"A PORTION OF GOD'S LIGHT": MORMONISM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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In 2015, the Catholic Church celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its landmark proclamation *Nostra aetate.* As one of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra aetate* laid the foundation for contemporary Catholic interreligious engagement. Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, the document opened up multiple pathways to dialogue and identified the theological parameters within which these dialogues and collaborative projects could be undertaken. Referring specifically to non-Christian traditions, the document states that the Catholic Church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."[1]

By comparison, on February 15, 1978, the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints released an official statement entitled "God's Love for all Mankind." Despite its brevity, the document contained the most theologically inclusive language ever released in

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A version of this paper was delivered at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship on November 11, 2016.

1. Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra aetate,* Oct. 28, 1965, sec. 2, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

the form of an official Church statement or proclamation. "The great religious leaders of the world," it said, "such as Mohammad, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals." The paragraph that follows is particularly germane to this discussion: "Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or the life to come."[2]

This paper seeks to engage the implications of these ideas through the comparative exploration of Catholic and Mormon thought. I will do this within the field of study known as the "theology of religions." Broadly speaking, this field addresses theological questions that arise *between* faiths (as contrasted with questions arise *within* a faith community). As theologian Mark Heim describes it, those working in the field are often "driven by concern for religious diversity as an intellectual and perhaps apologetic problem." In its simplified form, he asks: "How can Christians account for the existence, the power and the virtues of other religious traditions?"[3] One may enter this discussion from many angles, but Catholic theology provides an especially helpful comparison

2. "Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind," Feb. 15, 1978.

3. S. Mark Heim, "The Shifting Significance of Theologies of Religious Pluralism," in *Understanding Religious Pluralism: Perspectives from Religious Studies and Theology,* edited by Peter C. Phan and Jonathan S. Ray (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 243. See also Gavin D'Costa, "Theology of Religions," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918,* 3rd ed., edited by David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 626–44, and Catherine Cornille, "Soteriological Agnosticism and the Future of Catholic Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue,* edited by Terrence Merrigan and John Friday (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 201–15.

for drawing distinctions and clarifying the issues at stake in thinking about the diversity of religions from an LDS perspective.

Among the overarching aims of Vatican II was to "renew" the Catholic Church and reassert its relevance in the modern world. Pope John XXIII described the proceedings of the council as an effort to "throw open the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the Spirit blow through."[4] Recognizing the inadequacies of traditional Catholic teaching on the subject, many bishops and theologians were anxious to rearticulate the work of God outside the confines of the visible Catholic Church. From their perspective, the quality and depth of devotion found in a variety of religious traditions necessitated a more inclusive theology.

Another key document, *Lumen gentium,* offered a more expansive treatment of the Church and its function in relation to non-Christians. "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience."[5] Among the more knotty issues with which the document grappled was the longstanding theological tenet known as *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (which translates as "outside the Church there is no salvation"). This idea can be traced to the third century and was employed in response to a variety of encounters across the centuries. Pope Innocent III put the matter succinctly in 1208: "We believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that there is one church, not that of heretics, but the holy Roman Catholic and apostolic church, outside of which we believe no one can be saved." Pope Pius IX followed

4. Quoted in James Rudin, *Cushing, Spellman, O'Connor: The Surprising Story of How Three American Cardinals Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 84.

5. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium,* Nov. 21, 1964, sec. 16, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

suit in 1854: "we must hold it as of faith that no one can be saved outside the Apostolic Roman Church: that this is the only ark of salvation . . . that anyone who does not enter this will perish in the flood."[6]

However, by the time Vatican II rolled around, the stage had been set to settle widely divergent accounts of this dogma. How did the council deal with it? It concluded that the traditional understanding of this tenet could no longer be maintained. Though dogmas of the Church are said to be unchanging, the way they are expressed can take different forms. "[I]t sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives a fuller and more perfect human expression."[7] Such was the case with *extra ecclesiam nulla salus.* It wasn't that the Church abandoned the dogma; rather, they refined the concept of the Church to include those who are *in* the grace of God, but yet who remain unbaptized. "We have to distinguish between the *soul* of the church, which consists of the invisible society of all the souls that are actually in the state of grace and a right to salvation, and the *body* of the church, which consists in the visible society of Christians under the authority of the Pope."[8]

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6. Pope Pius IX, *Singulari Quadam* (1854). Both statements are found in Francis A. Sullivan S.J., *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response,* reprint edition (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 5–6. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* had been expressed in a number of decrees and definitions across the centuries. For example, this dogma was reaffirmed in the Fourth Lateran Council and later in the councils of Florence and Trent.

7. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration: In Defense of the Catholic Doctrine Against Certain Errors of the Present Day,* June 24, 1973, sec. 5, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html.

8. Auguste Castelein, *Le rigorisme, le nombre des* élus*, et la doctrine du salut.* See Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?,* 126. See also Emile Mersch S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body,* translated by Cyril Vollert (St. Louis: Herder, 1951).

Theologians have also utilized the distinction between the "Church visible" and the "Church invisible" to flesh this out. Traditionally, the Church invisible had referred to a *subset* of those who are baptized into the visible, institutional Church. Yet both before and after Vatican II, theologians were working to extend the reach of the Church to include those with the right kinds of desires. "God, in His infinite mercy," wrote the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, willed that "salvation can, in certain circumstances, be obtained when the helps are used only in desire or longing. To gain eternal salvation it is not always required that a person be incorporated in reality (*reapse*) as a member of the Church, but it is required that he belong to it at least in desire and longing (*voto et desiderio*)."[9] Those within God's grace would be part of the mystical body of Christ known only to God.

Thus, the position embraced by the council has often been categorized as an *inclusivist* approach to the theology of religions.[10] Though a person may be saved outside the confines of the institutional Church, the source and goal of that fulfillment remains the triune Christian

9. Letter of the Holy Office to Archbishop Cushing, Aug. 8, 1949, published in *American Ecclesiastical Review* CXXVII (October 1952): 307–11.

10. Inclusivism is often identified as a middle position between *exclusivism* and *pluralism.* In a Christian context, exclusivism defends the position that salvation is only attainable within the confines of the visible Church. Theologian Hendrick Kraemer argued, for example, that religious tenets and dogmas cannot "be taken one by one as independent items of religious life" that "can arbitrarily be compared with, and somehow related to, and grafted upon, the similar item in other religions" (*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* [New York: Harper, 1938], 135). Other terms in this category include *particularism* and *restrictivism.* Pluralism is the position that salvation can be accomplished through multiple religions. A well-known proponent of this view was John Hick, who argued that each of the great world religions "constitutes a valid context of salvation/liberation; but none constitutes the one and only such context." See John Hick, "The Philosophy of World Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (1984): 231, and *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).

God. Since Vatican II, there has been vigorous debate regarding the appropriate implications of *Nostra aetate*. Some progressively leaning theologians began to characterize the Catholic Church as existing *alongside* other faith traditions as one path to salvation. In response, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (something akin to the LDS Correlation Committee) published *Dominus Iesus* to reel in positions they viewed as too relativistic and too inclined to diminish the unique role of Jesus Christ and the Church. "The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism." Any theory that maintains that "the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith."[11] These issues have received renewed interest of late in recent years as Pope Francis continues his efforts to extend Catholicism's reach.

Mormonism

Having identified key features of Catholic theology on these questions, we can address distinctions on the work of God outside the confines of the LDS Church. From the earliest days of Joseph Smith's revelations, Mormonism has maintained a very capacious understanding of salvation. God not only desires the salvation of all but established the conditions whereby (nearly) all of his children would be resurrected and occupy a degree of glory. This position can usefully be described as *soft universalism* ("universal" because it applies to all—or nearly all—and "soft" because it does not imply that all will return to the presence of God). Though all will be *saved* by virtue of being resurrected, not all

11. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, *Dominus Iesus,* Aug. 6, 2000, sec. 6, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

will be *exalted*—the highest station in Smith's richly graded heaven. In his 1832 vision, Smith describes a condition in which occupants of the lower degrees (or "kingdoms") "shall be servants of the Most High; but where God and Christ dwell they cannot come, *worlds without end.*"[12] This clause has been traditionally understood to imply that, once assigned, there will be no opportunity for progression between the kingdoms.

