

HERETICS IN TRUTH: LOVE, FAITH, AND HOPE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THEOLOGY, COMMUNITY, AND DESTINY

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I want to begin with a passage of startling—and unsettling—insight, from John Stuart Mill:

There is a class of persons . . . who think it enough if a person assents undoubtingly to what they think true, though he has no knowledge whatever of the grounds of the opinion. . . . This is not knowing the truth. Truth, thus held, is but one superstition the more, accidentally clinging to the words which enunciate a truth.¹

In this formulation, a conviction that is correct, but is held on insufficient grounds, is just a superstition that happens to be true, or words that accidentally coincide with the truth. John Milton, in his work *Areopagitica*, spoke to similar effect, using the expression “heretic in truth” to describe those who happen upon the truth but hold it on inadequate, erroneous, or insufficient grounds.² They both speak with powerful relevance to our own cultural moment. It is not enough to hear the truth and accept the truth. One must seek out and find good cause, good reason, to embrace that truth, to live that truth, and to cleave to that truth. One must make

1. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, edited by Elizabeth Rapaport (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), 34.

2. John Milton, *Areopagitica*, edited by Richard C. Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 43.

it one's own, or it is just a superstition we hold that happens to be true. I think, in such a case, we are the plant in the parable who, in the words of Mark, "have no root in themselves" (Mark 4:17).

So I want to talk today about foundations and fractures. Why do some stay disciples and others depart from the way? I have wondered of late what part faith, hope, and charity play in discipleship. And I am going to relate them, in my own experience, to theology, community, and destiny.

Paul speaks of love, faith, and hope as the triad of virtues most devoutly to be desired—and I am going to suggest they provide us with a map of durable discipleship.

Charity—pure, absolute love—is the only force in the universe stronger than self-interest. I believe it to be the necessary motive force behind faith, the only salvational catalyst, because all other motivations are a form of investment, of behavior that is merely prudent, of actions that are directly or indirectly self-seeking. Faith is manifest when we enter that realm where the present is severed from future reward or happy outcome. It is perhaps the only occasion in which we engage the divine non-teleologically.

Faith is the purest manifestation of such a motive force. It is the commitment to be responsive, true, and loyal out of love, in the here and now, the present moment, with no conceptualization of a tomorrow. It is the willed offering of trust in response to the call of love.

Hope is the concrete expectation of a good result, the opposite of despair. Faith is the leap into the darkness, hope is the confidence you will be caught. We generally conflate the two into the concept of faith, but faith does not anticipate the end of the action. When Mormon returned to lead his armies, saying it was without faith (Mormon 3), it was without faith in the outcome, or more accurately, without hope. It was a gesture devoid of trust in the efficacy of the gesture.

Hope is something, according to Paul, that we rejoice in (Romans 5:2). Hence, it has to be the other side of the coin of faith. Faith is the cast of the dice that only we can originate. Hope is when we have, from the outside, intimations of the outcome. Or as Paul told the Colossians, hope “grounds and settles” us, after the initial gesture of faith (Colossians 1:23). Or again, faith is manifest in the act; it is the gesture requiring willful effort, what Paul calls the actual “work.” Waiting with what he calls “patience” in anticipation of faith’s fruit is the realm of “hope.” This is how he explains the relationship to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:3). And the engine motivating the whole sequence, he says, is charity.

Abraham’s relationship with God is predicated on love. There is a relationship of mutuality. Stupendous as it sounds, God has actually invited Abraham into intimate communion with him, and Abraham reciprocates. Asked to sacrifice his son, love guides his gesture. He acts in a trusting way, without regard to consequence. That is his faith clothed in action. His hope is in the expectation that this is going to end well, though he can’t find a logical reason for such anticipation. Hope is not always founded in empiricism, but in the spirit’s attestation. Hope is what we receive in response to our act of faith. Only love can carry us through what is at times a harrowing and prolonged process.

Now my point today is that this process of discipleship breaks down if any of those three ingredients fail. If we do not feel the call of love and find it in ourselves to respond. If we are unwilling to take the risk that faith entails, to make ourselves vulnerable, to expose ourselves to error and self-deception. And if we find we cannot endure in the desert of failed expectations, with no spiritual or emotional meat to sustain our journey.

