

# An Exploration of Eternal Economics:

A Skeptic's Struggle for Truth and Faith

Luke D. Harmuth

This book is dedicated to the ones, both living and passed, who have aided me on my spiritual journey. They have tutored me daily by their writings and speeches, which I have listened to in my FedEx delivery truck. They were my guides and inspirations – my spiritual and intellectual heroes who hold my admiration for their character and spirit.

In no particular order:

President David O. McKay

Dennis Rasmussen

Daniel C. Peterson

Terryl Givens

John Dehlin

Eugene England

Elder B.H. Roberts

D. Michael Quinn

George Lucas

Lowell Bennion

Jonathan Haidt

The Prophet Joseph Smith Jr.

Leonard J. Arrington

Hugh Nibley

And for all those who search for a place to call their spiritual home.

**T**he things of God are of deep  
**T**importance, and time and  
experience and careful and ponderous  
and solemn thoughts can only find  
them out. Thy mind, O Man...must  
stretch as high as the utmost Heavens,  
and search into and contemplate the  
lowest considerations of the darkest  
abyss, and expand upon the broad  
considerations of eternal expanse; he  
must commune with God  
*-The Prophet Joseph Smith.*

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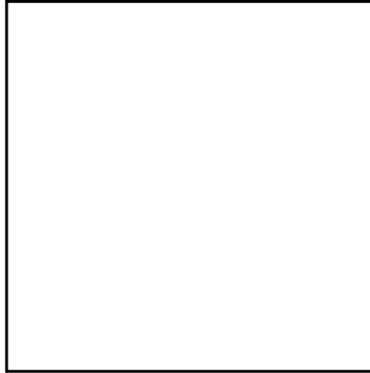


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# Chapter 1

## On the Outskirts of Zion



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### **Confidence Lost**

I am sitting in front of the Provo City Center temple on the metal chair southwest of the fountain looking up at the building. It is night time and patrons are leaving the front doors and talking with each other in a large group, how I imagine my ward will be when they go tomorrow. It is a trip I wish I could join.

It has been a while since I have participated in any ordinances, as I have been disfellowshipped for some time now. (All of this book except for chapter eight was written during my disfellowshipment.) I remember the emotions I first felt when I told the sister I ministered to as she asked me for a blessing that I no longer held the priesthood, the feeling of wanting to help but knowing I could not in the way they asked me to. The isolation I felt watching as I was the only one visible not taking the sacrament, and the pain I felt as every temple trip was announced. How did this all begin?

It started with a letter that a hurt and confused me gave to my bishop at the ward Thanksgiving party in the second story of the BYU Wilkinson student center.

*“I surrender my claim to wield priesthood power and authority, and the privilege to enter the House of the Lord”* concluded the letter. It was sealed in an envelope where inside was a small plastic bag that contained two things: my vial of consecrated oil, and the remains of a burnt temple recommend. It was a dark time in my life, a time best described by my journal entry, the place where I attempt to work out my emotions:

*“Do we think of God as someone who watches us but doesn’t watch over us? Like an absentee father? Do we say There is a god, but it’s not the god for me? And as we ponder our struggle we emotionally learn the lesson: God is a God of miracles for other people, and if I must be like God I must live for other people because my blessings don’t matter. So you bury your desire for blessings down deep where your soul cannot reach, or else in reaching for them your soul may hurt itself. Because to desire is to be vulnerable, and to love is to risk death. Perhaps, you think to yourself, something went wrong with you from the beginning. Then you consider yourself to be one of God’s failed experiments – that God was perfect until he made you. Then Heavenly Father doesn’t seem so heavenly anymore. Perhaps one day something changes, the light touches you and God once again seems to be the one with outstretched hands and not the withholder of blessings. He asks for your heart to be one with His. And then a broken you responds in sadness, ‘If I still had a heart I would gladly give it to you, I wish I could.’ He then places His hands on both of your shoulders and responds with warmth: ‘Then give me the part of you that wishes.’”*

Dear Bishop Anderson,

I am very tired. I have been facing very hard emotional distress for some time, relationships, finances, work, etc. It has been a very long time since I have felt God's love, or help. Temple trips and service notwithstanding, I know He's real, I've seen Him help others, and I've had the privilege of being orchestral in their blessing, and for that I am grateful. I have even been His instrument in doing miracles by Priesthood power. I have a surfeit of knowledge in His existence, and that this Church is the vehicle for His authority. But the only time He enters my life is for me to bless someone else, to the point of miraculous events, indescribable events. But I don't feel Him there for me. I feel like a courier for a rich person, who is given envelopes of money to deliver to people in need, and when I am apart of a blessing for someone else, whenever I deliver an envelope of divine aid to someone, I am happy because they are happy, but there's never an envelope with my name on it, so I no longer expect it. I feel I am only the vehicle for His love, but not the object of it. I know the doctrine says different. I've read, I understand. The God Who Weeps, Delivering Christ, Jesus Wept, etc.

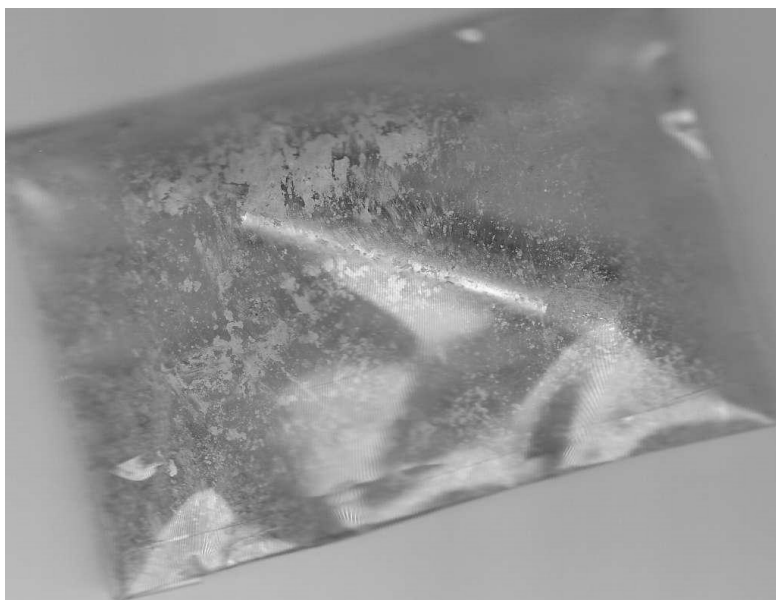
Because of this feeling of divine estrangement, the prospect of going to the temple again is too painful, I have ceased to pray for myself, only for others. I have decided to step away for a while, work on a project on a search for God's love, if it's there for me. I want all this to make sense. The deadline for my sojourn is Feb 7 of next year, which is my birthday. If I study, help others as much as I can, perhaps I will feel His presence for me. On that day I will conclude a journey of investigation, not into the truth of the Church, I know it's true, I will defend it until I die, but an investigation if I want to stay, something I never thought I'd come to. I'll still come to church, as an investigator. I'll still do my ministering, I enjoy it. I hope I choose to stay. If I do, when I meet with you I'll begin the process to make myself ready for the temple. I want it to be special, I want to want to go. I was angry at God today. I don't want to be angry...

Sunday Nov 20

Here is the remains of my temple recommend, the result of  
an act of my sadness and anger, as well as my oil vial.  
I surrender my claim to wield priesthood power and authority,  
and the privilege to enter the House of the Lord.

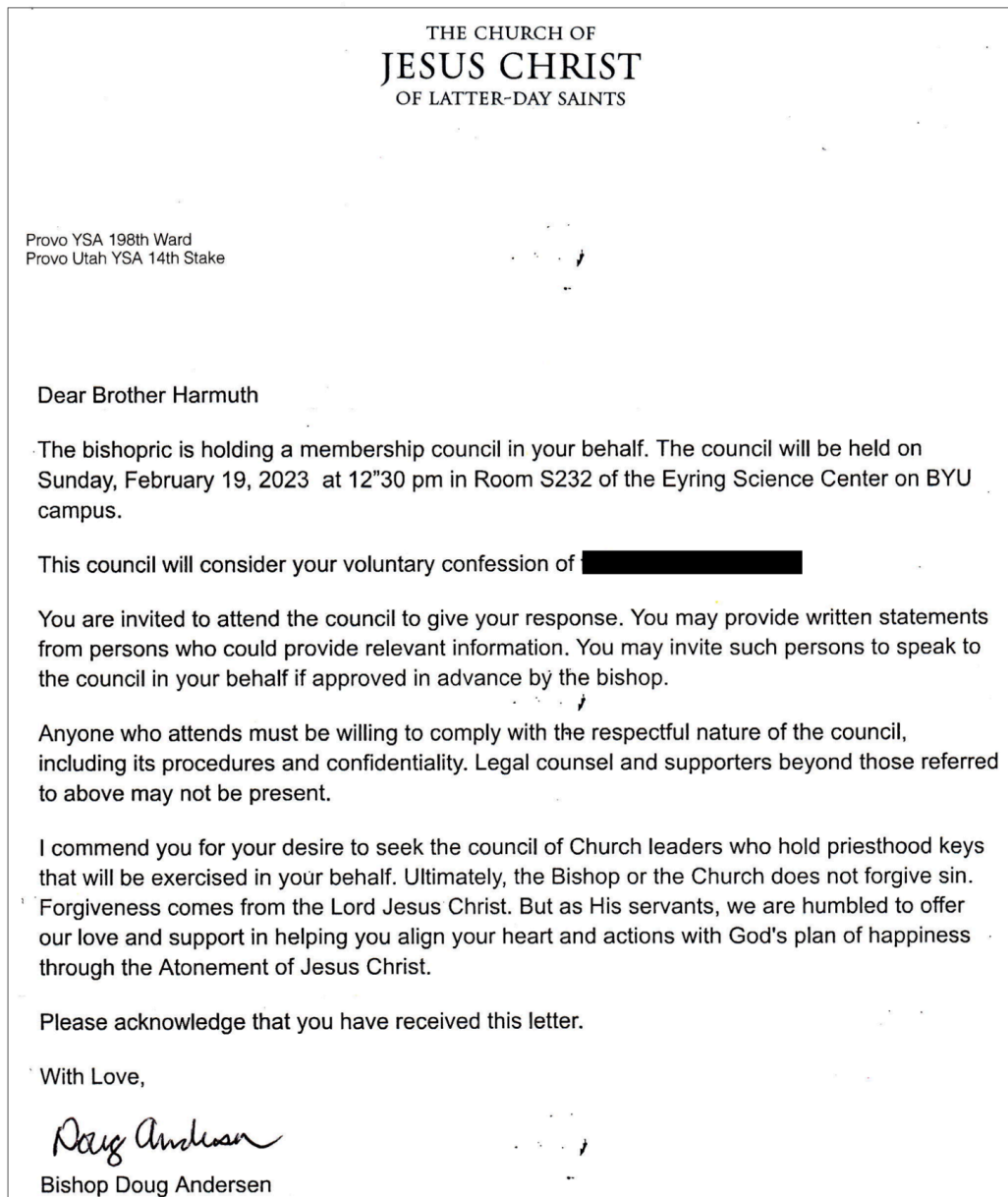
Please keep these things safe for me until Feb.

Luke Harmuth



*(The remains of my Temple Recommend in its envelope, with my oil vial)*

Flash forward some time and after having lived in a way that I wish I had not, making choices I knew I should not have, the consequences of which made others feel pain that I wish I could take back — and having done a lot of research in many fields of study, I went to my bishop to confess, and a disciplinary (or membership) council was held for me.



(The summoning letter, format is publicly available in the Church's General Handbook of Instructions. At my bishop's recommendation, the reason has been omitted.)

It was sitting in the chair in the back hallway of the Eyring Science Center waiting for my council that the entirety of an early draft of Chapter Two was written in an hour of continuous typing on my iPhone. As the last paragraph was being typed the door opened and there sat my

council as well as— to my surprise — my roommate who was to record the confession and the proceedings.

A decision about my ecclesiastical fate could not be reached (no consequence, informal restrictions, or formal restrictions, and I had even offered to help them choose one of the options provided they give me the reasoning) so another council was scheduled further out to be held after the next General Conference – which meant it was by default an informal restrictions ruling.



THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Provo YSA 198th Ward  
Provo Utah YSA 14th Stake

Dear Brother Harmuth,

Thank you for participating in the Membership Councils held on your behalf on Sunday, February 19 and April 16, 2023. We felt the Spirit of the Lord helping us both understand your situation and provide individualized counsel to help you in the process of sincere repentance. We commend you for exercising your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in your voluntary confession and willingness to accept the counsel given.

The decision of the counsel was Informal Membership Restrictions. This means that you are to continue your personal counseling with the Bishop with some membership restrictions in order to give you time and focus on strengthening your relationship and trust with the Lord. Because of the circumstances of your sin, length of time before confession, and priesthood and temple covenants you have made, Formal Membership Restriction was considered. Formal Membership Restrictions include many of the same membership restrictions, but comes with a time frame of at least a year before another council would be held to consider removing membership restrictions. The council felt that informal restrictions without a year's time constraint would be better in your situation. Because of your honesty about your situation and willingness to follow the counsel of the bishop and stake president, we felt that temporary membership restrictions could be lifted before a year's time, and that you and your bishop could work together in removing restrictions when the Spirit indicates,, and without the need to convene another council.

In order to give you time in repenting of a very serious sin as a member who has made temple covenants, you will not be able to hold a temple recommend or participate in temple ordinances. You may not partake of the Sacrament until authorized to do so by the bishop. You are not to exercise the Priesthood by participating in any priesthood ordinances or blessings.

You were also given specific counsel of things that you should do or continue to do. You are to wear the temple garment both night and day as instructed in the endowment. When properly worn, the garment will be a shield and protection to you to resist further temptation. You are to continue daily personal prayer and scripture study. You were given counsel to record "I" statements in your study journal. You are to continue to attend church weekly in the ward of your membership record and to inform the bishop if you are not going to be there. You were given the assignment to be a proactive ministering brother and that you could hold a Church calling. Active service is an important component of looking beyond ourselves. You may offer public prayers, offer testimony, and participate in lessons.

THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Provo YSA 198th Ward  
Provo Utah YSA 14th Stake

The length of time of these restrictions is determined by you and your spiritual progress, as determined by the bishop. As such, you should formally report your progress to the Bishop with a meeting at least by-monthly. This is part of the principle of stewardship and accountability. You have been given a stewardship by the bishopric to follow the counsel given, and reporting on our progress or struggles in fulfilling the stewardship is an important part of growth and support.

We recognize your faith and testimony, and the respect you have for the sanctity of the temple, and for exercising the priesthood. We know that as you continue and follow this counsel, you will have power through Christ's atonement and that weak things will become a strength. We recognize that there is no way that we can work our way to forgiveness or salvation—it is through the grace of God and accepting Christ's atonement that we can repent and be clean. By your open confession and participation in the Membership Council, you demonstrated a contrite spirit and broken heart. By exercising your faith and following the counsel given, you will be showing the fruits of repentance. We love you and pray for you.

Love,



Bishop Andersen and the Provo YSA 198 Ward Bishopric

During this time I felt the rift that had widened between God and myself close, and the companionship of the Spirit once again returned. My desire to return to the temple, to regain the priesthood and use it to serve had been strengthened by that companionship I felt. After praying about the future, I felt the Spirit tell me that I was well with God again, that I would soon be able to do all those things I had desired. It was a distinct feeling, more than just that “warm fuzzy” phenomenon we associate with the ambiguous phrase “feeling the spirit” that is so haphazardly thrown around. It was the same Spirit that I had felt guide me on my mission, as an EFY counselor, and as I labored to keep others in the faith. That Spirit was strong in the council as they asked me to testify of the atonement,

tears were shed by all those in the room. Walking into the council I was confident that the outcome would be a full reinstatement — and walking away I felt more confused than ever in my life, as the verdict given to me was that the Spirit had not testified to them that I could return, and that my interpretation of my feeling was incorrect.

Suddenly, the confidence I had in my ability to discern the Spirit had vanished and my faith in the system of the Church to handle my repentance dissipated. I was told that the feeling I had received was incorrect (or that I had interpreted it incorrectly), yet it was by that same feeling that I had confirmed the validity of the truth claims of the Church — my confidence and faith in its spiritual judicial system was likewise based on that feeling. It felt like the same Spirit that I had felt inside the temple while as a worker and as a patron. I remember driving aimlessly that day, thinking of all the times I had spoken to people who had concerns over the rumors or stories about disciplinary councils, trying to put their concerns at ease by telling them that the purpose of the council was to increase their connection to the Spirit. I remember as I sat in my car, the thought shouted itself loudly over the haze, *was I wrong to believe that?*

A temple recommend is an interesting thing to me now. What does it measure? Can I trust it in the future if I ever get one again? Shall I determine my spiritual acceptance of God by the same Spiritual feeling that I was instructed by my leaders to not trust? I was taught that temples are where you go to find peace, but every time I see one I now feel pain. It is a reminder to me that what I feel cannot be trusted — that I can protest a decision (I have tried), but in the end, I have no say in my worthiness. We can make the argument that none stands blameless before God, all have sinned, and that is true — but there is no getting around what our prophets tell us, that some people get a recommend, and some do not. That piece of paper is the veil between those who our prophets say are

saved in God's kingdom, and those of us who are on the outside, between those who are worthy and those of us who are unworthy. At the end of the day in the Church as run in the mortal realm, you cannot enter the temples unless you have a piece of paper they can scan, and that piece of paper is given to you by someone else, and for reasons that are beyond your control, they may choose to not give you that piece of paper. We are told that our worthiness is in our hands, but we cannot sign both lines at the bottom of the spiritual permission slip. I cannot tell them to sign it. Ultimately, whether or not we can go to the temple, is not something we can control — if we are honest about it. That is why many people lie in their temple interviews. What is not up for debate is whether or not your possession of a recommend is totally within your control, the only debate that could be had is how much control of under 100% you do have and whether or not that percentage is right. I can see valid arguments for both sides.

I have felt another version of what we in the Church call “enduring until the end”, the pain that follows every time I am asked by my parents “When will you get your recommend back so you can come to the temple with your family?” Knowing that my broken heart, my contrite spirit, the changing of my behavior, and doing my best to be a good person are not enough has made me question the foundations of what my faith was built on.

The gospel phrase that miracles come after the trial of your faith seemed to sound a lot like “just do as you're told and then good things will happen” — something that pushes on my avoidant attachment style. I was raised in a way where I emotionally learned that positive reinforcement only comes after satisfactory performance, and although this mindset pushed me to accomplish hard things, it left me damaged to the point where my relationships suffered from its deep and lasting effects. Subsequently, I emotionally felt the drive to separate myself from the

Church; not the people, but the ecclesiastical structure. Yet even during this time, I have worked to help other people resolve their faith concerns in the direction of maintaining faith in the organization.

This paradox puzzles me to this day. I work to defend a Church I do not feel at home in. Why do I do it? Because I believe that the story of a being coming through a portal from another dimension to a kid in New York is true, and the evidence compels me to believe it — or at least provides a justifiable and probable basis for belief.

How do I make sense of my experience? I will tell you in the final chapter. A missionary recently asked me this question as I recounted my story to them. She said, “What would you do if you received an answer that you did not want to receive?” (in regards to the question of if I am ready or worthy enough to return). I thought for a few seconds before responding with a cracked voice, “Then I will continue to defend the faith of the members of a Church I am no longer a full member of.” Though, now I know why someone could know the truth in the end, and willingly choose the Terrestrial Kingdom — maybe that is where I will be. But to maintain my intellectual integrity I must argue for that which I believe to be true.

You must be asking – if I no longer trust my promptings, how can I know the gospel is true? I do not know how much is true, but I know something is there. I have in the presence of witnesses performed miracles by the power of the priesthood, which is why I relinquished it in the letter — it is a very sacred thing to me. It is something larger than myself. I have had other sufficient experiences to know that there is something special about keys, things that I cannot explain away using a naturalistic worldview. Those experiences have matured parts of what was initially faith into knowledge. Thus, I have a logical leg to stand on, something beyond the feelings given to me by the source I have been instructed to disregard. I continue to remain true to my convictions not because of an

emotional faith but because of cold reason. However, faith must rest on something real happening, or else it is blind or naive faith. Faith is a fire, unique at every point in its existence. Heat is simply when atoms are vibrating rapidly, moving, and ever-changing in their places in this three-dimensional reality. Cold is what happens when the atoms slow down until they reach a state of absolute zero - when they have ceased their movement altogether. Facts of history are those things in a state of absolute zero. They happened independently of yours or my ever-changing fires of faith. Because they are independent of us, they are the things we can stand on — to build our structures of wood to light our fires of faith on. I will not say too much about faith and reason here, that is for a later chapter (or earlier chronologically).

### **Staying In the Present**

Throughout my experience in ecclesiastical exile (which I have been told is a period of testing for me or a period where I can grow and make an unspecified transformation), I find myself thinking about my past, reliving old memories, and drowning in the depression that comes from the emotional recollection of a past self. Alma the Younger calls this being “harrowed up”.<sup>1</sup> I also find myself contemplating my future, what will it hold, will I ever return to full fellowship in this life, since it is logically possible that all subsequent bishops can not receive the confirmation of the Holy Ghost that I am welcome again into the temple walls and have made that ambiguous transformation I have been told I have yet to complete. The anxiety-inducing thought of its implications frightens me. Yet as I live in these two places, my past or my future, I neglect my present, and that is why I often feel powerless; because who I am is tied directly to my agency. I am an intelligence that can act for itself,<sup>2</sup> and the past is a

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 36:12

<sup>2</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 93:30

place where my agency has no power, the same as the future. How about peace? I cannot feel peace in the past. I can feel peace about my past (or my future) in the present. It is the present that is where my focus should be, for the present is the only point in time where eternity and agency meet.

We often talk about Christlike attributes like forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness, but the attribute that precedes all of these is that wherever He was – He was present. Aware of His surroundings and the people within His vicinity, He could see where He was needed. He was the great “I Am”.<sup>3</sup> In Christ’s mortal life, it was His “I Am” – the way that He lived in the present that gave Him power. How often could he walk the passageways of Jerusalem musing on His past heritage, or dreaming of His future mansions, but that was not how the Master lived. He lived where He stood, and where He stood He lived. So powerful was his “I Am” that as the enforcers came to the garden to take Him away to be tried and killed, when they said they were searching for Jesus of Nazareth, as soon as Christ uttered the words “I am he”, they were by an unseen force knocked on their feet and onto the ground.<sup>4</sup> The sheer power that Christ possessed because of not only who He was, but because of how He lived, was on display as a warning to his accusers, and a reassurance to His fearing apostles. He was in control. This is the first and the core of the attributes of Christ resulting in the great word that has been connected to Him. Charity is something we cannot hear without sensing the unsaid echoes of Christ’s life in it.

We have faith in the past on the things that have been passed down to us. The pleadings and warnings of prophets long gone, the testimony of a family member recently deceased, and the advice of a parent are landmarks drawn on the map that we can use to navigate our lives in this strange thing we call existence. We have faith in these things, that they knew what

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 3:14

<sup>4</sup> John 18:6 “As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.”

they were talking about, that they were present. They pray that we can have faith in their words as they have had faith in those who came before them.

Hope is like a rope we pull ourselves into the future. We have hope in what could be. Hope is what you get when you envision a life greater than the one you live and transport yourself into that realm. You will notice that you cannot have hope in the past, because the past is solid and unchangeable. You've already lived it. So if faith relies on the past, and hope is for the future, then what is in the present? It is a charity. I cannot have charity in the past, I cannot have charity in the future, because charity is tied to my agency – and the only time I can use my agency is right now. But you cannot live without all three, as each is dependent on the others. Give up faith and you lose your balance. Give up hope and your determination fades. Give up charity and your life is spent in other parts of eternity, or worse, spent in the present but in the control of your vices, making you feel powerless to what you fear. That is why the work of God requires all three. "...faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work".<sup>5</sup>

## **Why?**

So we have established that we are to live in the present, but this begs the question, live for what? Why even live at all? The 1957 Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus commented on this question in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*,

*"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has*

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<sup>5</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 4:5



*three or nine categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.*<sup>6</sup>

Each day when we rise and each day we lie to sleep we answer that question. When do we ask ourselves this question of all questions? We ask it when the dark clouds of hopelessness and despair cloud out the sun, and when life's thunderstorms force us back into the caves of the mountain. Despite all our technological advancements, we are no different than our ancestors who made their homes out of mud and clay – we all answer the same question, and our lives are evidence of the answer they chose. Despair, and its eventual maturation nihilism, is a powerful force, it should be given the respect it is due. Nihilism, the belief that life itself is meaningless, is a belief that should not be underestimated. It is the product of unyielding despair.

Still, some claim that the meaninglessness of life is where we can find philosophical safety. The logician Bertrand Russell declared:

*“That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the débris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm*

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<sup>6</sup> Camus, A. (1990). *The myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin, 5.

*foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.”<sup>7</sup>*

Just a lovely passage – from which one might be able to infer the amount of happiness Russell attained in his life. No reason for hope, it was by accident that we were born, and it would be by accident if we left (or not an accident, since an accident requires there to be a *right way* to go about life).

And where does Russell's “firm foundation of unyielding despair” ultimately lead to? A Harvard University graduate left behind a nearly 2,000-page suicide note, in which he described the project and ultimately his death as an “experiment in nihilism”. He begins by saying:

*“If there is no extant God and no extant gods, no good and no evil, no right and no wrong, no meaning and no purpose; if there are no values that are inherently valuable; no justice that is ultimately justifiable; no reasoning that is fundamentally rational, then there is no sane way to choose between science, religion, racism, philosophy, nationalism, art, conservatism, nihilism, liberalism, surrealism, fascism, asceticism, egalitarianism, subjectivism, elitism, ismism.*

*If reason is incapable of deducing ultimate, non arbitrary human ends, and nothing can be judged as ultimately more important than anything else, then freedom is equal to slavery; cruelty is equal to kindness; love is equal to hate; war is equal to peace; dignity is equal to contempt; destruction is equal to creation; life is equal to death and death is equal to life.”<sup>8</sup>*

He goes on to say how he dedicated his life to the path that nihilist Friedrich Nietzsche described as the will-to-power, a continual rebirth and

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<sup>7</sup> Russell, B. (1923). *A free man's worship* (Vol. 97). TB Mosher, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Heisman, M. (2010). *suicide note*, 20-21.

overcoming what we currently are to become something stronger, dominant, and powerful.

*“Combining Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power, and especially the idea of overcoming one’s self, with foundationally anti-Nietzschean, unromantic and materialistic self-view, I basically turned myself into a kind of war machine with the singular aim of overcoming my weaknesses in the cause of life.”<sup>9 10</sup>*

What this author displayed was an inward mindset, and that is why his discoveries always led to sadness. Perhaps if he had seen power as a means to an end instead of just the end itself he would have become a force for good in his community. He was smart, but was too busy chasing reason to see that it is not something that can bring you joy. I am afraid that he mistook the tool for the creation. Reason’s purpose is to help us move into a state where we do not think about it, a state where we are just *living*.

At what points in our lives do we not ask the question *is life worth living*? It is when we are swept away in the arms of companionship, of friendship, of love, and the maturation of all these things: joy. We are not burdened because we feel depressed and stagnant, we are burdened because we know what it is like to not feel that way. To be a member of the Church of the Lamb of God (and I am not referring to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), means that we will stand as a barrier between those who are contemplating giving up the last of their hope, and the gospel of unyielding despair. We are to be ambassadors of joy.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 1861

<sup>10</sup> *Some might object to me bringing suicide into the discussion in a book not specifically dedicated to addressing the problem of suicide, since you probably picked this up to read about theology. But hopelessness must be given its due, and be challenged head on. Doubt must be shown respect or it never gives up its cynicism.*

## **About this Joy**

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof.”<sup>11</sup> Is this joy when we finally move on past pain? When we enter a state of eternal rest where no more sadness is felt? If that is what we seek, then perhaps we might be disappointed to one day know for ourselves the true extent of the hurt that comes with omniscience. This deep pain and anguish surprised Enoch, who in a vision saw Satan and his angels laughing while holding a chain over a darkened earth, with the great God crying. He then asked God essentially “You created everything, you have all power, how are you crying?” And God responded, “How could I not, knowing that my children are in pain?”<sup>12</sup> With greater consciousness requires a greater strength to match the pain that it brings. Whatever definition of joy we give to our Heavenly parents, it must make room for the pain that godhood brings. The theologian Paul Tillich calls this godly joy blessedness.

“For joy has something within itself, which is beyond joy and sorrow. This something is called blessedness. Blessedness is the eternal element in joy, that which makes it possible for joy to include in itself the sorrow out of which it arises, and which takes it into itself.”<sup>13</sup>

He argues that “It preserves in itself its opposite, sorrow.”<sup>14</sup> Lehi would have gotten along well with Tillich. He too argued not only that we exist to have joy, but that with that joy, there must be an equal despair – an opposition to all things. Opposites give each other their form – old and

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, J. F. (2009). *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Messenger Publications, 255.

<sup>12</sup> Moses 7:26-37

<sup>13</sup> Tillich, P. (2005). *The new being*. U of Nebraska Press, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 151.

new, peace and conflict, darkness and light, chaos and order, virtue and vice, pleasure and pain.

But that is a very abstract and aloof explanation of joy, what about something that is more tangible and understandable? Perhaps you feel joy when you do not realize it, because you are too busy *living* to realize it. It is best described as when we feel the most alive when our full being is called upon to perform, and our whole being responds. When I was a track athlete I would periodically be running a race and, for lack of a better phrase, *feel fast*. I could feel my legs almost moving on their own at a speed I knew was faster than I could go. I knew I should be in substantially more pain than I was in, but for some reason, it felt like my legs decided that they would go faster. I could feel my body entering a new gear of performance, that I had surpassed the runner that I once was, that I was faster, better, stronger, and in that moment, the world around me faded to silence. It was as if there was only myself on that track – it was me running against me, and I knew I could outrun myself. And as I sped up, I said goodbye to what I once was. This state of confidence, of pride, of realizing I had more control over my agency, that I was a new creature, is what the researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.<sup>15</sup> We enter a state where we are so enveloped in what we are doing, where time is distorted and our focus is so precise and our full capacity is called upon. Perhaps we can think of this state as the state in which the full concentrated power of our agency, our current grasp of it, is being harnessed – where our past selves merge with our future selves, and between the two infinities of past and potential are crossed. We witness *progress* only as we can observe our place *between* the two infinities. In this state, we witness all our faculties or inner forces that are so often distracted or at odds with each other, merge their focus and effort towards achieving one goal. We are *at-one* with our agency and feel

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<sup>15</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2013). *Flow: The psychology of happiness*. Random House.

our control over it increase. Our trust and confidence in ourselves expands, it is our creation.

Feeling ourselves in the flow state and increasing our capacity to harness our agency is not the end of the journey of joy, because all our skills and achievements mean little to just us, we crave someone to share it with. To collectively witness the growth of the group places us in a state of unity. We are all *at-one* together, not just because we all witness our individual growth, but because in our rejoicing together, we feel accepted and at home. Our trust and confidence in each other expands, it is our creation.

Do we long to feel at home, or the trust that comes with being home? Do we wish to feel good about ourselves, or confidence in ourselves? We may be able to artificially inflate our self-esteem, or convince ourselves that uniting with others is beneficial to us, but what cannot be faked, is confidence and trust. These lay beyond emotions and logic, they are their products, their creations.

There we see the state of joy, the creation of trust – which is the same as creating confidence (increasing in stature).<sup>16</sup> It is this creation that can counter the eternally demanding question that nihilism asks of us, *why exist?* Confidence must be there to counter hopelessness, and confidence is given its form only because hopelessness is there to ask the question, just as God brought light into the world when it was already dark.<sup>17</sup> Confidence is never more experienced than when we lose ourselves in the service of others, in an act of selfless creation.

### **Like the Maker**

It is this state of creation that our intelligences yearn for – our souls carry the Maker's prints on them. We organize our agency within

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 2:52

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 1:3

ourselves, and then we organize ourselves within a group with those on the same frequency as us. The Catholic writer Dorothy Sayers commented that “the characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things”, and then went on to comment on intelligences. “Though we cannot create matter, we continually, by rearrangement, create new and unique entities.” Just as our fires of faith change continually, our relationships with others also change, never the same at two different points along the axis of eternity. That is because *relationships are our faith* in people, either less or more.