Christian Universalism has been generally understood as the position that "all intelligent beings" will ultimately be saved by the grace of God.[13] Its legacy begins with the writings of Origen, who taught that since God desires to bring all souls back to himself, his purposes will eventually be accomplished beyond this life. Origen's teachings were famously condemned by later councils, and universalism was thus viewed with wide suspicion until its revival in seventeenth-century England. By the time of Joseph Smith's 1832 vision in which he describes three degrees of glory, debates over universalism had swept across the American theological landscape. Traditional Calvinism taught that the elect of God are predestined to salvation, with all others to be confined to an everlasting hell. Universalists, on the other hand, were preaching, with increasing success, that limiting grace "to the narrow span of this life" was opposed to both "reason and equity."[14]

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12. Doctrine and Covenants 76:112. This 1832 revelation was called simply "The Vision" in the early days of the Mormonism. Several followers of Smith reported their initial discomfort with the inclusiveness of its teachings.

13. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. rev., edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 705. The more technical term for this position is *Apocatastasis* (ἀποκατάστασις).

14. Paul Dean, *Course of Lectures in Defence of the Final Restoration* (Boston: Edwin M. Stone, 1832), 43. Dean was the minister of the First Universalist Church of Boston. See Peter J. Thuesen, P*redestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770–1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

A recurrent theme in arguments against Universalism is the idea that embracing the position leads to spiritual complacency—and Mormonism is no exception in this regard. One of the foremost villains in the Book of Mormon narrative is Nehor, whose universalist teachings are associated with subversion, licentiousness, and greed. In his legendary 1980 address, Bruce R. McConkie inveighed against kingdom progression, characterizing it as one of the "seven deadly heresies" of Mormonism. Employing imagery reminiscent of the Book of Mormon, McConkie declares that the doctrine "lulls [one] into a state of carnal security" and "lets people live a life of sin here and now with the hope that they will be saved eventually."[15]

Yet despite these considerations, the issue has neither been universally held nor has it been established as a fully settled point of doctrine. Numerous sermons and publications emphasize the full implications of "eternal progression." Wilford Woodruff, for example, taught that "If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent creature."[16] This point is underscored by the fact that, on two separate occasions (1952 and 1965), the Church released official statements in which it declined to take an official position. The 1965 letter from the secretary of the LDS First Presidency stated that "[t]he Brethren direct me to say that the Church has never announced a definite doctrine upon this point. Some of the Brethren have held the view that it was possible in the course of progression to advance from one glory to another, invoking the principle of eternal progression; others of the Brethren have taken the opposite view."[17]

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15. Bruce. R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies" (Brigham Young University fireside address, June 1, 1980), https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie_seven-deadly-heresies.

16. Wilford Woodruff, Dec. 6, 1857, *Journal of Discourses,* 6:120.

17. LDS Church, First Presidency letters, March 5, 1952 and December 17, 1965. See Gary James Bergera, "Grey Matters," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 1 (1982): 181–82.

In either case, every person is said to be given an opportunity to receive the gospel—whether in this life or the next. The dynamic of preaching and conversion extends to the afterlife and will eventually reach those "who have never heard." This has been a remarkable feature of Mormon theology given the challenges other traditions have faced. There is, for example, an active debate in Evangelical circles regarding the appropriateness of what they call "post-mortem evangelism." As Richard Mouw puts it, LDS teachings offer "more hope than is typical of traditional Christianity for those who have not accepted the claim of the gospel in this life." He is in a good position to judge given both his Calvinist leanings and his longstanding commitment to Evangelical–Mormon dialogue.[18]

I would submit, however, that questions regarding those outside the faith do not end here. Though post-mortem evangelism goes a long way toward answering questions regarding the justice of God, it does not adequately address the purpose of *this life* for the 99.9 percent of God's children who have lived and died outside the context of gospel teachings. Is there a theologically *adequate* way to account for the lives of the seventh-century Buddhist peasant or the pre-colonial Zulu or the third-century Coptic Christian monk?[19]

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18. Richard J. Mouw, "Mormons and Interfaith Relations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism,* edited by Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 629. See also Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012); John Sanders, "Those Who Have Never Heard: A Survey of the Major Positions," in *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views,* edited by Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 299–325; and John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992).

