

When he was killed, I liked to a died myself, if it had not been for the teachers, I felt so bad. I could have died, just laid down and died; and I was sick abed, and the teachers told me,

"You don't want to die because he did. He died for us, and now we all want to live and do all the good we can."

Things came to pass what he prophesied about the colored race being freed. Things that he said has come to pass. I did not hear that, but I knew of it.

After I saw him plain, I was certain he was a prophet because I knew it. I was willing to come and gather, and when he came in with Dr. Bernhisel I knew him. Did not have to tell me because I knew him. I knew him when I saw him back in old Connecticut in a vision, saw him plain and knew he was a prophet.

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and there will never be any other on earth. It has come to stay.



A MISCELLANY FOR THE SACRIPANTS OF RELEVANCE

Robert J. Christensen

Robert J. Christensen is enrolled in the Asian Studies graduate program at Princeton, for which he is doing work in Taiwan and Japan. At present he serves as president of the Taipei Branch.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a schizophrenic church. Its ultimate concern is with things beyond — life after death, justice-in-judg-

ment, salvation, exaltation — and with their earthly preparation — baptism, repentance, endowment. But at the same time the Church is concerned with things here below — individual freedom, material welfare, social justice. With the exception of certain organizations, i.e., the John Birch Society, the Students for a Democratic Society, and the Catholic Inquisition, I have not found an organization as deeply committed in both precept and action to either the things beyond or the things here below as is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. To some this schizophrenia may be a stumbling-block, to others mere foolishness, but for us it must be the very heart of the Gospel, to be both schizophrenic and sane, to keep our eyes and hearts on the things beyond while simultaneously being anxiously engaged in the betterment of things here below.

But while they should not be forgotten, neither should they be confused as so many would urge. The John Birch Society has valiantly attempted to steal for itself the garments of the priesthood, hoping thereby to enlist our aid in their search for little red arsonists while the house collapses from the domestic termite wolves. Others have tried to rewrite our history or to suppress the views of some of the brethren in order to call us to their conservative cause. The liberals of the Church have justly cried in alarm as the First Presidency simultaneously both rebuked the attempted use of the Church for conservative political and social purposes and reasserted the Church's neutrality. But now, under the guise of the "search for relevance" and the "challenge of secularism," the liberals seek to involve the Church directly in their own liberal political and social programs. Apparently both the conservative and the liberal believe us incapable of exercising our free agency and relevantly applying the Gospel in our lives and actions.

Within recent years more and more voices have been questioning the relevance of the Church, while ignoring the relevance of the Gospel to our secular or worldly concerns. J. D. Williams is quoted by *Time*, the weekly newsmagazine, while Richard L. Evans preached the same sermon six months earlier in General Conference. James Clayton wonders about the challenges and dangers of secularism in *Dialogue* while President David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, Marion D. Hanks, and even Ezra Taft Benson have been pondering in their individual ways the same challenges and dangers for years. The quest for relevance is not new; the prophets of Israel so quested centuries ago. The quest for Church-directed relevance is not new either, but I thought it too had been resolved in heavenly councils centuries ago, or earlier. No one seems to have noticed the First Presidency's timely letter of September 7, 1968, in which they counseled:

The growing world-wide responsibilities of the Church make it inadvisable for the Church to seek to respond to all the various and complex issues involved in the mounting problems of the many cities and communities in which members live. But this complexity does not absolve members as individuals from filling their responsibilities as citizens in their own communities.

We urge our members to do their civic duty and to assume their

responsibilities as individual citizens in seeking solutions to the problems which beset our cities and communities.

The letter reminds me of Joseph's "teach them correct principles and then let them govern themselves," as each is made responsible for his actions and his concern for others. I often listen to the conservative or liberal counsel of others, thinking that I might gain in the ability to govern myself — but too often their actions outshout their words and I am forced to conclude they are no wiser in governing themselves than am I. They seem to absolve themselves of their duties in their own communities — and the Church — and seek to cover their inaction with noise about relevance. We might well spend less time questioning the relevance of the Church, and more time being individually relevant.