People who are moving up want to surround themselves with those who are moving up too. Those spiraling down gather near others who are also spiraling down. We gravitate towards those who have similar goals, aspirations, and dispositions – those whose faith feels like our own. It is our path in life to find that faith that enables God to command the loyalty of the intelligences He has organized, who follow Him not out of fear, but out of love. It is this confidence I seek, the confidence that I can find in a true Creator. I find Him not by sight, but by feeling.

The strength to answer the great eternal cynicism of nihilism we need the strength of a Creator, the joy that comes from creating and organizing what once was into what things could be – the confidence that comes with being at-one with ourselves and at-one with others. The power of creation is the power of agency, and the present is the only point in eternity where time and our agency meet, and all the attributes of Christ exist on that principle. To become a creator we must all develop confidence in what is true for ourselves.

## **Preface**

It is not easy to write a book that is in a very real way, a condemnation against myself and how I choose to live. I find it ironic to be writing a book about trust when I have broken it so many times – both

with myself and with others. Upon completing it I find myself still unsatisfied, unable to fully put into words what has been given to me in whispers and in dreams. I see through a glass darkly and I write what I can half-perceive imperfectly. Do I further complicate the message I wish to convey? Maybe, but that does not mean one should not try. Perhaps it is called the sword of truth because it cuts into us, showing us how inadequate we are – but at the same time, it allows us to behold what the truth could be. It gives us a condemnation and a vision at the same time. Is it a blessing or a curse? It could be both. Maybe those two words are more similar to each other than they are opposites.

In this book, I will write under the assumption that The Book of Mormon was translated by a divine and supernatural (if there is such a thing) means – and subsequently that the other restoration scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are valid sources of knowledge. The justification for my belief in them will not be in this book. If you are not a member of my faith, consider this to be an interesting cruise along the strait of my beliefs, and perhaps an enlightening vision of the grand plan my faith tradition professes belief in.

There are many more things I wanted to include in this book, but for the sake of brevity, I have kept it at the length it is. If I sound repetitive in this book, it is on purpose, some concepts I want to hammer in so that they will be remembered. If this book does not live up to your standards for spiritual or intellectual fulfillment, I apologize. I am not a white collar Ph.D. holding academic, or even a seminary teacher – I am merely a twenty-five year old FedEx driver who wrote most of this book after my shift in the Magna, Utah hub break room.

I wrote this book first and foremost as an answer to myself a question that I always have in the back of my head: *What do I really believe?* It is my sure foundation, paid for by my pain and tears, and by the exertion of my faculties of reason and faith to their fullest capacities. It is



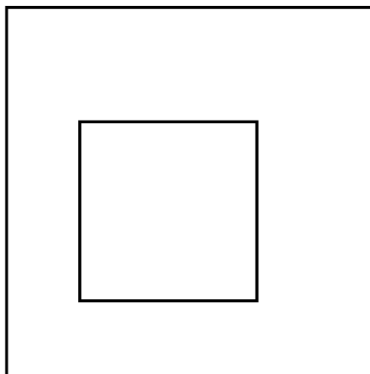
my offering – it is my, to steal the words of Oswald Chambers, “My Utmost for His Highest”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Chambers, O. (2022). *My utmost for his highest*. Christian Classics Reproductions.

# Chapter 2

## The Spirit of Questioning



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*“Just now it is much in fashion to laud ‘the simple faith’; which is content to believe without understanding, or even without much effort to understand. I maintain that ‘simple faith’ (which is so often ignorant and simpering acquiescence) without understanding of the thing believed, is not equal to intelligent faith, rational faith, in which the intellect as well as the heart has a place and is a factor.”*

*- Elder B.H. Roberts<sup>1</sup>, recognized as the most respected defender of the Mormon Faith and Latter-day Saint intellectual leader<sup>2</sup>*

### Challenging My Teacher and the Class

The teacher had been telling the class for roughly five minutes that reason was the opposition to faith, and that we did not need to try and make sense of the *why* of what we believed, but to just have faith and obey.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts, Seventy's Course in Theology, 5:iv-v.

<sup>2</sup> Stan Larson, “Intellectuals in Mormon History: an Update,” *Dialogue* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 187-189.

After a short while I shot my hand up, not waiting to be called on, I said (more loudly than I had anticipated) “I have a question!”

The teacher stopped walking in front of the room and turned to face me. “Oh, what is it?” they asked, and my response may have been a bit brash. In a constant stream uninterrupted by breathing or pause, the words spilled out of my mouth.

“What if I don’t like that answer? What if personality-wise I am anti-hierarchical, I don’t agree with following an authority figure without a good reason to.<sup>3</sup> I don’t like being told what to do and if someone tells me to just accept something on faith it makes me not want to follow whatever it is?<sup>4</sup> What if I want to understand what I am doing and blind faith seems like a dangerous way of acting? What role does reason play in building a testimony, does it compete with faith or work with it and how so?”

The teacher looked at me for a second and said, “Getting to the deep questions now, can I open this up to the class?” I nodded.

The first person told me about Adam building the altar, and when being asked by the angel why he was offering sacrifices, he said he did not understand why, he just knew that he was commanded to. I responded that Adam was literally talking with a being that emerged from a portal from another dimension and he actually talked with God, so maybe the situation is different with us. More responses were directed to me, to which I would respond with another probing question, and then one person raised their hand behind me and said, “Actually, I’m like that too, I

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<sup>3</sup> *Authority must be earned in order to not be questioned. The military is a good example for following authority, since advancing in rank is indicative of performance and merit. They have earned the right to instruct you.*

<sup>4</sup> *Reasons for belief require well articulated justifications on the part of the one demanding obedience. This is different from withholding explanations for reasons such as national defense (compartmentalized information). Religious reasons should be eagerly given to devotees and questioning should be encouraged.*

think reason is important, and I am also...how did you put it...anti-hierarchical.”

More people raised their hands and voiced their agreement with him. Soon the class was divided, those advocating for acceptance on faith alone, and some advocating for needing something beyond faith in addition to it. It was all very satisfying to me to know that people in the class now had the courage to speak their mind with some confidence, and that their personal doubt was not something that had to be swept under the rug of anonymity and taboo. Said Elder Hugh B. Brown: “I believe we should doubt some of the things we hear. Doubt has a place if it can stir in one an interest to go out and find the truth for one’s self.”<sup>5</sup>

## **A Defense**

To discredit reason itself, to declare it as unimportant to the building of a testimony is a tragic error. To do so would be to discredit countless hours Nephi dedicated to “write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ”.<sup>6</sup> Or his brother Jacob, who said that he and his brother “labored diligently among our people, that we might persuade them to come unto Christ, and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest”.<sup>7</sup> And how about Paul, who says of his own testimony “I know, and am persuaded”.<sup>8</sup>

But reason is merely an exercise we perform to make sense of what we are experiencing. How do we order the information we have possessed into systems of knowledge, and how does this knowledge apply to the world?

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, H. B., & Firmage, E. B. (1988). *An abundant life: the memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*. Signature Books.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Nephi 25:23; see also 1 Nephi 19:18 “that perhaps I might persuade them...”

<sup>7</sup> Jacob 1:7 ; see also Mormon 3:22 “...that I could persuade all ye ends of the earth to repent and prepare to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

<sup>8</sup> Romans 14:14 “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.”

For these questions the Lord has invited us to “come...and with him that cometh I will reason as with men in days of old, and I will show unto you my strong reasoning....let me show unto you even my wisdom”.<sup>9</sup> If we are to love God with all our being, perhaps we should include all parts of our being, our heart, desires, might, and mind. What more to us is there besides our desires (heart), our faith (might), and our intellect (mind)? We are limited in our current form, our intellects have bounds, as our ability to perceive reality is dismal. Not only can we not observe all the colors on the spectrum, but we cannot hear all the voices around us. Those whispers from beyond the veil of our limited sensory abilities go unheard from our perspective – and yet the whispers of the spirits continue to each other. If you are in a room, thinking you are alone, and then all of a sudden you hear a sound from the other side of the room, your attention will turn towards what you have just perceived. A gap exists, since we cannot study consciousness in its entirety, since to do so would require us to experience consciousness without the aid of consciousness; we can conclude that consciousness itself is outside the range of perception itself. And since we can only act on what we perceive, none of us act in relation to truth itself – we only can act on our limited perception of truth. This should not diminish our attempts to comprehend it though, for both the purposes of knowing, and loving.

Is not the God of heaven pleased when we reach with our reason and intellect to understand His knowledge and His mysteries? For how can we not love what we cannot know? There is no salvation without knowledge, for “Knowledge saves a man;” says Joseph Smith, “and in the world of spirits no man can be exalted but by knowledge”.<sup>10</sup> If reasoning is required then reasoning is expected, and finally it is even commanded.

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<sup>9</sup> D&C 45:10-11; see also 2 Nephi 26:27 “...he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.”

<sup>10</sup> Smith, J. (1844, April). The King Follett Discourse. In *General Conference Meeting*.

“...thus saith the Lord...bear testimony in every place, unto every people and in their synagogues, reasoning with the people”.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Spirit of Questioning**

The spirit of questioning is not new, a certain class of people are always inclined to do so. Everyone feels the right to question that which they do not accept as true, but not everyone allows the same courtesy for their idea of truth. When it comes to the truth claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or disagreements with its current (or past) teachings, distrust of leaders, predicated on their careful analysis of observable facts, they are usually treated with feigned support from members of a group, who will want to preserve the group’s purity by punishing actions that deviate from what is acceptable – often unknowingly. The one who questions or challenges authority or teachings will be labeled as a problem to be dealt with. Devoted members will tell them to simply put their ideas aside and follow the prophet, without answering the general question of should we follow something that we do not believe to be right? But these people do not understand what it is like to question the foundations of belief – they have grown up in the faith, it is true by default, how could someone not believe in it or see that it is good? Why is this person questioning what they have learned as a child? Why do they question the teachings of the living prophets when they have had the lyrics “follow the prophet, he knows the way” drilled into their core? It is easy, just don’t question the voice of God that comes through these men. Why are they making a big deal out of something that is insignificant, or rejecting something that is so obviously true or good?

Unlike the fire we are used to, methanol based fires are invisible to the naked eye since they burn colorless. High methanol concentration fuel

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<sup>11</sup> D&C 66:1,7 “Go unto the eastern lands, bear testimony in every place, unto every people and in their synagogues, reasoning with the people.”

was used in race cars, and videos of drivers scrambling out of their crashed cars clawing at themselves while appearing just fine on the outside show how dangerous they are. This fire is however visible in the dark, burning with a light blue hue. For those members that live in a state where they question nothing that is told to them, who live in the light, they look at those who are burning with an invisible fire and tell the person that they are alright, and to just stand still. They have no idea the desperation and the pain that comes from having a fire set underneath your worldview, often brought about by an unwanted experience that contradicts what we have been taught or led to believe. Their trust for leaders is diminished by statements that do not give doubt its due, such as the much repeated “doubt your doubts before you doubt your faith” that has been ingrained into the standard cultural vocabulary. When they have grown up in a Church that claims to value truth so much, when they hear statements that seem like leaders are motivated to hide facts from the ordinary member, their trust is shattered and they feel betrayed. This mental grappling is the invisible fire that covers those that struggle to breathe the fresh air of confidence of truth. Many members who go through this baptism by fire are plunged into the depths of doubt, and those who have never doubted do not have the skills necessary to swim into the river to rescue them.

In addition to this, there is a strain of intellectual hypocrisy that runs through the members of our faith, as it does with members of any devoted group of people to an idea or a movement who engage in missionary work (secular or religious). Our missionaries often run into that family or individual that was “born Catholic, and will die Catholic”. In our culture, giving the possibility that what we have been taught might be false is discouraged, and yet we ask people of other faiths to question their ideas of what is true. And when they respond with an unwillingness to hear our message (which to them is a false message delivered to lead

them away from the truth), we label their behavior as prideful. Yet we tell our children to never question the words of the living prophets. We want them to be “born a Latter-day Saint and die a Latter-day Saint”. In other words, we label the same closed off behavior in ourselves as righteous devotion and steadfastness as prideful stiffneckedness in others. We should admire their devotion to their idea of truth as much as we admire it in ourselves, as well as be willing to question what we believe to be true as we invite others to do so – otherwise we are hypocrites.

If a new idea is presented to you and you accept it without thought or consideration, just as not accepting any new light and knowledge, you do not use your whole being. If you care about truth you must care about what is true, and to carry that out is to subject what is being taught to rigorous tests of knowledge. If we were not meant to do this, why would the Lord provide witnesses for the Book of Mormon plates, to let them handle them among other objects, and bear their witness so that others might be willing to consider, and exercise their reason to faith that the story might be true? Says Elder Widstoe, “The youth of our day, in their approach to knowledge, are thinking for themselves. For that let us be grateful. And may they think straight, so that truth may not pass them by unrecognized!”<sup>12</sup>

What is true may not be accepted because it is presented in a way that makes no sense. A reason why some movies do not do well is because they do not make sense. A review on a blog about a movie saying “I did not understand what I just watched” is not a flattering review. We use stories to make sense of the world — and some stories are not told well. When sharing the message of the Gospel to a friend, you start off with why a restoration is needed before expecting them to accept a restoration idea. A logical presentation of the gospel is our duty if we believe our duty is to share the gospel. People accept what they believe is acceptable, so let us

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<sup>12</sup> Widstoe, J. A. (1930). *In search of truth: Comments on the gospel and modern thought..* [quote found in Prefatory Note]



present the gospel acceptable not to replace faith, but to allow faith to take root. Says the English philosopher Austin Farrer, “For though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish”.<sup>13</sup>

And when the points are raised to question our beliefs, as we should expect all people of a good sound mind to do, and if we are to be disciples of Christ let us then “...honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...”.<sup>14</sup>

## **A Legacy**

This task of showing the reasonableness of faith has been taken up by many, from early advocates raising the pen such as Elder Parley P. Pratt (*Key to the Science of Theology* [1855]), Elder B.H. Roberts (*New Witness for God* [1895], *A Defense of the Faith and the Saints* [1907]), Elder James E. Talmage (*The Philosophical Basis of Mormonism*, which he presented in front of The Congress of Religious Philosophies on July 29, 1915; *The Vitality of Mormonism* [1917]), and Elder John A. Widtsoe (*In Search of Truth, Evidences and Reconciliations, A Rational Theology* [1930]). When Fawn Brodie’s book *No Man Knows My History* was published in 1945 it caused a stir. It used questionable sources that framed Joseph Smith in dim light and the academic community began to take on a closer interest at the history and origin of the Church. Hugh Nibley swiftly responded with his work *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie’s Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose*.<sup>15</sup> Nibley with his command of 14 languages and a photographic memory rose to the defense

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<sup>13</sup> Farrer, Austin. "The Christian Apologist." *Light on CS Lewis* 26 (1965).

<sup>14</sup> 1 Peter 3:15, ESV

<sup>15</sup> Nibley, H. (1990). *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History* (pp. 257-318). Garland. (1946).

of the prophet and The Book of Mormon in showing its connections to ancient cultures. He along with his contemporaries Sidney Sperry and Max Jakeman turned the study of the gospel into a more formal academic discipline.<sup>16</sup> The long-standing tradition of helping clear the weeds of misconceptions of Christianity that make it seem unappealing to some and outright absurd to others is a task that all should be engaged in to some degree. This task of defending the gospel is referred to as *apologetics*, which meant a logical defense long before it meant to ask for forgiveness.<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis thought of it as a duty for those who have the capacity to effectively advocate truth have the duty to do so, and to stand as a barrier and a bridge between what is true and what is not, casting our light of knowledge like a life-preserver to those who may not have as much understanding. “To be ignorant and simple now -- not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground -- would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen”.<sup>18</sup>

We should use our faculty of reason to advocate what we believe effectively, as well as to defend our beliefs to those who honestly question them. If an idea is held up as important it deserves to be questioned, and to think otherwise would be intellectually dishonest.

We should not fear questioning, we should not fear light. The only thing that should be frowned upon is dishonesty. When discussing the complicated parts of our history as a people, Howard W. Hunter advocated for the spirit of open questioning. He thought that we, the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, were mature

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<sup>16</sup> Hill, M. S. (1976). Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny, 300.

<sup>17</sup> *The verse that shows this best is 1 Peter 3:15, with the Greek word being apologian [ἀπολογία]. Plato's The Apology of Socrates is a recount of Socrates being defiant towards the Athenian court, giving his defense. The word apology did not change its meaning to what we understand it today to be until the late 1500's.*

<sup>18</sup> C.S. Lewis at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, Autumn, 1939.

enough to have mature conversations.<sup>19</sup> The suppression of free inquiry by in some cases the leaders of the Church<sup>20</sup>, as well as the culture created by members who's desire was for stability and faith, has led to many members lose their trust.<sup>21</sup> One of the foundations of trust is transparency. We should encourage a spirit of honest questioning because after all, that is what started this whole Restoration. If you honestly believe in the Restoration, you believe in questions.

## **A Critique**

Though reason is important, it is not perfect. Just how faith can be misplaced so can reason, and we will discuss further how reason works later. But because reason has been used in opposition to faith in general, those who are faithful are skeptical of it, using their reason to combat reason.

The first mistake is to assume that all reasoning is the same. First, the reasoning of whether or not a tree branch will fall on someone walking and the reasoning of how to order a society are different exercises. But they have one thing in common: use of premises.

Reason is only as good as the premises, or foundation blocks it can work with; like having five legos of all different colors. You can arrange the legos in different ways but you can only create something that has five colors. Add more blocks with different colors and you can create more advanced structures with more color combinations. These blocks are our biases, experiences, desires, and the information we have gathered. If someone not of our faith hears that we discourage our members from

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<sup>19</sup> Bergera, G. J. (1971). *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971–1997*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Stoddard, L. Hannah, and James F. Stoddard. *Faith Crisis. Leonard Arrington & the Progressive Rewriting of Mormon History*. Salem, UT, UT: Joseph Smith Foundation, 2020, p. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Riess, J. (2019). *The next Mormons: How millennials are changing the LDS church*. Oxford University Press.

reading the New Testament, their image of us as un-Christian is logical. Only with the introduction of further knowledge can this image be changed.

So too with us, not all testimonies are equal. Some foundations are created with wrong ideas, and these ideas weaken the structure. Someone may have a really tall tower, a zeal for the Church and you may think to yourself, “they are solid, they would never leave” and then they shock you by leaving. Do not mistake emotion for strength. I call this the *Tall Tower of Faith* fallacy. The tower is tall, so one would think the foundation is deep and strong, but that is not always the case. We should seek to find where our foundations are cracked (being able to do so because of reason) and strengthen our beliefs, switching out false ideas for correct ones. There is a foundation upon which if we build we cannot fall. Again, that was what the Restoration was all about.

Joseph Smith said that it is not just essential that we believe that God exists, but that we have “...a *correct* idea of his character, perfections and attributes”.<sup>22</sup> There exists the correct and true idea, outside of what we may create in our mind, or perhaps what beliefs one might have inherited from a previous generation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, Joseph. *Lectures on faith*. Zion's Camp Books, 1988.

<sup>23</sup> *Much of the beliefs of modern Christianity are inherited from the Christian Creeds such as the Nicene Creed, The Apostles Creed and the Athenasian Creed, which superimposed Greek philosophy over the Hebrew God. Changes to God's nature were already underway in the first centuries of the Church by people trying to make Christianity appealing to the Greek philosophers. These blending of teachings resulted in paradoxes such as: a God who is touched by our suffering is also a God who is without passions or outside influences; a God who came to Earth and experienced a variety of emotional states that were affected by time and circumstance is also an unchangeable God; a God who is without body parts as the creeds declare it had a body; only good things come from God who created everything out of nothing, but this God cannot create evil (Hell or evil), which means logically there must be something outside of God that is not good who could create them; a God that interacts with other consciousnesses (the Godhead) is actually one consciousness because neo-Platonism states that God is “the One”. These paradoxes, among others, exist. The fundamentals of modern Christianity and the LDS doctrine of intelligences, with our spirits being the same species as God and thus having the same potential and dignity as God stand*

In The Book of Mormon, these incorrect ideas are exemplified by Nehor, and his philosophy that Christ's grace saves you no matter what – and so there is no need to live a certain way. It is also personified as the unbelievers right before Christ's coming to the New World, who proclaimed

*“...it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come; if so, and he be the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, as it has been spoken, why will he not show himself unto us as well as unto them who shall be at Jerusalem?”*<sup>24</sup>

Reason again, is only as good as the building blocks it has, that the person accepts as valid.

Reason also is not the seed of tenacity and strength, though it helps us understand it. Strength is in the realm of faith, and courage is the product of all three working together: faith, reason, agency. Reason alone cannot stand against life. To those who rely solely on reason “...all this argumentation avails them very little when the lightning falls on the roof tree, or the Angel of Death spreads his black wings over the house”.<sup>25</sup>

Nor are we content just in being the one who questions, playing the role of the unyielding skeptic who, in not wanting to build a home anywhere, must say that we do not firmly believe in anything, which is a symptom of spiritual commitment issues. This is no basis for a peaceful life – it is no basis for love either if one would want that eventually. Our ultimate joy is not to question but to respond to a question.<sup>26</sup> The pleasure

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*at odds.* [See David Paulson's “Harmonization of Paradox” entry in The Encyclopedia of Mormonism]

<sup>24</sup> Helaman 16:18; see also v 15-16: “...began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom, saying: Some things they may have guessed right, among so many; but behold, we know that all these great and marvelous works cannot come to pass, of which has been spoken.”

<sup>25</sup> Jacks, Lawrence Pearsall. *Religious perplexities*. George H. Doran Company, 1922, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Rasmussen, Dennis. *The Lord's Question: Thoughts on the Life of Response*. Provo, UT, UT: Keter Foundation, 1985, p. 4.

of always questioning the teacher is exceeded by answering a difficult question posed by them successfully.

Something about questioning must also be addressed, and that is the distinction between truth seekers and deaf questioners. I join in the choir singing against those who follow by faith blindly – never questioning the instructions handed to them. I believe it is dangerous and intellectually lazy. In my criticism of this however, the person singing the song of questioning next to me then displays the same unwavering and unquestioning devotion to another set of principles. Criticisms of their position are not allowed, and counter arguments will be labeled with their choice of dissent-diffusing terminology. This person has fallen into a case of epistemological schizophrenia, which is employing harsh and penetrating examination to one set of beliefs while criticizing the stifling of dissent, *while simultaneously* deploying the same tactics they just criticized when it comes to their own deeply held sacred beliefs. Either you allow criticism of everything, or you relinquish the right to complain about hush-tactics used to isolate you and your criticisms. To have it both ways is to feign a position of free intellectual inquiry and expression, but to deny the spirit thereof. Again, if an idea is professed to be important it must also not just welcome inquiry and criticism, but *demand* it. The deaf questioner can not be held to their own standard, and if called out they close their ears. Even the Lord Himself invited us to question Him – do we think ourselves above that?<sup>27</sup>

Since reason can be misused, influenced by our shortsightedness, blind spots, and insufficient knowledge, we must seek out new knowledge. We must be explorers in a vast sea of information, searching the cosmos of wisdom for that which is most useful to us. Only then can we build a most satisfying existence, and fully exercise our faith in the correct understanding of Jesus Christ. And when we encounter false ideas,

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<sup>27</sup> Micah 6:3 NIV “My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.”

because ideas have real world consequences we should be the advocate of what is true, the light on a hill, pointing our beams of knowledge towards the safe harbor of Christ.

## The Risk

There is a question which must be addressed: *is the knowledge of the full story of the restoration, an awareness of all facts no matter how uncomfortable, worth knowing if it could lead one to lose their testimony?* Efforts to shield members from complicated parts of our history have been sustained by more temperamentally conservative General Authorities, from Elders Boyd K. Packer,<sup>28</sup> Ezra Taft Benson,<sup>29</sup> and Joseph Fielding Smith,<sup>30</sup> while others argued that more honesty with the general membership should prevail – with the proponents of openness being

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<sup>28</sup> Boyd K. Packer: *Those willing to tell the full story "may unwittingly be giving 'equal time' to the adversary," because "teaching some things that are true prematurely or at the wrong time, can invite sorrow and heartbreak instead of the joy intended to accompany learning." Though it is unclear when he thought complicated facts should be taught.* [Packer, "The Mantle," 265.]

<sup>29</sup> Elder Benson promoted the use of spies in the Church Education system to report on professors with which he personally disagreed with on matters of politics and racial views, for example who believed that interracial marriages were morally permissible, or who supported the Martin Luther King led civil rights efforts. Elder Benson believed Civil Rights was a movement orchestrated by Communists, and they were using African-Americans as tools. He wanted to fire university professors who sympathized with the movement "to make an example of one or two of them to let them know that BYU is going to insist on the teaching of Mormon economics, Mormon principles of government and that these principles are part of the great Gospel plan." See the Wilkinson Presidential Papers for the letters by Benson calling for professors to be fired in Box 186, Folder 3, Box 378, Folder 5, Box 461, Folder 8.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith makes no mention of Joseph Smith's polygamy in his book *Essentials in Church History*. Though he does give attention to the Mountain Meadows Massacre, when a Mormon Militia executed a caravan of families under a false flag of peace.

Elder B.H. Roberts,<sup>31</sup> Howard W. Hunter,<sup>32</sup> and President David O. McKay.<sup>33</sup> Their quotations are in the footnotes.

I was discussing this with a friend on what should and should not be talked about during Sunday School, she said that controversial things should not be brought up because it might shatter someone's testimony. My question is: what testimony are they losing? Are they really losing *their* testimony, or a testimony handed to them? Perhaps you might argue that keeping an inherited faith is better than losing it, but I believe this is a fear based approach to the question. Were we not sent here to test our faith?<sup>34</sup> Would this attitude of intellectual sheltering be hindering that plan? What if their beliefs were wrong? Are we not out here to find the truth? Brigham Young said we have a duty to study evil, to examine the good and the bad, to understand views different from our own.<sup>35</sup> How can one use their agency if they do not know any other way of thinking than their own? It is reminiscent of John Stuart Mill's idea he posed in his classic essay *On Liberty*,

*"He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them.*

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<sup>31</sup> See the quote at the beginning of the chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Howard W. Hunter: *Leonard J. Arrington, Church Historian records in his journal that Elder Hunter said that he believed the Latter-day Saints were mature enough to have mature conversations.* [Bergera, G. J. (1971). *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971–1997*, 3.]

<sup>33</sup> David O. McKay: *"Responding to General Authorities wanting to excommunicate more liberal members of the Church for their publications, Pres. McKay held them at bay and defended the right of the individual to challenge traditional narratives. "President McKay would say, and two or three times I heard him say privately, and once or twice publicly in meetings where I sat, that "if you would have to take action on that kind of a person thinking that way, you'd better take action on me, too."* [Elder Paul H. Dunn interview, October 6, 1995.]

<sup>34</sup> Abraham 3:25 "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;"

<sup>35</sup> *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941, pp. 256–57) "It is your duty to study to know everything upon the face of the earth, in addition to reading those books. We should not only study good, and its effects upon our race, but also evil, and its consequences."



*But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion”.*<sup>36</sup>

It is also worth noting that in the same book, Mill comments on the dismal treatment of the Mormon missionaries and the lack of intellectual honesty on the part of the British people to hear them out.<sup>37</sup>

How can agency be used in its fullest capacity unless our reason shows our faith the full picture of what there is to choose? People in the Church have questions, and if their questions and doubts are not met with respect, then they will go to those who show them that respect. It is the duty of those in the Church who have the capacity to meet those on the crossroads of decision to make the best case for their side, without demeaning the validity of the concern of the individual. It is the honesty of the apologist and the defender that opens the mind of the disgruntled and the doubting. It should precede the argument. We are open to those who share our same spirit, Paul knew this.

*“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mill, J. S., & De Quincey, T. (1885). On liberty. [Chapter 2].

<sup>37</sup> “I cannot refrain from adding to these examples of the little account commonly made of human liberty, the language of downright persecution which breaks out from the press of this country whenever it feels called on to notice the remarkable phenomenon of Mormonism.” Ibid. Chapter

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-22

This means that often it is only the skeptical that can reach the skeptic, because the questioning skeptic can trust them emotionally, and then open up intellectually. It is the job for those who have never doubted to step aside, they do not have the right tools for this job.

With this full picture of all facts, from sources ranging from biased for and against, from sources both reputable and questionable, we enter a maelstrom of information that takes effort, perseverance, and the spirit of discernment and the aid of the Holy Ghost to navigate. But into the storm we must go, if we are to leave the safe space of our inherited walls and venture into that great adventure of faith. We come into contact with facts that muddy the waters, not everything is so black and white. Church history was not that clean picture we learned in CTR 8, but perhaps it is not as vile as our most critical friends claim it to be. After doing the hard work of learning by study and by faith, we realize that there is a more mature way of looking at history and doctrine.<sup>39</sup> Elder Bruce C. Hafen in his book *Faith is Not Blind*, calls this the move from simplicity, to complexity, to the simplicity after complexity.<sup>40</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, one of the founders of Western philosophy, calls this maturation process the thesis (original belief), antithesis (opposite view in every way), then synthesis (a reconciliation, or merge of the two views).<sup>41</sup>

Joseph Smith taught that if we do not come into contact with opposing philosophies then we cannot reach the fullness of our potential to be utilized by God. Many members have heard Joseph's self description of being a "rough stone rolling" in reference to being imperfect, but few have heard the rest of the quote.

*"...and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force*

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<sup>39</sup> D&C 88:118 "seek learning, even by study and also by faith"

<sup>40</sup> Hafen, Bruce C., and Marie K. Hafen. *Faith Is Not Blind*. Deseret Book Company, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> *If we get really technical, these terms were not used by Hegel himself but it was what his philosophy described. These terms were coined by Johann Fichte who was explaining Hegel's views.*

*against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty”<sup>42</sup>*

I believe that having a real testimony, one based on truth—a deep understanding of the truth and its opposite, is worth taking a step off the boat and seeing if we can walk on the water. Let us have the attitude of courage, let us say: “Give me the best arguments of both sides, prove me herewith, have faith in me as I was sent here to try my reason and my faith. Let me have my own, real witness.”

### **In Sum:**

Joseph Smith would invite other pastors to preach in the chapel, wanting the Latter-Day Saints to know what was being taught, he did not fear examining and hearing differing views, he was not closed off. His successor Brigham Young waited years before joining the Church to satisfy his reason and not just his faith, waiting to see if the fruits of this young religion and its leaders were worth believing and carrying on. Joseph Smith in his lectures in The School of the Prophets began by explaining faith as the beginning of action: “...turn their thoughts and reflections to the operations of their own minds, they would readily discover that it is faith, and faith only, which is the moving cause of all action, in them...” [Lecture 1:10]. In Lecture 3, Joseph then explains that faith in Jesus Christ relies on our foundation of knowledge of Him. “...it was by reason of the knowledge of his existence, that there was a foundation laid for the exercise of faith in him...For faith could not center in a being of whose existence we

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<sup>42</sup> *History of the Church*, 5:401

had no idea; because the idea of his existence in the first instance is essential to the exercise of faith in him..." [Lecture 3:1].

Furthermore, I have spoken about reason being used as a tool for defense, which is true. "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason because bad philosophy must be answered".<sup>43</sup> To love God would mean we strive to be ready to defend His character against claims such as Him being "arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction," claims Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion*, "jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak..."<sup>44</sup> Or perhaps if we are to correct misconceptions such as we deter our members from reading the Bible.<sup>45</sup> If someone is to reject us, let them reject the real us.

However, reason is much more enjoyed when used as a method for advancing and exploring. You have heard the saying the best defense is a good offense. So too would agree Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert Millet, "A proper understanding of gospel principles is the most eloquent and effective defense of the faith".<sup>46</sup> It is easier and more satisfying to paint a really good picture, to tell a very compelling and awe inspiring story that captures the imagination and inspires the soul to raise itself to a higher level of existence than it is to weed a garden, as important as that is. In this task of inspired storytelling, let us tell the story that is true, that is inspiring, and that is good. "We are called to out-narrate the dominant stories that shape our culture, by exposing their weaknesses or showing...how they are eclipsed by a more luminous and compelling story".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lewis, Clive Staples. *Weight of glory*. Zondervan, 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Dawkins, Richard, and Lalla Ward. *The god delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Stuckey, Allie. "Leaving Mormonism for Christianity | Guest: Lynn Wilder | Ep 725." *You Tube*, uploaded by Allie Beth Stuckey, 15 Dec. 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBsS8z1GDhk>.