So I am going to lay those three stages, those three Pauline virtues, along three parallel topics to chart my own spiritual pilgrimage. Those topics are theology, community, and destiny.

Love and Theology

I want to preface this section with a plea that you open yourself to the possibility that theology is not mere intellectual abstraction but the very lifeblood of the disciple's heart.

How is theology related to love? In Moses' reconstituted vision as described by Joseph Smith, Moses sees the "workmanship of [God's] hands" constituting "works . . . without end," including the human family from first to last (Moses 1:4). More startling, he sees that the universe includes endless worlds, "and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof" (Moses 1:29). This stupefying vision overwhelms Moses with his own finitude and smallness: "Now . . . I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10). After describing the immensity of creation as seen by Moses, Smith learns a second truth that utterly inverts his self-appraisal when God makes man the focal point and telos of all divine striving rather than an inconsequential atom in an infinite structure. Moses learns from the Father's own mouth that "mine Only Begotten is and shall be the Savior," whose work it shall be to accomplish the Father's self-appointed task: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:6, 39). The poetic irony is religiously profound: we are an infinitesimal speck in a boundless sea of fathomless immensity, yet that minute particle called humanity is the focus and guiding preoccupation of the master architect of the whole. Whereas dozens of writers from Tertullian to Rick Warren and John Piper have written with perfect unanimity that God created humans and their world "for the glory of His [own] majesty," "for God's glory" not ours, because "God loves his own glory above all things"—those are direct quotations from those writers, and I could cite numerous others—in the face of such holy

sacrilege, Joseph Smith has Moses reverse the equation.³ God is not the supreme narcissist of the cosmos, but a being of incomprehensible selflessness who, like his Son, “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world” (2 Nephi 26:24). Yet not the world, but its each and every inhabitant; not the vineyard, but each individual tree therein, is a cause for divine rejoicing and divine tears.

At this moment, at the very commencement of any survey of Mormon theology, I find the most unutterably sublime being of any faith tradition. And in Restoration theology, we find that such love has boundless efficacy. Some years ago, a woman revealed that Holocaust victims continued to be baptized posthumously into the LDS faith. (According to some reports, the woman submitted the name in order to subsequently blow the whistle.) Commentators and public figures were indignant. I was asked to field some questions from a Philadelphia radio station on the subject of proxy baptism. Why, the Jewish host asked me, are you baptizing my dead ancestors? I said, “We believe in heavenly parents who envision a great wedding feast at the last day, where the entire human family will be present. We believe the privilege has been given us of preparing the guest list. You don’t have to come, but we believe everyone should be invited.” “What a beautiful idea,” he responded. “How do I get on the guest list?”

His response was good-natured and half in jest. But I like to think it was half in earnest. For in his gracious reply was embedded the recognition of a divine generosity, capaciousness of heart, and efficacious love, without parallel.

3. Tertullian, *Apology*, translated by S. Thelwell, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 31; Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 55; and John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2000), 192.

Now many people both in the Church and out consider theology to be an antiquated science, too remote, too filled with abstractions and verbal formulae to be directly meaningful to the lived experience of religion. I couldn't disagree more. In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, God teaches most powerfully of the crucial link between theology and discipleship. Commenting on the many corruptions to the biblical text, the voice of the Lord speaks in mercy, understanding, and promise. He tells Nephi, "Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that state of *awful woundedness* which . . . they are in, because of the plain and most precious parts of the Gospel of the Lamb which hath been kept back" (my emphasis).⁴ This is one of the most potent scriptures in our canon because it states the dilemma that necessitated the Restoration with economy and beauty. Because of scriptural corruption and loss, because of what the Lord himself called creedal abominations, we are in a wounded state. We are, all of us, wounded. No one within the sound of my voice has not suffered hurt, anxiety, loss, disappointment, and despair. This generation, more than any in history, knows the loneliness of depression, the darkness of perpetual anxiety. But compounding those wounds, aggravating and intensifying our pain, is the God of the Christian creeds—devoid of body, parts, and passion, seeking his own glory, limited and confined in the scope of his redemptive love. However, those words to Nephi promised that God would not abandon us to such a condition of misrepresentation, ignorance, and fear.