19. See Eugene England, "Becoming a World Religion: Blacks, the Poor—All of Us," *Sunstone* 21, no. 2 (July 1998): 49–60; David L. Paulsen, "The Redemption of the Dead: A Latter-day Saint Perspective on the Fate of the Unevangelized," in *Salvation in Christ: Comparative Christian Views,* edited by Roger R. Keller and Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University,

This question invites a deeper examination into the role of mortal life—insofar as it serves as the essential condition for growth and development toward exaltation. Important among these is the necessity of gaining of a body and experiencing the freedom and contingencies that attend human life. The challenge lies in offering an account of mortality that moves beyond these universally shared conditions and addresses the vast array of human experiences across cultures.

For example, the idea is often expressed that an important purpose of life is to learn faith. However, if only a minute portion of God's children are able to exercise genuine faith while in mortality, then this purpose does not obtain for them.[20] A similar consideration applies to keeping the commandments. For the ninety-nine percent of those who have not been explicitly aware of the commandments, this purpose would not obtain for them either. This all goes toward the point that the more specifically one describes the purpose of life in relation to Church teachings, the less applicable it becomes outside the Church. But there are theological dangers on both sides. The more inclusive the theology, the less relevant the Church becomes. The less inclusive the theology, the more solipsistic the Church becomes.

This leads us to consider ways in which the criteria for success in mortality might be expanded and highlighted without losing vitality and relevance. How much inclusivism can Mormon theology accommodate? What forms could it take? As we noted above, the 1978 statement refers to "moral truths" received by the great religious teachers that led to "higher levels of understanding." In the current literature of the LDS Church, this connects closely to the discourse surrounding the Light

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2005), 263–297; and Sheila Taylor, "The Hope for Universal Salvation," *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 39–54.

20. LDS theology has long maintained that in order for faith to be genuine, it must be related to a true object. Among the more oft-quoted scriptures in Mormonism is the dictum that faith is to "hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21).

of Christ, described as "the divine energy, power, or influence that proceeds from God . . . and which influences people for good and prepares them to receive the Holy Ghost."[21] Now in this case, the extent to which people act in ways consistent with the Golden Rule or other generalized moral principles, they are said to have a "portion of God's light." So in addition to gaining a body, living in accordance with moral principles is understood to be another critical feature of mortality. However, the Light of Christ is often described in terms lacking in specificity relative to the central principles of the LDS gospel—and the extent to which they are connected to the purpose of mortality. If this is so, questions still remain regarding our ninety-nine percent.

Spiritual Progression

Swirling in the background thus far have been questions regarding the features of religious traditions that are essential in mediating salvation. I will examine three candidates: 1) propositional belief, 2) ritual performance, and 3) virtue acquisition. Propositional belief has to do with the cognitive dimensions of religious life. There are certain beliefs that are said to be true of a religion and others that are said to be false (e.g., that Jesus is Lord or that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God). Ritual performance has to do with specific actions such as baptism, confirmation, communion, or temple marriage. Christian denominations differ regarding the extent to which these rituals need to be performed for their effects to be realized. Finally, we come to virtue acquisition. In an LDS context, this is closely tied to the idea of eternal progression. Central to the plan of redemption is God's effort to create the conditions whereby human souls can progress from a rudimentary and immature state to "becoming like God." A superb example can be found in Joseph Smith's

21. "Light of Christ," Gospel Topics, https://www.lds.org/topics/light-of-christ?lang=eng, accessed Apr. 8, 2018. The Light of Christ has served as a critical form of *general* revelation in LDS thought.

King Follett Sermon: "Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation."[22]

Latter-day Saints are committed in various ways to each of these three areas. There are propositional, ritual, and virtue-building dimensions to the faith. But our question involves which of these is the most vital link to the other traditions. Around which of these could Latter-day Saints could build a theology of religions? I believe we can dispense with propositional belief in short order because we know how few people receive the opportunity to hear the propositional teachings of the gospel and are able to accept or reject them. Ritual practice lies in much the same boat. Catholicism, as we observed, affirms the necessity of baptism but conceptualizes it such that it can be effective in the absence of the physical ritual. Latter-day Saints, by contrast, maintain the necessity of ritual performance but expand the conditions under which it occurs. Vicarious work for the dead is a central part of the Latter-day Saint plan of redemption and serves as the primary means through which Mormons defend the justice of God in the face of diversity and ignorance of the LDS gospel plan. However, both of these workarounds are indicative that ritual performance cannot be the critical link within mortal life.