<sup>46</sup> McConkie, Joseph F., and Robert L. Millet. "Sustaining and defending the faith." (1986).

<sup>47</sup> McGrath, Alister E. *Narrative apologetics: Sharing the relevance, joy, and wonder of the Christian faith*. Baker Books, 2019.

Do not fear the doubt which leads you into the journey of courageous faith. Perhaps agency is the child of faith, and reason is the child of sight. I act through my faith, and my reason helps me expand my faith, broadening its potential directions and uses. Give your doubt its due, it can help you create the foundation for a tall tower of faith. Reason is a beautiful thing, for beauty is an idea as much as it is a feeling. Without vision, the people perish, and without movement the people surely will too. To close, here is a poem that came to me at the end of the day while in my FedEx truck.

The fruits of a life planted in gospel sod  
These are the presents we give to our God  
The gift of our faith in one hand and the gift of our reason in the other  
Never are they separate, they are always given together  
Forever they are one, two sides of the same coin, the best traits of their  
own they set out to join  
The healing water of faith and the burning fire of reason, for the growth of  
a forest they both have their season  
These are the unified effects of Christ's word, for the great comforter  
declared, he had come with "a sword"  
They appear to us a rivalry of siblings, one a sister, one a brother,  
But they are of the same family, and on that last day we shall know that  
faith and reason had always loved one another.

## Other Notable Quotes

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*“I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them ... [that] will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all.”*

- Joseph Smith Jr.<sup>48</sup>

*“There are altogether too many people in the world who are willing to accept as true whatever is printed in a book or delivered from a pulpit. Their faith never goes below the surface soil of authority. I plead with everyone I meet that they may drive their faith down through that soil and get hold of the solid truth, that they may be able to withstand the winds and storm of indecision and of doubt, of opposition and persecution. Then, and only then, will we be able to defend our religion successfully...I admire men and women who have developed the questing spirit, who are unafraid of new ideas as stepping stones to progress. We should, of course, respect the opinions of others, but we should also be unafraid to dissent — if we are informed. Thoughts and expressions compete in the marketplace of thought, and in that competition truth emerges triumphant. Only error fears freedom of expression.”*

- Elder Hugh B. Brown<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1867, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/239>

<sup>49</sup> Brown, Hugh B., Edwin B. Firmage (ed. *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999, 135–40.

*“Our curriculum at that time, though well-meaning, did not prepare students for today...Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and a teacher responded, “Don’t worry about it!” Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue...To name a few such topics that are less known or controversial, I’m talking about polygamy, seer stones, different accounts of the First Vision, the process of translation of the Book of Mormon or the Book of Abraham, gender issues, race and the priesthood, or a Heavenly Mother.”*

- Elder M. Russell Ballard<sup>50</sup>

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### **Further Recommended Material on the Subject:**

Faith and Intellect: The Lives and Contributions of Latter-day Saint Thinkers [By Leonard J. Arrington, published by Signature Books]

*An Eternal Quest—Freedom of the Mind* [BYU Devotional, Elder Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency, May 13, 1969]<sup>51</sup>

Religion and the Pursuit of Truth [By Lowell Bennion, CES Educator, published by the Deseret Book Company]

In Search of Truth [By Elder John A. Widtsoe, published by the Deseret Book Company]

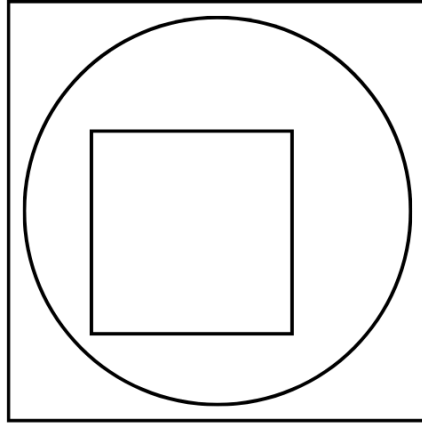
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<sup>50</sup> Ballard, M. R. (2016). The Opportunities and Responsibilities of CES Teachers in the 21st Century. *address to CES religious educators, Salt Lake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, Feb, 26.*

<sup>51</sup> Brown, H. B. (1969). An Eternal Quest—Freedom of the Mind. *Educating Zion*, 86-87.

# Chapter 3

## Where Can I Turn? The Searching Soul



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### Searching

“...give me this water, that I thirst not...” cried the woman speaking with Christ at the well.<sup>1</sup> This is the tortured call for help of a person who is unsatisfied with the way their life is going – looking for something that they cannot find to satisfy the longings that they cannot fulfill. Her plea is very similar to the question Christ called out to His father while He was suffering on the cross. “Why hast thou forsaken me?”<sup>2</sup> These two verses point us to the soul’s innermost desire to be one with the universe. Christ wanted to be one with His Father, a representation of the great divine will and favor. The woman wanted to be in harmony with the story that would

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:15

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:46



give her closure to a journey to find the source of more than just pleasure, but peace and joy. Her aim was wrong.

How often do we thirst but pass the well that Christ stands next to? Then when we are unsatisfied with what we have been given by other fountains we cry towards the sky in resentment for the God we feel has abandoned us? Yet God has never ceased asking the question that He asked our first parents in the Garden of Eden: “Where are you?”.<sup>3</sup> Where have you wandered off to? Why have you left me here by the well that has what you want? When will you come back?

### **Questions of the Soul**

Where can I turn for peace? So asks the person who questions. Says Tolkien “not all those who wander are lost”. Perhaps we might envy the quiet and calm drifting, but we admire the driven and the passionate. Where do I put my affection, my devotion, and my inspiration? What story is worth devoting my own eternity to? Where is the altar I can find my calling, the purpose of my creation, the ends to which I have been made? All these questions stem from perhaps the central question of existence. *What is real?* Is reality only what I make it to be, and if so, is there no separation between the realm of dreams and the realm I inhabit where I am reading this right now? The quest of each person's life should be a quest to find the ground of reality, a firm place where we can stand on for balance. What is real is what is true. And what really is true, is what never changes, it is things as they are, as they were, and as they are to come. It is on this definition where I want to build my life's journey. But how can I find where to build, where can I find solid ground, or am I doomed to spend my life in that great and spacious building that Lehi saw, hovering in the air, forever disconnected from what is real?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:9

<sup>4</sup> 1 Nephi 8:26

Being the master over my own agency, I am allowed to choose where I place my faith. I stand like the Roman governor before a Palestinian-Jewish peasant and ask the question of all questions: “*What is Truth?*”<sup>5</sup>

### **No Vision of Heaven**

In the Church we talk about how the Celestial Kingdom is a place where we go to be with our families forever, but just existing forever? We have to be doing something there, besides sitting around telling each other “is it not wonderful that we can just be here with each other, standing or sitting near each other, and not sitting at different heavenly dinner tables?” In our normal gospel discussion discourse to be found in Sunday School class or in General Conference, no vision of heaven is articulated beyond this sound byte of “families can be together forever”. There is little to no discussion being had about this topic. It is as if I told you. “Hey, let’s go to that building over there, I know it will be a good time”, to which you respond, “well what will be do in there?” Then I reply “I don’t know, but we’ll be together that is for sure.” What a vision. We must articulate what it means to be in a family, heavenly or earthly, beyond the assumption that just being in a family is wonderful. What type of family, what are we doing? Sitting there congratulating ourselves for being in a family, then doing the same thing the next celestial day? If that is it, then it makes no difference if we were in any of the other kingdoms, because we could just as easily see our relatives and ‘hang out’. To understand what we will be doing in the Celestial realm will be our inquiry.

### **An Ultimate Story**

All questions of philosophy are derivations of that great question. Is there a truth external to me, something that I must align myself with? Or

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<sup>5</sup> John 18:37

is it the truth just what I make it? Is truth, or the goal, or the story, a responsibility self-created in us, or a responsibility placed onto us? Logos, λόγος, meaning the word, the reason, the truth, the way, the path, the *ultimate story*, has had its countless admirers since time began, all trying to unravel its mystery. Where did I come from, what am I to do, and where am I going after I die; these questions demand an answer. No one question can be isolated — the implications of one affect all the rest.

Is the ultimate story to be found with the Materialists, and their assertions that we are the product of random collisions of atoms, and that all our thoughts are but chemical reactions and will vanish like waves against the shore, never pre-existing the wind that formed them and never transcending the rocks against which they crash? And our purpose, or the aim of all acts uncontrolled by our non-existent souls all in the service of the propagation of genetic code? Says Francis Crick as the opening line in the first chapter of his book *The Astonishing Hypothesis*: “The Astonishing Hypothesis is that ‘You,’ your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”<sup>6</sup>

Is the ultimate story to be found with the Hedonists, that the ultimate good is to maximize our pleasure and to minimize our pain, thus the goal and reward of a virtuous life is one spent in complete ecstasy?

Is the ultimate story to be found with Epicurus, agreeing with the Materialists that we have no soul, who then developed the Hedonist’s philosophy to mean pleasure of the mind, the pursuit of wisdom and understanding is the way of virtue? A virtuous life is one spent in avoiding pain, and our altruistic feelings to do good for the sake of goodness itself is

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<sup>6</sup>Crick Francis. *The Astonishing Hypothesis : The Scientific Search for the Soul*. Scribner ; Maxwell Macmillan International 1994, p. 3.

a mask hiding the innermost human drive to have more pleasure than we do pain.<sup>7</sup>

Is the ultimate story to be found with Epictetus and the Stoics, and the path of developing our self-control and discipline to stand firm in one's convictions to maintain a spirit of integrity and to minimize the destructive nature of emotions?

Is the ultimate story to be found with the Confucians, that autonomy and individual happiness is the best state, and that the ruler should be the servant of the ruled?

Is the ultimate story to be found as explained by the Buddha, that happiness is found when the true nature of reality is revealed to us, our vision being freed from the distortions we place on ourselves, and to reach enlightenment and nirvana we cease to be individuals with an ego and join with the universal consciousness? Is the ultimate story to be found with the.....

### **Leaving the Great and Spacious Building**

*"The people have a right to the truth as they have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."*

- Epictetus (55-135 A.D.)

To answer the question of where is the ultimate story to be found we are led like prophets before us into the wilderness, taken out of our places of comfort and thrust into the unknown and unfamiliar. All must enter the space of the strange and the new and the hidden; the mists of darkness do not just conceal what we fear, but what we hope for. I came into the world to enter the mist, to discover for myself the truth about

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<sup>7</sup> *"It is a plain fact of human nature that each of us is consistently motivated by our individual desire for our own pleasure or happiness and that we always act in such a way as to attempt to achieve a balance of pleasure over pain."* [Klein, Daniel. *The Art of Happiness*. Penguin, 2012, p. 72.] *The early hedonists contended with such philosophers as Socrates and Plato, who argued on behalf of the immortal soul and altruism in contrast to materialism and benevolent self-service.*

myself and my place in eternity. I follow a line of pilgrims who have done the same before me, Abraham leaving his country, Lehi and his family leaving their wealth, and Jesus being led into the wilderness.<sup>8</sup> Like Lehi, I am taken by an angel and into the field of darkness. I was taken from my premortal state of knowledge into this lone and dreary world. Departure into the unknown is a basic archetype within many religions. “People go to the wilderness” says Laura Feldt who teaches the study of religion and culture at the University of Southern Denmark, “to meet themselves, their demons, and their gods; it is simultaneously framed as refuge, paradise, waste land, and hell; it is where you can be lead astray, into idolatry or death, or where you can discover a new subjectivity, where you may find the deepest wisdom or great ignorance”.<sup>9</sup> To see what light I need I must see what light I have, and for this I must be submerged into the abyss like the others. This ritual is a baptism, presided over by the beings who watch me from realms I cannot see, but whose presence I can discern.

As I leave the great and spacious building I am presented at a rod of iron, firmly driven into the ground. I look up the path at Lehi, who is standing under a tree and shouts to me holding a shining fruit, and that what he holds is desirable to make me happy. I turn to the angel and they tell me to climb. Onward I commence on my treacherous journey, through the darkness I see a ravine of churning water, steep walls, other paths, and confused wanderers like myself searching for something to grasp. The climb is steep and the winds are strong but I hold onto the rod on a narrow path, using all my powers to discern what is ahead, seeing through the mists darkly.

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 12:1 “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee”; Luke 4:1-2 “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”

<sup>9</sup> Feldt, Laura, and Gustavo Benavides. *Wilderness in mythology and religion*. De Gruyter, 2012, p. 1.

I come to the tree and see its giant roots stretching forth into the ground all around me reaching in all directions. I can see the building from where I came, hovering high in the air, appearing as though it would fall down at any moment. I look down; for the roots to have grown so deep and so far, the ground must have remained as it was. Because this ground is unchanging, it is safe, it is real, this is truth.

The Lord is generous with His mysteries. He has outlined His pattern through those that He has led, who have given us their stories to follow. The story of Lehi's dream in first Nephi 8 is a precursor to Christ's parable of the sower in Mark 4. In both of these stories, there are people that receive the story, the truth, and the way, and they commence on the path of planting the seed. Some stick to the story and some do not. Some are lost in the mist or do not have the chance to plant the seed stolen by the birds. Some plant the seed, but the root is shallow so when put under pressure they abandon the project, such as those who left the tree after being mocked. Others feel their way towards the building, or their seed lands among thorns, the desires for the things of the world. How many times has the Lord given me knowledge freely but my ground was not ready, it was not that the Lord withheld from me His wisdom but it was that I was too stubborn to accept it. But the Lord is patient with me. Though he is infallible, He has given me the free will to turn away from Him. In creating the universe for freedom instead of certain salvation, He preserved the dignity of the soul by setting myself at His level, free to choose to draw myself close to him, or to choose another path.

### **To Know the Mysteries**

To those that draw near, those that search for Him, that seek to be taught those hidden things of eternity, that stand at the door of heaven and knock, the door of knowledge shall be opened. These have the hearts of little children; eager to learn and eager to try. The world is a magical place to someone like that. These people are looked on with favor by those

who have knowledge to give. Knowledge is a possession, and who to trust to hand it down to depends on the heart of the receiver. The trust of the Lord is required. Who would you rather take under your wing? Someone who drags their feet, hears your words but never listens, and never does more than the least possible amount to get by? Or someone who has read what has been given and then some, who goes to the repositories of knowledge and seeks for themselves, then comes to you with what they have found and asks “what lack I yet?” Their ground is ready for the hidden things, the logos, the ultimate story that moves the universe forward.

“It is given to many to know the mysteries of God,” says Alma the Younger to Zeezrom the Lawyer, and those that are eager to learn and to apply “...is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God in full.”<sup>10</sup> And to those that cannot be trusted, who cannot learn and who will waste whatever is given, they receive “...the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries.”<sup>11</sup> And if we are not living that ultimate story, the logos, “if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it is not found in us, then will our state be awful, for them we shall be condemned.”<sup>12</sup> Alma is speaking from his experience; he remembers that while his heart was hard, he was struck down by the angel, and after suffering in an awful state wishing that he lived a different story for his life, saw a vision of the Lord in heaven, his soul “did long to be there”.<sup>13</sup> He saw the end of the story, the logos, “the word which he has imparted unto me,” and he has been trying ever since to help others see as he has seen, and to taste the joy he has tasted, the vision of an eternity worth reaching for. He attests the source of his joy “the knowledge which I have is of God.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alma 12:9

<sup>11</sup> Alma 12:10

<sup>12</sup> Alma 12:13

<sup>13</sup> Alma 36:22

<sup>14</sup> Alma 36:26

The Lord echoes Alma in speaking to the modern church. “Behold, this is wisdom, whoso readeth, let him understand and receive also; For unto him that receiveth it shall be given more abundantly, even power.” And “according to that portion of Spirit and power which shall be given unto you, even as I will” (His trust), we will have the gift of understanding and the power to “expound the mysteries thereof out of the scriptures”. These two passages are the same, Alma 12:10-11 and Doctrine and Covenants 71:5-6,1. Down to the words and concepts of expound, power, trust, and knowledge. This whole message has been been compressed into one of the harshest sayings uttered by Christ in Matthew 25: “For unto every one that hath [the story working in them] shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

### **Moroni’s Promise**

Missionaries should not invoke Moroni’s promise in the first lesson, inviting people to be baptized. The people they are teaching do not remember half the things that were said in the first lesson, nor understand the doctrinal implications of the new and everlasting covenant of which path that they are stepping on to. The promise is put in the back of the book for a reason – it is also misquoted. The missionary reads “ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things *are not true*” and says “this says to pray and ask god *if it is true*.”<sup>15</sup> That is not what Moroni is saying. You are supposed to read the book, apply what it is saying in your life (they have not had a chance to plant the seed yet), and then see if it is good with your own reasoning, then go to God. It would be as if you ask someone to be exclusive in the same conversation you ask them to go on a date. The prayer, as Moroni is encouraging it, should look something like this: “Dear

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<sup>15</sup> Moroni 10:4



God, I have found this book, it has taught me many wonderful things, and I have applied what it has said and I feel an increase of peace and strength in my life. I feel it is good, I have done what Alma told me to do and planted a seed. I have felt it growing, and the fruit is sweet. And now I have reached the end of the book, and Moroni has given me a charge, to ask you if these things are not true. So, God, I intend to keep living like this for the rest of my life, so if this seed is not good, and I have been deceived, stop me now. Otherwise I will give others the seed – the story as well so they can share with me this knowledge so they can taste the joy I have tasted, and see as I have seen, and feel as I have felt.”

This is what is meant by *receive* in both Moroni 10:4, and by God in D&C 71:6. This prayer is not just a communication, it is an ordinance (though the lines are blurred when you think of the two). Moroni’s language is clear, and the only other time this language is used in the Book of Mormon is to initiate the sacramental prayer.

“O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ”<sup>16</sup>

“God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ”<sup>17</sup>

In both prayers you are making a covenant to learn, to receive, and to share. The sacrament is ingested, the bread and the water become a part of us, and it builds us stronger than we were before we had it. This covenant between what we are and what we are becoming, between our soul and the divine, is what Caroline Myss calls our Sacred Contract. “Every time we enter a new sphere of power, which can include obtaining more money, earning more university degrees, or, as with Jesus, attaining a higher level of spiritual insight, we are given a ‘test’ to see how we will manage the influx of yet another level of earthly power into our lives.”<sup>18</sup> Brigham Young agrees. “God never bestows upon His people, or upon an

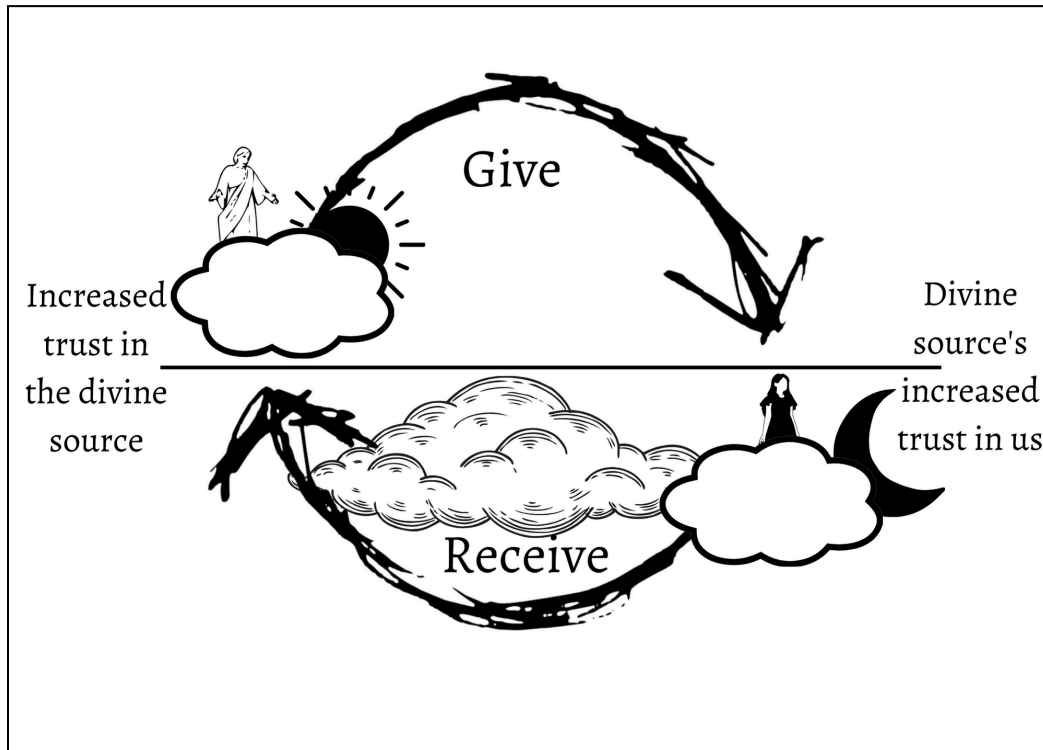
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<sup>16</sup> Moroni 5:2

<sup>17</sup> Moroni 10:4

<sup>18</sup> Myss, Caroline. *Sacred contracts: Awakening your divine potential*. Harmony, 2013.

individual, superior blessings without a severe trial to prove them, to prove that individual, or that people, to see whether they will keep their covenants with Him, and keep in remembrance that He has shown them. Then the greater the vision, the greater the display of the power of the enemy.”<sup>19</sup>



### **Co-Laborers with God**

Those that can live their lives well, who upon receiving new knowledge can resist the temptation to revert to their former and more crude state, will be then asked to help others learn the story too, to go and feed the Master’s sheep.<sup>20</sup> Let us go back to Matthew 25. The Lord says that those who used what they had, and invested in themselves and can be trusted, will receive the responsibility others had who broke God’s trust. We can substitute the word talent for the word trust. “Take therefore my

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<sup>19</sup> Journal of Discourses 3:205

<sup>20</sup> John 21:15-17

trust from him, and give it unto him which hath my trust.”<sup>21</sup> And upon receiving the new responsibilities, the highly favored of the Lord is told “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” We have joy, we have peace, when we have the confidence of those who have all power and who seek to give it to us. Those who cannot get their act together cannot comprehend this peace, it is foreign to them and they spend their life forever searching. And that is why we labor diligently in the Lord’s vineyard, co-laborers with Him, to reach those who are lost, and share with Him in His joy. Alma was granted a vision into the heavens where the highest joy is to be found, and his soul longed to be there. Where your soul longs to be is where your peace is to be found. Peace is to be found with God because the riches of heaven are His to give – the riches of peace, joy, and purpose.

With the gift of knowledge and wisdom He gives us the gift of sight and discernment, to see the patterns of life, and as light cleaveth into light we can know who serves God, and who serveth Him not.<sup>22</sup> And as we go to find and reason with those that “obey not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness”, we can share in the Lord’s purpose and then share in His joy.<sup>23</sup> William Danforth has discovered this joy, and uncovered a restlessness to accompany it. “Once you have it, you can never be the same. Once it is yours, you can never rest until you have given it to others. And the more you give away the greater becomes your capacity to give”.<sup>24</sup> How great will our joy be, says the Lord, if we labor all our lives and help but

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew 25:28 “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.”

<sup>22</sup> Malachi 3:18

<sup>23</sup> Jacob 5:75

<sup>24</sup> Danforth, William. “Are You One of the Priceless Few.” *I Dare You*, William Danforth, St. Lois, Missouri, 1942, pp. 5.

one soul find the sacred ground of truth.<sup>25</sup> Chedva (חֶדְוָה) is a Hebrew word for joy that I resonate with. It is found twice in the Old Testament.

“Glory and honor are in his presence; strength and gladness [chedva] are in his place”<sup>26</sup>

“...the joy of the Lord is your strength”<sup>27</sup>

Notice common factors: Christ, strength, and joy. Like life’s three big questions, these three also cannot be separated from each other. Where I find Christ I find strength, and where He has walked joy is soon to follow. Perhaps this triune symphony mirrors another declaration which invoked its own divine sanction – that all are created equal, and that it is the right of every soul to commence on their journey of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>28</sup> In life we are given the gift of choice – and with it the dignity of the Gods.<sup>29</sup> And with that dignity, we are shown a destiny.

The paradox is that if we are to reach up for our future destiny we must reach within and backwards into our past origin to find the source of our “I Am” that lies within our inner eternal being. Truman Madsen put it best when he wrote “One begins mortality with the veil drawn, but slowly he is moved to penetrate the veil within himself. He is, in time, led to seek the ‘holy of holies’ within the temple of his own being.”<sup>30</sup> We have found our ultimate story, our *logos*, our **I AM**.

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### **Recommended Scriptures for Further Study:**

Doctrine and Covenants 52:13; Luke 16:2; Mosiah 2; Moses 1

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<sup>25</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 18:15-16

<sup>26</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:27

<sup>27</sup> Nehemiah 8:10

<sup>28</sup> The Declaration of Independence, ¶3

<sup>29</sup> Alma 12:31 “and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act”

<sup>30</sup> Madsen, Truman G. *Eternal man*. Deseret Book Company, 1966, p. 20.

**Recommended Books and Writings for Further Study:**

The Lord's Question: Thoughts on the Life of Response [By Dennis Rasmussen]

Sacred Contracts: Awakening Your Divine Potential [By Caroline Myss, published by Harmony]

*The Image of God* [By Dorothy Sayers]

*King Follet Discourse* [By Joseph Smith Jr.]

Lectures on Faith [By Joseph Smith Jr., published by Deseret Book]

# Chapter 4

## Ammon, the Arms, the Brain

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*“You see, consciousness thinks it's running the shop. But it's a secondary organ of a total human being...”*

- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*<sup>1</sup>

“Keep the sheep together!” Ammon shouted to the servants. He placed his hand on the hilt of his blade as the robbers descended on the group from the hills. “I’ll deal with these men!” Ammon ran to the front of the flock ahead of the servants. In his mind he had one goal: protect the sheep, protect the servants; he was not going to die today. He was on a mission to bring the gospel to the people he dedicated himself to serving and he had not yet accomplished that mission. This was his moment to demonstrate to them the power of God that can give someone strength beyond their own.<sup>2</sup> The God of Abraham, the God that parted the Red Sea for Moses, the God who would deliver the world from sin would deliver him from the enemies who stood before him.

This did not mean Ammon was not afraid or anxious, he could feel the instinct to flee as his amygdala sent a distress signal to his hypothalamus, that Ammon was in immediate mortal danger and to activate the body’s defense systems. Without any control on Ammon’s part, his body began to prepare for a fight as his hypothalamus, the unconscious command center put his autonomic nervous system on high alert, pumping Ammon’s body with adrenaline. This adrenaline rushed

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, J., & Moyers, B. (2011). *The power of myth*. Anchor.

<sup>2</sup> Alma 17:29

through Ammon, alerting all his organs that this could be the end of Ammon's life, and that all non-essential activities in the body would be given less priority and to redirect all available power to the main systems. The organs responded and power was rerouted to Ammon's vital organs, his heart, his lungs, his muscles, the sensory organs such as his eyes, ears, nose, and skin. They needed to collect as much data from the environment and pass it on to Ammon's controlled thinking center so he could act quickly if Ammon was to survive. His pupils dilated, taking in more light so he could more efficiently scan the environment for threats. As the robbers ran down the hill Ammon's heart beat faster, giving more blood and energy to the bodily systems associated with defense and attack. His lung's passageways expanded to compensate for the increased demand for oxygen rich blood flow to Ammon's muscles, which needed it for their strength, and Ammon's brain for both the unconscious command system and the conscious controlled thinking.

Ammon took a deep breath, both because he felt his body needing it and to remain in control over his emotions. He knew that giving in to fear was the worst thing he could do, it would make him act carelessly and cause him to make a mistake. Ammon was the son of King Mosiah, he had received advanced military training from the best teachers in the Nephite armed forces, he had prepared for tense situations, but he had never faced so many people, let alone people dead set on trying to kill him. In an instant memories of training flashed through his mind, remembering what he was taught. As long as he did not forget the basics of his training, he would be fine. But against so many?<sup>3</sup> His mind then thought of what he had been taught by his father, and his close friend Alma's dad the prophet had said. If he placed his trust in God and if God needed him to do something, he would be given the strength to do it. God had promised his father that he would be protected.<sup>4</sup> He thought of the angel, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Alma 17:34

<sup>4</sup> Alma 17:35

power that it possessed as the earth beneath his feet shook, the booming of his voice as he commanded him and his friends to stop fighting the saints of God. He wished he had those powers, but at least he knew that this power existed, and that if he could have a fraction of it lent to him, he would survive. That's it! If he combined his training and his faith, he would live. This thought kept his fear at bay, keeping his body from taking complete control and running carelessly into the crowd that was rapidly approaching him.

He took one more mental picture of the field, taking note of where his fellow servants were whom he trusted, and where the robbers were whom he needed to contend with. "What do I do?" he thought. He took his hand off the hilt of his sword and felt for his sling. Reaching down he felt around in the river for some smooth stones.

"It's just one man!" one of the robbers shouted as they gained ground!<sup>5</sup> Ammon took aim at him at his charger, and let the stone fly. One by one the robbers fell, the robbers could not believe what they were seeing. This one Nephite was single handedly holding back their advance. His aim was precise, and he appeared calm. Who was he? Their excitement turned to rage. They would have revenge for their fallen.

They let out a war cry in unison that frightened the sheep, and the servants struggled to keep them from scattering. Ammon drew his sword and prepared for hand to hand combat. Lord, protect your servant he thought as the robbers came within ten feet of him. The robbers encircled Ammon, who remained calm, holding his sword across his body in a defensive posture. The servants watched as their new Nephite friend was about to be killed, glancing at each other, waiting for someone to give the signal to run. The robbers descended upon the Nephite prince. As soon as Ammon fell they would flee, but what came next made them gaze in disbelief. Ammon was taking on 4 robbers at a time. Deflecting their

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<sup>5</sup> Alma 17:35



blows with ease. His movements were smooth and flowing, like the waters of Sebus they were standing in. His swings were powerful – so powerful that the robbers' clubs broke under the weight of Ammon's strength.

Ammon knew he could not just deflect blows all day, he would eventually run out of strength, but his goal was not to come to kill people. He thought of his options. Looking at the arms of his attackers, he knew what he had to do. Remembering a technique he learned during training on how to disarm an opponent by deflecting a blow and immediately aiming for the pit of the arm, he willed his arm to do so. The muscle memory flooded back to him and what he had needed to use plenty of concentration to perform, now came with ease, almost automatic as if he had always known how to do it.

The robbers stumbled back as Ammon disarmed them. They could not land a blow on this Nephite. Who was he? He fought like a demon, like he had power from the unseen world. The robbers feared for their lives, and they ran back towards the hills. Whoever this man was, they did not want to face him.

The servants stood still and silent. They could not believe their eyes. Ammon approached them after washing his sword in the river. The servants took a step back, they too feared this man. Ammon smiled at them. "Are you alright?" he asked, "It's alright, we're safe now. Let's get the sheep back to the village." Who was he? Was he really a Nephite prince who just wanted to be a servant of his enemy? No, he had to be something more.

"We have to tell King Lamoni about this." said one servant, finally breaking the silence as Ammon walked off. "Get the arms in the bag, we'll show it to him. A God walks among us."

The walk back to the village was silent. Ammon knew what they were thinking. He knew they understood that something from the unseen

world had given him power, they had witnessed it. And they were on their way to tell the king.

“I’m going to feed the horses before dinner. I’ll see you later.” Ammon said and with a wave he took the path towards the stables. The servants were again shocked. After all that Ammon wanted to work still?

The servants walked into the King’s court holding the bag of arms, and told Lamoni what had happened. They had seen Ammon hold off a small army, his skills were unmatched by anything they had seen.

“It’s like he had power given to him.” said the head servant.<sup>6</sup> The king nodded, the bag that laid at his feet was a testimony to this. His servants did not have the training to stand against these robbers. This Nephite seemed harmless when he first met him. He had just come to his land and offered to be his servant. What are his true intentions? Not just who is he, what is he? Is he the Great Spirit? King Lamoni felt a shiver of fear run through him. Was this spirit come to punish him for all the ways he mistreated his servants? He had to find out at once.

“Where is Ammon now?”

“He said he was going to feed the horses before dinner.”

A Nephite prince who cannot be killed, who left his country to be a servant of an enemy nation? This story does not make any sense. And even after fighting a battle he was still carrying out his duties? No break? This Ammon is not a mere man. This has to be the Great Spirit. He wanted to meet him, but how could he command the Great Spirit to come to him?

