you as cynical, or shallow, or lacking in basic soundness, or no longer relevant.

For instance, how long has it been since you picked up the Constitution of the United States and read it? If you do this, you may think it improbable for fifty-five men and women currently representing our states to produce a document equal in brevity and good sense and as solidly rooted in timeless principles as did those who gathered in Philadelphia that hot summer of 1787.

When I read the New Testament, a compilation of letters and treatises written by men associated with the Savior some two thousand years ago, I asked myself if any small group of men today could write a series of letters and religious documents equal in wisdom and inspiration to those comprising the New Testament canon. If they tried, do you think what they produced would end up being used and revered by millions of people for two thousand years?

Now to raise some more general but related questions, are some ideas more important than others? Is there a center of things? Are some

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principles, doctrines, and ideas of infinitely greater value and more basic than others? Is that which is written today by our best minds likely to be of greater value than that which was written by the best available authors one or two millennia ago? If modern man is thousands of years further along than New Testament authors, would our best written thoughts not be of infinitely more value than those of our ancestors in Palestine who wrote the documents comprising the New Testament? If man has had significant upward progress in the last two thousand years, does the New Testament have *any* relevance today? I shall address a few of these questions.

IS THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITATIVE AND RELEVANT TODAY?

One addressing a church group will often ask, “Did you bring your scriptures?” To most in the world this question means, “Did you bring your Holy Bible?” To the Latter-day Saint it means, “Did you bring your Bible and your triple combination that contains the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price?” One of the most revered of the books of scripture is the New Testament portion of the Bible. It is not only that these “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21)¹ but that these New Testament authors wrote their messages. Then what they wrote became, in process of time, accepted by the Church as especially authoritative, binding, and inspired, as well as useful for doctrine and instruction in the Church. On the other hand, much, even most, of what others spoke and wrote in the past, though useful and instructive, does not quite have that authoritative status in Church literature. For example, there is available to the student a large amount of ancient literature dating to biblical days, including the writings of the apostolic Fathers and others, which are not accepted generally as scripture, although they are useful to scholars.

We accept the New Testament as scripture—that is, as authoritative and inspired. We use it all the time, we cite it as authority, and we read and study it at home and in our Church instructional sessions. We clearly prefer the King James Version of the New Testament,² but we are not adamant about that. Any responsibly prepared version could be used and might be helpful to us. It is the doctrine and the teachings in their historical setting that are useful and authoritative to Latter-day Saints.

Unlike some students of ancient history and scripture who reject any suggestion of influence from a divine source in the writing of scripture,

following the notion that nothing is worth much if it cannot be established by analytical and scientific means, faithful Latter-day Saints accept without such qualification the influence of the Holy Spirit and heavenly messengers in the lives of men, including those who wrote the scriptures. We believe that Matthew did write what is known as “The Gospel According to St. Matthew” and that indeed all of the books of the New Testament are inspired. For thousands of years, people have felt something basic, special, and authoritative in the New Testament. We have that same feeling today as Latter-day Saints. I will try to identify a few reasons for our feeling together with some differences in our approach to using the New Testament.

A RATIONAL APPROACH TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

It would not shake our faith if it were proven that someone other than the ascribed author penned one or more of the books of the New Testament. We doubt that evidence will ever be found of this, but Latter-day Saints are realists who believe that “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). We do not reject truth in favor of fairy tales.

The essence of our practical approach to truth can be gathered from this statement by Brigham Young: “Were you to ask me how it was that I embraced ‘Mormonism,’ I should answer, for the simple reason that it embraces all truth in heaven and on earth, in the earth, under the earth, and in hell, if there be any truth there. There is no truth outside of it; there is no good outside of it; there is nothing holy and honorable outside of it; for, wherever these principles are found among all the creations of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his order and Priesthood, embrace them.”³ Whatever is found to be true of the New Testament, therefore, becomes ipso facto a part of the religion and belief of the Latter-day Saints.