That saintly man of God, Edward Beecher, proclaimed that "of all errors, none are so fundamental and so wide reaching in their evil

4. *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, N.Y.: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 31. In the 1981 edition currently used by the LDS Church, this passage is designated as 1 Nephi 13:32 and follows an 1837 emendation by Smith to "state of awful blindness"; see Royal Skousen, "The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 2 (2002): 56–57.

tendencies and results as errors with respect to the character of god.”⁵ Joseph Smith, with sentiments exactly parallel, taught that a “correct idea” of God’s character is the only foundation, the only effective catalyst, to meaningful discipleship.⁶ John may have said that God is love (1 John 4:8), but it took the prophets Zenos and Enoch to show us, convincingly, what that love looks like, not just in Christ, but in his Father, “Man of Holiness” (Jacob 5; Moses 7). It is only in the Restoration scriptures that we encounter the weeping God.

And that is just the beginning. One of the great scholars of early Christianity has recently noted that the father of Western Christianity predicated his entire theological edifice on blatant, demonstrable errors of translation. Not proficient in Greek, Augustine did not know that the *proorizein* of the New Testament should be rendered “to mark out in advance,” or as Mormons would say, “to foreordain,” not to predestine.⁷ As a consequence, Augustine vanquishes the efficacy of human agency and individual choice, in the face of a predestinating God of caprice, whim, and indefensible cruelty. This is the God fully embraced and taught by the great Reformers, a sovereign deity who damns and saves indiscriminately and independently of human efforts, choices, or desires.

Augustine compounds the error by elaborating a pernicious dogma of original sin. In David Bentley Hart’s analysis (which is, by the way, seconded in numerous sources), “only in the West did the idea arise that a newborn infant is somehow already guilty of transgression in God’s eyes,” because the Latin text Augustine relied upon “contained a mistranslation that suggested that “‘in’ Adam ‘all sinned.’” The actual

5. Edward Beecher, *The Concord of Ages, or, The Individual and Organic Harmony of God and Man* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1860), 156.

6. Joseph Smith, “The Character of God,” Lectures on Faith, in *Doctrine and Covenants* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835), 36.

7. David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity: An Illustrated History of 2000 Years of the Christian Faith* (New York: Quercus, 2012), 77.

Greek text,” he continues “says nothing of the sort.”⁸ So sin and depravity become the basis, the default, on which Western theology is constituted.

Fiona and I would challenge a third translation. The Greek word *sodzo* has the meaning of healing or making whole. It appears numerous times when Christ is curing, restoring sight, bringing back health and healing. But following upon the foundations of sin, depravity, and inherited guilt, translators have opted to render the word in most cases as “save.” This in spite of the fact that when Christ announces his own mission and the purposes thereof, he quotes Isaiah’s beautiful words that he has come to “heal” the brokenhearted and those damaged by calamity, not to rescue from sin and condemnation. Sin is real, and we need divine assistance to escape its allure in our lives. But Christ’s emphasis, as the Book of Mormon teaches us, was on pain, our wounds, our infirmities.

Taken together, Joseph’s revelations restore a God wholly devoted to our fullest thriving who safeguards our agency at terrible cost, who sacrificed beyond imagining to bring us healing in his wings and guide us through this terrible but necessary mortal crucible. Through the Restoration, I have come to know, and I have come to love, a Christ and a Father as more than scriptural abstraction. The place of Mormon theology in my life, in my private discipleship, is that it has engendered in me a real, visceral adoration for the true God and his Christ. I feel to say, with George MacDonald, that “whatever energies I may or may not have, I know one thing for certain. That I could not devote them to anything else I should think entirely worth doing. Indeed, nothing else [could] repay the labor, but the telling of my fellow many about the one man who is the truth, and to know whom is life.”⁹

I do not know that God exists. I believe, I hope, I trust that he does. Perhaps, in my better moments, my belief attains to knowledge. But one thing I do know for sure. I know only that the the Weeping God

8. Ibid.

9. George MacDonald, *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (n.p.: Tutis Digital, 2008), 312.

of Enoch—the Weeping Gardner of Zenos—and Christ the Healer, are [not is] worthy of the risk. And so I am willing to live by faith in such a divine family.