If the question of relevance, of the relevance of traditional Christianity to twentieth-century urban society, were not so pervasive, it might be well to drop the subject here, for the Mormon tradition only slightly resembles traditional Christianity. But the question is posed in such contemporary language — language that is so often our very own — that I fear we might be unthinkingly seduced into mistaking relevance's faddishness for profundity.

If we were to suppose that the Gospel is to appeal successfully to Everyman, to awaken within him the light of Christ, at that point we should begin to be concerned that there is "a marked trend away from traditional Christian belief" and that the churches in their orthodox efforts have failed to make their doctrines meaningful to modern man. The scriptures, however, suggest that the Gospel will at best be meaningful to a small handful. While carried away in a dream, Nephi beheld "the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, . . . and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small" (1 Nephi 14:12). When Christ observed that "because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14), he did not call for the gate to be redesigned and the road signs and lighting to be improved. If someone is caused to stumble in the dark, it is probably less the fault of the gate and the way, than it is the fault of the light that ought to be shining within us.

I am disturbed by the claim of some that we are not "in good faith" with the times, but I should rather be in good faith with myself than the times. James Clayton in his "The Challenge of Secularism" (*Dialogue*, Autumn 1968, p. 68) remarked that "by the mid-1960's secularism had become the prerational basis of virtually all sophisticated thinking in the United States." I suppose he is acknowledging the fad that now no sophisticated man ever feels the need — nor would he permit himself, if he felt the need — to call upon the supernatural to account for things and actions he finds on earth. I fail again to find anything terribly novel here; it was this same intellectual tradition that provided the intellectual structure of the apostasy from the Gospel. The Gospel was restored to challenge that very intellectual tradition, not to be co-opted by it; and I can see nothing today that modifies or invalidates that challenge. As one sophisticated Mormon thinker wrote, "If the history of Christianity has been one long undignified retreat, one

continual process of accommodation to the science of the hour, the time has come to reverse the process, since the science of the hour has brought us to a most dismal slough in which it is no delight to dwell."

We are urged to develop a sense of change in our doctrine, to realize that each generation has its own Mormonism, its fixed and unfixed principles and practices, its own Gospel. This is an "almost" sophisticated idea, but upon further reflection — and perhaps prayer, if permitted — we might conclude that the Gospel has an existence independent of my thoughts, of Brigham Young's thoughts, or even the apostle Paul's thoughts. It is the sophisticated man who perceives that the brethren do not always agree, that the art critics do not always agree, and that neither do the historians, and who then allows this perception of disagreement to justify his lack of further interest in the disputed subject. But it is the truly intelligent man who realizes that the cold facts of the Gospel, the painting, or the American Revolution — however hard those facts may be to ascertain — are not necessarily identical with the conflicting views of the apostle, the critic, or the historian, and who then stays to find and to glory in the great beauties of the disputed. He will see that we each grow in the Gospel at different rates, and he will not be overly disturbed by the differences. He will be aware that the emphasis we individually give to things will vary and will often reflect the environment in which we live, but he will also see the constancy of the Gospel. Once we realize this, we might be less willing to play idly with the Gospel and more willing to immerse ourselves seriously in its intellectual and spiritual depths.

How ironic, and yet tragic that the apostles of relevance are tripped-up by the irrelevant trivialities of skirt length, beards, and rock bands at Church socials. I would have hoped them wise enough first to consult their spiritual consciences and then courageous enough to follow them, prayerfully.

The secular intellectual tradition centuries ago created a god in whom they thought man could believe; now they celebrate the death and burial of their make-believe god. And we are asked to join in and declare that our God too is dead, beginning to stink, and in need of a rapid burial. As Mr. Clayton remarked, "the central thrust of the secular theologian's argument that the traditional Christian doctrine of God is simply unbelievable today applies more to Mormons [with their anthropomorphic God] than to virtually anyone else" (p. 73). I fail to perceive any cause for fear. The Mormon God so faintly resembles the dead god that only the blind (and perhaps the philosopher) could confuse them. Sterling McMurrin once declared in the pages of *Dialogue* that our loving Father-in-Heaven God could and should be transformed into a more profound philosophical formulation. Perhaps it is merely my naïveté, but I find this loving and caring Father-in-Heaven far more meaningful and with greater philosophical clarity than any other philosophical or theological concept I have ever studied. And now even some philosophers, particularly the positivists, begin to find anthropomorphism both philosophically meaningful and defensible. As Howard Hintz remarked several years ago,