It is interesting and useful to read the conclusions of Paul Johnson, a noted scholar, concerning the authenticity of the books of the New Testament. He concluded, “The earliest Christian document is Paul’s first Epistle to the Thessalonians, which can plausibly be dated to about AD 51. Paul was writing in the fifties and early sixties; his authentic epistles (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) are in an evidential sense straightforward written documents; there is no oral tradition behind them and the editing process is

minimal—indeed some of them may have been circulated or ‘published’ in edited form even during Paul’s lifetime.”⁴

If such an assertion of fact concerning the authenticity of books of the New Testament as that made by Johnson should prove to be correct, which is possible although we accept all of the New Testament as authentic, it would not change the faith of the Latter-day Saints but would add to their factual knowledge of how the New Testament came into being as a book. Latter-day Saints would be quick to recognize that if those few books that Johnson listed as surely authentic were the only authentic books of the New Testament, they would be sufficient to clearly establish early Christian teachings on crucial doctrines such as the fatherhood of God; the divine mission of His Son Jesus Christ; His identity as a separate and distinct, though closely related, personage; the principles of love, repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as basic doctrines; the important role of the Holy Ghost; the Crucifixion, death, and Resurrection of Christ; and the salvational aspects of the Atonement of Christ in the lives of those who believe and practice the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ is established in those epistles that Johnson clearly labeled as authentic and historic.

In summary, we believe in the historicity of the New Testament and in the divinely inspired nature of these writings. We rise above dogmatism, however, because we believe only what is ultimately true about these writings. The Book of Mormon adds emphasis to our rational viewpoint when it quotes Jacob’s teaching that the Spirit “speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be” (Jacob 4:13).

A SPECIAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have a special endorsement of the New Testament from an unexpected source—section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The endorsement began, oddly enough, with a reference to the Book of Mormon and a statement that the book is true because it was confirmed to certain witnesses by the administration of angels, who disclosed to the world that the Book of Mormon was true. Then switching gears, and in point for our discussion of the New Testament, section 20 states that one of the key reasons for bringing forth another sacred and inspired book was to prove “to the world that the holy scriptures are true” (D&C 20:11).

It is obvious from the context of the quoted section of the Doctrine and Covenants that the term “holy scriptures” used in the section means the

Bible, including, of course, the New Testament. Latter-day Saints, therefore, have an unexpected ringing endorsement of the New Testament in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and its clearly established authenticity by witnesses to whom angels appeared and who publicly endorse every published copy of the Book of Mormon by their printed testimony. By accepting the Book of Mormon as authentic, a person automatically accepts the divine authenticity of the New Testament. Indeed, one of the principle reasons for the necessity of another book of ancient scripture being found, translated, and published is to establish the divinity of the New Testament for a world largely turned to secular thinking, which has separated Christians from the central role formerly played in their lives by the New Testament. Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants provides the person who accepts it as sacred scripture the means of identifying things of enduring value in religion and life.

RELIGION AND REAL HISTORY

To Latter-day Saints, New Testament religious history is real, meaning that the events written and described in it actually happened. We believe there was a man named Jesus who hung on a cross on a hill called Calvary that actually existed and in fact still does exist. Special and deeply spiritual experiences occurred in a garden on the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. These were real events in real time. They are not stories or parables that form part of a doubtful and largely symbolic literature for the purpose of establishing a set of ideas making up a philosophy called "Christianity."

We believe firmly that real events on earth are, have been, and will again be directly connected with our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and by inspiration to man through the Holy Spirit. We also believe that there have been and are on earth virtuous and inspired men called prophets.

When we speak of religious history, we add to places sacred to Christians, such as Galilee and Golgotha, places in our own age where special revelatory experiences with heavenly influences came to virtuous and inspired men such as Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Gordon B. Hinckley, to name only three. Places such as Nauvoo, Liberty Jail, and the farm of Joseph Smith Sr. are not only real but are sacred just as Bethlehem is sacred. One can visit these places to learn more about man's relationship

to God. We believe that God does influence man's course on earth by revelation to those living virtuous lives who ask and seek.

Understanding this view of the New Testament helps one better understand the beliefs espoused by the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a tangible and historical religion but not a superstitious or dogmatic one. These things either happened or they didn't happen. If they happened, as Church members believe, they indicate that God loves and interacts directly with men and women. The ultimate implication is, of course, that God informs man how he should live and act to receive salvation. And that gets us to the heart of things.