He did not have to finish making a decision, Ammon walked in the door. The guards took a step back and the king jumped to his feet. No one spoke. Ammon read the room, everyone seemed to be in shock, maybe another time. “I finished feeding the horses, I’m going to go eat and head to bed now with your permission.”

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<sup>6</sup> Alma 18:2

“Rabbanah,” said one of the servants to Ammon, which shocked him. He understood that word was used to address Lamanite royalty. “King Lamoni wants you to stay.”

Ammon turned to King Lamoni. “What would you like me to do for you?”

King Lamoni marveled. Do for *me*? No, what should I do for *you*? What should I say to the Great Spirit? What could I say?

The room stood silent for an hour.

It was almost as if Ammon could hear the king’s thoughts. He felt joy. He knew Lamoni wanted to learn. The heart of the king was open. There was humility in the room. It was time to share the gospel, the story of Jesus Christ, the creation, the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, Lehi, the records, the plan of Salvation, it would be accepted.

Ammon spoke with boldness before the king, and the king believed all his words.<sup>7</sup>

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## **Our Brain**

For many centuries, humans have thought that their gift of reason was what separated them from the animal kingdom, giving it superiority over God’s creatures. This gift of reason is what allowed humans to create civilizations in inhospitable places, while the rest of the animals could only stay where their environment kept them alive. With this gift of reason and intelligence we left the animal kingdom with its animalistic passions behind, to become enlightened, our spirits clinging to reason instead of to passion. We have, unlike the other fellow creations that inhabit our realm,

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<sup>7</sup> Alma 18:24, 40

the ability to transcend ourselves. This idea, along with the many technological creations of our own making has given us an arrogance that has blinded us to the deeper story of our mind and its operations.

We might say that our brain is the most advanced computer ever produced. They are gifts to us, handed down from each generation of species to the next from the time this creation round began. This computer is handed to us with programs already installed, having the basic program of survival embedded in its deepest level of code, with overlays of creativity and curiosity layered on top.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at our brain from the outside, we see the cerebral cortex. Grafted onto the brain later in the creation period, the cerebral cortex which gave us the ability to reason, plan ahead, and imagine new and better futures was given. At last we can leave our animalistic emotions behind, surrender ourselves to logic, and in this logic create ourselves a utopia of sanity, or so we thought.

At the very center of the brain structure lies our survival centers, the amygdala, the hypothalamus, and the hippocampus, all near the brain stem. Our oldest gifts have been carefully attuned to help us survive, as they helped all those who came before us. These are in command of the fight-or-flight response mechanisms. Built into these centers is the code that runs under the surface of our consciousness called automatic processes, contrasted to controlled processes such as strategic thought and contemplation.<sup>9</sup> These processes work to help us seek out those that the brain believes to be safe based on past experiences, pushes us to avoid those who it believes as a threat based on past experiences, and these forces influence our reason in the decision making process. Often, our mind has

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<sup>8</sup> *The Blank Slate theory (tabula rosa), an idea that the brain was empty at birth and that habits and behaviors are purely the result of nurture, was challenged by B.F. Skinner and David Hume, among many others in the 20th century. What used to be the argument of “nature v. nurture” has been replaced by an understanding that both have an impact on our habits and behaviors.*

<sup>9</sup> Haidt, Jonathan. *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. Basic books, 2006. P. 24.

already been made up, before our reason has a chance at weighing the possibilities, and these subconscious forces can even lead us to reason in a way that creates chaos in our judgment.

## **Safety First**

The most ancient parts of the brain that handle the fight or flight response pushes us to seek out what is familiar, both in the environment and in people. We naturally gravitate towards those that are most similar to us, similar in looks, culture, behavior, etc. This is called association bias.<sup>10</sup> We will group ourselves into tribes, teams that work together for the common survival of the group. We look for signs that we can trust people, and we ask ourselves: who is playing the game I am playing?

You may remember in elementary school that when you went out to recess you would look around for “your people”. Maybe your people were the ones on the soccer field, the ones in the library playing cards, the ones on the swings, or the ones who stayed in the classroom reading their books. The ones who you felt were most similar to you were the ones you felt the most comfortable around, or at least the ones that you would feel the least anxious and stressed around. “...we have a natural preference for people who we think are similar to us, and this preference guides how we judge and behave towards others. This ‘similarity effect’ happens quickly and automatically, leading us to judge people who are similar to us as more likable, competent, and trustworthy.”<sup>11</sup> The hippocampus or the part of

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, John. “Understanding Association Bias: Causes and Consequences.” *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2010, pp. 289-299.

<sup>11</sup> Saef, Rachel. “How Personality Can Help Build Trust between People from Different Cultures.” *How Personality can Help Build Trust between People from Different Cultures* | Society for Personality and Social Psychology. Society for Personality and Social Psychology, December 23, 2019.  
<https://spsp.org/news-center/character-context-blog/how-personality-can-help-build-trust-between-people-different>

our brain that deals with memories, scans our past for the times we felt safe, and points them out to us, as if to say “These people are safe, go to them”.<sup>12</sup> If we are facing people that our brain has deemed not safe, as in Ammon’s case with the robbers, our amygdala tells the hypothalamus to release the alert hormones. Our brain has memorized faces we associate as untrustworthy and has stored that information to alert us if that face (or a face like it) appears later on.<sup>13</sup> Involuntarily, our cortisol levels (stress hormone) rises and epinephrine (adrenaline) is pumped into the bloodstream which is sent to the vital organs to prepare us to face the supposed threat.<sup>14</sup>

The brain seeks out what is stable, and when we are growing up as a young child, stability is needed for a healthy development, or else the fear processing systems in our brain will be trained to always be turned on, and that takes a lot of energy to run, which will lead your body to in a way overheat and shut down. Stability gives the child the greatest possible chance to develop prosocial habits, and become a healthy contributor to society.<sup>15</sup> A healthy society needs a good amount of stability and trust in one another. The societies, businesses, and families that thrive have common agreed upon rules, and rituals that they create to participate and interact with one another. According to a 50-year long study, families that have rituals are more resilient during times of stress.<sup>16</sup> For society at large, Steven Covey pointed out: “Societies that trust are societies that

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<sup>12</sup> Wimmer, G. Elliott, and Daphna Shohamy. "Preference by association: how memory mechanisms in the hippocampus bias decisions." *Science* 338.6104 (2012): 270-273.

<sup>13</sup> Hou, Chunna, and Zhijun Liu. "The survival processing advantage of face: The memorization of the (un) trustworthy face contributes more to survival adaptation." *Evolutionary Psychology* 17.2 (2019): 1474704919839726.

<sup>14</sup> "Understanding the Stress Response." Harvard Health. Harvard Health Publishing, July 6, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Harden, Brenda Jones. "Safety and stability for foster children: A developmental perspective." *The future of children* (2004): 31-47.

<sup>16</sup> Fiese, Barbara H., et al. "A review of 50 years of research on naturally occurring family routines and rituals: Cause for celebration?." *Journal of family psychology* 16.4 (2002): 381.

prosper".<sup>17</sup> We have to have a common game that we play for the wellbeing of our families and institutions.

The agreed upon rules that we live by is called the social contract, coined by John Locke in his 1689 essay *The Second Treatise of Government*.<sup>18</sup> He argued that groups would naturally form based on the nature of individuals. Those with a common nature would group together to protect their interests, and select leaders that they trust will serve their interests. We can see this association bias in effect in hiring practices too. Those in charge of selecting the next cohort of employees, or the ones to help them lead, will pick those whom they trust the most, and this is affected by automatic processes in the brain.<sup>19</sup>

### **Reason and Its Purpose: Deductive v Inductive Reasoning**

When thinking about situations and coming to conclusions about what they mean, what people meant, why this person said or did that, you will be using either deductive or inductive reasoning. When you have all the facts about a situation it is deductive. The famous detective Sherlock Holmes gathered all the facts before making a definitive statement on his case. The scientific method is based on this form of reasoning. Make a hypothesis, gather information, analyze information, then reject the hypothesis.

Inductive reasoning is less reliable than deductive reasoning because it relies on observed patterns and learned lessons. We will see in a little bit why this is problematic. Using your experience you make general sweeping conclusions based on limited data. Unfortunately, we usually do not have

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Covey, *The Speed of Trust* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Locke, John. "Second Treatise of Government." edited by Richard Cox, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980, pp. 269-270.

<sup>19</sup> Rooth, Dan-Olof. "Automatic associations and discrimination in hiring: Real world evidence." *Labour Economics* 17.3 (2010): 523-534.

time to use deductive reasoning when we must act quickly so we rely on inductive reasoning. The body's internal alert system (hypothalamus, amygdala, hippocampus) uses this system, and they do it beneath the surface of your consciousness.

So if two people have all the facts that could be known in a situation, using deductive logic would they come to the same conclusion? No. Reason is affected by many things, including mood, personality, and even what one is smelling at the moment.<sup>20</sup> One may be tempted to consider logic a universal human trait and that in giving two people the same facts that the two people will come to the same conclusion. This could be true for some forms of reasoning, but not all questions that require reason are the same.

Consider these two questions:

- Will the falling branch hit the boy on the head while he walks under the tree?
- Should the age to vote in the United States be lowered to sixteen from age eighteen?

Perhaps for the first question two people, or even twenty people could come to the same conclusion with no issue. For the second question however, disagreement may arise very easily. The first question is a case of cause/effect reasoning, with universally (hopefully) understood laws of physics. Gravity makes the branch fall down, if the boy is under the branch, the boy will be hit. The second question is moral reasoning which is much more complicated because people's moral reasoning is not as straightforward as linear cause/effect reasoning. I want to focus on moral

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<sup>20</sup> *Our mood can affect the way we think, even what we smell can cause a measurable difference in our judgment. Standing next to a trash can that smells bad can cause one to be more harsh in assessing dilemmas and transgressions.*

Bialek, Michał, et al. "Disgust and moral judgment: Distinguishing between elicitors and feelings matters." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 12.3 (2021): 304-313.



reasoning, which I will cover briefly here, and more in depth in a later chapter while tying it into gospel issues.

### **Moral Reasoning**

Our moral reasoning is heavily influenced by what we want. Our desires lay the tracks for our logic's train of thought. David Hume knew this and so in recognizing reason as a tool we use to act in the world, a pragmatic (useful) process, he observed that "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions".<sup>21</sup> This is not saying that reason should be subservient to feelings, but he is saying that first comes passion, that forces reason to serve it; he is right. For a long time, people thought of logic as universal processes, and that humans all used the same framework for their reasoning, but some people were simply better at the same process.

This "same process" mindset was evident in the last third of the 20th century, when social psychologists and economists became infatuated with information processing models for human thinking, also known as "rational choice" models.<sup>22</sup> These were used to explain phenomena like prejudice, bonds of kinship, to flirting and persuasion. But thinking of our persons just like we would think of a computer is erroneous. Politics is evidence enough that intelligent people can look at the same data and come up with different courses of action, and even if two people come to the same conclusion, one person may actually do it, and another person may not. The agency factor is the wrench in the gears. People do things that are...illogical. *Rational Choice* theory argued that people made a rational choice by weighing cost and benefits.<sup>23</sup> We are "rational actors" that seek to maximize our interests and minimize losses. Similar theories

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<sup>21</sup> Hume, David. "A Treatise of Human Nature." Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 417.

<sup>22</sup> Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. Basic Books, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Becker, G. (1976). *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*. University of Chicago Press.

prevailed until challenged by Richard Thaler (among others) in the 1980s who focused on studying the unconscious impact on decision making, rather than our conscious logical efforts.<sup>24</sup> Thaler was one of the founders of the field of behavioral economics, which was expounded upon by Daniel Kahneman who began studying how humans focus in the 1970's, focusing on how attention is a cognitive function which requires effort.<sup>25</sup> His later book, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Kahneman, 2011) he divides cognitive processes into two systems:

- System 1: automatic, no voluntary control (Ammon's situational awareness of where the robbers and where the servants were)
- System 2: effortful, requires concentration (Ammon using the technique to disarm his opponents\*)

Processes that require heavy concentration can trigger the same responses that anxiety and stress cause (expanding pupils, elevated heart rate). In moments of high emotional intensity, our body forces us into a high state of concentration, however, the automatic functions influence our decisions. Using an example from Daniel Kahneman's book, when we are merging into chaotic traffic or passing someone on the highway, we place all our concentration into that act. If a person is talking to us in the passenger's seat, they recognize this instinctually and pause their sentence to let us focus on the task at hand (Kahneman, 25). We have a limited amount of processing power, do not attempt to pass a semi-truck while

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<sup>24</sup> *The identification of the unconscious role in decision making was one of Sigmund Freud's landmark contributions to the field of psychology, and is not taken into account in the information processing models like the aforementioned "Rational Choice Model".*

<sup>25</sup> "The allocation of attention is costly in terms of effort, and is therefore sensitive to the expected gain from an action." Kahneman, Daniel. *Attention and effort*. Vol. 1063. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973, p. 38.

*\*actions that have been repeated so many times can become automatic, like driving. After a while driving along the highway in normal conditions requires little cognitive effort. Ammon feeling his muscle memory come into play is another example.*

working out the answer to  $34 \times 9$  in your head. When it comes to complex logical puzzles, like moral puzzles, our brain wants to use the least amount of energy to solve it, so it will use shortcuts, or heuristics to free itself from the strenuous mental effort of weighing multiple variables.

There are two modes of moral-strategic thinking. Exploratory scientific thinking, and defensive thinking. When you are in a discussion with someone, especially a discussion where you have some emotional investment in one particular side, you are likely going to engage in defensive thinking. You want to protect something, something sacred, something that should not be harmed, and you will do anything to protect it, including suspending or not listening to potential evidence that refutes your opinion. When in this state and presented with a view that seems to threaten your views, you ask yourself: *do I have to believe it?* You desperately search for something, anything that can release you from the pressure of changing your views. The evidence that releases you does not have to be very good evidence, but the fact that you want to believe it makes it good enough for you. Thomas Gilovich wrote “For desired conclusions, we ask ourselves, ‘Can I believe this?’, but for unpalatable conclusions, we ask, ‘Must I believe this?’”<sup>26</sup> To avoid uncomfortable situations, our brain pushes us to surround ourselves with only those who believe as we do, creating an echo chamber of circular reasoning, and the absurdity of the outsider’s opinions grow more absurd with each retelling within the circle of those in the group.<sup>27</sup> The group then, to maintain stability, not only rewards its members positively for agreement, but rewards members for their negative interaction with outsiders, taking it as a sign of their loyalty. This only serves to widen the chasm between people of different beliefs and customs and ever widening the gap of trust and

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<sup>26</sup> Gilovich, Thomas. *How we know what isn't so*. Simon and Schuster, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Kimball, David C., et al. "Political identity and party polarization in the American electorate." *The state of the parties* (2018): 169-184.

mutual understanding that could exist if someone was brave enough to try to cross it.

## **Mental Shortcuts and Heuristics**

We have covered that because we do not have time to gather all the data but have to make a decision in the moment that we use inductive reasoning to make the best possible guess based on our general beliefs. This shortcut has the risk of using an incorrect belief to make a decision or judgment about someone else.

Since it uses our experience to generate a solution or answer to our question of how we should think about a given situation or make a judgment about someone, built into that solution/answer is our unconscious biases. Biases are always flowing into this conclusion: I am right, and I want to be with others that are like me, who are also right because they think like me (also known as the In-Group-Bias). This leads to the other side of its coin: judging those outside of your group who think differently than you as unintelligent, malevolent, and inherently damaged. This is the birth of the tribal mindset, what Jaron Lanier calls the “pack switch”.<sup>28</sup>

Other biases exist. Attractiveness Bias leads us to associate attractive people with attractive traits, such as higher intelligence, greater social value, and as happier in life.<sup>29</sup> Assertions made by those who work at universities, especially those thought of as elite universities, with letters behind their name (Phd., etc.) are viewed as fact, while the same assertion could be made by someone else could be viewed as a conspiracy theory. The Social Proof bias leads us to accept what the majority accepts, because

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<sup>28</sup> Lanier, Jaron. *Ten arguments for deleting your social media accounts right now*. Random House, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Talamas, Sean N., Kenneth I. Mavor, and David I. Perrett. "Blinded by beauty: Attractiveness bias and accurate perceptions of academic performance." *PloS one* 11.2 (2016): e0148284.

if the majority like it then we have to like it as well so we do not get ostracized by the group. Preference in graduate school admissions is given to those with higher GPA's, a metric thought of as an accurate indicator of future success, and thus the student is worthy of investment of resources by the faculty. Those that wear glasses are seen as more intelligent, receiving a perceived boost in IQ and associated with fields such as teaching or law. Being bald was shown to be associated with idealism, and a beard with the qualities of both goodness and unconventionality.<sup>30</sup> How about entities? Big news network stations that have existed for a long time and YouTube channels with more subscribers are seen as more reputable and trustworthy. After all, they have been around for a long time, that makes them trustworthy. Ryan Holiday in his book *Trust Me I'm Lying: The Confessions of a Media Manipulator*, goes into detail on how the media economy relies on your ignorance, your impatience, and stokes your unconscious fear systems to make you click, read, accept, and buy into political opinions or worldviews. He outlines that in the blogosphere, bloggers know that if they include lots of hyperlinks in their article, the piece will seem more credible.<sup>31</sup> Readers rarely follow the rabbit hole of clicking the links, and most of the time they skim an article while relying on the title to inform them, using their preexisting ideas of the world to fill in the gaps of information. Almost all of the public are not media literate, they accept what they are fed as reality, they do not catch their biases at work, and these biases have real world consequences.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hellström, Åke, and Joseph Tëkle. "Person perception through facial photographs: Effects of glasses, hair, and beard on judgments of occupation and personal qualities." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 24.6 (1994): 693-705.

<sup>31</sup> Holiday, Ryan. *Trust me, i'm lying: confessions of a media manipulator*. Penguin, 2013, p. 161. [See The Link Illusion section]

<sup>32</sup> *The process of creating our worldview from what we see in the media we consume is called Cultivation Theory, which was presented by Dr. Bergner along with what he called Mean World syndrome, where people see the world more dangerous than it is because all they see on the news are disasters and tragedies.*

## **Cognitive Distortions**

Because of our biases, we fall into errors of judgment grouped into what we call cognitive distortions. While biases happen below the surface, like a current, they guide our thinking. While we are swimming we are swept by a current and go with it because it is easier than fighting the riptide of critical analysis, or having to face the unpleasant thought that we might be wrong. Some common distortions are:<sup>33</sup>

- **Mind Reading:** assuming what you think the other person is thinking is actually what they are thinking.
- **Catastrophizing:** thinking of the worst possible outcome as the guaranteed outcome.
- **Overgeneralizing:** using a single incident to make broad sweeping judgments about a group or the world.
- **Emotional Reasoning:** your emotions control your frame of thought, letting your amygdala and hypothalamus rule your brain.
- **Negative Filtering:** looking at only the negatives, often to protect your self-pity.
- **Labeling:** making negative definitive statements on you or someone.
- **Black and White Thinking (Dichotomous Thinking):** thinking there are only two ways to look at a situation.

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Gerbner, George. "Cultivation analysis: An overview." *Mass communication and society* 1.3-4 (1998): 175-194.

<sup>33</sup> Leahy, Robert L., Stephen J. Holland, and Lata K. McGinn. *Treatment plans and interventions for depression and anxiety disorders*. Guilford press, 2011.

- **Blaming:** thinking that other people are the source for your own negative emotions and that you cannot change your emotional state by yourself without them doing something.

These distortions are the cause of much anxiety. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is designed specifically to combat these distortions by isolating the ideas that have been reinforced in the person's mind and making the person confront them. Disconfirmation questions, questions aimed at helping us challenge our existing paradigm are necessary to help minimize the amount of bad logic we use.

These distortions cause not just personal anxiety, but are at the root of almost all societal division. Perhaps we might try and cast the beam of bad reasoning out of our own eye before going into the world and subjecting everyone else to our warped sense of reality. If the gospel is aimed at finding the truth, and cognitive distortions and heuristical judgments serve to hide the truth from us (or hide ourselves from the truth), then included in our commitment to spiritual development is the duty to find where these distortions lay within the labyrinth of our minds and shine the light where they hide.

### **In Sum:**

Our brains are built for survival, pushing us to run towards what is safe, and group ourselves together to stay alive. Competition between groups will arise, and when competition is engaged, scientific and exploratory reasoning go out the window – all that matters is that our team wins, or else we die.

Of course we may not be able to be aware of all facts of a situation, concept, or person/group. There will always be more information just out of our reach, so with certainty not possible, we attempt to minimize the

amount of uncertainty. In statistics this is called the margin of error. The greater our sample size – the better our data is collected. The more steps we ensure to filter out errors in our calculations – the lower our margin of error will be. Perhaps the greatest premise that the scientific method is built on is that we should be in the business of proving ourselves wrong, asking the difficult questions and throwing everything we have at our existing paradigm and seeing what remains. Truth is the goal, and truth will stand – *if* we rid our reason of the distortions that serve to hide it. A desire to be right, a desire for safety, to be intellectually sheltered from ideas contrary to our own, to surround ourselves with those that only validate us, makes one fragile and unable to cope in a world where people disagree.

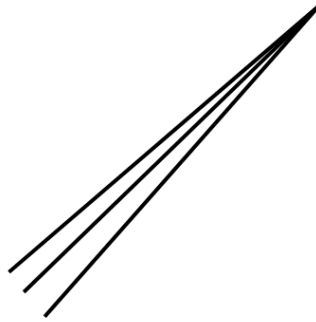
To have true diversity, and to experience the richness it brings, we must simultaneously cultivate the spirit of questioning, and the spirit of self-humility, to look inside ourselves for our logical distortions, biases and blindspots created by our personality, experience and the unconscious calculations to make sure we are always in the right. Then we must look outside ourselves and learn from others different from us. We must not be swayed by our lizard brain, giving in to fear and perpetual distrust. In a world where everything from advertisements for clothing to the media put forth for us to consume is saturated with traps set for the weaknesses of our mind, perhaps we might be more careful about what we think, and reflect on why we have come to the conclusions we have arrived at.

Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and that does not just apply to our homes, but our minds as well. A clean mind is not one that just rids itself from that which is unclean in the sight of God, but one that seeks to uncover that which is hidden under the bed of our unconscious mind and above the cabinets of thought; the unseen motivations that underlie our house of reason. It is good to serve the Lord and His creations with our reason, let us make sure it is with the best our reason can be.



# Chapter 5

## Underneath Lucifer's Three Questions: The Governing Laws of Trust



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*“And that they may grow up in thee, and receive a fullness of the Holy Ghost, and be organized according to thy laws...”<sup>1</sup>*

### **The Philosopher King**

Marcus Aurelius, who was crowned emperor of the Roman Empire shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ back into heaven, was beloved by the citizens of Rome and continues to be admired to this day as one of the great stoic philosophers. Why? Being mentored by a former slave at a young age, he held himself to a high personal standard of ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 109:15

Despite growing up in wealth, he trained himself to become accustomed to a life of discomfort; his mother would find him sleeping on the cold floor of his bedroom. He did not aspire for power, he only wanted to be a good person, but power came looking for him. The emperor, witnessing Marcus's inner strength, selected him to succeed him. Marcus did not care much for treasure. He was concentrated on serving those he ruled. He was not focused on his future legacy, he was focused on the present. He viewed his position as emperor not as an escape from the hardship of the common citizen, but as a sacred throne of responsibility for the welfare of his citizens. Not focused on conquest, ambitious generals (namely Cassius) rebelled against him and started a civil war. This did not last very long however, the power-hungry Cassius was assassinated by his own officers, a testament to his character.

Disaster after disaster, the philosopher king (so he has been called) remained steadfast with his people, through a plague that killed five million,<sup>2</sup> the Tiber flood that brought further death,<sup>3</sup> instead of retreating to an isolated villa he stood in the midst of his people. When the armies were depleted from disease and defending against invasion, another had to be raised. Armies cost money. What did he do? Did he raise the taxes on his people? No. He sold the palace's possessions, from furniture to clothes collected by those who ruled before him.<sup>4</sup> A house was a house, and material possessions meant little to the man whose only concern was to live a life of honor.

He wrote a journal to himself of his private thoughts and feelings during the difficult times of his reign. This was not meant to be shared with anyone, it was silent prayers to truth written for the nourishment of his soul alone. But it eventually was found and published and what it

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<sup>2</sup> Fears, J. R. (2004). The plague under Marcus Aurelius and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. *Infectious Disease Clinics*, 18(1), 65-77.

<sup>3</sup> Aldrete, G. S. (2007). *Floods of the Tiber in ancient Rome*. JHU Press, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Birley, A. R. (2012). *Marcus Aurelius: a biography*. Routledge, 160.

revealed was that the ruler who cared little for material things, who used his power to serve, who took ownership of his own life and endeavored to learn and grow and forgive and change, did not live for that legacy, he believed it. That journal is now published as *Meditations*, one of the greatest works of stoic philosophers. Niccolo Machiavelli posed the question: is it better to be feared or to be loved? It depends on how you wish to die, fearful or free, and how you wish to be remembered. In his book *The Prince* he argued that “Since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved...it is much safer to be feared than loved because ...love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Encounter in the Wastelands**

The confrontation in the wilderness between the father of truth and creation, and the father of lies and destruction has for a long time fascinated me. This for both the event’s narrative drama and its doctrinal significance. I wonder what emotions Christ felt as He, being depleted of physical and emotional energy, after fasting for weeks from food and human contact had as he saw his arch-nemesis Lucifer approach him. Outside of the endowment ceremony and Christ’s encounter in the Judean Wastelands, we know virtually nothing about the dialogues between the father of lies and the members of the Godhead. Furthermore, I find it interesting that Christ’s interaction with Satan was calmer than how we know He once spoke to Peter, given that Satan led away a third of the intelligence that Christ helped to organize. The conversation between the exhausted Jesus and the spirit Lucifer is a case study into how Gods are expected to interact with their antagonists.

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<sup>5</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolo. "The prince (1513)." *Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions* (1993).

In their meeting Jesus was asked three questions. These three temptations, and three responses are the three windows into the hearts of both parties. In these three invitations all temptations and vices can be categorized and distributed. Our lives are the response we give to all three invitations posed to us by the deceiver; and the response of each individual has an effect on their soul, their behavior, and then society. The responses create an environment where trust can grow and relationships can thrive, where love abounds and charity is set free, or an environment which erodes connection, trust, freedom and dignity. A society lives and dies by its members' answer to each of these choices of being:

1. Do you consider your treasure to be things, or people?
2. What do you choose to do with power, use it to show your status, or use it to serve?
3. What is your sense of personal justice, do you choose the path of entitlement, or the choice of gratitude?

### **Law of Treasure**

*"The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."*

- Lucifer (Luke 4:3, NIV)

I only have so much agency I can use in this mortal life, where does it go? To what end and to what purpose do I throw my passion and my liberty? Do I place my affection in mere objects – things that cannot return my devotion? If so I walk down a road of certain disappointment since that is a path where my agency is captured in the sinkhole of temporary pleasure, it takes all and gives nothing in return, a bank where only deposits are allowed and withdrawals are an impossibility. If I placed my feet into the quicksand, entrapped on the hedonic treadmill of a never ending spiral of dissatisfaction, it will be near impossible for me to escape.

Once I acquire something shiny and new, I search frantically around for something else to break the peak on my chart of pleasure versus pain.<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau described the transition of our unnecessary things undergo becoming what we feel to be necessary to our wellbeing in his discourse on the origin of inequality:

*“Since these conveniences by becoming habitual had almost entirely ceased to be enjoyable, and at the same time degenerated into true needs, it became much more cruel to be deprived of them than to possess them was sweet, and men were unhappy to lose them without being happy to possess them.”<sup>7</sup>*

So too felt another great philosopher. “In the bottomless ocean of pleasure,” mourned Kierkegaard in his journal, “I have sounded in vain for a spot to cast anchor. I have felt the almost irresistible power with which one pleasure drags another after it, the kind of adulterated enthusiasm which it is capable of producing, the boredom, the torment which follow.”<sup>8</sup> Because things never satisfy, they do not give me balance, they leave me forever wanting more. Plato taught that true poverty is not the decrease in my things but rather the increase of my greed, and Aristotle warned me that this greed would be the root of my immorality. “Take” says my greed to my soul, “take at all costs”. Even if it is the cost of human dignity. If things are my treasure, and not people themselves, then I must get through people to get to things. They become mere objects in the process, and I will have, as Kant puts it, spent my time treating people as mere ends,<sup>9</sup> not seeing them with the dignity they deserve. People are then

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<sup>6</sup> The “Hedonic Treadmill” is when our baseline of happiness rises with the improvement of temporal circumstance. Our situation improves but we feel as if we stayed in one place. [Brickman, Philip. “Hedonic relativism and planning the good society.” *Adaptation level theory* (1971): 287-301.]

<sup>7</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *A Discourse upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind*. R. and J. Dodsley, 1761.

<sup>8</sup> Journal 1835

<sup>9</sup> “Act so as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, at all times also as an end, and not only as a means.” Kant, I., & Schneewind, J. B. (2002). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Yale University Press, 51.

to me tools, the means through which I use to get to pleasure. By doing so I sever my soul from theirs, a reciprocal relationship cannot form, not one based on any sense of unity anyways. My affection will only go so far as their utility for me. I take from those that can give, and lose sight of the real world.

Things and their monetary value are illusions – the world of relationships is the world that is most real, because it is what affects us the deepest. Objects cannot return my affection, only intelligences can do that, things that can act, that can have faith in me as I can in them. But what constitutes as *things*? You can say money (although that is a means to acquire things because paper is just papers, the thing would be praise or respect or things that can be purchased, say jewelry and luxuries), but you must also include anything that is not something that acts for itself. This can include wisdom and knowledge of truths, things do not just have to be material.

These things have an essence, and their essence does not grow with each transaction, though value can be added on top of the value of the essence, like a vintage record disk. The song never changed, but value was added to it.

Our deepest joy can be unlocked when someone has faith in us, because their faith reminds us of our dignity, and by extension our origin and destiny. There are no gold plated relationships. This is my test to see which world I will choose: that of reciprocal emotion, or that of one way faith.

Jesus was tempted to put aside the purpose of his fasting, which was to prepare him for the task ahead of him, for which he would do out of his love and faith in us. This to him was infinitely more important than the satisfaction of his mortal body's desire to eat. He knew god would not prompt him to fast to his death, it would defeat the purpose of his fast. We are his purpose, Jesus chooses the world of people, of relationships, of

intelligences. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”<sup>10</sup> The faith between two intelligences, if willingly given, cannot be eroded by time, only by new action — a decrease of faith and goodwill by one or more of the parties can do that. Inflation cannot touch it, it is eternal and can be called on with confidence. It is the bank that is equally if not more thrilled by requests for withdrawals than deposits. But what is the difference? “Our most valuable possessions”, once said William Danforth, “are those which can be shared without lessening: those which, when shared, multiply. Our least valuable possessions are those which when divided are diminished.”<sup>11</sup> Houston Smith agrees with Danforth in his famous work *The World’s Religions*: “Wealth, fame, and power are exclusive, hence competitive, hence precarious. Unlike mental and spiritual values, they do not multiply when shared; they cannot be distributed without diminishing one’s own portion.”<sup>12</sup>

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* -Jesus Christ<sup>13</sup>

### **Law of Power**

*“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world...If you worship me, it will all be yours.”*

- Lucifer (Luke 4:5,7, NIV)

And about my power — my stewardship? Do I marshall my resources for the purpose of service, or do I think nothing more than to

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:19-21

<sup>11</sup> Danforth, William H. *I dare you!*. William H. Danforth, 1942. p . 7.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Huston. *The world’s religions: Our great wisdom traditions*. Perfect Bound (HarperCollins Publishers), 1986, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 6:21

use what I have to lift me up, and compete in a race to the top of the admiration pyramid created by a group's attributes? I will attempt to use the *things* as previously discussed (wealth, knowledge, morality, etc), as tools to elevate myself above another so that I, like the Pharisees, can secure my spot at "the uppermost rooms at the feast".<sup>14</sup> It matters little what I use, because the important thing is that I use *something*, whether it be material possessions or knowledge itself, or even the way I live my life. I will find something, some metric to distinguish myself from the rest. That becomes my world, and I am its god, and as the god of that world I must protect my throne at all costs. It is a lonely place at the top, and a fearful place to be in if I am afraid to lose it. If someone rises and threatens my position, and all I care about is my own reputation or my own place on society's totem pole, I would decide to sabotage the person's efforts as well as their reputation. How anxious I am in this state, when everyone's success becomes a threat to my own. The mind that is motivated by fear, the most forceful of the motivators, cannot "rejoice with those that rejoice",<sup>15</sup> but it seeks to "dig a pit" for their neighbor.<sup>16</sup> For those who seek status, their goodwill extends only as far as their fear will allow, and once they secure a higher reputation they will take steps to safeguard it. They then call this place peace and strength when those are masks for insecurity and weakness. What I do to be recognized by others is not an action freely chosen by my soul, but an action imposed on me by my fear. Those who put on displays of power do so to hide themselves from the looming sense of their own destruction. Power becomes a prison. Abraham Lincoln said that if we want to have peace then avoid popularity. The search to be popular creates unnecessary friction and animosity. When the mother of James and John asked Jesus to secure for her children

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 23:6 "And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues"

<sup>15</sup> Romans 12:15

<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 26:27 "He that digs a pit for his neighbour shall fall into it: and he that rolls a stone, rolls it upon himself"



places of high authority in His kingdom, the other apostles immediately grew distrusting and angry at them.<sup>17</sup> Maybe they asked their mother to inquire it of Jesus, or maybe not, but those who try to secure status will be controlled by it. Jesus in His example counters this, and washes the apostles feet. He did not come “...to be served, but to serve”,<sup>18</sup> and that if real power is what we look for, it comes by being the one that serves. But not serve just one’s own group, but to serve all, because “all are alike unto God ” who is “not a respecter of persons”.<sup>19</sup>

We are as self-centered as groups as we are as individuals, our biology requires it of us.<sup>20</sup> We are built for group competition, loyal soldiers for our ideological alliance,<sup>21</sup> it becomes easy to compromise the dignity of others to preserve our own (so we think). The others and their inferior (choose one: inferior morality, inferior possessions, inferior intelligence) are the means to our end — our status.