This brings us to virtue acquisition, which I believe to be the most fruitful area from which to build an adequate theology of religions. From an LDS perspective, peoples of other religions do not possess the

22. Joseph Smith, King Follett Sermon, "7 April 1844 (2) (Sunday Afternoon)," in *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph,* edited by Lyndon W. Cook and Andrew F. Ehat, vol. 6 (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1980), available at https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/words-joseph-smith-contemporary-accounts-nauvoo-discourses-prophet-joseph/1844/7-april-0. See also Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (1978): 8.

propositional content of the gospel, and they do not possess efficacious rituals. In the absence of these other features, however, they do possess many of the virtues necessary for salvation, and in some cases, I would argue, possess them to a greater degree than many Latter-day Saints. This position may fairly be characterized as a form of virtue inclusivism. On this account, exaltation is being effected in a variety of religious traditions through the cultivation of virtues necessary to become like God. On this account, propositional belief and ritual practice are secondary features that may be added at some later point. Virtue inclusivism would allow Latter-day Saints to honor other religions such that we may stand in awe and reverence in the face of what God can achieve through diverse forms of religious life. Among the more challenging implications of this approach lies the idea that there are equally efficacious forms of spiritual life across religious traditions—and by "efficacious" I mean that which positively leads human beings toward exaltation.

I understand this to be an extension of what Howard W. Hunter said in his powerful address entitled "The Gospel: A Global Faith": "All men share an inheritance of divine light. God operates among his children in all nations, and those who seek God are entitled to further light and knowledge, regardless of their race, nationality, or cultural traditions."[23] The LDS Church's 2011 Mormon Newsroom commentary on divine revelation echoes this same sentiment: "In its broad meaning, revelation is divine guidance or inspiration; it is the communication of truth and knowledge from God to His children on earth, suited to their language and understanding."[24] It has not gone unnoticed that the LDS Public Affairs Department has, of late, been fond of using Krister Stendahl's three rules of religious understanding. The late dean of Harvard Divinity

23. Howard W. Hunter, "The Gospel—A Global Faith," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1991/10/the-gospel-a-global-faith?lang=eng.

24. "Divine Revelation in Modern Times," Mormon Newsroom, Dec. 12, 2011, https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/divine-revelation-modern-times (italics mine).

School said that when trying to understand another religion, 1) you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies, 2) don't compare your best to their worst, and 3) leave room for "holy envy."[25] If there truly are enviable features to be found in other religions, then one could argue that there are ways of being that are efficacious in ways not found in one's own tradition.

Among my favorites from Joseph Smith is his 1842 editorial for the Times and Seasons. Though the piece is titled "Baptism for the Dead," he deals with a variety of theological issues related to the providence and justice of God. It is quoted often in Church curriculum and fits nicely in relation to Catholic thought and its implications:

> [God] is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but, "according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil," or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, "not according to what they have not, but according to what they have," . . . . He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family."[26]

Smith's editorial may, I believe, be usefully compared to statements in *Lumen gentium* that we quoted above.

> Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the

25. See Krister Stendahl, "The Art of Religious Conversation," *Books and Religion* 19, no. 1 (1992): 13–44.

26. *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 12, Apr. 15, 1842, 759, The Joseph Smith Papers, http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/9.

> Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.[27]

Both Catholics and Latter-day Saints advocate a form of *fulfillment inclusivism*. Whatever work God is doing in the lives of Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, or Jews, it is to be seen as a preparation for the full gospel as mediated in their respective ecclesiastical communities. However, fulfillment inclusivism may be perfectly consistent with the form of *virtue inclusivism* described above. On this view, even if one maintains that other traditions are incomplete in doctrinal formulation or ritual performance, one can *also* maintain that other traditions are equally—and in some case more—efficacious in key aspects of eternal progression.