"AS FAR AS IT IS TRANSLATED CORRECTLY"

An oft-quoted qualification to Church members' belief in the Bible is the article of faith stating, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8). This statement implies that translation errors were possible, even probable, in the Bible. To some Christians, it is blasphemous to imply that there could be errors in God's word. Latter-day Saints believe that errors are possible. This belief is consistent with what I have already said about the history of the New Testament. And even more to the point, the Book of Mormon contains language which indicates that "plain and precious things" have been removed from the Bible (see 1 Nephi 13:40).

Another way of understanding this idea is the obvious and consistent fact that the authors of the Bible were real people, often humble people of limited literary education, who were involved in and reported real events. In turn, other men copied these writings by hand. Reporting and copying errors were inevitable in such circumstances, even when those men were inspired and virtuous people operating with excellent intentions. A book made of such writings is more believable, tangible, and real to us than one created perfectly and delivered by Deity to men who had no part in creating it. Working through humble and often less-educated men seems to be God's *modus operandi*.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT CHRIST?

Let us now turn to a crucial question—what do Latter-day Saints believe about Christ? Remember, as Paul Johnson confidently asserts, "Christianity is essentially a historical religion. It bases its claims on the historical facts it asserts."⁵ And, examining the scanty but firmly established evidence, he

concludes that “there can, at least, be absolutely no doubt about his [Christ’s] historical existence.”⁶ He then reminds us of the few, but sufficient, references to Christ in well-authenticated historical documents. He includes the references to Jesus in *Antiquities* by Josephus (published about AD 93), another reference to Christ by Tacitus in his *Annals* concerning events in AD 64, and another reference to Christ by Pliny the Younger, written in AD 112. Thus firm evidence clearly establishes that a person named Jesus Christ actually lived. We believe that.

As for the authenticity of the Gospels, though it may be true—as many scholars of the New Testament assert—that these manuscripts are based originally on oral teachings which were not written until well after Paul’s letters were written, we are confident that the four Gospels are based on actual writings by Matthew and John, who were Jesus’ Apostles, and by Mark and Luke, disciples and missionaries of Jesus. There may also have been early source documents by unknown authors and witnesses. These Gospels are not biographical manuscripts but rather a statement of the doctrine and teachings of Christ in the context of His life and brief ministry. But these authors were eyewitnesses of many of the events described, and their writings bear marks of authority and authenticity. Although, as is true with almost all other books as old as those in the Bible, we do not have originals of the books of the New Testament. After a lifetime of studying the New Testament as a written document, eminent scholar Frederic Kenyon has concluded, “It is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God.”⁷

He adds in a later publication, “The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”⁸

We believe that Kenyon was essentially correct in those conclusions. Doubt cast on the New Testament by higher criticism and the fact of not having available originals of the books is almost completely overcome for us by the strong evidence that what we have was directly descended from authentic documents and that, although mistakes, deletions, and

insertions probably occurred in the documents by those who reproduced them by hand, they are basically what they purport to be.

We also have another authenticating witness. The Book of Mormon account of Christ's visit to America and His teachings to those living there at Christ's Crucifixion amounts to another Gospel. That the Book of Mormon account so closely parallels and confirms the substance of the New Testament account is evidence to those of us accepting the Book of Mormon, "that the holy scriptures [meaning the Bible] are true" (D&C 20:11).

Thus, the Christ a person meets in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and the Epistles of the New Testament is basically the Christ in whom Latter-day Saints literally believe. His teachings, His divine Sonship, His Atonement, and His Resurrection are for us established historical facts. The Prophet Joseph Smith did a thorough work, considering his limited tools, in revising the New Testament and restoring concepts lost in it so that the "key of knowledge, the fulness of the scriptures" (JST, Luke 11:52c) could be available to man.

One may ask, why has the Joseph Smith Translation not been made more generally available to Church members if Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon corrected errors and recaptured meanings therein? One answer to that excellent question is that through extensive footnotes, cross-references, and excerpts in the appendix, most of the significant additions and corrections by Joseph Smith are now available using the 1979 edition of the King James Version of the Holy Bible published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With the cross-referencing, footnoting, and other integrating of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, the Church has made available to diligent students a coherent fulness of the standard works.