*“I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”*

- Lucifer (Luke 4:6, NIV)

Satan presented the kingdoms of the world to Christ, as something he could give. Unlike a vision Jesus gave to Moses centuries earlier,<sup>22</sup> a vision that focused on the dignity of souls, Lucifer’s presentation focuses

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew 20:20-24

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 20:28

<sup>19</sup> 2 Nephi 26:33 and Acts 10:34 respectively

<sup>20</sup> *Team wins and losses have real consequences on our physiological state. If our (sports) team loses, we feel symptoms mirroring depression. We can also extrapolate this to political team, religious affiliation, and more.* [Hirt, Edward R., et al. "Costs and benefits of allegiance: Changes in fans' self-ascribed competencies after team victory versus defeat." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 63.5 (1992): 724.]

<sup>21</sup> Fox, R. (2011). *The tribal imagination: Civilization and the savage mind*. Harvard University Press, 91.

<sup>22</sup> See Moses chapter 1

on the utility of others' souls. Christ recognizes this for what it was, a house of cards. Worldly strength relying on fear is not something Christ is interested in, a frenzy of jealous individuals fighting for a bit of status, anxious and fearful of one another. What desire does the creator have for this version of the world? Plus, Satan cannot give "that power" to anyone, he pretends it is under his control, but they are all under the power of fear. Their allegiance is not to each other but to themselves. Christ knows that true power, influence, cannot be handed over as a group, but it is created from a single individual's interaction with another, and that mutual service is the basis for stable power, not mutual attempts at subjugation. The ones who serve command the love of others, their desire for unity and fellowship. It is a much better state than that of anxious looks over one's shoulder for someone to betray them. And on the other hand, those that seek only to serve their own good and to be seen as higher than others "they shall have their [temporary] reward",<sup>23</sup> and one day "shall be abased."<sup>24</sup> Their flashy trinkets they hold up as symbols of their moral virtue mean little to the dirt they will be buried in.

A U.S. Navy SEAL, one of the elite components of the United States Military, was asked who makes it through the demanding and rigorous training and selection program. He replied that he could tell you the type of person who did not make it. "The preening leaders", those who valued being praised, or who wanted to prove themselves as better than others did not make it. The ones covered in tattoos and had large muscles who came to show other people how tough they were did not make it through. People who passed selection were "skinny and scrawny", and others that were selected to join the elite force could be seen "shivering out of fear", but the reason they were selected was because when they felt they could

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 6:5 "...they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."

<sup>24</sup> Luke 14:11 "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

not go on any longer, they somehow found the strength to help the person next to them, when they felt they could not even help themselves. Those individuals are counted as worthy of the highest trust and the greatest respect.<sup>25</sup>

*“Another principality, angelic and demonic at the same time, is power...In itself a great angel, good and evil, it is the builder of cities and nations, a creative force in every human enterprise, in every human community, in every human achievement. It is responsible for the conquest of nature, the organization of states, the execution of justice...World history is the realm in which the reign of the angel of power is most manifest in all its glory and in all its tragedy.” - Paul Tillich (The New Being, page 55)<sup>26</sup>*

### Law of Personal Justice

*“The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’ ”*

- Lucifer (Luke 4:9-11, NIV)

Maybe the angels would have caught Jesus — but that was not the point. Nor was the point to prove Himself as Savior to the masses below, having the witness of angelic intervention as irrefutable proof. The witness born at His baptism was enough for Him. Besides, it was not time yet to remove faith from the equation. This temptation was whether or not Christ valued agency. I’m jumping off, expecting the angels to catch Him, He would view their grace as His property. And maybe so they are

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<sup>25</sup> Parsons, Mike, host. “Simon Sinek Together Is Better Ep. 55” *Moonshot*, Jul. 2019.<https://www.moonshots.io/page55-simon-sinek-together-is-better-transcript>.

<sup>26</sup> Tillich, Paul. *The new being*. U of Nebraska Press, 2005, p. 55.

obligated to save Him, but in viewing their action to save Him from the consequences of His actions as His right would be to both treat Himself as something that should be acted upon, and them too by extension. If grace is a right, then it is not a gift, and who gets to decide who has the right to who's agency? This is a question of justice — are we entitled to grace, and thus we can live our life as if we do not care about consequences? Or do we view ourselves as things that can act, and being part of a community of intelligences where everyone has their own freedom to act, and where actions have consequences, how should we use our agency? Are we grateful for that ability? Are we entitled, or are we grateful?

### **What is in Our Control?**

Our focus determines our reality, and our reality we subjectively create determines how we use our agency in relation to others. We can focus on the things we are not in control of or focus on what is in our control, our domain, our kingdom, our stewardship. The beginning of our stewardship is our mind, and at its center is our focus. The more we focus on what *is not in our control*, the more anxious we become (anxiety is literally the hyper focusing on the unknown, the uncontrolled, the things out of our control which engages our body's defense systems and prepares us to face bodily harm.) If we focus on *what we do control*, we can actually use our agency to do something productive in our situation.

Who is to blame for situations? Oftentimes others, and oftentimes ourselves — and oftentimes it is hard to tell, but your brain will naturally work to relieve yourself of the responsibility for negative outcomes.<sup>27</sup> It thinks if you are right, you are safe, and if you are wrong you are unsafe, and it will adjust its hormones to protect itself. This is why when your

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<sup>27</sup> This is called “momentary confabulation” where real memories are taken out of context by the brain to justify a position being taken in the present. [Berlyne, N. “Confabulation.” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 120.554 (1972): 31-39.]

friend who is clearly making their situation worse for themselves cannot see that they are the root of their problems, but everyone around them can see it. There are brain centers dedicated to justify one's own actions and beliefs at all cost, including sound reasoning. Michael Gazzaniga who researched patients with brain damage that left the brain's hemispheres split called the left side's language centers the "interpreter modules", which are responsible for fabricating for automatically arranging information and memories to create a believable story to someone to exonerate your actions and answers you give.<sup>28</sup> It is necessary then, as a basic principle, when multiple people and variables are involved for a situation to blame others second and take the maximum amount of self-responsibility as possible. First, this forces you to see yourself as someone that has the power to change your circumstance, and dampens your natural instinct to be angry at others. Not everything is your fault, many things are the fault of others, they are to blame for creating the environment where your pain and suffering or misfortune was created, but your choice is this: who do you blame first? Others or yourself? One's answer to this question reveals what they think of themselves. One answer leads to a road of self-pity, a blanket wrapped around one's self as protection, it is a false comforter. No amount of logic can break self-pity's grip, and it is addicting. That is probably why people will create sad music playlists to lull themselves away to the land where they are always the victim of life, and thus if life is the villain, they themselves must be the hero. It is a shortcut to righteousness. Maybe it is purely the fault of others that I ended up in my situation, but if I choose to do nothing about it, I am responsible for that. Whenever I have given into the siren call of self-pity, I have felt my determination, my will, my faith, slip away, I surrendered my agency, and my dignity.

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<sup>28</sup> Gazzaniga, M. S. (1985). *The social brain*. New York: Basic-Books, p. 72.

“Out of the night that covers me, black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance, my head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears, looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years, finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

- “Invictus” by Earnest Henley

### **Eager to Learn:**

Those who choose to be grateful for their agency then will try to find the best ways to use their agency. If choosing gratitude was not difficult enough, the path becomes more difficult. If we care about truth, we must care about what is true.

I was at the DMV in a parking spot on the street facing the sidewalk. There was a car to my right and people in front of me. Suddenly, I felt my car moving forward, my body leaped into action slamming the breaks, but my car did not stop. Fearful of hitting the people in front of me, I panicked. Having an accident hitting someone is bad enough, and having an accident at the DMV was shameful. Adrenaline pumping through me, I kept my foot on the break, but I kept moving forward, almost like I was shooting forward. I braced myself to hit the people, and suddenly, I stopped. Or did I? It turns out that the car next to me was backing out of their spot, and that created the illusion that I was moving forward. Were my emotions valid in that moment? Yes, based on what my perception was, but my perception was wrong. How many other times in my life was I

unable to perceive things as they really are? And then used that experience to create beliefs about myself, the world, and people in general? I must allow myself and my views to be challenged because I am not omnipotent. We discussed that our brain has many defense mechanisms to keep us feeling stable, and if we are really after improvement, wisdom, and truth, then we must be willing to confront that horizon of unknown and unfamiliar ideas, many of which, probably most of which, we do not agree with on a fundamental level. We may be tempted to ask that the horizon be made safe for us, to be spared from discomfort and offense, but in doing so we also declare ourselves as unfit for the journey. We are focusing on what we can not control, and we feel our anxiety levels rise. Confronted with a person who articulates the antithesis of our views, we may feel adrenaline flood our veins preparing our body for physical confrontation, and our left-hemisphere of the brain, our critical thinking canterers go silent. It is hard to get out once pulled by the flesh's natural response. This is made difficult by our media ecosystem. With social media, we can choose the voices we listen to, and surround ourselves with validating ones. Then we get used to the positive feedback loop of our echo chamber, seeing others arguments misrepresented and easily defeated. If we stay in this realm then we dwell in a realm of shadows and half existent forms. Having destroyed the caricatures of our intellectual foes in the debates that run through our head in the shower, our egos inflate and the desire to remain in the world of shadows is reinforced. Again, we come into contact with adversarial ideas, and our brain flushes our body with chemicals meant to drive us back into the shadow world. "It is safe there" it whispers, "you are always right, you are always good, and if you are always right and always good, you can then always feel good. Don't let anyone take that from you." But I want to move out of the world of shadows, I want to use my agency in the real world, I want to exist in as close to reality as I can get. I can never really overcome my desire for safety, I always feel the pull for

ideological (really biological) safety, to be with those that will tell me I am right, and it is in that moment where I am forced to choose between my faith and my fear. Do I abandon the exploration at my encounter with the first storm? If I turn back, how much harder will the next storm be to push through? I can justify myself in the name of safety, but will I ever be able to consider myself as courageous? I cannot brave a storm while anchored in port. We must demand to be challenged, to resist making immediate emotional judgements on opinions and views shared with us, otherwise we should not complain if the whole world turns a deaf ear to our own voice. The entitled person claims the right to question (wonderful), as well as the right for themselves to remain unquestioned (not wonderful). If every person in the world held this view, no one would be able to explain themselves to anyone else. The free flow of information is essential to growth, both as a person and for society, and efforts to impede it, no matter how one chooses to justify it, all lead to one source: fear, insular validation, the preservation of a false sense-of security. Only if I demand to be challenged can my full being be called upon to respond, and to act.

We must be challenged because our beliefs are gathered from our experience, and sometimes our experience of a situation was drastically different from what actually happened. We must be brave enough to confront the unknown, the ideas we may disagree with, and not be demanding for someone else to make our path easy and pleasant — we came to this probationary state to be tested, to see if we will choose strength of character and will over ease and avoidance. In the wilderness of ideas we should strive to be explorers of knowledge, not just tourists confined to the safety of intellectual and emotional guard rails. If we care about truth we must care about what is true. Those who really want to learn, maintain a spirit of intellectual humility: they reserve the right to be



wrong, and they protect the right of others to tell them they are wrong. Am I entitled to *your* opinion? If not then don't act entitled to *mine*.

### **Eager to Change**

Upon further receiving new light and knowledge, we need to apply it. We cannot live simply from receiving water from the well, we have to drink it. The seed (story) must be planted and grown. The sacrament (a representation of the word — Christ) is taken in and literally made to be a part of our body. The attributes we are taught by religious sages, once added to our behavior, helps us become something more than we were. With each growth marks the death of our old selves. This is a constant cycle of rebirth, a realization of our potential. Maslow called this self-actualization, the highest goal on the pyramid of needs.\* When we change our story to make it a better one (the theological term for this is repentance), we live on the edge of death and rebirth, betwixt two eternities, our past selves and future possibility. When we change our story *we live*; that is when our agency is harnessed. And the more we change our story, the more we get used to our power to choose and to take charge of our course. Our confidence grows — a confidence that cannot be faked. It cannot be faked because it relies on not just a hope, but on the knowledge that our agency is a power we are in control over. In seeing ourselves as something that can and does act,<sup>29</sup> we develop self-respect, a gift that God Himself cannot give. We are uncovering the power of our intelligence, our link to the family of eternal creators.

If we cannot change, if we do not reach for a higher form of living, then we will never develop that self-respect and confidence in ourselves. We then will forever be looking to others to give us reassurance and comfort in all we do. We will see ourselves merely as something that life

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<sup>29</sup> 2 Nephi 2:26 “they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.”

acts upon, and if life acts on us, then life is responsible for our happiness. It is a wonderful way to blame the world for our misfortune, but it is not an admirable path. Like a bad smell, the lack of self-respect or the endothermic confidence generated from the consistent harnessing of our agency leaks insecurity into our life that is revealed to others in how we act and speak. Comfort and consolation by themselves are often necessary as a support, but they are horrible foundations for motivators.

### **Eager to Extend Grace**

It was by the grace of others that we all lived past our infancy, and it is by our grace that those that will come after us will survive theirs. Because we have been given much we too must give. And because we are given the opportunity to change our stars we must extend that same opportunity for others. It is very sad that some people who cannot change themselves actively prevent others from moving on from their past. The shadow that is cast by someone reaching for a higher life is frightening for those who choose to remain where and what they are. They will sabotage the person's growing confidence in themselves by digging up their past and throwing it at them, as if preventing someone else from progressing advances one's own stature. The cancel culture and call out tactics of today are possibly projections of personal insecurity, or signs of spiteful malevolence. Perhaps we might be so used to seeing someone as morally beneath us, that witnessing them changing their story threatens our position of power within our own mind. We feel we must keep them down to maintain our ego's mental health. "Let people repent. Let people grow." said Elder Holland at a BYU devotional, "Believe that people can change and improve. Is that faith? Yes! Is that hope? Yes! Is it charity? Yes! Above all, it is charity, the pure love of Christ. If something is buried in the past, leave it buried. Don't keep going back with your little sand pail and beach shovel to dig it up, wave it around, and then throw it at someone, saying, 'Hey!

Do you remember this?"<sup>30</sup> Let us allow people the dignity to change their story, it is too much work to keep everyone down.

If we are really grateful for who we have become, then we must be grateful for those who created the conditions for us to develop into who we are. To extend grace to ourselves for our past and the extension of grace to our future self and the mistakes we will make frees our agency in the present to its fullest capacity. Forgiveness is the antidote to guilt and fear, both for ourselves and for others. We are commanded to forgive all because it frees us; but to set ourselves free we must set others free too. An environment where forgiveness is generously offered is an environment where growth flourishes. [class math teacher experiment\*]. On the other hand, some people will always see Alma the Prophet as Alma the Younger. Those people create a place where no one can change, where no one feels safe, where all are under condemnation-though what they think of themselves is always different, you will see the look of superiority in their eyes.

### **Lead With Benevolence**

An entitled person will practice selective benevolence. They will demand of others to view them or those members of their own group with the benefit of the doubt, and yet in their interactions with others they lead with a presumption of malevolence. It is ethically dishonest to demand others to assume the best of you while they are still assessing you, while treating them as your worst possible conception of their character. This lack of courtesy cannot lead to a good faith relationship, and it leads to unnecessary misunderstandings and potentially to suffering. In assuming the worst of someone, we are tempted to respond to their benign statements as camouflaged threats, and we respond with overt ones. We escalate the situation and when they take their own defensive posture in

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<sup>30</sup> Holland, Jeffrey R. "The Best is Yet to Be" University Devotional. Brigham Young University. The Marriott Center, Provo. 13 Jan. 2009.

reaction to our overt hostility we take it as a confirmation of our original thought of them, wrapping us in another layer of lies we internalize of first our own ability to perceive the world and cleverness to uncover hidden signals, and misjudge their defensiveness as pre-existing hostility for us. Both of which serve to heighten our own ego and prevent us from seeing things clearly as they are.

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How we answer these questions creates two types of environments. If people are our treasure, if we use our power to serve others and esteem all like unto ourselves,<sup>31</sup> if we are grateful for what we have been given, choose to see ourselves as things that can act, focus on what is in our control, learn as much as we can, allow ourselves to be challenged and to hear others out in good faith, make changes to our story as we learn more, and let other people have the opportunity to change as well, we create an environment where trust can grow. This is the heart of charity.

If things are our treasure, we will use people to get to things, and if they get in the way, we must cast them aside, and view them as mere means to our ends. We destroy them. If we use our power and our stewardship to lift ourselves up in the esteem of ourselves and others, people around us become tools for us to wield in our quest for status. If we see someone as a threat to our status, we lay traps and snares for them, spread rumors and present them to others in the worst possible way. We destroy them. If we choose to live life in a state of entitlement, where we barricade ourselves in a semi-justifiable (or even fully justifiable as we will discuss shortly) self-pity, closing our minds to feedback that can bruise our self-image of natural occurring virtue using hush tactics to silence others, we metaphorically destroy and murder them, which is always preamble to the

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<sup>31</sup> Jacob 2:17 “Think of your brethren like unto yourselves...”

real thing. Whenever disagreement prevails, the lines of civil disagreement cut, the desire to sincerely understand is lost, and pluralism is abandoned, the road we head down is a competition for the thrones of power and not cooperation. If they have no voice it is as if they don't exist, it is destruction through subjugation. This is an environment where trust cannot grow. There may be illusions of trust, but the bonds are only as strong as one's insecurities. Bonds made with these answers will break at the first sign of trouble. In this state ruled by fear, jealousy, greed, and vanity, the virus of resentment festers, infecting everything it comes into contact with. Siding with Lucifer on one question will have a reaction on the other two. Each question is not independent of the others, they are all connected. The threads of the respect for dignity runs through each one, and then cannot be unwound, only cut.

Our answers to the three questions of treasure, power, and justice show where our allegiance lies, to Christ or Lucifer. No one can serve two masters.<sup>32</sup> Do we strive for the heart of a Creator and the spirit of charity, fostering an environment of forgiveness, excellence, and trust? Or do we fall in line with the Destroyers and the virus of resentment, casting our bets on the desire for things, the lust for power, and the insulation from adversaries as our salvation? Moroni made it a point to tell us that we must choose a path. "Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil."<sup>33</sup>

The choice to be a creator or a destroyer, with a heart of charity or resentment, an ear for fear or faith, a disposition to create trust or to erode it, effects the health of the individual and by extension their community.

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>33</sup> Moroni 7:10-11

## **Hell on Earth**

Why do nations fail? Because those who see people as objects, who value only their own status, and who believe they are exempt from the consequences of their own actions and are entitled to other people's good grace cannot create stable relationships with other individuals around them, and a culture of distrust is formed. Ruled by their fear, they attempt to guarantee their power, failing to realize they lay the foundation for their own potential subjugation. They are trapped minds in a feedback loop of self-destruction and cognitive distortions because those that are angry believe themselves to be right. They are unable to check their own biases (or worse, they rationalize themselves as virtuous for having them) and assume the worst in others. Societies fall when those that build are overpowered by those that take, when those that pride themselves on their ability to deconstruct gain leverage over those who create, and when those who destroy trust break the bonds of relationships faster than those who can build trust repair them. The martial law enforced on a society is but a projection of the martial law of the mind, the abandonment of cerebral logic and a regression back into the sympathetic nervous system's survival and conquer programming – our hand-me-down subconscious computer inherited from our prehistoric reptilian ancestors. To this part of the brain, everything is a threat. Trust no one. I can think of no better description of hell, than a place where everyone uses everyone else as means to their ends, seeing people as tools for their own pleasure and status, or seeking their admiration as a medal to display on a race to the top of social standing, and where any attempts to challenge bad logic are met with outbursts of anger. The prophecy in the second book of Timothy is realized. "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of

God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. [They are]...always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth...”<sup>34</sup> And because of this virus of the soul, Christ forewarns: “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...”<sup>35</sup>

We see this virus of the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, status, and insular validation everywhere. The boss that views their employees as tools to get themselves a raise,<sup>36</sup> the parent who uses their child as a proxy warrior in the fight for inter-familial social standing, the CEO’s disregard for the janitor’s wellbeing, the difference in courtesy given to the garbage collector and the president, the retrieval of old actions to cast like stones at those who have moved beyond their former selves, the accumulation of economic power in the service of further accumulation, a cyber ecosystem that rewards outrage and comparison, activists of all types and factions who demand public apologies from people while having no intent to forgive, and many more examples can be shown. Trust, unity and understanding cannot thrive here, and a society built on this will groan under the weight of collective resentment. “A world built on the notion of maximizing personal gains at the expense of others,” says one of the most prominent social and linguistic scholars of the 20th century Noam Chomsky, “...a small society based on that principle is ugly, but it can survive. A global society based on that principle is headed for massive destruction.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> 2 Timothy 3:2-7 NIV

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 24:12 “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”

<sup>36</sup> *Anti-social behavior in organizations is described by Robert A. Giacalone and Jerald Greenberg as extortion, blackmail, discrimination, lying, violations of confidentiality, bribery, and sabotage.* [Giacalone, Robert A., and Jerald Greenberg, eds. *Antisocial behavior in organizations*. Sage, 1997, p. viii.]

<sup>37</sup> Chomsky, Noam. “Requiem for the American Dream.” *Documental, Netflix. Estados Unidos de Norteamérica* (2019).

What are we to blame for society's collapse? Money? Money is not the cause of economic collapse, it measures it. What is money but the checks to cash out at the bank of human trust and human agency? Money goes where trust flows, it is not the root of all evil, it is the paper trail of the things people place their faith in. Faith is what keeps the monetary system alive, it is just paper. Take the monetary system away and what are you left with? Relationships of mutual agreement and trust (trust as a value neutral term, you can put the trust of your desire in anything). Money is but one tool we can use to measure the exercise of trust and the exchange of human agency. Steven Covey said it best in the opening page of his book *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*:

*"There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world—one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love. On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet, it is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time. That one thing is trust."*<sup>38</sup>

But the armies of those who build lasting trust and those who erode it stand juxtaposed, their beliefs pitted against each other at every decision point in human history. We have failed failed to recognize what really matters when it comes to remembering our past. On that great and last day, we will see that the most important historical events were the choices we made in regard to our fellow beings in our day to day lives. How did we answer those three questions? Did we foster a heart of charity, the only solid foundation for lasting trust between individuals that can act

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<sup>38</sup> Covey, Stephen R., and Rebecca R. Merrill. *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. Simon and schuster, 2006.



for themselves? Or did we foster our resentment, halting our progress in knowledge, in faith, in integrity, and in connection with others?

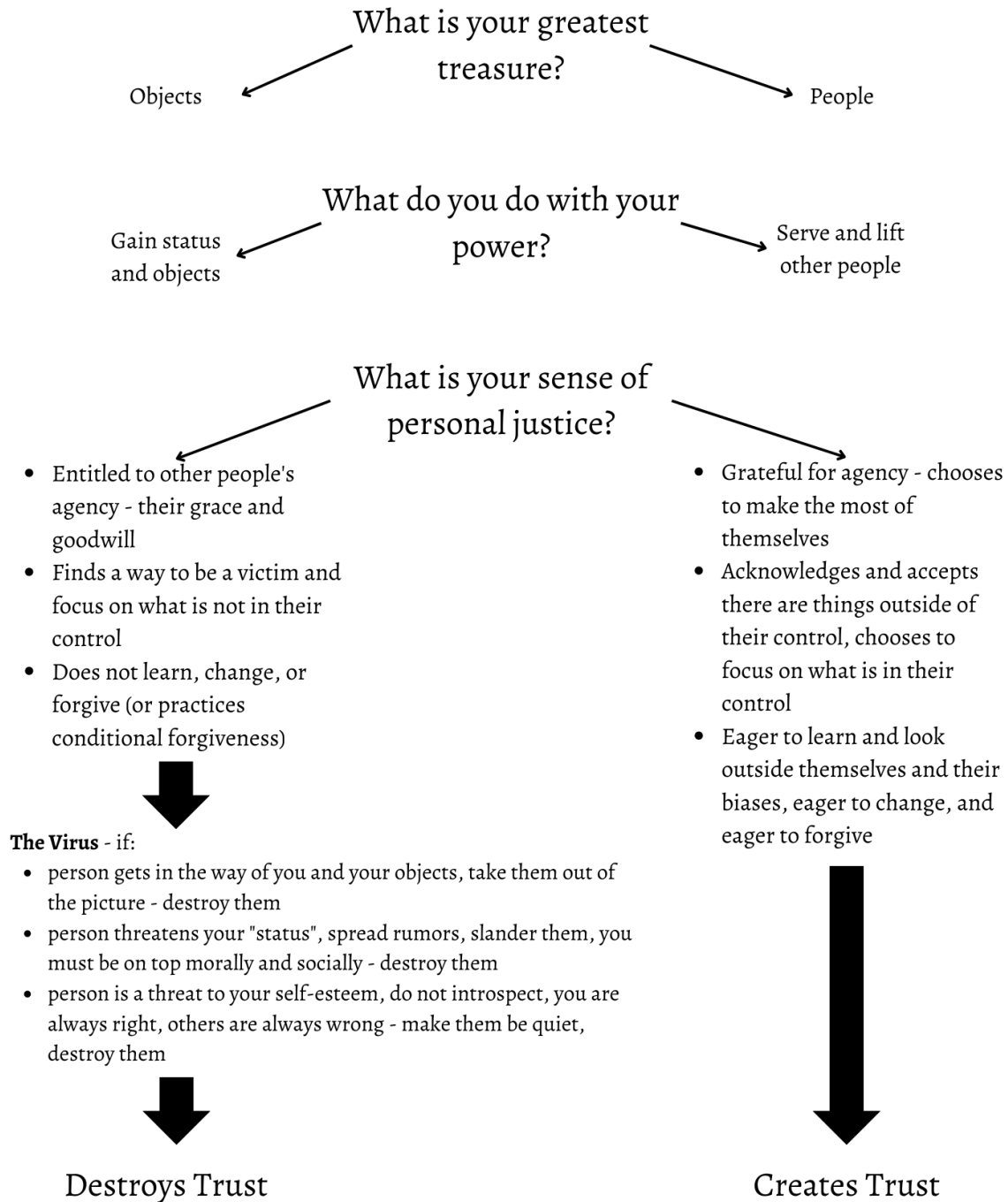
Trust only can be maintained between two individuals if they both hold people and relationships as their highest treasure, they use their power and stewardship to serve, and they are grateful for their life and try their best to focus on what is in their control, learn more, are willing to be challenged, and allow themselves and others to change. These are the three questions of existence, and contained in the questions are the Governing Laws of Trust – the formula for creation.

*“Wherefore, by this pattern ye shall know the spirits in all cases under the whole heavens.” - Jesus Christ <sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 52:19

# The Governing Laws of Trust



# Chapter 6

## The Perfect Victim

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### Irony

That night and day of His atonement, trial and crucifixion the Savior to be was subjected to not just cruelty, but irony. Jehovah was the architect of the Hebrew system of justice that was designed to protect life at all costs. That court, called the Sanhedrin, had no prosecution lawyers. Instead, all the judges were to act as the defense for the accused, and even had to be fluent in more than one language so that no mistranslation by a third party translator could affect the judgment. Three scribes would record the votes for condemnation, innocence, and one recording both; life was too precious for one scribe to make a mistake and condemn an innocent person to death. A person could not be summoned to court by the Sanhedrin itself.<sup>1</sup> The accused first had to have charges levied against them by non-court official accusers, and then summoned by the court. Those two or more *outside witnesses* must have perfectly *aligning testimonies* and could not testify while in the room together as to ensure legitimacy and prevent unjust collaboration.<sup>2</sup> When any difference in testimony is detected the High Priest was obligated to throw out the case (this was called the law of strict agreement).

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<sup>1</sup> Wingo, E. L. (1954). *The Illegal Trial of Jesus*. Earle L. Wingo Publications, Incorporated. [page 50]

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 75

Jesus was taken by order of the court, who sought witnesses to testify against Him, who were then allowed to be in the same room together to testify, and still contradicted each other.<sup>3</sup> Any judge that held feelings of disfavor for the accused must withdraw from the trial. Jesus was brought forth by the high priest Caiaphas, who held the accused in disfavor, and was by law required to withdraw himself from the trial; he instead presided over it.<sup>4</sup> The trial was not to be held during Passover, nor on a Friday. The trial was held during Passover, and on a Friday. It was not to be held at night, capital punishment was considered a religious act, therefore it could not be held before the morning sacrifice was offered in the temple nor after the evening sacrifice was offered.<sup>5</sup> Jesus's capital trial was held after the evening's and before the morning's sacrifice had taken place. An admission of guilt by the accused was not enough to condemn themselves to death, but Jesus's self confession of being the Son of God was taken as adequate.<sup>6</sup> Since no body of judges that large (there was supposed to be seventy-one of them, the seventy that Moses appointed and one to represent Moses himself,) would ever agree on something unanimously, a universal verdict of guilt would result in releasing the accused.<sup>7</sup> There was a universal verdict for death, and yet the accused Jesus was not released. When a person was convicted to die, the council was required to go home, fast and pray and find some way to acquit the accused, and if any "intern" could find a reason to release them from the judgment, they would be granted automatic lifetime membership in the Sanhedrin, so sacred was life in the Hebrew law.

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<sup>3</sup> Hester, H. I. (1963). *The Heart of the New Testament* (Fifteenth Printing). Quality Press Inc. [page 207]

<sup>4</sup> (Wingo, 91)

<sup>5</sup> Fruchtenbaum, A. G. (2016). *Yeshua: The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. Ariel Ministries.

<sup>6</sup> (Wingo, 73)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 84

There were many other violations of the safeguards for innocence and life during this trial, Jesus's second religious trial that morning, the civil trial, and then the walk up to the hill (if anyone, while the guilty was walking to their death, could present a reason why the accused was innocent, they would walk back and keep the trial going), but you get the idea.

The Lord was convicted guilty by a court system designed to keep the innocent alive, created by His prophet that He had called Himself from within the burning bush, and presided by a dishonest and disingenuous High Priest who wore a head plate saying "Holiness to the Lord". That death sentence was then carried out by a civil judge that found him innocent. We will never experience this irony. It is salt in the wound.

In retrospect, we see that Christ's trial in the wilderness, with its three questions of virtue and Vice, was a preparatory shadow of His pinnacle moment of mortal life on Earth. While suffering in the garden, blood leaking from his pores, and hanging on the cross, nails in his body, he was summoning the maximum power of His agency, not to just stay conscious, but for what was going on in His mind while He was conscious. In those moments He was not focused on relieving His temporal suffering, we were the object of His love and His effort. He prioritized us over Himself. He was not thinking of His status, for He might have summoned His legions of angels to shock the Sanhedrin while they stood in court mocking the offices that they held, or at any moment during the death march or while being hung up to die. Nor was He abandoning His responsibilities that He had assumed before the world was; He was applying all that He had learned and taught.