Finally, a concluding word is in order regarding Joseph Smith's 1836 vision of the celestial kingdom, wherein he describes the presence of Abraham; Adam; his mother, Lucy Mack Smith; and his brother, Alvin, who had died of illness in 1823. Regarding the presence of Alvin, Smith reports that he "marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom" given that he "had not been baptized for the remission of sins." The answer comes in the following verse wherein Smith records "the voice of the Lord" saying:

> All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, *who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry,* shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom.[28]

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27. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium,* sec. 16.

28. Doctrine and Covenants 137:7–8 (italics mine). The death of Alvin was a tragic event for the Smith family and had an especially profound impact on Joseph. Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's mother, reports, for example, the family's astonishment when the local Presbyterian minister "intimated very strongly that he had gone to hell, for Alvin was not a church member" (J. S. Peterson interview with William Smith, 1893, *Zion's Ensign,* Jan. 13, 1894, reprinted in *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star,* Feb. 26, 1894, 133).

From a theological standpoint, these seventy-six words carry profound significance. If taken in straightforward fashion, this situation would apply to many of our ninety-nine percent. It is an exceptionally accommodating pathway for those outside the reach of LDS gospel teaching and ordinances. However, it may also present a challenge given our form of virtue inclusivism. The revelation could be read to imply that God must have knowledge of every "counterfactual of freedom"—i.e., knowledge of every action that would have occurred if a different choice had been made by a person in any given situation.

There has been a longstanding debate in philosophical theology regarding the usefulness of this type of divine knowledge—commonly referred to as "middle knowledge."[29] Some theologians employ this category as a way of addressing the justice of God. In Evangelical circles, for example, Donald Lake argues that "God knows who would, under ideal circumstances, believe the gospel, and on the basis of his foreknowledge, applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime."[30] Others, however, have argued that middle knowledge is irrelevant with regard to divine judgment and justice. If God may award salvation based upon how a person would have acted

29. The term "middle knowledge" is attributed to the Spanish theologian Luis de Molina, who argued that there is a type of divine knowledge that lies between *natural knowledge* (God's knowledge of all logical and metaphysically necessary truths) and *free knowledge* (God's knowledge of contingent truths that are dependent on his will). See E. Dekker, *Middle Knowledge—Studies in Philosophical Theology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom—The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (New York: Brill Academic, 1991); and David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought," *Religious Studies* 22, nos. 3–4 (1986): 407–22. For an informative account of middle knowledge in LDS thought, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God,* vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 137–86.

30. Donald Lake, "He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement," in *Grace Unlimited*, edited by Clark H. Pinnock (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 43.

rather than how they actually acted, how far might this situation extend? Would it not ultimately render actual choices irrelevant? For our purposes, if virtue inclusivism is correct—and experience is necessary for eternal progression—then attaining exaltation based on counterfactual knowledge would appear to eliminate the need for actual choices in a contingent world.

Another intriguing feature of Smith's revelation is the passage immediately following the quotation above: "For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts."[31] Contemporary LDS discourse places particular emphasis on this clause and tends to steer clear of the implications of counterfactual knowledge. Church curriculum, rather, inclines toward connecting this revelation to receiving the gospel in the afterlife. "The true desire of our heart determines our future. If we have had the opportunity to hear the gospel, our obedience to it demonstrates our true desire. If not, our desire will determine whether we accept it when we are given the opportunity, either in this life or the spirit world. All whose hearts are right will receive and live the gospel whenever they have the opportunity."[32] This returns us to the issues raised above in our discussion of the Catholic sacrament of baptism. "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity."[33]

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31. Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.

32. Church Educational System, *Doctrine and Covenants Study Manual,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 355.

33. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed., 1260, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a1.htm. There has been considerable disputation regarding the theological merits of "baptism by implicit desire." See Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, vol. 14, translated by David Morland, O.S.B. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983) and Gavin D'Costa, Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 19–23.

Though both traditions leave room for debate regarding the scope and application of their inclusive theologies, Catholicism and Mormonism share important sensibilities that deserve careful and respectful attention. Though religious diversity remains among the most challenging areas of theological studies, there is a compelling need to engage these questions with both candor and humility. In doing so, we may well find that God's light comes in healthier portions than we expected.