Christ is revealed in those four standard works in great detail, especially in regard to His teachings and divine mission. What Latter-day Saints believe about Christ is found therein. More scriptural explanations and references are available to the careful student than have ever before been available to mankind. As an example of this enhanced availability, a quick look at the Topical Guide included in the Church's 1979 publication will reveal many pages of scriptural references to Christ from a number of different conceptual bases.

In addition to personal revelation through the Holy Ghost, the real key to understanding Christ is in studying Him in the New Testament and

then expanding that knowledge by adding what inspired men have known of Him in the Old Testament, the Pearl of Great Price, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants. Thus, for example, Jacob of the Book of Mormon, writing in about 500 BC, explained that he wrote “for this intent . . . that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us” (Jacob 4:4). This adds a breathtaking dimension to our knowledge of Christ totally unknown to those bereft of the additional books of scriptures available to us.

So not only do we have a strong belief in the Christ of the New Testament, but we have a much expanded global and dispensational view of Christ through “the fulness of the scriptures.” Our view is not that of the fundamentalist that sees the New Testament as the *only* source of knowledge of Christ and as a *perfect* document from God. It does not bother us to find, for example, varying accounts of Christ’s visit to Paul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:7; 22:9). We expect that there will be a need for further reconciliation, expansion, and even correction of these New Testament documents precisely because they are real, historic writings. This does not in any way diminish their inspired nature. God continually reveals His will to man, and therefore we have an expanding, ever-increasing body of revelation rather than a closed, sterile, or perfect canon. The expanding body of revelation, however, does not change fundamental verities.

WHAT USE DID JOSEPH SMITH MAKE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

For his part, Joseph Smith made constant use of the New Testament. Not only was he inspired at an early age by a passage of the New Testament found in James 1:5–6 to seek inspiration from God, but the role of the New Testament in Joseph’s life continued and expanded. His lengthy sermons to the Saints during the zenith of his prophetic career in Nauvoo were peppered with New Testament passages. His mastery of the scriptures was phenomenal. Our understanding is that Joseph almost always spoke extemporaneously without notes, writing few if any talks for delivery to the Church. On one occasion he was working on a rare prepared talk with his scribe Robert B. Thompson. Thompson subsequently read the talk Joseph dictated in general conference on October 5, 1840. The subject of

that address was "Treatise on Priesthood." This description of the process of preparation by Howard Coray, one of Joseph's clerks, is interesting.

One morning, I went as usual, into the Office to go to work: I found Joseph sitting on one side of a table and Robert B. Thompson on the opposite side, and the understanding I got was that they were examining or hunting in the manuscript of the new translation of the Bible for something on Priesthood, which Joseph wished to present, or have read to the people the next Conference: Well, they could not find what they wanted and Joseph said to Thompson "put the manuscript [to] one side, and take some paper and I will tell you what to write." Bro. Thompson took some foolscap paper that was at his elbow and made himself ready for the business. I was seated probably 6 or 8 feet on Joseph's left side, so that I could look almost squarely into Joseph's left eye—I mean the side of his eye. Well, the Spirit of God descended upon him, and a measure of it upon me, insomuch that I could fully realize that God, or the Holy Ghost, was talking through him. I never, neither before or since, have felt as I did on that occasion. I felt so small and humble I could have freely kissed his feet.⁹

On that occasion, although he had no Bible at hand, Joseph accurately cited and dictated fourteen scriptural passages. Only twice did he not remember the chapter and verse of a passage but quoted it accurately anyway.¹⁰ Joseph Smith summed up his own view of the Bible as follows: "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."¹¹

CENTRAL IDEAS AND DOCTRINES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

As implied in the introduction, some ideas are more important than others. Some are central to the guidance of man into a righteous life, and some are on the periphery. Christ's teachings are without any question central to the gospel in all ages and that is true for the era of restoration commenced through Joseph Smith. Elder Bruce R. McConkie summarized his thoughts on the subject as follows: "Nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendent of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord. It is the most important single thing that has ever occurred in the entire history of created things;

it is the rock foundation upon which the gospel and all other things rest. Indeed, all ‘things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.’”¹²

