

tion 132? Would we, or would we not, embrace the awful responsibilities undertaken by the pioneers?

While my crystal ball license has expired, I suspect that regardless of Section 132 the Saints would put up a ferocious fight against legislation that would result in the right to practice polygamy. My guess is that if

the repeal of sex laws should sweep the country, Utah and a few states of what H. L. Mencken called the Bible Belt would stand firm in clinging to stringent anti-polygamy legislation. And that strange sound you would hear would be John Taylor and other pioneer prophets whirling in their graves.

## *FAITH AND REASON*

# **The Logic of the Gospel**

*Lowell L. Bennion*

There are those who delight in pitting faith against reason and who thereby disparage thinking in order to exalt religion. They even find scriptural justification for taking this stance in the writings of Paul, particularly in the early chapters of First Corinthians. The apostle knew from experience that the learned Greeks in Athens were not disposed to believe his account of the resurrected Christ. It was hence easy for him to declare that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

When one depreciates the thinking of men, he may also unwittingly demean thinking within religion itself and run the risk of practicing a form of religion that is a mixture of feeling, tradition, recollection, hearsay, and opinion — a kind of conglomerate with limited substance and structure.

Let me hasten to say that I do not disparage faith. Religion deals with the unknown, with super-empirical reality, with ultimate questions which, in good part, transcend experience and logic. It must, therefore, go beyond knowledge in its quest for meaning and the ideal. Nor do I deny Paul's statement "that the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." Revelation is more than man's thinking; it is the Spirit of God working on and through the mind of man.

Granted all of that, this does not mean that a religious person must set aside reason, close his eyes to thought, and cease being rational when he practices his religion. Thinking is fruitful not only in science, philosophy, art, and everyday life; it is equally so within religion itself. The Gospel

of Jesus Christ is more than feeling, more than hope, more than faith. It is also built upon ideas. It has an inner logic that infers a use of the mind in order for one to understand and appreciate it. My purpose in this essay is to illustrate this assertion.

### *JESUS' INTELLECTUAL EMPHASIS*

The teachings of Jesus reveal a person of faith, a mystic in the finest sense of the word, who spoke of the ultimate, His God, in the most trustful words, a person also of deep feeling and sensitivity. But they also bear witness to a lucid, brilliant mind. His parables are profound and artistic; his proverbs meaty, pithy, and insightful; his questions and answers incisive. His ideas hang together, support each other, show consistency; and form configurations of meaning not unlike the coherence one finds in philosophy and science, howbeit of a different kind.

His major appeal to men is that they should love one another. His life and teachings are wholly consistent with this emphasis: "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; "Judge not that ye be not judged"; "Blessed are the merciful" and "the peacemakers"; "He that would save his life, shall lose it"; "If a man ask thee to go one mile, go with him twain"; "Forgive seventy times seven." In fact everything in the Law and the Prophets hangs on this principle of love.

The second moral virtue Jesus stressed and exemplified is integrity. This ideal embraces all of the moral virtues of the Gospel which are not preempted by love,

the mother of the social virtues. Sincerity, humility, meekness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, absence of pretense and guile, repentance, freedom, moral courage are all ingredients and expressions of integrity which Jesus spoke of abundantly.

Integrity and love, coupled together, build the moral life of the Christian. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, in its moral dimension, provides a thoughtful framework built on these two principles and made real in the life of its author. These virtues challenge the mind as well as the heart.

H. C. King in his *Ethics of Jesus* points out the inner logic of the Beatitudes. He calls them a map of life and shows how each builds on and presupposes those which have gone before. The first four are more personal and, in my view, are expressions of integrity. Living these prepares one to express love as illustrated in the second group of four. A summary of King's view of the meaning of the Beatitudes is as follows:

1. The poor in spirit = the *humble*, those who feel their spiritual need.

2. They that mourn = the *penitent* who recognize their sins and mistakes and correct them.

3. The meek = the *self-controlled*, who are free from the necessity of guarding the self.

4. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness = those who practice *integrity*, who seek the highest good.

5. The merciful = the sympathetic, compassionate.

6. The pure in heart = the guileless, selfless.

7. The peacemakers = those who *promote love* among men.

8. The persecuted for righteousness sake = those who sacrifice for others.

The Beatitudes are not simply a miscellaneous statement of beautiful sayings, they are an integrated work of thoughtful reflection. Like steps on a ladder they lead from one to another upward.

#### THEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCIES

Just as there is consistency among the ethical teachings of the Gospel, so there is also a relatedness and coherence within its theological and worshipful aspects. For example, the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are not separate ideas and

practices, but like the Beatitudes, they build on each other and form a meaningful whole. Faith in Christ leads naturally to repentance, which means acquiring a new mind. Baptism is a meaningful symbolic witness of one's repentance and search for a new life as a disciple of Christ. And when one is stirred by faith, made more whole and contrite by repentance, and has entered the fellowship of co-believers, he is ready to receive the Holy Ghost, who will fill his life "with perfect love." Partaking of the Lord's Supper is a meaningful way of renewing this process of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

Modern scriptures, even as the Bible, were not written as theological texts. And Mormonism has not yet been developed into a completely consistent, comprehensive theology. Maybe it never should be because theology tends to become abstract and sterile compared to the spontaneous preaching and writing of the prophets. Yet there are many groupings of ideas within the Restored Gospel which have appeal because they cohere logically and suggest rational solutions to vital issues. Space will permit only one or two illustrations.

Latter-day Saint teaching concerning the eternal, uncreated nature of man's intelligence, the elements, laws, and time and space suggest important implications for the problems of human freedom and the presence of so much natural and moral evil — two of the most difficult problems of theology. If, as in traditional, historical Christianity, God is conceived as being omnipotent and omniscient and the ultimate source of all creation, it is most difficult to see how man as His total creature is free in relation to the Creator. It is also most difficult to square the gross amount of human suffering, injustice, and inequality with the goodness of God. By contrast, in Mormon thought, free agency is an eternal aspect of man's uncreated intelligence and is God-protected and respected rather than God-given in an ultimate sense. In Mormon doctrine much of natural evil may logically follow from the eternal elements and laws with which the Creator must work and moral evil is the result of man's inhumanity to man.

This Mormon philosophy of eternalism and spiritual pluralism raises other questions, as any theological system does, but it has great meaning for the religious life. It makes faith, repentance, personal respon-

sibility for self and others, and the whole moral and religious life real, without in anyway depreciating God as the ideal or His abundant grace as essential elements in the Gospel plan.

There are other configurations of ideas within Mormon thought which have consistency and which appeal to the mind. For example, the Mormon concept of a very personal concept of Deity goes well with the belief in continuous revelation, the production of new scripture, the fatherhood of God, and the eternal progression of man towards the eternal character and creativity of God and Christ.

### APPLICATION

If I have been able thus far to suggest the considerable degree of rationality in the Gospel, then it must follow that anyone who believes in and practices the Gospel would profit by thinking as well as by feeling. As Jesus said, one should love God with all his mind as well as with all his heart. May I suggest two ways in which one can and ought to use his mind in his religious life.

#### I.

One ought not — in the words of Levi Edgar Young — to pulverize the Gospel, live it piecemeal, one rule or principle at a time bolstered by a single text. It is more prudent to keep in mind the Gospel as a whole, a framework of fundamental principles, to which lesser and single ideas can be related and from which they receive their meaning. For example, Latter-day Saints believe in the fatherhood, justice, love, and intelligence of God. Believing this, I do not accept interpretations of His character or ways which contradict His impartiality, love or intelligence. Everything that men have said and done in the name of God cannot be accepted at face value unless it is consistent with His character and purpose. And for me, Jesus Christ best reveals the character, spirit, and will of God. What I cannot square with Christ's teachings, I will question no matter what the source. The nature of God becomes then a basic, rational guide with which to interpret the religious and moral life. This, in my judgment, is the most significant purpose of theologizing.

Another example of using a grouping of ideas as a guide in the religious life is

found in the Mormon doctrine of man. We believe that man is eternal, in the image of God, with capacity for freedom, with responsibility for himself and others, that all men are brothers, and that they have the capacity to grow in the likeness of God, sharing increasingly in His creative work and glory, finding joy by fulfilling their human and divine natures. Believing this, I refuse to accept any interpretation of Scripture or of the Gospel which contradicts or impedes the free agency of man, his brotherhood with all men, or which bars his opportunity for self realization.

#### II.

Another way to exercise reason in the religious life is in its application to the practical aspects of living. Man has learned a good deal about the universe through astronomy and physics, about nature through chemistry and biology, and about the mind and society through the behavioral-social sciences, although admittedly there is less agreement in the sciences which study human behavior. If religion is to find its full and rightful place in human experience, it must relate to the knowledge and wisdom of human experience. The Word of Wisdom and the sciences of health and nutrition need each other. The Christian principles of integrity and love are consistent with and are supplemental to the knowledge of human nature born of scientific study.

In summary, religion is more than feeling, more than hope, more than mystery. It also includes moral precepts and theological postulates which provide thoughtful perspectives on significant areas of life. The religious life should be motivated by faith but also be guided by the logic of the Gospel as well as by the spirit. I believe that impressions of the Spirit should be checked by the logic of Gospel fundamentals even as I believe we should pray concerning our rational conclusions. I find it distasteful and inappropriate to hear people disparage reason in order to glorify God. If the glory of God is intelligence, then intelligence is no less the glory of man who was created in His image. Jacob said it well to those who believe:

But to be learned is good  
if they hearken unto the  
counsels of God. (II Nephi 9:29)