His treasure was us, the power of His agency was used to serve those He loved by opening the doors of salvation, and He was anything but entitled in that moment. He was not demanding others' grace as if He

owned it, He was exercising His own. Though, the question of entitlement was the real test, and we will discuss this shortly.

Contrast this to the Pharisees, who prioritized themselves (or the ones pulling the strings in this case anyways, namely Caiaphas and Annas), they used their power and position to lift themselves up and thought more of their social standing than serving those they presided over. And far from being grateful, they thought themselves above reproach, all knowing and showed no sign of intellectual or spiritual humility. They were not to be questioned, and all those who opposed them were wicked, knowledge-less, second class citizens in their artificially created theological empire. Because Jesus stood opposed to their views of themselves, they resented Him, and when resent powers our action, destruction is always to be found around the corner. Christ and the secret combination of the high officials valued different things, how could they grasp the higher knowledge of the gospel when their hearts were not open to hear it? They both answered the three questions differently, and destroyers convicted the Creator to death.

All through that humiliating trial the Creator held His dignity, never giving into the urge to lash out and to assert His dominance. He was playing a different game than them. But on that cross, tortured, and stripped of anything resembling power as the world sees it, in that moment the Heavens watched to see, in the last seconds of Christ's life would He remain pure, clean, honorable, humble, and loving? Or would He give in and plant a small seed of resentment, that would result by prioritizing Himself over us, showing His true power in a spectacle of shock-and-awe, and withdraw His love for His oppressors?

### **Jesus's Right**

The legitimacy of Jesus's victimhood was essential for this part of the Atonement to work. Subjected to unjust proceedings and humiliation, the Master was perfectly justified in withdrawing His love and desire to

“be at one with” from those who saw Him as a prop in their play, an obstacle to their power. They broke the rules of what trust requires, and because they violated them, the victimized party is justified in wanting to turn away, exchange resentment for resentment, to say “if this is a game of power, then I will compete for yours”. But Jesus was playing a different game. Truth gave Christ the right to be resentful, to respond in kind, but Christ chose to give that up.

### **The Eternal Paradox of Competing Truths**

There are two truths, emergent from how trust works. The first is that upon the violation of trust, the victimization of an individual, that individual is justified in their urge to pull away and to separate — to act on their resentment and respond in kind. Justice is just, and punishments must be made or else agency would be separated from accountability. However, an endless cycle of retaliation is not a heaven to be desired. The other truth is that unity, peace, and harmony cannot exist in a space where resentment has a grasp on the agency of individuals, which drives them to seek to dominate their oppressors. And so we have the two competing truths. Offense is justified but peace cannot exist where offense is taken and returned. In opposition to what Nietzsche calls the “will-to-power” Jesus Christ bridged these two eternal juxtaposed axioms of agency, by exercising the “will-to-freedom” through forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> The story of Christ is this: you are a victim. Terrible things happen to you by factors external to your control. People use you and manipulate you, nature runs its course and causes disease, disability, and temporal separation from loved ones. You are a just victim, and thus are entitled to your anger and resent. Your feelings are valid. Now can you give them up, an offering at the altar of peace? Perhaps you may choose to withhold your offering, and use it to

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, F. (2021). *The will to power*. Good Press, 693.

protect your self-pity that you rightly deserve. However, if you choose to do this, you will forever remain trapped. Christ can wash you clean, but He cannot save you from your ability to turn away — that is on you and you alone. Self-pity and resentment tells us that peace comes when we gain the upper hand, when the tables are turned on those who have wronged us and until we control the levers of power we will not be at peace. This is a false idea. It kills unity on an internal level, then between two individuals, and then causes ripples throughout society. Living in a state of resentment and anger is taxing on the body, sapping its resources by keeping the fight systems constantly on alert.<sup>9</sup> It destroys good thinking and good will for others, a reflection of one's attitude towards themselves. The Gottmans are the world's foremost authorities on marriage and family studies. Through decades of studying couples they assert that the number one predictor of divorce is resentment for the spouse which they call bad memories.<sup>10</sup> It is resentment for the partner that causes one party to use the children as tools to hurt the other, creating generational trauma, the children as innocent casualties in a war for psychological dominance.<sup>11</sup> God is very clear on what happens to those who use children in this way — it carries a harsh condemnation.<sup>12</sup> It is self-pity and then resentment that causes the world's man-made catastrophes. It was the resentment of the allied powers at the closing of World War One that caused them to put such a taxing burden on the German people through the Treaty of

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson, O. J., Vytal, K., Cornwell, B. R., & Grillon, C. (2013). The impact of anxiety upon cognition: perspectives from human threat of shock studies. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 7, 203. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2013.00203>

<sup>10</sup> Gottman, J., Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1995). *Why marriages succeed or fail: And how you can make yours last*. Simon and Schuster.

<sup>11</sup> Walker, M. (1999). The intergenerational transmission of trauma: The effects of abuse on the survivor's relationship with their children and on the children themselves. *The European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling & Health*, 2(3), 281-296.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 18:6 "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."



Versailles to pay them massive reparations that created the fertile soil for Hitler's words of retaliation could take root.<sup>13</sup> Some allied leaders wanted to see Germany in a state of powerlessness, as exemplified by Sir Eric Campbell-Geddes, a British officer's words "We shall squeeze the German lemon until the pips squeak!" For that sentiment by the military's leadership, the British people suffered under the relentless bombing of London by the Nazis decades later. We are warned by King Benjamin to watch our thoughts, for they turn into our actions.<sup>14</sup> We must cut off self-pity before it turns into resentment and spiteful vengeance, watching our emotions "diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."<sup>15</sup>

No amount of power satisfies resentment, it will keep wanting more. That is because it is an agency-consuming phenomenon. Jesus Christ showed us that only those that can forgive, are the ones who are really at peace, and those that are at peace are free — for they have "overcome the world".<sup>16</sup> Forgiveness is the catalyst for charity, the element essential for the creator's answers to the three questions of truth, the ingredients for charity. Self-pity always leads to resentment, which *demand*s your agency to serve its purposes. Forgiveness leads to charity, which sets free your agency, which *inspires* your actions. Christ's physical sacrifice was sufficient only because His emotional sacrifice was complete, He was the only person who lived who remained free until the very end. A perfect Master of His own agency, the "will-to-freedom" was His fire, which He set out to give to us.

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<sup>13</sup> The allies demanded the war torn and economically devastated Germany to pay \$33 billion in reparations, which would be roughly \$580 billion in today's money. This added on top of the humiliation of losing the war created the need to feel respected and powerful once again, and the quickest way to that is through the accumulation of power through conquering.

<sup>14</sup> Mosiah 4:30

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 12:15

<sup>16</sup> John 16:33

## Downstream and Upstream Grace

We all consider ourselves to be a part of groups, it is in our nature — not only as spirits but as a byproduct of the body we were given that has taken millions of years to form and evolve. To our group, which we see as extensions of ourselves, we are eager to forgive. They are the ones we trust the most, and so we are pulled by an unseen force to want to give them the benefit of the doubt over someone from an outside group.<sup>17</sup> Those we naturally want to extend our grace to, are downstream. Grace to them does not have to compete with the gravity of prejudice that the outsider, the other, the stranger must overcome. They have the disadvantage of our bias working against them. Our grace is not naturally flowing to them, and thus they are upstream, and we have to carry our grace to them, fighting the current all the way up. To them, our grace is truly a gift, because it was the force of our agency which made it possible for us to grant it.

Those who we believe to have victimized us are so far upstream that we might believe it is not worth it to hike and tread to them. May we ask ourselves in this situation, is grace worth the climb and is freedom worth the trek? They are as much our neighbor as those who are downhill. Were we not told by the only one who lived their life as a free soul to forgive seventy times seven? Incredible strength must be mustered to follow this commandment to its end.

The sociologists David L. Weaver-Zercher, Donald B. Kraybill, and Steven M. Nolt wrote a book titled *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*, in which they explored this community's exemplary capacity to overcome experiences that should leave anyone in a state of anger and resentment. In one such story, on August 19, 1957, Paul Coblentz was murdered in front of his wife and baby over the theft of \$9.

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley, D. A., Sokol-Hessner, P., Banaji, M. R., & Phelps, E. A. (2011). Implicit race attitudes predict trustworthiness judgments and economic trust decisions. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(19), 7710-7715.

Paul's father Mose expressed the grief of a parent who had lost a child, but then went to the prison to visit the man who killed his son. "I hope God can forgive you" was his message to the offender. A quick trial sentenced Paul's murderer, and the non-Amish community was shocked by what followed. Paul's Amish community in Ohio and Amish people everywhere sent letters to the governor pleading for the man who killed Paul to be spared. In the Amish newspaper *The Budget*, an article was published which read "Will we as Amish be blameless in the matter if we do not present a written request to the authorities, asking that his life be spared?" How did the perpetrator feel witnessing these events? The place where Paul lived was poetically called Mt. Hope, the people lived up to that name. Here we witness a community of free souls, a community of true strength, a strength that is cast aside by a world consumed in a battle for institutional power. They tread on this strength, and by extension its patron Jesus Christ as a thing of naught.<sup>18</sup> There is another story where a mother whose baby was killed by some teenage boys, and in response to letters from people calling for harsh punishments for them, she responded "If I saw the boys who did this, I would talk good to them. I would never talk angry to them or want them to talk angry to me. Sometimes I do get to feeling angry, but I don't want to have that feeling against anyone. It is a bad way to live...We plead leniency for them."<sup>19</sup> If only the world could follow the example of these Amish saints, it would be a much better place.

It is no easy feat to achieve the level of living that these ambassadors of grace have shown, but Viktor Frankl, world renowned psychologist and survivor of the holocaust claimed that by what he observed in the camps, a few people held on to their humanity while being subjected to inhumane conditions. These people have released a part of themselves that Frankl

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:13; 1 Nephi 19:9 "the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught"

<sup>19</sup> Kraybill, D. B., Nolt, S. M., & Weaver-Zercher, D. L. (2010). *Amish grace: How forgiveness transcended tragedy*. John Wiley & Sons, 77.

called “the defiant power of the human spirit”, a part of us that cannot be shackled by an outside source, nor that is ever sick.<sup>20</sup> He said in talking about those who held onto hope and let go of resent that “They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”<sup>21</sup> We have the capacity to choose grace. Let us not forget that another reason that the atonement worked is that the power of agency that is alive in Christ is identical to the one that is placed in us.

### **The Man and the Snake**

A man saw a snake being burned to death and decided to take it out of the fire. When he did, the snake bit him. The bite caused excruciating pain, the man dropped the snake, and the reptile fell right back into the fire. The man tried to pull it out again and again the snake bit him. Someone who was watching approached the man and said: “Excuse me, but don't you understand that every time you try to get the snake out of the fire, it's going to bite you? Why are you being stubborn?”

The man replied: “The nature of the snake is to bite, but that's not gonna change my nature, which is to help.”

So, with the help of a metal pole, the man took the snake out of the fire and saved its life.

“Do not change your nature simply because someone harms you. Do not lose your essence, only take precautions. Worry more about your conscience than your reputation. Your conscience is what you are, and your reputation is simply what others think of you - and what other people think is not your problem... it's theirs.”

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<sup>20</sup> Miller, C. (2004). For What are We Born to Become?: The Logotherapy of Dr. Victor Frankl. *International Journal of Philosophical Practice*, 2(3), 48-55.

<sup>21</sup> Frankl, V. E. (1985). *Man's search for meaning*. Simon and Schuster, 86.

## Accountability and the Principle of Least Necessary Force

Forgiveness does not do away with consequences, but its goal is to halt the consequences caused by resentment – it prevents unnecessary suffering. A person who has forgiven someone and a person who holds to their resentment for someone will have different views on justice. In a hypothetical court case, the victim that has forgiven will ask “what is the minimum amount of suffering this person will have to go through for them to change?” The change of their oppressor is their main concern, the punishment is a means to that end. The resentful victim will say “what is the maximum amount of punishment I can force upon my perpetrator?” Change is not their focus, punishment and suffering is. The urge to dominate has taken over. Justice, as a concept, is a tool they can use to create more suffering. The resentful cries for justice are calls for suffering masked in a cloak of virtue. They shout demands for public apologies, with no intention of forgiving — an act of submission is what they seek. Malcom X, commenting on Lord Acton’s observation that “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” added that “Having no power even corrupts more absolutely”.<sup>22</sup>

The resentful victim who has no desire for reconciliation *is an oppressor who simply does not have the means to oppress*. If given the means to do so they will quickly become the object of their scorn — and the dangerous thing is they are the ones who think they deserve power the most. Says Aldous Huxley in his novel *Chrome Yellow*, “The surest way to work up a crusade in favor of some good cause is to promise people they will have a chance of maltreating someone. To be able to destroy with good conscience this is the height of psychological luxury, the most delicious of moral treats.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cone, J. (2004). Theology's great sin: Silence in the face of white supremacy. *Black Theology*, 2(2), 139-152.

<sup>23</sup> Huxley, A. (1922). *Crome yellow: a novel*. Harper.

Christ was a victim, but it is not the resentful victims that walk with Christ, only the ones that maintain their love for those who spitefully use them walk with the prince of forgiveness.

We live in a world which increasingly turns to higher authorities to solve problems that could be handled by confronting an individual on a personal level. If a person offends us, perhaps we might consider two things. The first is that we should remember what Epictetus said: "Remember, it is not enough to be hit or insulted to be harmed, you must believe that you are being harmed. If someone succeeds in provoking you, realize that your mind is complicit in the provocation. Which is why it is essential that we not respond impulsively to impressions; take a moment before reacting, and you will find it easier to maintain control."<sup>24</sup> This may be about to calm our emotions, or help us see that we misunderstood the situation and remember that we are biologically primed to interpret things in the worst possible way,<sup>25</sup> and thus we can avoid unnecessary further action. But when confrontation is necessary, do we go to the person in private and ask them to explain what they said and seek to understand them (this it not to agree with them), and explain why we feel why we feel, or do we mount a campaign to force an apology, and take it straight to their superiors? Which produces a more trusting environment? We must remember that in our confrontations, if we do not follow them with increased love, then we are spiritually blind. Our attitude of forgiveness creates the environment that allows for a person to change in a way where a future unity is possible, and where trust can be maintained *despite*

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<sup>24</sup> R. Dobbin (Ed.), *Epictetus' Discourses and Selected Writings*, Penguin Classics, New York (2008), 228-229.

<sup>25</sup> "Catastrophizing has been broadly conceived as an exaggerated negative "mental set" brought to bear during actual or anticipated pain experience. In the literature that has emerged during the past 2 decades, catastrophizing has risen to the status of one of the most important psychological predictors of pain experience." [Sullivan, M. J., Thorn, B., Haythornthwaite, J. A., Keefe, F., Martin, M., Bradley, L. A., & Lefebvre, J. C. (2001). Theoretical perspectives on the relation between catastrophizing and pain. *The Clinical journal of pain*, 17(1), 52-64.]

differences. Forgiveness must be at the center of a pluralistic society, otherwise it degenerates into a game of power and a world of distrust made possible by the consuming sinkhole of resentment.

## **Social Change**

Though He was the patron of forgiveness, Jesus did not claim that injustices should go uncontested. Rather, it is the obligation of those who serve truth to confront injustice, but *how we go about confronting the injustice* so reveals our hearts and our view of Christ and His ways.

Much resentment towards the Roman Empire was felt among the citizens of the Kingdom of Judea — and rightly so. A foreign occupation is not an ideal condition to live under. Jesus also did not favor the empire as an entity. Jesus was not viewed favorably by the revolutionaries of His time because unlike the rebels of His age — those who saw themselves as just in their anger, the Master's direction for social change focused on change *while preserving the dignity of their oppressors*. The revolutionaries were not concerned with such a thing.

One of the famous lines by the Master is to turn the other cheek. This passage has been misunderstood to mean taking a stance of passivity, a stance never shown by Christ. In his book *Jesus and Non Violence*, Walter Wink shows how this passage displays Christ's game of creative resistance, where the focus of the defiance is towards a union rather than a game of power. If an oppressor slaps someone they deem inferior they do it with the back of their right hand, and it hits the right cheek. To turn the left cheek would force them to hit you with their fist, and in Christ's social context, such an act is only done when you consider that person to be an equal. It forces them to see you as an equal when they just saw you as an inferior, and gives them the chance to reflect on their own nature as well as

yours. It is meant to throw them off balance.<sup>26</sup> It communicates this: “You are hitting another child of God, in this identity we are equals, now hit me and declare it so”.

In Christ’s advice when being forced (by a soldier) to walk one mile to carry their pack, to walk another one. Soldiers are only legally allowed to force a citizen to carry their gear for no more than a certain distance, to both assert dominance but to not allow soldiers to abuse the citizens so much that uncontrollable animosity is created. Punishments for soldiers that broke this were harsh. So imagine if you were that soldier, and the person whose land you were occupying was carrying your gear for more than the legal time limit, refused to give it up and continued to carry it cheerfully, what would you think they were up to? Were they trying to get you in trouble? Suddenly in your mind the power dynamic has switched. If caught forcing them to do this you are in danger. A need to reclaim your belongings from the person who you deem your inferior throws you off balance. The anxiety would torture you every step that they carry on with your things. You are part of an army but are equally as powerless to it as the person who is carrying your pack. This gives you a chance to reflect on the nature of power, and how it should be used. Paul, in trying to convey this message of Jesus to the Roman saints, told them “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”<sup>27</sup> The results may not be immediate, but the process is divinely prescribed — it is the way to confront injustice that maintains the door for future union.

Jesus is clear (and so is Paul), that even though we might be oppressed by those wielding worldly power, if we fail to treat them with a full consciousness of their worth to God, we forget our own identity as His children too. Just like how if we lie to others we first lie to ourselves,

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<sup>26</sup> Wink, W. (2003). *Jesus and nonviolence: A third way*. Fortress Press.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 12:20



we cannot treat someone as if they had no value to the Creator without forgetting our value as well. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”<sup>28</sup> If we do not love our oppressors, striving to create change in a creative way that maintains the dignity of both parties and not escalating situations above what is needed to promote reflection, we are, in Jesus’s own literal words, not the children of our Father in heaven. Perhaps by maintaining the dignity of those whom we most want to forget, we preserve our own. This is a difficult commandment to fulfill, and so it is an adequate test to reveal to us how much we understand Christ, and how much we love Him. For if we really love Him, then we will love who He loves — and He loves all, for the oppressor and the oppressed stand in the same line before Him. They may bicker amongst themselves for comparing each other’s moral virtue, and one may be right, that they were closer to the truth than the other, but one thing is constant: all of us stand as the oppressors of Christ, and so we all stand in the same line for His forgiveness. Because of this fact, all that bickering amongst ourselves is pointless, because through the grace of Christ we are all equalized. Someone changed by Christ’s grace feels no need to argue their moral virtue, their only concern is where can they help. We must be careful that we are not on the side of the murmurers, whispering amongst one another “Out of this whole crowd of us, why is Christ going to have dinner with Zacchaeus, a sympathizer and servant of the oppressors?”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:43-45

<sup>29</sup> Luke 19:7 NIV “All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”

### **Who to Comfort – Upstream Grace?**

To whom our grace must be carried upstream to the same can be said about our empathy. We are told by the Master to comfort those who stand in need of comfort, and we will be naturally inclined to comfort some more than others. Perhaps some of us will be adamant on withholding our empathy. These are those who we consider to have wronged us, or to have wronged someone we value. To the Jews in the time of Jesus it was both the oppressing Roman legions and the unclean Samaritans. Their reasons for viewing them as morally inferior may be different, but the contempt was the common factor.

Who do we consider to be unworthy of our comfort? Did not Christ atone for the sins of the oppressor and the oppressed? For those who consider themselves as clean before God and for those who the “clean” seem as untouchable? Did Christ not take upon Himself the suffering of *all* His children, so that He might comfort them *all*? Perhaps when we find ourselves preparing the smug grin of contempt within ourselves at the suffering of those we feel deserve it, we might rethink our own standing before God. For Christ had compassion on all, and if we are to deny ours, do we declare ourselves as more clean than the Master? Careful we must be when looking at the suffering of others, whether we feel it to be deserved or not. For where the suffering walk, there the Master has walked too. To exercise empathy is to enter a house of sorrow, the temple of hallowed pain. We walk on sacred ground, for there we will find Christ, and we should hope we wipe the smugness off our face before the Great Comforter finds us with our shoes on while walking through the temple of Atonement. Resentment is the disease of a trapped mind, it shows no reverence. Resentment is not just content with winning, it desires humiliation — its desire is to light a fire in the holiest of holies of those they see as their enemy. It seeks to put its idols in the temple of forgiveness, it seeks power over it — a power it can never get. Forgiveness cannot be

taken, so it cannot be conquered. Why does charity never fail? Because it requires nothing for its victory. Its mere expression is the prize, and unity is its cause. This unearned forgiveness under pressure is the entrance hall to the temple of oneness, for we will never truly feel at home with someone while we know harbored resentment, because we can never be sure it is completely gone. But with Christ, that surety is there.

## **Sum**

A relationship requires genuine connection, a firm clasp of the hands in mutual good will. With all we meet there is a door – a door for us and a door for them. Good will is the open door, the desire for unity and oneness is our outstretched hands through the door. Christ is the only one whose door remained open, we have all closed ours. Our reasons may have been good, but we have felt, and given the isolation that comes with shutting it. Paul Tillich articulated that Jesus Christ maintained a spirit of unity despite all that drove him to division.<sup>30</sup>

How many things cause us to divide ourselves today? How many tribes have we formed, who reward negative interaction with those they consider the outsiders? When mobs form where is the grace of Christ to be found? Not with those whose hearts are filled with spite, and who use that spite as the fuel for their actions. Mob mentality rewards us for surrendering our empathy, and by extension our dignity as we cease to act as an individual but let the group do our choosing for us. We pay the toll with our agency and our prize is to feel like the victor, but the prize is not real, it does not last.

Disagreement is not the force that drives away the spirit of God, it's the rage that comes all too easily along with it. Is frustration a sin? No – if so then Christ would not have been perfect, as He was often frustrated by

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<sup>30</sup> Tillich, P. (2005). *The new being*. U of Nebraska Press, 27.

His apostles.<sup>31</sup> Is feeling the emotion of resentment a sin? No – it is a phenomenon that appears without our consent in response to perceived injustice. It becomes a sin when we choose to harness it and use its emotional potency to justify **The Virus** of using people as objects, seeking power over others, and relieving ourselves of responsibility to focus on what is in our control and seeing ourselves as entitled to the grace of others. If we choose resentment, we sow the seeds of division.

Do we value reconciliation over division? Christ told us that without the desire for reconciliation, our offerings are worthless: “...if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps something even more damning was said by the Prophet Joseph, “If you do not accuse each other, God will not accuse you. If you have no accuser you will enter heaven”.<sup>33</sup> By this standard, how are we doing? Judging by the earnestness of President Nelson’s April 2023 talk on healing our divisions and to disagree without spite, and the subsequent social media posts I saw of people telling others how what they are doing on their page is not under condemnation but what others do is — not well. When will we leave this way behind? Anger does not change minds, it does not foster unity, it drives disagreement deeper into our souls, and divides us to the point where we cannot heal the rift ourselves.

Perhaps Christ will turn to us, and ask us to come follow Him. “Where?” We might ask as we walk with Him down the path, and up ahead we see the grove with a rock, a hill with a cross. “I do not want to watch you suffer.” we tell Christ. “Oh this is not for me, I have already

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 17:17 “Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you?”

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 5:22-24

<sup>33</sup> JS, History, 1838–1856, vol. C-1, addenda, created 18 Oct.–ca. 20 Nov. 1854; 75 pages in volume bearing three labels reading “Historical Notation,” “From 1841 to 1851,” and “Addenda to C1;” handwriting of Leo Hawkins, Jonathan Grimshaw, Robert Campbell, and John L. Smith; CHL.

been here. These are for you.” The hill of unyielding forgiveness is the hill that Christ died on, and for all those who dare profess themselves as Christian it is a place we must die on too, leaving our old life behind, to be changed by His grace. “But I don’t want to die” we protest, “I don’t want to give up my feelings of moral superiority, my victimhood, my self-pity, I suffered for it, it is my right, I earned it!” Perhaps then Christ would smile, and reply, “You’re right. You did earn it, and you may keep it. Truth grants it to you.”<sup>34</sup> But if you’re willing to give up that life for my sake, you will find a better one.<sup>35</sup> My way is a higher trust than the one you are clinging to.<sup>36</sup> The same law that you cite to justify your just victimhood is the same law that I fulfilled,<sup>37</sup> I am the new law, forgiveness is the new way. You cling to a dead tradition, and you may hold on to it, but it will get you nowhere. My truth sets you free.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the choice is yours.”<sup>39</sup> To hold resent is an act of turning in, but forgiveness is always turning outward. Elder Bednar says in his book *Act in Doctrine*, that “...you and I as fallen, natural men and women would likely turn inward with self-absorption, self-pity, and selfishness. But the character of Christ, the consistent capacity to turn outward and minister to others in the midst of affliction, is the very foundation of the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Leviticus 24:19-21 “And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.”

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 16:25 “For whoever wills to save his life will lose it and whoever will lose his life for me will find it.”

<sup>36</sup> Luke 6:32 “Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

<sup>38</sup> John 8:32 “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

<sup>39</sup> Helaman 14:30 “Ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves” see also Joshua 24:15; Alma 30:8; Moses 6:33

<sup>40</sup> Bednar, D. A. (2012). *Act in doctrine: Spiritual patterns for turning from self to savior*. Deseret Book, 14.

In this age of personal polarization, when the proverbial lands of our hearts are frozen over with the ice of revenge, and the forests of community burned with the fires of resentment, when our voices no longer sing the songs of grace, then it matters little what ordinances we participate in, for only our lips will draw near to Him. Revenge is not a dish best served cold – it is a dish that *can only* be served cold, because it comes from a heart that is iced over. Our forgiveness is the candle that slowly thaws the cold disposition of those that have fallen into the winter river of self-pity, where each act of revenge is but a shiver of a soul shaking to feel itself warm once more. May we pray for the strength to forgive, the strength that leads to peace — our desire for the salvation of others becomes the same plea for us. Where we find Christ, we find forgiveness, and where we find forgiveness, we witness strength. We always have a choice when we feel we are the victim, whether our feeling is truly justified or not, to let ourselves be corrupted by that pain, or as the LDS marriage and family therapist Carlfred Broderick says, “some find the strength to ‘metabolize’ the poison within themselves, refusing to pass it on to future generations. Before them were generations of destructive pain; after them the line flows clear and pure...In suffering innocently that others might not suffer, such persons, in some degree, become as ‘saviors on Mount Zion’.”<sup>41</sup>

## **A Free Soul**

Pilate looked at the death march forming, the man he had just sentenced to execution was being presented with a cross. The people were spitting on him. *Was this not the man they had just welcomed into the city yesterday with songs of praise? Mobs really turn on their own*, reflected

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<sup>41</sup> Carlfred Broderick, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, August 1986, 38-39.

Pilate. This whole ordeal had shaken Him. *The son of a god? My power to crucify him was given to me from another realm? They say he is a king but he claims no land, but the world of truth itself?* Had he made the wrong decision? Should he have risked the Jewish uprising in spite of his already unstable reputation with Rome? He had sworn an oath to uphold the peace, but then today he had come face to face with a man who showed no fear in the face of death, nor hatred in the face of injustice, not anger towards those who had beaten him. This was a man that this squabbling population overly concerned with rite and ritual had produced, who the leaders sought to eliminate. A man who was not just devoted to religion, but to truth. All these thoughts flashed through Pilate's head as he saw Jesus raise the cross.

Jesus began to walk, and before leaving the Roman governor's sight, he turned to face him. Pilate could see this man was under immense pain, from the torn flesh on his back, the weight of the cross and the crown of thorns on his head. Even though this Jesus was a ways off, it was as if Pilate could see his face if he was standing next to him. It was surreal, like he was out of his own body and brought to stand before the accused. Jesus looked into Pilate's eyes, with a penetrating gaze. It was a sad look, yet one full of understanding. It was as if he told Pilate "I know the situation you are in, and I do not blame you. I know that you tried to save me, that you went to the stone pavement that you always go to contemplate at to think about the choice you were making, even though you could have just dismissed me and gone on with your busy day. But like I said, this was destined to happen. Thank you." All these words flowed through Pilate's mind, as if it were spoken with a still small voice. Then Jesus smiled, and walked away.

This caused Pilate to break down, "What have I done?" he said out loud, the guards looking at him strangely. Pilate turned to Caiaphas, who stood watching nearby. "What have you done?! I just sentenced the best person your civilization has produced to death, someone that you needed,

someone that had the moral fortitude to unite your people, someone who stood for something larger than themselves!”

Caiaphas was shocked at the sudden outburst by the Roman prefect. Pilate motioned to his servant. “Bring me a board and paint.” And when the servant had brought it, Pilate told him “Write JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. And write it in Hebrew, Greek and Latin so that everyone can read it. Have the soldiers put it on Jesus’s cross.”

Caiaphas protested, “No, you need to say that he said he was the king of the Jews.” Pilate turned to face the chief priest. “If you had a king you should have wanted Jesus to be him. What I have written, I have written, I’m not changing it.” And with that he gave the servant the order to run after the procession. As he watched him run through the courtyard and out of the gate, he heard a voice, but he was too distraught to think of where it came from. Whether it was a servant or a soldier or a priest or his head, it made no difference. It asked him “Pontious, why did you write that?” Pilate’s eyes remained fixed on the line disappearing into the distance. “That Jesus was stronger than I ever could be. I have been to Rome and spoken with philosophers who talk about setting the soul free, but I have only met one man who had a free soul, and I just killed him.”<sup>42</sup>

Undeserved forgiveness was the hill Christ died on, it is the hill we must die on too. Forgiveness at all costs – and its price is our pride. It is the gift of grace that creates the space for one to change their heart and feel safe doing so. Because we all wait in the same line for Christ’s grace, whether we broke one law or one-million it makes no difference, we are equals

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<sup>42</sup> Though Pilate has been looked down on by many Latter-day Saints as cowardly, who selectively depict the Pilate of Matthew and Luke, John clearly did not see nor depict Pilate like the other synoptic gospels. St. Augustine claimed Pilate was a convert and the Greek Orthodox and Coptic churches named Pilate as a saint. John Carroll explains in his book *The Existential Jesus* that Pilate was exonerated by Jesus who knew that Pilate had to carry out his duty to keep order to uphold his oath of office, and that is what made the victimization of Christ valid. [Carroll, J. (2007). *The Existential Jesus*. Scribe Publications.]



before Him. He is the great equalizer that brings the prideful low. Jesus is the Ruler of the Kingdom of Forgiveness, and it is a kingdom that cannot be conquered. Says the author Kahlil Gibran, “How could a tyrant rule the free, and the proud”.<sup>43</sup> This kingdom holds no ground and yet its borders encompass the whole world. May we pray that we can be worthy to be its citizens, to become the Children of its King, that His upstream grace is found in us, that we might discover the life His grace brings, being reconciled to each other and fulfill Paul’s dream of there being no more strangers.

If we have his grace in us we will be like him. Remaining in the current state of deep disagreement, we may not be united in law or practice, but perhaps united in forgiveness – and for now, that is enough.

Upstream Grace is an unnatural phenomenon, unsupported by the scientific literature based on the premise of our survival-instinct evolutionary roots. Upstream Grace is itself – a miracle. Our creation was an act of grace, who dares say they deserved to be organized as an intelligence? So too we are saved by the grace of Another, embraced in society by the grace of others. Society is not held together by laws as it is by the unspoken and unacknowledged grace we all exercise knowing that in some way we all break the written or unwritten law. Because we were formed by grace (our first-cause), and we are saved by grace, law is the interim between the states of grace. Perhaps it is what allows us to witness it, and appreciate it. But when we remember how miraculous Upstream Grace is, and the charge we are given to embody it by taking upon ourselves the name of the embodiment of Upstream Grace, the ultimate miracle worker, we are reminded of our destinies as well – we were born to be miracle workers, to behold, capture, and return Grace. In this endeavor, we become as Christ, and our souls are set free through the power of His way.