To return to an introductory idea, we do not subscribe to the notion that man is a purely physical animal, evolving slowly upward to a higher form so that the latest generation of men and women is higher in ability and intelligence than were men living in earlier eras. Our view of man as an intelligent and knowledgeable being is dispensational. At times the truths of the gospel are more generally available with greater intensity among men than at other times. In other words, the availability of gospel light fades and flickers to dimmer brightness at times and then is reestablished and grows brighter again.

We believe that men, as Richard Weaver observed, constantly need to “return to center” and thus recapture days in which truth is held in high value and when men are driven more nearly by ideas that properly position them vis-à-vis God. Weaver sees that “there is a center of things, and . . . every feature of modern disintegration is a flight from this [center of things] toward periphery.”¹³ Of course, our notion and Weaver’s is the ancient and much maligned one that there are eternal verities that can be lost by concentrating on peripheral things and by too much specialization and fragmentation. For us there is a center of things as revealed in the New Testament, and that center is Christ. Knowledge of Christ is also discovered anew and expanded in the restoration of His gospel through Joseph Smith.

BOOK OF MORMON EMPHASIS BRINGS US TO CENTER

In my view, the reason President Benson and President Hinckley have emphasized again and again a return to the Book of Mormon is that the book is the restorational vehicle for the return to center accomplished by reestablishing, in a document not changed by time and interpretation, the primacy of the New Testament Christ. Thus the Book of Mormon brings us back to the center of things once again. When we drift toward the periphery, we leave the center and are in danger of wandering in treacherous byways. The prophet Mormon aptly taught in the Book of Mormon: “This [meaning the Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [meaning the Bible]; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also” (Mormon 7:9). Had there been no drift from the central doctrines of the New Testament, there would have been no need for the Book of

Mormon to bring us back to the basics. But there was clearly a fateful flight from the solid central doctrines needed by man.

The consequence of leaving the center is spiritual wandering. Man drifts easily from the central truth that he is a divine son of God to the variant view that man is just another beast wandering on earth in a society in which child abuse, selfishness and war, unbridled sexual pleasure without family responsibility, immorality of all kinds, egotism, lack of interest in one's daily work, and pride exist. The Book of Mormon teaches that if such a drift downward by mankind is unchecked, civilization will eventually decline and be destroyed by hatred, bloodshed, and war. We seem to be teetering on the edge. Only a return to the center of things, as taught in the New Testament and authenticated by the Book of Mormon, can save this generation.

As pessimistic as it may sound, that is our view of the state of civilization in an era in which men leave the New Testament Christ and the eternal verities of the center to man's uninspired and vain philosophies that exist on the periphery. Secularism, founded on the ideas of men that scoff at God and His teachings, has had its day, and such philosophies clearly lack the ability to ennoble, inspire, and exalt men. When God and His dealings with man are thoroughly debunked, what takes the place of that core concept in men's lives? What inspires men to do well and serve each other?

A WORD ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE CONSTITUTION

Actually, the New Testament influence is more pervasive in our lives than we will ever know. Its teachings have deeply influenced the lives of countless great men and women and shaped institutions. As an example of this influence, although it is beyond the scope of these remarks to undertake a detailed analysis of the underlying concepts of the United States Constitution and trace them to the New Testament, I want to say a word or two about the Constitution because I wrote this in the bicentennial year for that noble document. What I say should be looked at more as an intuition of a situation (to borrow a phrase from Weaver) than a careful analysis.

In general, those most responsible for drafting the Constitution were men schooled in theology and religion in the colleges and churches of their day. In both church and school, the New Testament was always a primary text. Thus, since the men who wrote the Constitution were schooled

in the scriptures, the influence was undoubtedly there. For example, James Madison of Virginia, who is often called the father of the Constitution, was a brilliant, well-educated man who began his schooling under a Christian minister and completed it with a college education heavily influenced by the Christian religion. He, with contributions from many (and notably James Wilson of Pennsylvania), was the man most responsible for the final form of our Constitution. The preparation of Madison for this historic task seems to have revolved around religion and political theory, the primary educational interests of many of our founding fathers.