Faith and Community

The Christ whom I worship, the Parents to whom I aspire to return, enjoin me to something beyond a shallow spirituality, a cheap substitute for costly religion. So let me turn to what is, to my mind, the most amazing development in the Restoration. And that is what *didn't* happen on that spring morning in 1820. Joseph Smith would record in his earliest autobiographical sketch of 1832 that he was concerned as a young boy “for the welfare of [his] immortal soul.”¹⁰ Oliver Cowdery, claiming Smith’s assistance for his 1834 narrative, wrote that Smith hungered for “that assurance which the Lord Jesus has so freely offered.”¹¹ “I felt to mourn for my . . . sins,” Smith wrote in his 1832 account.¹² So he “cried unto the Lord for mercy . . . and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness. . . . A pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noon day came down from above and rested upon me.”¹³ Vision became revelatory encounter when he “saw the Lord and he spake unto me saying, Joseph my son thy sins are forgiven thee.”

Now my question is, why was this not the end of the story? Why was this consummation, so devoutly desired by Joseph and by millions of others before and since, not the final word? Why did he not, following

10. Joseph Smith Jr., “History, circa Summer 1832,” *The Joseph Smith Papers: Histories*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 11, available at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/2>.

11. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter III,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 3 (Dec. 1834): 43.

12. Smith, “History, circa Summer 1832,” 12.

13. Ibid.

Luther and Wesley and myriad others, feel his quest essentially at an end and thereafter share the good news of his and humanity's salvation?

"My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no assurance that my merit would assuage him," wrote Luther in providing the spiritual backgrounds to his own work as a Reformer.¹⁴ Persuaded that salvation was to be found through a personal reliance upon Christ's righteousness rather than our own, a conception that would come to be called salvation by grace or imputed righteousness, Luther believed he had found the path to salvation. His work was henceforth to convince the world of that path. John Wesley, too, found his spiritual quest one of perpetual anxiety until a decisive moment when, he recorded, "I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."¹⁵ His work, too, was the simple broadcasting of that good news, the incitement to recapitulate in the lives of countless others the saving grace he had experienced.

I wonder, have we paused to marvel at the fact that Joseph's quest for salvation began at that precise point where that of the Reformers ended? Joseph's religious journey could have so easily ended that spring morning. He could have gone home happy in his discovery that God loved him, his sins were forgiven, and rested peacefully in the assurance he had found.

I believe the exercise of comparing Joseph to Luther and Wesley (or George Fox and C. S. Lewis, for that matter) is an invaluable step toward more fully appreciating what constitutes the magnificence of Mormonism: the contrast makes clear that perhaps the single most distinctive hallmark of Smith's religion-making was his subsequent

14. Martin Luther, quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), 65.

15. John Wesley, "24 May 1738," in *The Heart of Wesley's Journal* (New Canaan, Conn.: Keats, 1979), 43.

conviction that salvation was collective and collaborative, not personal and individual. He wanted to bring everyone home, build the city of Zion and enlarge its borders unendingly, enlist us all in the great work of being saviors on Mount Zion, extending the gospel's reach—for the first time in the post-apostolic age—across the bounds of life and into the very depths of hell.

His conception culminated in discerning God's grand design of providing a means to redeem the entire human family, incorporating them into an eternal chain of belonging through sacramental rituals and binding covenants. The locus for the earthly consummation of these preparations is within the temples that crowned Smith's religious project. So first and foremost, I find in my Mormonism a faith of limitless generosity and expansiveness, and the incitement to actively participate in a project of supernal spiritual ambitions. After such a vision, I can no longer conceive of religion as a merely private affair. I no longer believe there is a private—or solitary—road to salvation. I will not find God in the mountains or at the seaside. That seems to me now, by contrast, a contracted, selfish, and impoverished substitute for the real thing. If, as I said at the onset, my faith is motivated by love, by an outgoing of the spirit, then it necessarily places the self in relation to others.

We have been particularly gifted by our associations in far-flung wards and branches. I remain deeply convinced that Joseph's prophetic gifts are manifest in the unique Mormon communities that have become legendary for their love, cohesion, and synergy. Lay clergy, home and visiting teaching (I mean, "ministering"), high religious demands made individually and collectively, and, most potent, ward boundaries that enclose us in fixed laboratories of love from which there is no escape—only the ever more insistent calls to forgive, to tolerate, to endure and to serve—these create crucibles of discipleship without parallel in the world, and I have tasted the foreshadowings of Zion they can often herald.