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<sup>43</sup> Gibran, K. (1993). *The Prophet by Khalil Gibran*. VICTORIA INSTITUTIONS, Aaradhana, DEVERKOVIL 673508 India.

# Chapter 7

## War for the Dead Body of Christ: Personality Based Theological Battles

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*And isn't it a bad thing to be deceived about the truth, and a good thing to know what the truth is? For I assume that by knowing the truth you mean knowing things as they really are. - Plato*

*“That same principle applies as we build unity with people who are from vastly different backgrounds. The children of God have more in common than they have differences. And even the differences can be seen as an opportunity. God will help us see a difference in someone else not as a source of irritation but as a contribution. The Lord can help you see and value what another person brings which you lack.” - Henry B. Eyring, 2008<sup>1</sup>*

*“The main thing is to engage, dialogue, bridge, and interact with people of all sorts. Unless we participate, we lose our ability to both influence the world and learn from it.” - Elder Kearon<sup>2</sup>*

### **Chapter Overview:**

We are people with differing temperaments and biology which influences our opinions and worldview. Our opinions about how the

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<sup>1</sup> From the October 2008 General Conference address “Our Hearts Knit as One”

<sup>2</sup> At the Religious Freedom Annual Review, June 21, 2019.

world should be arise from our gut level response to questions and then justified by our strategic reasoning, on topics such as whether or not traditional leadership is legitimate, what people deserve in terms of economic resources (and blessings) and even our definitions of love. Separating ourselves into groups based on temperament, our biases are reinforced, and it is made worse by a media ecosystem that rewards us psychologically for separating ourselves from those we disagree with and for grandstanding our opinions for those that do follow us who we make sure agree with us.

Political and religious dialogue is the same because religion is simply how we order the government and economic reward system of heaven. When reasoning about both, the same centers of the brain are brought into action.

### **Personality and Its Influences: The Five Factor Model**

If you think about your friend group, you will know that your friends will respond differently to the questions:

- Where should we go to eat, the same place as last time or a new place?
- Should we switch our activity we are currently doing and just drive into the mountains?
- Should we clean up the dinner table before we watch the movie?

Different personalities have different ways of living in the world, and our personalities are rooted in our biology and influenced by upbringing. Our nature as a distinct person with a distinct personality, as well as our behavior as humans in general are not solely due to environments where we were raised, the things we are taught by others explicitly, or by adaptation to the environment. Our brains are not a blank

slate at birth, which was an idea that influenced social science for a period of time.<sup>3</sup> We have a basic human hardwire with a unique personality hardwire built into us at birth, and it emerges as we grow, combining with experience to shape our emergent personality.<sup>4</sup> The neuroscientist Gary Marcus puts it as “Nature provides a first draft, which experience then revises. Built-in doesn’t mean unmalleable; it means organized in advance of experience.”<sup>5</sup> Only either the uninformed or authoritarian dictators (or those that would be dictators if given the power) see people as balls of clay they can mold into anything they want.<sup>6</sup>

The Big Five (or Five Factor Model,<sup>7</sup> FFM) for personality traits as put forward by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae is the gold standard for conducting personality assessments and analyzing reciprocal relationships.<sup>8</sup> The five categories are:<sup>9</sup>

- Extraversion (higher degrees of sociability, assertiveness, talkativeness, and self-confidence)
- Agreeableness (cooperative, sympathetic, tolerant, and forgiving towards others, avoiding competition, conflict, pressuring, and using force),

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<sup>3</sup> Pinker, S. (2003). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature*. Penguin.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus, G. F. (2004). *The birth of the mind: How a tiny number of genes creates the complexities of human thought*. Basic Civitas Books, p 12.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, G. F. (2004). *The birth of the mind: How a tiny number of genes creates the complexities of human thought*. Basic Civitas Books.

<sup>6</sup> *They also will argue that people are born good, but corrupted by society, a view called romanticism. This view is attractive to authoritarian persons because it gives them the moral justification to usurp power and change society to what they deem as better.*

<sup>7</sup> Goldberg, L. R. (1993). The structure of phenotypic personality traits. *American psychologist*, 48(1), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Poropat AE. A meta-analysis of the five-factor model of personality and academic performance. *Psychol Bull.* 2009;135:322–38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014996>.

<sup>9</sup> Huddy, L., Sears, D. O., & Levy, J. S. (Eds.). (2013). *The Oxford handbook of political psychology*. Oxford University Press, p 31.

- Conscientiousness (being precise, organized, disciplined, abiding by a set of principles and rules, and working hard to achieve success)
- Neuroticism (people's loss of emotional balance and impulse control. It is characterized by a prevalence of negative feelings and anxiety that are attempted to cope with through maladaptive coping strategies, such as delay or denial)
- Openness (intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, unorthodox ways of thinking and creativity, the preference for independence, novelty, and differences)

The acronym OCEAN (Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism) is an adequate mnemonic truck to remembering them. Studies conducted on twins separated at birth shows that to an extent, genes do influence the way our personality crystallizes as we get older,<sup>10</sup> though the debate over how much of the variance in personality comes from genes from some arguing it influences 30% to as high as 60%.<sup>11 12</sup> For most, our personality remains relatively stable throughout our adult life.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sanchez-Roige, S., Gray, J. C., MacKillop, J., Chen, C. H., & Palmer, A. A. (2018). The genetics of human personality. *Genes, brain, and behavior*, 17(3), e12439. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gbb.12439>

<sup>11</sup> Zwir, I., Arnedo, J., Del-Val, C. *et al.* Uncovering the complex genetics of human character. *Mol Psychiatry* 25, 2295–2312 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-018-0263-6>

<sup>12</sup> Bouchard TJ, Jr, McGue M. Genetic and environmental influences on human psychological differences. *J Neurobiol.* 2003;54:4–45.

<sup>13</sup> Small, B.J., Hertzog, C., Hultsch, D.F. and Dixon, R.A. 2003. Stability and change in adult personality over 6 years: Findings from the Victoria Longitudinal Study. *Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 58: P166–76.

## Personality and Politics

Robert McCrae linked the trait Openness (to experience) to leaning politically liberal in 1996,<sup>14</sup> and this finding has been replicated to exhaustion by other studies for voting choice,<sup>15</sup> self-identified ideological (left-right) leaning,<sup>16</sup> and candidate preference. Liberals tend to be natural early adopters of new technology,<sup>17</sup> interested in abstract and complex art more than Conservatives,<sup>18</sup> and the biggest advocates of cultural exploration entering the fields of sociology and anthropology at a staggering rate higher than Conservatives.<sup>19</sup> These are novelty seeking behaviors, which is exactly what Openness to experience is. Someone low in trait Openness, which has been shown demonstrably to indicate a politically right leaning individual, sticks to what is tested, familiar and unambiguous, and weary of outside influences on their culture. As John Stuart Mill puts it, they are the party of “order and stability”.<sup>20</sup> This political link to trait Openness to experience (and to a lesser degree trait conscientiousness<sup>21</sup>) should help us reframe the way we look at politics, that party identification is really personality identification. It should be

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<sup>14</sup> Fowler, J. H., & Schreiber, D. (2008). Biology, politics, and the emerging science of human nature. *Science*, 322(5903), 912-914.

<sup>15</sup> Capara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1999). Personality profiles and political parties. *Political psychology*, 20(1), 175-197.

<sup>16</sup> Jost, J. T. (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American psychologist*, 61(7), 651.

<sup>17</sup> Sigrin, B., Pless, J., & Drury, E. (2015). Diffusion into new markets: evolving customer segments in the solar photovoltaics market. *Environmental Research Letters*, 10(8), 084001.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, G. D., Ausman, J., & Mathews, T. R. (1973). Conservatism and art preferences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 25(2), 286.

<sup>19</sup> Langbert, M., & Stevens, S. (2020). Partisan registration and contributions of faculty in flagship colleges. *National Association of Scholars*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> “Each of these modes of thinking derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other; but it is in a great measure the opposition of the other that keeps each within the limits of reason and sanity” (John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*)

<sup>21</sup> Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Borgogni, L., & Perugini, M. (1993). The “Big Five Questionnaire”: A new questionnaire to assess the five factor model. *Personality and individual Differences*, 15(3), 281-288.

Note that the other traits, Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Neuroticism had no statistically significant difference in predicting political leaning.

noted that trait Openness to experience is the most heritable trait of the Big Five through a meta-analysis of twin studies.<sup>22</sup>

A study published in the *Perspectives on Psychological Science* in 2008 mapped the density of personality traits of the Big Five by states in the U.S.<sup>23</sup> The states that were highest in Openness were California, Oregon, Nevada, Washington, Washington D.C., Virginia, Colorado, and the New England coastal states. You may recognize these as states that vote Democrat. Within a state Liberals tend to move to large metro areas, where city life provides more opportunities for their trait Openness to experience can feel at home. Contrast New York to a small Conservative America town in Kansas where things largely stay the same and the opening of a Trader Joe's could be the area's big news of the decade. People move where their personality traits are rewarded, and this goes the same with professions as well as geography.

A study done on political affiliations and university faculty by field reveal that communications, journalism, and the other social sciences are overwhelmingly left leaning while the hard sciences, specifically engineering are more balanced.<sup>24</sup> While the national average for Democrats versus Republicans holding graduate degrees is 8:5 (1.6), the ratio of Democrats to Republicans professors in the interdisciplinary studies is 108 to 0 (rounded). The field of engineering's professorships ratio was closest to the graduate degree holding average at 1.5. This means one part of the personality spectrum, and the way that personality sees the world (and their biases and blindspots do not) goes virtually unchallenged. The same can be said about the majority of general authority positions in The

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<sup>22</sup> Bouchard Jr, T. J., & McGue, M. (2003). Genetic and environmental influences on human psychological differences. *Journal of neurobiology*, 54(1), 4-45.

<sup>23</sup> Rentfrow, P. J., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008). A theory of the emergence, persistence, and expression of geographic variation in psychological characteristics. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(5), 339-369.

<sup>24</sup> Langbert, M., & Stevens, S. (2020). Partisan registration and contributions of faculty in flagship colleges. *National Association of Scholars*, 17.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints heralding conservative style personalities. Unchallenged intellect is lazy intellect. It leads to lazy thinking and an inflated sense of intellectual invulnerability.

## **Viewing and Reacting to the World**

Conservatives and Liberals show differences in both reactions to fear related stimuli. When shown a picture of a spider on a person's face, eye tracking technology shows Conservatives focus on the spider (the threat) and Liberals focus on the eye (what is the person feeling). Having a higher physiological response to the spider, or a picture of maggots in an open wound, correlated with favoring “socially protective” policies on immigration and gun control.<sup>25</sup> Because they focus on different things, they will interpret and remember situations differently – **our focus determines our reality.**

In their book *Predisposed: Liberals, Conservatives, and the Biology of Political Differences*, authors John R. Alford, John R. Hibbing, and Kevin B. Smith argue that the Conservative's focus on stability and safety and tradition comes from their larger amygdala, the brain module that handles fear and that instructs our hypothalamus to release chemicals that prepare us to face threats.<sup>26</sup> Fear comes from the unknown, so how to combat fear is to remain in what is known to be safe — staying within the borders of what is keeping society afloat and shoring up the walls. Liberals have been shown to have more gray matter in the anterior cingulate cortex, the area of the brain that is involved with intellectual problem solving.<sup>27</sup> Problem

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<sup>25</sup> Oxley, D. R., Smith, K. B., Alford, J. R., Hibbing, M. V., Miller, J. L., Scalora, M., ... & Hibbing, J. R. (2008). Political attitudes vary with physiological traits. *science*, 321(5896), 1667-1670.

<sup>26</sup> Hibbing, J. R., Smith, K. B., & Alford, J. R. (2013). *Predisposed: Liberals, conservatives, and the biology of political differences*. Routledge.

<sup>27</sup> Kanai, R., Feilden, T., Firth, C., & Rees, G. (2011). Political orientations are correlated with brain structure in young adults. *Current biology*, 21(8), 677-680.



solving ability, or IQ (intelligent quota) has been linked to trait Openness, which is what Liberals (and Libertarians) are higher in than Conservatives, with Openness and IQ's correlation  $r$  to be 0.20 to 0.30.<sup>28</sup> This is a good correlation for differential psychology's standards.<sup>29</sup> Other brain structures have been correlated with a Liberal leaning temperament – such as cortical thickness in the left inferior parietal lobule.<sup>30</sup> More research is being done to find out what brain structures contribute to influencing political attitudes, but it is near-universally accepted that biology plays a role. What is debated is how large that role is – but it is measurable.

We know that personality is affected by biology and environmental factors, so therefore we know that political expression comes from a combination of biology and environmental factors. Perception of the world is influenced by what we pay attention to, which is influenced by our personality, which is influenced by biological factors that arose from evolutionary selection of the mechanisms that allowed our ancestral chain to survive until now. Conservatives have a higher reaction to fear based stimuli, and thus their mentality is geared towards survival.

I will focus more on the conservative and liberal personality groups since they are the largest parties and have the loudest voices compared to Libertarians or Independents, who generally 'stay out of it'. When I say the words "Conservative" or "Liberal" I am primarily referring to their

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<sup>28</sup> Von Stumm, S., Hell, B., & Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2011). The hungry mind: Intellectual curiosity is the third pillar of academic performance. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), 574-588.

<sup>29</sup> Gignac, G. E., & Szodorai, E. T. (2016). Effect size guidelines for individual differences researchers. *Personality and individual differences*, 102, 74-78.

<sup>30</sup> Vartanian, O., Wertz, C. J., Flores, R. A., Beatty, E. L., Smith, I., Blackler, K., ... & Jung, R. E. (2018). Structural correlates of Openness and Intellect: Implications for the contribution of personality to creativity. *Human brain mapping*, 39(7), 2987-2996.

personality type, or ethos, and not referring to their political party,<sup>31</sup> which is a result or manifestation of their personality's desires and our human tendency to group into teams to accomplish our goals.

### **Dimensions of Moral Reasoning and The Sacred Altars of the Personalities**

We have talked already about how our body and our brain are built to keep us alive, and they will use all our faculties to accomplish that — even our reason. We discussed research that showed most of our “reasoning” is done unconsciously and that things beyond our consciousness affect our actions. We discussed that we group ourselves naturally with those who agree with us because of the innate drive to be safe, resulting in everything from Dungeons and Dragons clubs to like-minded individuals who want to order their workplace and society in a way that they seem is best. Just as the Dungeons and Dragons club sends a representative to the university club council, the like-minded people send representatives to the government — also known as party politics.

When we say, that person is not acting rationally we are assuming that they acted after they philosophized about their actions before they acted. This is rarely the case. One model of moral judgment is the Dual Process theory, primarily advocated for by Joshua Greene, where when we have to make a moral decision, we use either reason, or our emotions to make the choice — like being at a fork in the road.<sup>32</sup> In this model, reason and emotions are separate. Recent studies have given more evidence to an

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<sup>31</sup> *The word “Liberal” also has different definitions in various countries, and I will be using it in the American political sense, due to the purpose of this book in examining religious thought in the Latter-day Saint religion, and since the founding of the restored Church happened in America, and the leading thinkers are centered in America — I believe using the terms liberal or conservative or libertarian in the American sense is acceptable.*

<sup>32</sup> *Greene argues that automatic processes control our moral judgments while controlled processes rule utilitarian judgments* [Greene, J. D. (2009). Dual-process morality and the personal/impersonal distinction: A reply to McGuire, Langdon, Coltheart, and Mackenzie. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(3), 581-584.]

intuitionist model as being more in line with what goes on in the brain when it comes to moral judgments. Jonathan Haidt, one of the leading advocates for the intuitionist model outlined the biological basis of the model in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis* as there being effectively a neural road between the cerebral cortex (strategic thinking) and the amygdala (center of emotions), and that our thoughts are influenced by our emotions and conversely our thoughts can influence our emotional state.<sup>33</sup> Then its application in moral reasoning in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Religion and Politics*, that there are five moral dimensions, or taste buds on a tongue of morality that have their basis in evolutionary psychology, and helped us survive in groups and progress to where we are as a civilization now, able to cooperate relatively peacefully with individuals that are not our kin unlike the rest of the animal kingdom. The foundations are as follows:<sup>34</sup>

- **The Care/Harm Foundation:** arising from the urge to protect a child, the original trigger being the suffering of a child, and its current associated emotion being compassion and its virtues being kindness and being a caring person.
- **The Fairness/Cheating Foundation:** arising from the necessity to form cooperative trading relationships, its original trigger was cheating or deception, modern triggers as cheating on one's spouse, or being cheated out of a business deal. Its emotions are gratitude and anger, and associated virtues are trustworthiness, fairness and justice.

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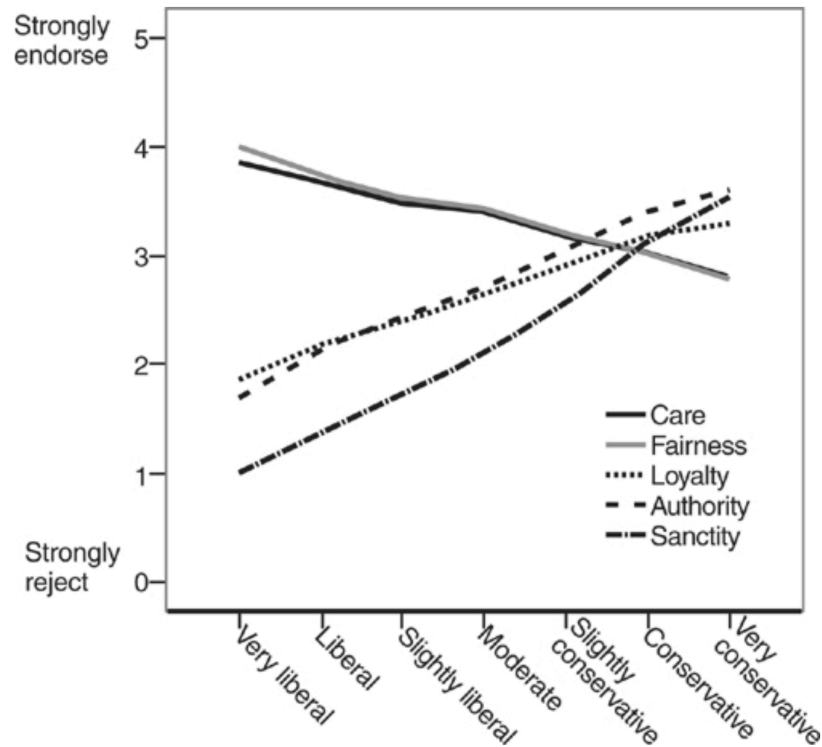
<sup>33</sup> Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. Basic books, p 31.

<sup>34</sup> Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Vintage, p 155-177.

- **The Loyalty/Betrayal Foundation:** arising from the need to band together to form alliances and inter familial groups, it was activated by another group threatening the group, and we simulate this today with sports teams and national competitions (war or the Olympics). The emotions associated are group pride and anger at those who leave the group to join the “enemy”. The virtues associated are patriotism, loyalty, and self-sacrifice for the benefit of the whole.
- **The Authority/Subversion Foundation:** arising from the primitive behavior of forming a hierarchy and knowing one’s place in it, and the benefits that come from a structure that delegates responsibilities. Its rituals were signs of submission or competitions for dominance, and we can see it today in workplace pecking-order relationships, explicit or unspoken. The emotions felt in this dimension are fear and respect and virtue is obedience.
- **The Sanctity/Degradation Foundation:** arising from our ancestors avoiding dangerous or poisonous foods or practices that contaminate the living conditions of the group (waste management). Our ancestors avoided diseased people and human waste, and now we see this foundation in avoidance with people who can ideologically contaminate us with taboo ideas. The emotion that is felt towards them is disgust, while the virtues associated with this is cleanliness, chastity, and temperance or self-discipline.

What Haidt and his fellow researchers found is that across the globe, conservative and liberal levels on each of these foundations could be replicated. Staunch Liberals are high in the Care/Harm and Fairness/Cheating foundations and low in the rest. Staunch Conservatives

ranked just about even on all five foundations, and moderates scored higher on the Care/Harm and Fairness/Cheating foundations and moderately (pun intended) on the other three, which is why they can see the points on both sides.



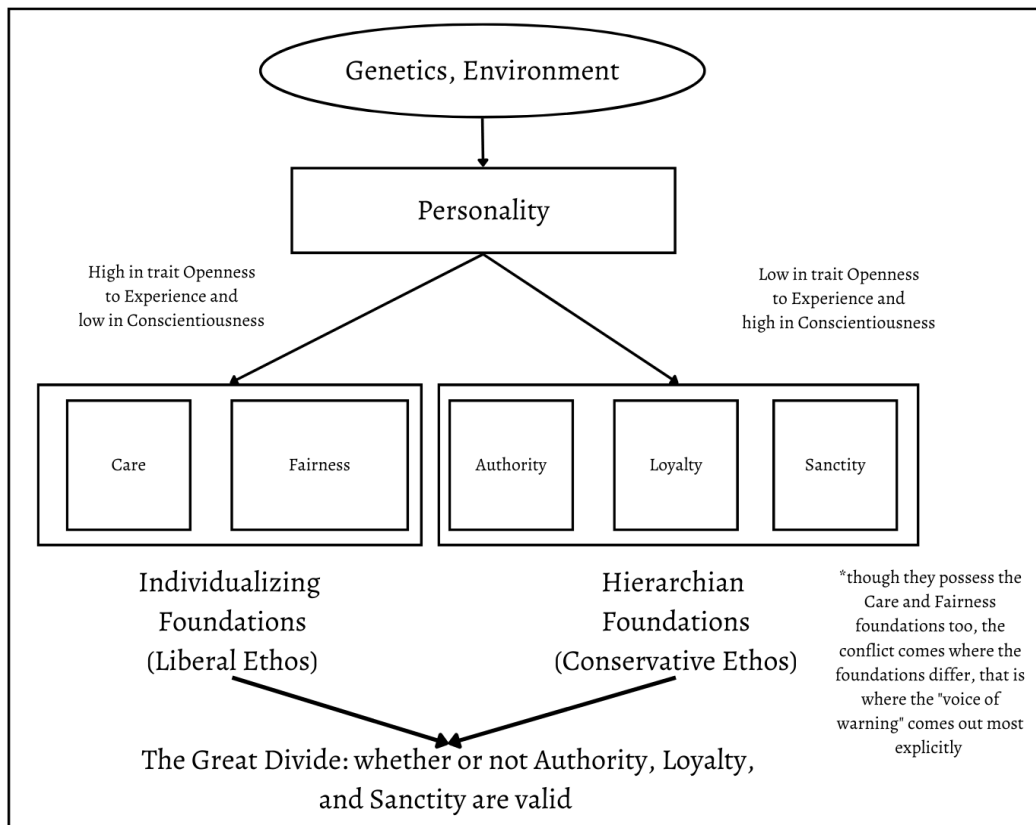
(Graph used with permission)<sup>35</sup>

The results are replicated in all countries, and even when they changed the question style to rating dogs (“The breed is very independent-minded and relates to its owner as a friend and equal...The breed is extremely loyal to its home and family and it doesn’t warm up quickly to strangers...The breed is very obedient and is easily trained to

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 187.

take orders”).<sup>36</sup> The results of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) became the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT).<sup>37</sup>

What does this mean? Liberals will see Conservatives as dwelling in the dark realms of morality because Conservatives see other moral dimensions as valid for society while Liberals do not. A conservative will not convince a liberal using the moral dimensions a liberal does not see as valid. The reason Conservatives and Liberals see moral foundations as valid or invalid comes from their intuitions, which gives them an emotional reaction to a moral question, and then logic comes in to justify their intuitions decision.



<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 187-188

<sup>37</sup> *A Conservative may, upon seeing this data, believe themselves to be more “righteous” because they possess more moral foundations than a Liberal. This is false, and each moral foundation or combination comes with strengths and weaknesses. We will discuss Conservatism’s (and Liberalism’s) weaknesses when it comes to the Plan of Salvation in the next chapter.*

Another difference must be pointed out. When asked about liberty and rights, Conservatives and Libertarians sided with what is called “Negative Liberty” and Liberals sided with “Positive Liberty”. These are not good/bad value terms, but on adding or subtracting – just how positive feedback loops continue because something is being added to the process. Positive Liberty is the view that in order for me to fully exercise my rights, you must be obligated to do something for me – which is why you hear the phrase “healthcare is a human right” from the political left. To fully exercise the human right to pursue happiness, the sick have the right to the care of the doctors. Negative Liberty is more of the ‘hands off my life’ mentality.<sup>38</sup> This is why Conservatives and to a greater degree Libertarians favor a smaller government that does not oversee as many social (Positive Liberty) programs that Liberals want to see.

The resulting division at its starkest points are as follows. One group of people value respect to elders simply because they are older (the code phrase for this is experience), who seek to preserve the existing hierarchies of decision making (or rule structure) and preserving respect for authority figures, as well as placing restrictions on what ought to be done to the human body (tattoos, piercings, food/drink codes). People should work for what they receive and are not entitled to what the other people have gathered (Fairness foundation but proportional fairness), though perhaps the people that have wealth ought to exercise the Care foundation and give on their own accord. These are the staunch Conservatives, or the Hierarchs. Hierarchy means well defined structure, a top down organization in terms of authority and loyalty. The theologian Paul Tillich also called this division between the religious parties the reformers versus the hierarchs in *The New Being* in 1950.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 212

<sup>39</sup> Tillich, P. (2005). *The new being*. U of Nebraska Press, 85. “The reformers fight with the hierarchs about the interpretation of the Bible.”

The Comics Code of 1954 is a product of and good portrayal of what Conservatives value. When comic books were becoming widespread, Conservative legislators reacted with fear of what the comic book industry could do to their children. The fear came from the publishing of a book titled *Seduction of the Innocent* by Fredric Wertham.<sup>40</sup> In which he argues that comic books lead from problems ranging from illiteracy,<sup>41</sup> to sexual assault.<sup>42</sup> Moral panic had already begun to set in as cities held their own book burning ceremonies for comic books.<sup>43</sup> Some cities attempted to ban comic books that focused on crime or horror, but their efforts were shut down by the Supreme Court ruling such measures as unconstitutional. One city implemented a book buy-back program called “Operation Book Swap”, where the person would receive in exchange for a horror comic book a collection of books that reinforced the Conservative values (such as *Swiss Family Robinson*).<sup>44</sup> With Conservative efforts to ban speech in order to preserve their culture being ruled unconstitutional, an organization formed called the Comics Code Association. They had a stamp that could be placed on the covers of books to communicate to the parents that this book was safe for their children to read. Some of the code’s rules were:<sup>45</sup>

- “*Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.*” (A-1)
- “*Policemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.*” (A-3)

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<sup>40</sup> Wertham, F. (1954). *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Rinehart.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 141

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p 184

<sup>43</sup> Costello, M. J. (2009). *Secret identity crisis: comic books and the unmasking of Cold War America*. A&C Black, 32.

<sup>44</sup> “Horror on the Newsstands.” *TIME*, 27 Sept. 1954.

<sup>45</sup> Murphy, C. (1954, October 26). CODE OF THE COMICS MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.



- *“Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered.” (C-Marriage and Sex-3)*
- *“The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.” (C-Marriage and Sex-4)*
- *“In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.” (A-6)*
- *“The letters of the word “crime” on a comics-magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word “crime” shall never appear alone on a cover.” (A-11)*
- *“Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.” (B-5)*
- *“All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.” (Costume-3)*

The moral foundations of Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity (*we will refer to this triad as the Conservative Ethos*) are clearly shown in these rules, which is what the Conservatives were fearful of their children losing a taste for. Comic books were simply a waste of time and money, a danger to “proper” moral development, and a road to semi-literacy.<sup>46</sup> Future studies showed that comic books had little effect on any of these, nevertheless, the safe space that Conservatives wished to cultivate had seeped into the culture, and a culture of fear for the next moral infiltration had been instilled in their collective unconsciousness.<sup>47</sup>

Staunch Liberals-Egalitarians (egalitarian means equal, without higher or lower value) do not respect authority simply because it exists, they demand a justification of the power structure that rests on the dual foundations of Care and Fairness, which they see as a caring, open, egalitarian society where possessions are relatively equal. They imagine and create new hierarchies of power and do not recognize any measures that rely solely on a Loyalty (nationalistic), Authority, or Sanctity foundation.

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<sup>46</sup> Nyberg, A. K. (1998). *Seal of approval: The history of the comics code*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, viii

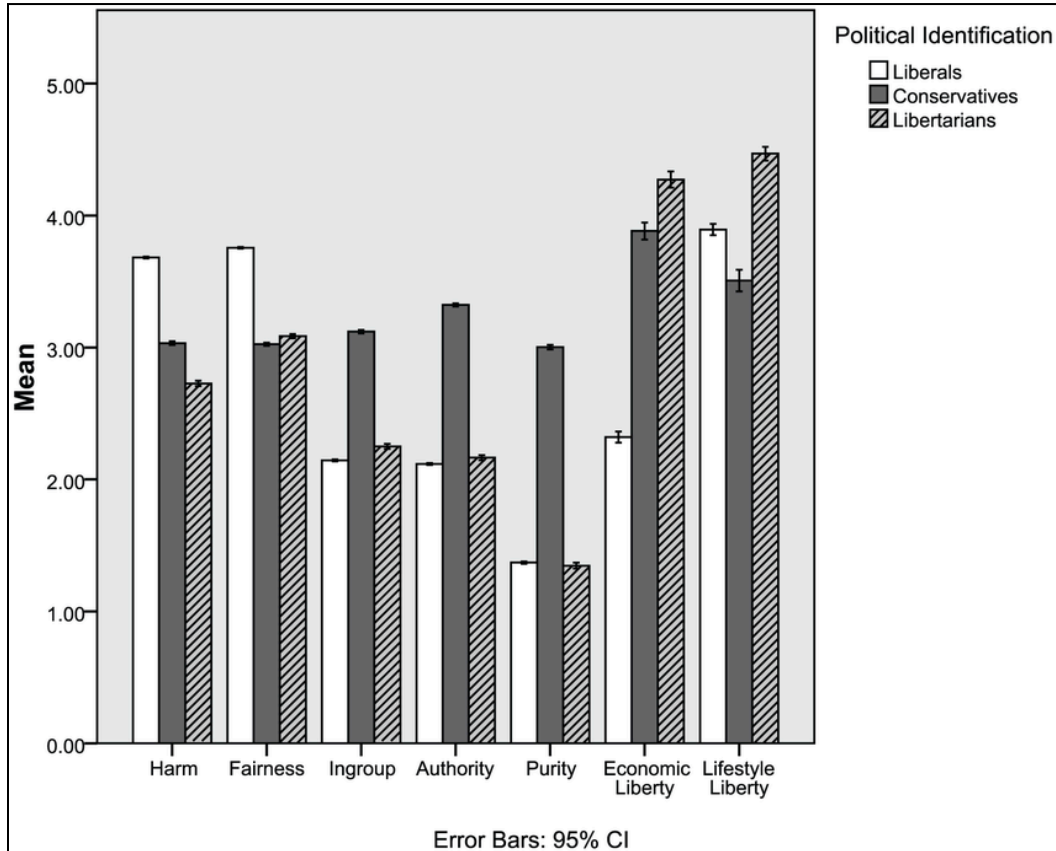
All those foundations are at best non-existent and at worst should be subservient to the Care and Fairness-Egalitarian foundations. They look for new ideas and seek to elevate them. The two trait combinations of Care and Egalitarian-fairness are called the *Individualizing Traits*.

This divide can be easily shown in support for firefighters and the police as institutions. Everyone loves the Firefighters, they put out fires for everyone and keep everyone alive without respect to nationality or income level (theoretically). Pew Research studies show that Conservatives have a substantially more favorable view of police than Liberals.<sup>48</sup> Firefighters represent the Care and Fairness foundations, which both Conservatives and Liberals share, but police represent a top-down authority structure of law and order (stability), which is why Conservatives with their ethos sport their favorable view towards that institution.

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<sup>48</sup> “Partisans Differ Widely in Views of Police Officers, College Professors.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (13 September, 2017)  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/09/13/partisans-differ-widely-in-views-of-police-officers-college-professors/>.