My intuition of the situation is that New Testament principles were well known to all of the delegates of the Constitutional Convention and had a profound influence on what they thought and wrote, irrespective of their religious persuasion. In addition, of course, they had available almost all of the writings of the day on the theories of government and politics.

These men accomplished a miracle. In the concluding paragraph of *The Federalist*—a series of eighty-five essays defending the Constitution that were published to assist the ratification of that document by authors Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay—Hamilton wrote: “The establishment of a Constitution, in time of profound peace, by the voluntary consent of a whole people, is a prodigy to the completion of which I look forward with trembling anxiety.”¹⁴ These participants sensed the greatness of the achievement of which they were a part. Washington wrote to Lafayette these words about the completion of the Constitution: “It appears to me, then, little short of a miracle, that the Delegates from so many different states . . . in their manner, circumstances, and prejudices, should write in forming a system of national Government, so little liable to well founded objections.”¹⁵

The underlying principles of the Constitution are not the creation of our founders. Those principles always existed and are eternal. The miracle is that these fifty-five men were able to come together that hot, muggy summer and agree on a Constitution establishing a form of government incorporating those principles and then persuade the states to adopt the Constitution. I will touch on an example or two illustrating the influence of the New Testament on what these men agreed to.¹⁶ The Lord made it clear by revelation to Joseph Smith that the Constitution was inspired of God (see D&C 98:5–7; 101:77–78; 109:54)—that it was based on principles which were not new but which had their source in God. Many of those principles can be found in the New Testament.

First, the New Testament teaches that men are children of God and are thus heirs of His attributes and destiny (see John 10:34–36; 1 John 3:1–3; Revelation 3:21). This noble and far-reaching view of man can be seen everywhere in the Constitution. Its very idea is that men have the intelligence to participate in the process of governing themselves. As observed in essay forty-nine of *The Federalist*, “The people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter . . . is derived.”¹⁷

Second, the New Testament also teaches the reality of evil and the temptations of selfishness, power, and greed that men face in striving to govern themselves (see Matthew 4:1–10). Thus the Constitution incorporates a system of checks and balances on those elected or appointed to positions of power in recognition of man’s natural tendencies. Further, and also in point, the powers granted by the people to those governing were carefully limited in scope. Again, as an illustration that this point had not escaped the Founding Fathers, we read the following in *The Federalist*: “Men, upon too many occasions, do not give their own understandings fair play: but, yielding to some untoward bias, they entangle themselves in words and confound themselves in subtleties.”¹⁸

Third, in the New Testament, we find an account of Christian converts defying the corrupt and well-established religious order in Israel, seizing the inherent right to preach and proclaim the gospel, speaking freely of their faith, even though that faith was built on a set of religious principles despised and misunderstood by those in power. The ideas of Gamaliel, Paul’s teacher and a member of the Sanhedrin, are interesting and seem almost to be from the colonial America era. He advised his fellow council members in these words: “Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:38–39). This kind of thinking also found its way into the Constitution. The first ten amendments to the Constitution, adopted almost as a part of the original Constitution and called as a block “The Bill of Rights,” begin with the well-known guarantees of freedom of speech, the right to a free press, and not only freedom of religion, but the guarantee against a state-established religion. The New Testament ideas in favor of religious freedom are therefore clearly incorporated in the Constitution.

My intuition of the situation is that the New Testament had both a direct and indirect influence on the men who drafted the United States

Constitution and that it influenced the form of government established by that document. The underlying principles of the Constitution were from a place near the center of things. That such basic principles were involved seemed to be recognized by Hamilton when he observed: "In disquisitions of every kind, there are certain primary truths, or first principles, upon which all subsequent reasonings must depend. These contain an internal evidence which, antecedent to all reflection or combination, commands the assent of the mind. Where it produces not this effect, it must proceed either from some defect or disorder in the organs of perception, or from the influence of some strong interest, or passion, or prejudice."¹⁹

In this quotation we find evidence that a clear thinker has noticed man's tendency to leave the center and move to the periphery unless brought back to basic ideas or truths. The New Testament, especially as restored to its center place through the Book of Mormon, brings us back home to that center. Perhaps, as Weaver observed: "It has been well said that the chief trouble with the contemporary generation is that it has not read the minutes of the last meeting."²⁰ Maybe those minutes of the last meeting are in the New Testament.