But here I also find challenges that some of us have found insoluble. I have never found Restoration theology to fail me. Still in process of

unfolding, it is the most compassionate, generous, reasonable, and beautiful system of belief I ever expect to encounter. And I do not know of anyone who has ever turned away from the Church because they found its God too full of love and feeling, his plan too capacious, or its heaven too populous. Still, I have found that words are not always adequate to staunch bleeding spiritual wounds because it is not always questions that lead people to seek other paths, but needs. Words can answer questions, but they are often helpless in the face of urgent human needs.

Martin Buber notes how this is most evident with children, who form relationships with imaginary creatures and stuffed animals sometimes even before language takes shape. As he recognizes, “It is not as if a child first saw an object and then entered into some relationship with that. Rather, the longing for relation is primary, the cupped hand into which the being that confronts us nestles.”¹⁶ The key is that the encounter begins as a “readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled.”¹⁷

Time and again I have met with young persons who have no problems with Mormon theology. It is the community that their hearts do not resonate with. Hyrum Smith, like his brother Joseph, thought a community of fellow saints was like heaven on earth. Hyrum once said, “Men’s souls conform to the society in which they live, with very few exceptions, and when men come to live with the Mormons, their souls swell as if they were going to stride the planets.”¹⁸ I have felt that way, time and again. But not everyone feels that way. And I get that. So let me say a few words at this juncture, to those who at present, or at some time in the future, may find themselves feeling out of sync—if not with the theology or doctrine of Mormonism then with the tone, the nuances,

16. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 78.

17. Ibid.

18. “Address of Hyrum Smith,” Apr. 6, 1844, in *History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 6:300.

the language, or the temper that can erupt through the scriptures, the conference talks, the temple, and the Sunday School classes.

I want to say two things about the challenges this can present to some of you. First, I would want you to note how God's language changes, and evolves, with time, with circumstance, and with need. Brigham Young said, "When God speaks to the people, he does it in a manner to suit their circumstances and capacities. . . . Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation. According as people are willing to receive the things of God, so the heavens send forth their blessings."¹⁹

And so we have heard in our own day Elder M. Russell Ballard's words that tough questions deserve strong answers, not mere testimony-bearing.²⁰ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's words that there is room in the Church for those with doubt, and that perplexity in the face of new narratives is not sinful or faithless.²¹ (I note parenthetically, and with sadness, that not everyone seems to have gotten those last two memos; they need to listen to these prophetic voices.) Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf's words that the "day of judgment will be a day of mercy and love—a day when broken hearts are healed, when tears of grief are replaced with tears of gratitude, when all will be made right," and his reminder that "salvation cannot be bought with the currency of obedience; it is

19. Brigham Young, "The Kingdom of God," Jul. 13, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9 (Liverpool: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1862), 311.

20. See M. Russell Ballard, "The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century" (address to CES religious educators, Salt Lake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, Feb. 26, 2016, <https://www.lds.org/broadcasts/article/evening-with-a-general-authority/2016/02/the-opportunities-and-responsibilities-of-ces-teachers-in-the-21st-century?lang=eng>).

21. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," Apr. 2013, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2013/04/lord-i-believe?lang=eng>.

purchased by the blood of the Son of God.”²² Elder Dale G. Renlund’s words that Christ sees our condition not as an evil to be punished, but as “a condition that needs treatment, care, and compassion.”²³ I rejoice in a church whose truths never change but whose language can evolve to keep pace with our needs, sensibilities, and spiritual preparations.

And to my second point: as I recently wrote to a loved one in her frustration, “You are part of a community of kindred spirits, but you just don’t know that. Others, like you, have been dismayed by the kind of cultural ills that you have lamented, but they have found a way through them. . . . So I just wanted you to consider [that] your true community may be hidden around you.” My wife and I have traveled to twenty-five countries and borne testimony in some twenty-five states to thousands of our fellow travelers throughout the world. And I can tell you with assurance that if we could learn to be more trusting, more vulnerable, and more outward-looking, we would find ourselves surrounded by others asking the same questions, craving the same spiritual nourishment, wrestling through the same challenges and feelings of occasional alienation and isolation. You have more fellow travelers ready to minister and be ministered to in the particularity of your spiritual questing than you have realized. I bear you my testimony that that is true.