The fact of the matter is that the beliefs of Billy Graham (whether one agrees with them or not is irrelevant) are more philosophically and logically tenable than those of Tillich. To Graham, God is a person — and a *person* must necessarily be essentially anthropomorphic whom he worships and to whom he prays. Tillich worships and prays either to a symbol which cannot be conceptualized, or to a fantasy which cannot be objectified in the empirical world God is a proper name. Either he exists as a person or he does not exist at all. You can't have your cake and eat it too. (*Religious Experience and Truth*, p. 260)

For the past several years we have within the Church tried too hard to be accepted by the world. In too many ways I fear we have been co-opted by the society around us; we have become more average than average. We have forgotten that the Church is a community with values which differ from and often oppose those of the large community around us. And now we seem, both the high and the lowly, to have lost the will to be a peculiar people in any but the most trivial sense. Perhaps it is the malaise of the urban Mormon, to have eliminated so many "less-defensible practices," that he has lost his identity. Personal and communal identity will not then be found in further compromise with the urban secularism, but only in returning to the peculiarities of our Gospel origins and finding the life that is in them. Then we might ponder the real questions for the Church, such as the extent of our obligations in the large community to search for other less "ideal" solutions when the Gospel's "ideal" solutions have been rejected by the secular society, the extent of my obligation to abandon the battle for men's hearts and to tinker instead with their societies.

When we are bothered by the intellectual strength and by the relevance of the Gospel, I suspect we just have not considered the Gospel deeply enough to find the rich spiritual living that is revealed largely through the scriptures and righteousness. When we do not submerge ourselves in the scriptures we find it too easy to turn instead to a shallow juggling of philosophical terms that passes among us as wisdom and that is much easier to master than the Gospel, especially when the Gospel is so poorly taught in sugar-water strengths by our Sunday Schools, Seminaries, and Institutes. For the moment our scriptural ignorance is appalling, and itself is a sign of our secularization. But I cannot fault the Church nor the Gospel for my ignorance, as I so often try to ignore the spiritual center of the Gospel in my fascination with the peripheral, as I let the commandments usurp living by the spirit as the end of all Gospel activity and reflection. Struggling for a knowledge of the scriptures, not the glossy memorization that merely produces a series of instant proof-texts for every problem that we confront, but the richness that understands and feels the desperateness of each man as he approaches the Lord and his relief in the Lord's response and love, it is then that we begin to understand the Gospel and to live spiritually. I yet understand and see little, and am worthy even less, but I have seen scriptural flashes of Gospel vistas more beautiful than any the secular world has yet offered.

If I might steal from a mentor, "I have written too much and said too little. . . . It is a situation in which I find myself; I am stuck with the Gospel, I know perfectly well that it is true; there may be things about the Church that I find perfectly appalling — but that has nothing to do with it. *I know the Gospel is true.*"

Now, to be relevant is to be silent and to begin to . . .

One of the most important things in the world is freedom of the mind; from this all other freedoms spring. Such freedom is necessarily dangerous, for one cannot think right without running the risk of thinking wrong, but generally more thinking is the antidote for the evils that spring from wrong thinking. More thinking is required, and we call upon you students to exercise your God-given right to think through on every proposition that is submitted to you and be unafraid to express your opinions, with proper respect for those to whom you talk and proper acknowledgement of your own shortcomings.

You young people live in an age when freedom of the mind is suppressed over much of the world. We must preserve it in the Church and in America and resist all efforts of earnest men to suppress it, for when it is suppressed, we might lose the liberties vouchsafed in the Constitution of the United States.

Preserve, then, the freedom of your mind in education and in religion, and be unafraid to express your thoughts and to insist upon your right to examine every proposition. We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox as we are that you shall have thoughts.

*President Hugh B. Brown,
From "An Eternal Quest—Freedom of the
Mind," delivered at BYU, 13 May 1969.*

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