It is not enough, however, to have a great Constitution. As people drift into the periphery and lose sight of the center of things, we are in danger of losing the moral force and righteousness necessary to retain the benefits of our government created by that inspired and excellent document. The more we recede from the inspired precepts of the New Testament, the more danger there is that we shall lose what we have so long enjoyed. As the New Testament teaches, we are children of a loving God and are capable of growth and development beyond our wildest imagination if we do not lose the way and drift away from our spiritual roots in Christ.

OUR ACCEPTANCE OF THE WHOLE NEW TESTAMENT

In conclusion, it is important to add that our acceptance of the New Testament includes all parts of it, insofar as correctly translated. We accept and follow the principles of Christ found in the four Gospels; Acts; Paul's epistles; the epistles of Peter, James, John, Jude; the book of Hebrews; and the book of Revelation. We don't apologize for or ignore James's appeal for good works or Paul's emphasis on grace. There is a unity and a harmony in the view of the Latter-day Saints concerning the New Testament.

Our Church's early history places us in a position to understand and empathize with the early Christian Saints. As they experienced, we believe

that angels played a part in the restoration of the gospel in the nineteenth century, and we also had a seminal founding person who experienced extreme persecution and martyrdom. We have the leadership of Apostles, the unprecedented program of missionaries who have experienced and continue to experience hardships and persecution, and a form of Church government similar to that of the New Testament Church. The doctrine of the Church also conforms closely to that found in the earlier Church. Temple worship and ordinances have played a major role in both societies.

SUMMARY

First, the New Testament is historical and real to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We believe it to be basically accurate, fairly complete, and in the greater measure true.

Second, we have extensively supplemented it and have reestablished its authority with the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ. With the help of that book, modern inspiration and revelation, and with careful scholarship, we have a fulness of the scriptures not known to others which sheds great light on the New Testament and illuminates its doctrines and teachings.

Third, the New Testament was a central and guiding document in the ministry of Joseph Smith.

Fourth, moving away from the central theme of Christ and His doctrine, including His Atonement, Resurrection, baptism, and so forth, is a dangerous move to the periphery of ideas leaving society bankrupt of those special truths which can save and preserve mankind.

Fifth, the New Testament has had a more pervasive influence upon men and institutions than we can ever discover. One example of an important document influenced by it is the United States Constitution.

Finally, we accept, use, and love all of the New Testament. It plays a central role in the gospel plan.

My personal witness is that the New Testament is basically historically authentic. I have always loved the New Testament. It has the ring of truth, is not only profitable for instruction but binding as canonized scripture, and it establishes the basic doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ in beauty and power. Through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, I have had experiences that entitle and obligate me to bear a special witness, not only of the New Testament but of the Lord and Savior who is revealed in it. I do so

with full understanding of the words I have chosen. In the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Peter's reference was to the Old Testament scriptures, but the principle also applies equally to New Testament scriptures.
2. See J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Why The King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1952), for an interesting and scholarly exposition of how various versions of the New Testament came to be published and the author's opinion of their relative value.
3. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 11:213.
4. Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 23.
5. Johnson, *History of Christianity*, vii.
6. Johnson, *History of Christianity*, 21.
7. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 144.
8. Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 288–89.
9. Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 51.
10. See Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*.
11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 6:57.
12. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 60.
13. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 52–53.
14. Quoted in Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed., *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1955), 43:259.
15. Letter dated February 7, 1788, quoted in Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966), xvii.
16. See also Dean Mannion, "The Founding Fathers and the Natural Law: A Study of the Source of Our Legal Institutions," *American Bar Association Journal* 35 (1949): 461.
17. Quoted in Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*, 43:159.
18. Quoted in Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*, 43:104.
19. Quoted in Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*, 43:103.
20. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 176.