Hope and Destiny

I come now to my third topic. I have argued that the gospel reveals a love beyond our understanding, and by imagining that love, letting it work upon our hearts and minds, we can find the motive power to exercise faith. I have suggested that the act of faith is a leaping forth

22. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “O How Great the Plan of Our God!” Oct. 2016, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2016/10/o-how-great-the-plan-of-our-god?lang=eng>; and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “The Gift of Grace,” Apr. 2015, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2015/04/the-gift-of-grace?lang=eng>.

23. Dale G. Renlund, “Our Good Shepherd,” Apr. 2017, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2017/04/our-good-shepherd?lang=eng>.

into the void; that it exposes us to risk; that it imbricates us in a shared community where we may find disappointment and pain alongside the joy of participation in the greatest communal enterprise Christianity has yet conceived. And now I come lastly to hope, which I relate to the Church and its destiny. If faith, as I said at the beginning, is the outgoing, love-laden gesture of response, hope is founded in the voice that calls back to us. And when all we hear is silence, hope is what fails. Some of us may feel, as did the poet George Herbert,

What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
 My lines and life are free; free as the road,
 Loose as the wind, as large as store.
 Shall I be still in suit?
 Have I no harvest but a thorn
 To let me blood, and not restore
 What I have lost with cordial fruit?

 No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
 All wasted?²⁴

To those who feel on the brink of despair and capitulation, I can only plead. We have before us the last, best hope of Christianity. May we resist the urge to resort to what Eugene England called “the appalling luxury of . . . utter skepticism.”²⁵ All paradigms, of the naturalist, the atheist, the scientist, or the disciple, require a life of strenuous endeavor to maintain it by continual questioning, reexamining, adaptation, and adjustment. So I would leave you with the words of B. H. Roberts, prophetic words that I think were delivered to him by the spirit for this very hour.

“Mormonism” . . . calls for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of the truths, but will develop the

24. George Herbert, “The Collar,” in *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (London: Pickering, 1838), 159.

25. Eugene England, “Enduring,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 113.

truths; and enlarge it by that development. Not half—not one-hundredth part—not a thousandth part of that which Joseph Smith revealed to the church has yet been unfolded, either to the church or to the world. The work of the expounder has scarcely begun. The Prophet planted by teaching the germ-truths of the great dispensation of the fulness of times. The watering and weeding is going on, and God is giving the increase, and will give it more abundantly in the future as more *intelligent discipleship* shall obtain. The disciples of “Mormonism,” growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of development.²⁶

I want to be the kind of disciple Roberts describes here. I hope you do, too, and that you can envision Mormonism at its very best, fulfilling its promise—and that you will stay to make that destiny unfold. And that you will find seeds of hope to sustain you. But you must make such hope a quest. It is my witness that the seeds of hope are all around us, in the doctrines, the communities, the lives touched and transformed by the Restoration.

I now conclude with one final thought. In C. S. Lewis’s masterful retelling of the Fall, Eve only gradually comes to a recognition of her own moral agency. She simply assumes that through her posture of total obedience and trust, she has given her will over to another. But then she awakens to the reality and inescapability of the burden of choice. As she explains to a kind of spiritual mentor,

26. B. H. Roberts, “Book of Mormon Translation: Interesting Correspondence on the Subject of the Manual Theory,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 9 (Jul. 1906): 713.

I have thought that I was being carried, and behold, I was walking. . . . Out of my own heart I do it. . . . I thought that I was carried in the will of Him I love, but now I see that I walk with it. I thought that the good things He sent me drew me into them as the waves lift the islands; but now I see that it is I who plunge into them, with my own legs and arms.²⁷

I love this scene, because it clarifies for me one of the most important keys to the vocation of the disciple: the recognition that discipleship is not a relinquishing of the will but a redirection: a condition of perpetual, willful, and will-filled redirection and reaffirmation (which is my preferred translation of *metanoeo*). Discipleship, belief, commitment, are in the end high-stakes, risk-taking, vulnerability-laden choice.

May you immerse yourself in the gospel deeply enough to taste God's love, may you find the faith to be willing to give yourself wholly to the community of fellow Saints, and may you realize that the choice is yours to find and nourish seeds of hope to sustain you along the way.

27. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Collier Books, 1944), 68–69.