## Libertarians: The Odd-Balls



(Graph used courtesy of Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, Haidt<sup>49</sup>)

Being a Libertarian is like dwelling in political no-man's land – everyone does not like you, because you do not fit neatly with either camp. You have no high investment in the Conservative Ethos (Authority, Loyalty, Sanctity), rendering you an irreverent and rebellious personality, similar to how they would see the Liberal. So you are against the system, but not for the same reasons as the Liberal, because you score lower than anyone on the Care foundation, which makes your ethical calculations heartless and utilitarian. (I am speaking in generalities, there can be Conservative-leaning Libertarians and Liberal-leaning ones.) They express

<sup>49</sup> Iyer, R., Koleva, S., Graham, J., Ditto, P., & Haidt, J. (2012). Understanding libertarian morality: The psychological dispositions of self-identified libertarians.

little concern over caring for those who are victims of society's systemic issues, and little respect for tradition and adherence to authority figures or institutions for non-pragmatic issues. Tony Stark (Iron Man) in his early movies channels Ayn Rand, one of the most influential Libertarian writers ideals: people who have the intellect and capacity to be forces of law themselves are above the institution's moral authority.<sup>50</sup> Society should not tie these "vigilantes" who march to the sound of their own drum down.

To the Conservative, a Libertarian is an agent of chaos, always challenging the existing social order and attempting to understand why certain norms came to be, and then challenging the legitimacy of those norms.

Liberals see Libertarians as supporters of a system that creates inequality, since the Libertarian is a staunch defender of property rights and free markets – which will inevitably create inequality in earnings, emotionally grouping them with the Conservatives.<sup>51</sup> But unlike the Conservative, the Libertarian is not only in favor of a free market when it comes to the economy, but the free market when it comes to morality, something they share with the Liberals. People should be free to choose what moral framework they adopt so long as they do not impede on the right of another person to privately determine their moral choices.

The ethos of the Libertarian project is how do we use dispassionate and impartial reason to create a system where people who disagree to the point where they are willing to kill each other, do not get to that point. Will the extremes on both sides be happy? No. But no war was ever declared by Libertarians to enforce their ideology on someone else, to do

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<sup>50</sup> Zhao, J. (2018). Ayn Rand v. Superman-Theories of Morality in the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universe1. *Culture*, 1(3), 75.

<sup>51</sup> *If there is lingering doubt as to the disagreement between the Conservatives and Libertarians, watch the debates between the Heritage Foundation (Conservative) and the CATO Institute's (the largest Libertarian think tank) interns online – with Libertarian's arguments for open borders and drug legalization you would think you are listening to a Liberal versus Conservative debate.*

so would render them anti-Libertarian. When asked to process moral questions, they showed a more logical based cognition style in processing the dilemma rather than the more emotional based reasoning that Conservatives and Liberals demonstrated. The results showed “that libertarians are particularly unemotional in their moral deliberations” and that they showed “a relatively cerebral as opposed to emotional cognitive style” of Conservatives and Liberals. Libertarians are the champions of doubt, questioning the conclusions they have held in addition to challenging the certainty of others.<sup>52</sup> That is why a lot of high profile atheists, like Sam Harris, classify themselves as classical-liberals, who are now known as Libertarians, who try to apply the Enlightenment principles of the scientific method of disproving a hypothesis to everything from geological facts to ethical positions. They will question the validity of traditional authority and also challenge the legitimacy of a victims claim to their right for retribution or reparations from the supposed oppressor. For Libertarians no question is off-limits, thus they violate the sacred “do not question \_\_” of both sides. This is why Socrates was sentenced to death by the Conservative establishment of his time for corrupting the youth, because he was encouraging the younger generation to question what makes truth true, and evaluate the traditionally held beliefs. He was a threat to their power in maintaining the status-quo, and he was seen as a virus to be surgically removed from society, for “the greater good”. Everyone loves the free-thinkers until the free-thinkers turn their intellectual muskets on their fortifications.<sup>53</sup>

While both Conservatives and Liberals see the government as a way to enforce morality and their respective ethical systems, Libertarians want

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<sup>52</sup> ibid

<sup>53</sup> Weaver, S. J. (2021, August 23). *Elder Holland asks BYU faculty to defend the university's unique mission; offer love, hope to LGBTQ while upholding God's commandments*. Church News.

<https://www.thechurchnews.com/2021/8/23/23218683/elder-holland-byu-university-conference-love-lgbtq>

the government to stay out of private ethics as much as possible, and the only purpose of the government is to make sure people do not harm each other in their individual pursuit of meaning and happiness – and the government is not to prescribe what happiness or meaning is.<sup>54</sup>

While Conservatives identify with community and nation, and Liberals identify their group as the world, Libertarians when asked which among these categories they identify with they answered low on every one – making them true individualists.<sup>55</sup> I classify Libertarians as Egalitarians because they often buck the status quo when it comes to conceptualizing “objective truth”, which is the focus of this chapter. I acknowledge the complexity of all the variables and the existence of outliers, but at the end of the day, there are those who favor the side of sustaining traditional authority and those who want to change the systems. People can fall on any point along this spectrum. On this bimodal distribution Liberals and Libertarians are closer than Libertarians and Conservatives.

### **Freedom to Speak**

Authoritarian persons from each side will see the right to free expression as a tool to forward their own goals. Liberals see free speech as a right by minorities to express their opinions against the majority, which is why authoritarian Liberals will see speech that lies outside their two individualizing moral foundations and exercised by a group holding more power than the minority as falling outside of the protection of the concept of free speech. Conservatives see free speech as a way to reach axioms of moral truth (as well as Libertarians), even if they hurt others feelings. Authoritarian Conservatives will be against free speech if those exercising it will disrupt the existing moral fabric, like when evolution was banned

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<sup>54</sup> This is called a negative ethical duty, negative meaning a duty ‘to not’ do something.

<sup>55</sup> Zhao, J. (2018). Ayn Rand v. Superman-Theories of Morality in the Marvel and DC Cinematic Universe1. *Culture*, 1(3), 75.

from being discussed in schools in the early 20th century.<sup>56</sup> They will allow anti-patriotic demonstrations to be outlawed during times of war when they see the need to band together for survival as a higher good than what the protestors could do to national morale, such as in *United States v. O'Brien* (1968), ruling that O'Brien's right to symbolic free speech of burning his draft card was not as important as the nation's interest to uphold the draft, held him in conviction.<sup>57</sup> Libertarians value free speech because they do not feel at home with either side and want to voice their disagreements with everyone. They view both sides as equally dogmatic and as religions in and of themselves since neither side does not welcome being questioned.

### **Feeling Righteous**

Both (or all three) of these groups form teams which have their own goals and in reaching for their goals they feel a sense of righteousness, a sense of approaching what they consider a divine mission larger than the self. We have now entered a religious domain. We know that when people form into teams, the object is to win, not learn (unless it is to learn how to win). When these two teams discuss issues it often gets “heated”, a state where the body's defense mechanisms which we discussed in Chapter Three are engaged and place the mind in martial law. The other team questioning their morality registers as a threat and triggers a flood of survival-related hormones. People are in no state to examine themselves or their paradigms in this state, they are not humble and teachable in this emotional frame. Direct confrontation with someone that has no intention of changing their beliefs rarely leads to that outcome, which is why the Savior taught His followers to serve those they disagreed with, and

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<sup>56</sup> Scopes, J. Fundamental Divides: The Trial of. *Crimes and Trials of the Century*, 99.

<sup>57</sup> *United States v. O'Brien*. (n.d.). *Oyez*. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1967/232>

perhaps that will open them up to exploring what makes you act the way you do for themselves.

Team competition is so powerful that it can change your views. In one of my communications classes we had a class-wide debate on whether paper media would become obsolete. You can argue this from many angles, the definition of obsolete, or the existence of paper, etc. I had debated in agreement with the proposition when I first took the class in 2018. Recently in 2022, I was talking with the professor in her office, she said she had to go to class early because it was debate day. I asked if I could tag along, and pretend to be an intro-Comms student again. I joined the negative side, while still believing in the affirmative side. However, I am very competitive, and since I was emotionally invested in sinking the debate, when we lost by a few points I was up in arms at the decision and thought we were in the right. Walking home I realized how my position had switched, simply because I was emotionally invested in winning. That was a powerful lesson to me on how we as humans operate. Many of our beliefs were not chosen by our logic, but by our emotions. We want to feel like we won, we want to be acknowledged for our victory—we want to feel righteous and to be known for it.

How Conservatives feel righteous is by protecting axioms of truth and preserving the hierarchy that sustains the current means for society's survival – spiritual or moral law and order. You can win social credit points with them by aiding them in defending traditional ideas of morality and preserving their culture, and by making arguments that legitimize the Conservative Ethos's three moral foundations that differentiate them from their Liberal counterparts.

How Liberals feel righteous is by exploring new ideas and advocating for them (as long as the new ideas rest within the two foundation Egalitarian Ethos). They feel a sense of righteous anger towards Conservatives for not being open enough to incorporating new



ideas fast enough, and by being advocates for these new ideas they feel the thrill of being an underdog. There is a never ending supply of new ideas, and new ideas are never yet incorporated into society and always have the least amount of followers, so staunch Liberals can feel pressure finding the least accepted two moral foundation ideas out there to support and will feel pressure from fellow Liberals for not being liberal enough.

### **Evil?**

I am a Liberal, enforcing those other moral foundations onto someone against their will is evil.

I am a Conservative, if you do not have these foundations or follow them, you are resisting God, and are working with Evil against His purposes.

I am a Libertarian, you are both zealots, also I reject the care foundation and all the Hierarchian foundations. (Is the most likely to say evil does not exist)

The Conservative weakness is that they don't realize how much of their pragmatic morality is influenced by fear, and if they needed to change their ways to adapt and survive they may not have the skills to do so. They will also try to take credit for social changes that were instigated by persons high in Openness (Liberals and Libertarians). The Liberal weakness is that they see themselves as more important than Conservatives, the pioneers of social innovation – but fail to see that they survive *on the backs* of Conservatives. Liberals go into fields that are not necessary for humanity's immediate survival. To review the political affiliation by professorship study, the top liberal academic fields of choice are journalism, communications and advertising, gender studies, and sociology. If the power grid goes out, those fields will cease to be a concern, no one will care about my degree in Communications studying social media trends while the plumbing is down. It is only in highly industrialized Western nations that have a high standard of living where these fields thrive.

Transportation is one of the oldest professions on earth, which was founded shortly after Lucifer practiced advertising in the Garden Eden. Line-hauling or trucking, is an overwhelmingly conservative field. If every conservative working in the trucking industry and every liberal working in media based marketing stopped working for a week, the consequences from things moving between places would far outweigh the consequences of a lack of infographics created.

Perhaps I am cherry picking two examples in an effort to prove my side's over-inflated sense of importance in this symbiotic relationship, but Conservatives do outnumber Liberals in the trade job professions. I realized while sitting in university, that the building I was sitting in while I was complaining about power structures, was powered by structures built and maintained by Conservatives. The industries of farming, construction, plumbing, and transportation provide for the basics of human needs, and their job's environments require a different mindset than one would find in an office where people can take time off for being depressed or anxious – made possible by an organization that can function on the Care foundation without a requirement from the Authority or Loyalty foundations. If a plumber came to my house and accidentally busted a pipe then told me they had to go home because they were feeling too anxious to fix it while the water was spraying behind them, I would want them to ignore their emotional state and do what I was paying them to do. Construction is slow enough, so I could not imagine how much slower it would be if people did not follow instructions from people higher in authority over them just because they were lower in the power hierarchy.

Conservatives and Liberals inhabit different worlds, with professions that require different personality temperaments. Each personality has their own unconscious-biases and stereotypes for the other, and when put together in teams, they lose the ability to self-reflect and see different perspectives. They seek to order the world in a way that their

personality would feel at home in, an environment where you take orders without question from higher ranks, or an environment where rules can always be questioned. A place where cultures mix, or a place where they remain separate. A world where the minority views are always accepted with speed and open arms, or a world that is weary about new ideas that fall outside the established order of things.<sup>58</sup>

### Personality Influencing the Religious Domain

Our personalities bleed into the way we think about religion, and how we view a righteous deity. A righteous God will reflect the fullest potential of the traits we possess.

Using Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory, Brian Nosek and Jesse Graham assigned words to match each moral foundation. LIWC-22, a language indexer that "connects important psychosocial constructs and theories with words, phrases, and other linguistic constructions" scanned religious speeches by various denominations.<sup>59</sup> Selected example words are peace, care, and compassion for the Care foundation, obey, honor, duty, defy, respect and rebel were words for the Authority foundation. They found that liberal churches such as Unitarian churches used words that matched the Care and Fairness foundations, which cluster they coined the **individualizing foundations**. Baptist

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#### <sup>58</sup> The Libertarian Weakness: Spiritual Commitment Issues

*I have observed in many Libertarians the tendency to be agnostic or atheist, due to their highly skeptic nature and devotion to critical reason. It is hard for these people who are high in Openness, resistant to rule systems, and who try to order the world so that people do not force their sense of "good" on them to devote themselves to a religious cause. They are relentless explorers who challenge authority, and a God imposing moral restrictions creates a divide between the libertarian community and the libertarian community. Their ethos is best described by the article entitled: "I don't know, so I'm an atheist libertarian", written by Penn Jillette on CNN. They may see the benefit to your religious concepts but want to keep their options open. 2 Timothy 3:7 describes their plight as "always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth". Korihor could very well be a libertarian. The author is a libertarian.*

<sup>59</sup> Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2004). Intuitive ethics: How innately prepared intuitions generate culturally variable virtues. *Daedalus*, Fall, 55-66.

preachers used more words from the Authority, Loyalty, and Sanctity word banks.<sup>60</sup> They conducted four studies and the results were the same, and their findings have been replicated by others as well.<sup>61</sup>

This is important because it shows how theologies are developed. Biological factors shape our temperament, which influences our worldview and things as they should be,<sup>62</sup> and as far as God goes, how God should be. This split between egalitarian personalities who focus on the individualizing traits and hierarchical personalities who see the Authority and Loyalty foundations as valid, has resulted in the religious schisms of history. The personalities have their answers to what should a religious institution focus on, rituals and consistent procedures, or a free flowing worship style? This is called High Religion and Low religion, coined by Jonathan Edwards in 1737.<sup>63</sup> These are not value terms, but indicators on how structured ritualistic wise a religious institution is. Catholicism with its symbols and rituals to help its members understand symbolism and application is the token Saint (pun unintended) for High religion, while a Calvary church's worship style would be an example of Low Religion, with its emphasis on an easy going worship service.<sup>64</sup> The Catholic-Protestants split during the reformation and the Presbyterian split during the first Great Awakening,<sup>65</sup> are examples of personalities

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<sup>60</sup> Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2), 366–385. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021847>

<sup>61</sup> Klebig, B., Hahn, L., Tamborini, R., Aley, M., Goble, H., & Baldwin, J. (2021). The influence of prevailing regional political narratives on intuitions featured in religious messages. *Communication Reports*, 34(1), 37-49.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis, G. J., & Bates, T. C. (2011). From left to right: How the personality system allows basic traits to influence politics via characteristic moral adaptations. *British journal of psychology*, 102(3), 546-558.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, J. (1979). *A faithful narrative of the surprising work of God*. Baker.

<sup>64</sup> Chisholm, H.(1911). *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Vol. 17, pp. 72). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>65</sup> *The factions were called the "New Lights" or "New Side" and the "Old Lights" or "Old Side". Each had their views on whether to change traditions or stick to the original interpretation of the Westminster Confession of faith, similar to how Liberals and Conservatives see the Constitution of the United States and whether to follow its writer's intentions or to view it as a living document.*

forming into teams and creating (or preserving) an institution to reflect their values.

But the creation of an institution reflects the creators' (pun unintended) vision of God. Does God want you to go through a specific institution and participate in their rituals and repent through ordained clergy, does God consider all traditions to be valid, does God not care if you are a part of a tradition at all and going to a chapel is something just for your support? People will want to look for a church where they agree with the principles being taught about the nature of God and how God interacts with and feels towards the variety of individuals in the human family. Liberals will criticize conservative churches for creating guilt complexes for being high demand religions with high ethical standards for its members. Conservatives will criticize liberal churches for adopting ideas that originate in the halls of universities and claim they have been corrupted by worldly practices.

For a Liberal-Egalitarian, the words love, charity, and righteousness, must mean the two moral foundations of Care and Egalitarian-Fairness and exclude the other foundations as it relates to individuals. Subsequently they will describe God and Jesus as someone who saves everyone, and cares especially for those on the edges of society who are suffering from a lack of acceptance by the majority. They will emphasize the atonement as a tool to help aid emotional distress, and the ultimate sin is to reject those who hold minority lifestyles and views.

For a Conservative-Hierarchy, righteousness consists of sacrificing your beliefs even if it means giving up what you want most out of loyalty to God and an act of submission. They will emphasize the authority of scripture or institutional leadership to guide everyone and that the people should listen to the leader (Authority foundation). You will find that conservative religions have strict health codes for its members. The sacrifice of individual desires in favor of following God's laws are a hallmark for

conservative religions. Sinning is a rejection of God's laws in favor of following your own path and rules. The Atonement is spoken mainly as a way to rectify our wrongs in regards to the law, focusing more on that than the emotional support aspect.

Both personalities value conformity, though their rule systems are different. The Conservative rules of conformity are explicit and written down as doctrine, while the Liberal code of conformity consists of requiring a certain positive attitude towards new ideas and lifestyles to match the attitude of Jesus.

When you hear the phrase: “I can’t believe in a God that would require \_\_\_\_”, what you are hearing is most likely someone’s personality’s negative intuitive-gut reaction to an idea about God, for which they will then fasten together an argument using scripture or personal example to reinforce their position.

### **The Latter-day Saint Liberal (Egalitarian) Profile**

Liberals-Egalitarians, will quote scriptures that emphasize individuality, and that advocate for the Care and Egalitarian-Fairness moral foundations and will be against hierarchical religious institutions. They will often criticize members holding vast quantities of wealth by quoting the story of the rich man who came to Christ and then went away after being told to sell all he had, and Christ’s words to the apostles that it is easier for a camel to fit through a small doorway in a city wall than it is for a rich person to enter heaven.<sup>66</sup> Inequality is a heavy focus for Liberal-Egalitarians and anywhere the scriptures warn against riches they will cite frequently (such as Jacob’s warning against riches and the rising pride of the people because of their fancy clothes).<sup>67</sup> Egalitarians in their anti high demand institutional attitude will emphasize Jesus spending time

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew 19:16-22

<sup>67</sup> Jacob 2:13

with sinners rather than the religious leaders of the time. Egalitarians, in their never ending urge to push back against rule systems will point out Jesus breaking religious codes, like eating corn on the sabbath.<sup>68</sup> In criticizing religious leaders, they will quote Jesus calling the Pharisees vipers,<sup>69</sup> or when prophets or apostles or religious leaders, the ones who have decision making power, advocate for ideas that fall outside the staunch Egalitarian's two moral individualizing foundations they will quote the famous "exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves"<sup>70</sup>. In criticizing what they see as unjust and unrighteous laws upheld by the institution, they will quote God saying "their creeds were an abomination in his sight",<sup>71</sup> as a claim against dogma. Calls for loyalty or appeals to authority do not register as valid for staunch Egalitarians. For them, the institution's primary duty is to make everyone feel welcome, and to take care of the temporal needs of everyone under its banner. Egalitarians are the first to point out the poverty of Church members in third world countries and the revealed financial reserves the organization has. They lead protests both online and in person, silently with themselves or in groups of allies, against the status-quo Authority/Loyalty/Sanctity based doctrine and practices of the institution. They will emphasize statements of prophetic fallibility and the ability for everyone to receive revelation as justification evidence that they are advocating for the true position of God, and that the prophets are not in tune with the Spirit enough to make the change. They will cite the Church's changes in policy in reference to plural marriage and blacks and

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<sup>68</sup> Mark 2:23-27

<sup>69</sup> Matthew 23:33

<sup>70</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 121:37

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Smith History 1:19 ; *Terryl Givens argues that what God meant was not that explicit creeds of religious dogma are what He despises, but the ideas of God being an impersonal being with no emotional reaction to the suffering of His children which was so pervasive at Joseph's time.*

the priesthood to reinforce that point.<sup>72</sup> They will quote Doctrine and Covenants 26:2 as evidence that the policies they oppose are not valid because they have not been voted on, the principle of common consent. “And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith, for all things you shall receive by faith.” They advocate for a focus on making people (especially those in the minority) feel at home, and aim to flatten what they see as unequal power distributions and to democratize decision making, as well as emphasize verses that equalize revelation. “I am no respecter of persons”,<sup>73</sup> “it is given unto many to know the mysteries of God...”<sup>74</sup>

### **The Latter-day Saint Conservative (Hierarchy) Profile**

Conservatives, or Hierarchs, will emphasize stories and quotes that reinforce the idea of unchanging truth, following prophetic guidance, and the status of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as being the only religious institution that has the fullness of truth, and its implied message to join it. For example, a Hierarchian will quote Alma, “I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable...”<sup>75</sup> They will use the Book of Mormon story in Alma 43 of Captain Moroni following Alma the prophet’s guidance on where to find and counter His enemy,<sup>76</sup> and quote the passage in the next chapter that “God will support, and keep, and preserve us, so long as we are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion”.<sup>77</sup> They will emphasize the need for prophets by quoting Doctrine and Covenants 1:38, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the

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<sup>72</sup> *It should be noted that evidence that someone was wrong in the past is not evidence for you being right in the present – and that goes for any ideological viewpoint.*

<sup>73</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 1:35

<sup>74</sup> Alma 12:9

<sup>75</sup> Alma 29:4

<sup>76</sup> Alma 43:24

<sup>77</sup> Alma 44:4



heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” as well as verse 14 of the same chapter: “the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people”.<sup>78</sup> And in reference to those who do not accept God’s commandments or council He gives through prophets, quote Nephi, that they have spoken “hard things against the wicked, according to the truth” and that they “taketh the truth to be hard”.<sup>79</sup> In talking about unchanging truth, they will point to *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* as the standard of unchanging truth to follow. If teachings do change, they claim in retrospect that the change was only to policy, not doctrine, because doctrine is eternal and prophets who speak for God have only taught true doctrine, so they can be trusted. The belief that doctrine never changes while only policy does, is a belief that only survives on ignorance. Doctrine taught by the president of The Church in this dispensation has changed. The most common instance cited is when Brigham Young taught that Adam “...is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do.”,<sup>80</sup> which doctrine “God revealed to me”,<sup>81</sup> and those who “...may hear these doctrines pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation.”<sup>82</sup> These are the most forceful words a prophet can use to declare the veracity and binding nature of their teachings, and Brigham Young’s teachings have been called a “deadly

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<sup>78</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 1:14

<sup>79</sup> 1 Nephi 16:2

<sup>80</sup> Brigham Young, April 9, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:50-51.

<sup>81</sup> Brigham Young, “Discourse.” *Deseret News*, June 18, 1873, 308.

<sup>82</sup> McConkie, B. R. (1980). *Seven Deadly Heresies*. Typed for Brigham Young University. Special Collections Library, 78.

*Bruce R. McConkie in a letter to Eugene England in February of 1981 explained that Brigham Young taught this doctrine, but that it was uninspired.*

heresy”, and inspired by the devil by later apostle Bruce R. McConkie.<sup>83</sup> Those that are aware of examples of prophetic fallibility must intellectually grapple with how to respond to what is taught by the current prophet(s), and whether or not their teachings will be disavowed as inspired by the devil by some future prophet. To preserve faith in the institution on contemporary issues, the Hierarchs will say that current prophets' counsel supersedes the words of ancient prophets. Measures are taken to protect members' trust in the institution and its leaders by keeping, as Elder Packer calls it, “advanced history”,<sup>84</sup> from seeping into the general knowledge. Their token phrases are “stay on the covenant path”, a phrase that had its genesis in the 21st century, or “stay away from the railing”, with the emphasis on staying away from the danger that lurks beyond the *safety* of obedience and the consumption of non-approved material, or discourages the acceptance of personal interpretations of scripture – especially if it disagrees with the current authorities attitude. Another indicator of a “safety-first” mindset is not updating the language of The Book of Mormon to be more accessible to a young audience, or those who struggle with the cadence of King James style language.

*“When a sacred text is translated into another language or rewritten into a more familiar language, there are substantial risks that this process may introduce doctrinal errors or obscure evidence of its ancient origin. To guard against these risks, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve...have not authorized efforts to express the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon in familiar or modern English.”<sup>85 86</sup>*

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<sup>83</sup> See Elder McConkie's BYU Devotional “The Seven Deadly Heresies”, June 1, 1980

<sup>84</sup> Packer, E. B. K. (1981). “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect.” *Brigham Young University Studies*, 21(3), 259–278. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43040959>

<sup>85</sup> Saints, First Presidency. “Modern Language Editions of the Book of Mormon Discouraged.” *Ensign* 23, no. 4 (1993): 74.

<sup>86</sup> **King James Only?** *They also will often argue for the King James translation as the supreme Bible for general consumption, not because of its content, but because of the sacrifices people made*

Unhealthy Hierarchs will use the explicit rules to measure righteousness, such as easy to spot infractions like wearing more than one pair of earrings or drinking. Explicitly codified rules automatically can be used as a measuring device, where people searching for status can rank themselves in reference to others, and point out others infractions as a way to reinforce their own “virtue”. (Egalitarians do this too with their unwritten and ever changing rule systems and hierarchies of value.) Hierarchs will emphasize our fallen nature as humans and our rebellious nature that keeps us from keeping God's commandments, and that we should keep commandments even if they make people feel bad. For Hierarchs, feelings come secondary to dedication, and they will use the Joseph F. Smith statement: “obedience is the first law in heaven” to reinforce their position.<sup>87</sup>

The Hierarch's focus on following authority can become their hammer, to which all events where people deviate from what appears to be the Overton window (of acceptability) of prophetic guidance becomes a nail. An authoritarian Hierarch will not only see it as their duty to correct people and admonish them from neglecting the guidance of the current (or past, depending on their leader of choice) authority figure, but they may take pleasure in doing so. They have kept law and order — they are righteous. But they are not always correct.

As a gospel doctrine teacher, BYU professor Daniel C. Peterson would take the scripture passages recommended by the manual, disregard

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*to bring it about, with the aid of God. This divine assistance is their sign that they should use that version and that version only. God preserved that version, so to not use it would be to go against God's wishes. What they leave out however, is that under this view, God preserved the apocrypha too, and yet that is omitted from the King James Versions disseminated throughout the conservative religious domain. If they really practiced that belief, they would view the apocrypha with the same reverence as the other books.*

<sup>87</sup> *His quote was referenced by future authorities. “Obedience is the first law of heaven, the cornerstone upon which all righteousness and progression rest. It consists in compliance with divine law, in conformity to the mind and will of Deity, in complete subjection to God and his commands” (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 539).*

the manual, then read the passages and find the intended meaning behind them. Then during the lesson, he would give the historical context for the passages while explaining what he believed was the central message rather than what the manual directed. One Sunday the stake Sunday school president sat in on the lesson – and was displeased. After class, he confronted Peterson, saying that he needed to follow the manual since they were given to us by divine inspiration. We must follow the script given to us, the people who wrote them knew what they were doing. What he did not know was that Daniel Peterson was on the committee that wrote the manual — and he did not like it, saying that unknown Church bureaucrats had gate-kept the committee members from making additions to the manual that would benefit the lessons.<sup>88</sup> Much of what Hierarchs believe to be divine inspiration is really just preferences from ecclesiastical middle management, who too often act as the police for religious law and order.

It should be noted that Christ was neither liked by the big-business supporting authoritarian right-wing Pharisees as well as the left-wing Sadducees who supported big government (Roman) intervention in public affairs.<sup>89</sup> <sup>90</sup> Paul observes that they both collaborated in the Jewish Supreme Court.<sup>91</sup> I am not going to list all the scriptures that support the respective Conservative or Liberal Ethos here, you must go and find them yourselves.

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<sup>88</sup> See 35:00 - 43:00 [Mormon Stories Podcast]. (2011, August 13). *LDS Church Apologist - Dr. Daniel C. Peterson Pt.3* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTx-n8Yx5eg>

<sup>89</sup> *In contrast with the two big parties of Jewish ecclesiastical society there was a third party, the Essenes. It is argued that John the Baptist was a part of or at least influenced by this third party.* Lichtenberger, H. (1992). THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST: REFLECTIONS ON JOSEPHUS' ACCOUNT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. In *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (pp. 340-346). Brill.

<sup>90</sup> *Pharisees resisted Hellenization, or adopting Greco-Roman influence, while the Sadducees did not resist. The word Pharisee means set apart or separated (from the unworthy or the Gentiles). Sadducees were seen as the party that was more globalist than the nationalistic Pharisees and who were more concerned for the "little guy".*

<sup>91</sup> Acts 23:6-9

In my personal experience in witnessing Conservatives and Liberals present why the Latter-day Saint faith is compelling to them, Conservatives are more likely to focus on how it is nice to have a prophet to tell the world what is right and wrong so there is no ambiguity and confusion regarding contemporary moral questions, while Liberals and Libertarians focus on religious paradigm expanding doctrines and their implications for raising the value of humans to a higher domain. Contrast their humanist approach to religion versus the authority and structure Conservatives focus on.

Egalitarians focus on Christ as a healer, a giver of aid to those that sit at the bottom levels of the existing power structure, and as someone who did not spend time with the religious institutions authorities. Victims are good, oppressors are bad. Victims' experiences cannot be questioned by anyone because righteousness consists of the two moral foundations Care and Equality-Fairness. Thus, the righteousness Christ suffered to comfort the victim, not question their experience.

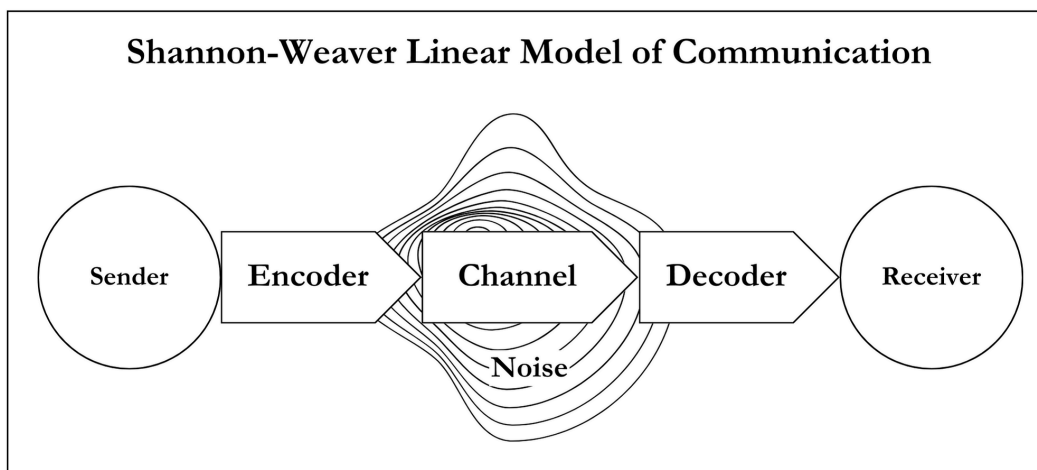
Hierarchians focus on Christ as the lawgiver and enforcer of eternal truths that require us to sacrifice our desires in the pursuit of exaltation, with a de-emphasis on individuality and an emphasis on a stable community. The foundations of Care and Fairness are a part of their moral frame, but they see other foundations as valid too, Authority (to elders or superiors), Loyalty (to the group) and Sanctity (the body is a holy vessel, do not pollute it). When a battle between the Authority and Care foundations ensue, Authority, in their mind, carries the greater virtue.

For Egalitarians (of the Liberal type), the ideas that should not be allowed to freely flow in public conversation are the ideas that invalidate the experiences of minority groups, as well as ideas that reinforce the systems that “oppress” them. For Hierarchs, the speech that should be kept private are ideas that undermine the confidence in the established authorities who keep law and order by telling the people the laws of God.

Both sides have their own version of speech that should be suppressed, and they justify them for different reasons – but safety is at the root of their reasoning. Statements such as Elder Packer’s words to Michael Quinn in an interview for a professorship at BYU exemplify this ethos:

*“I have a hard time with historians because they idolize the truth. The truth is not uplifting; it destroys. I could tell most of the secretaries in the church office building that they are ugly and fat. That would be the truth, but it would hurt and destroy them. Historians should tell only that part of the truth that is inspiring and uplifting.”*<sup>92</sup>

### The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model and Heaven’s Struggle to Instruct Mortals

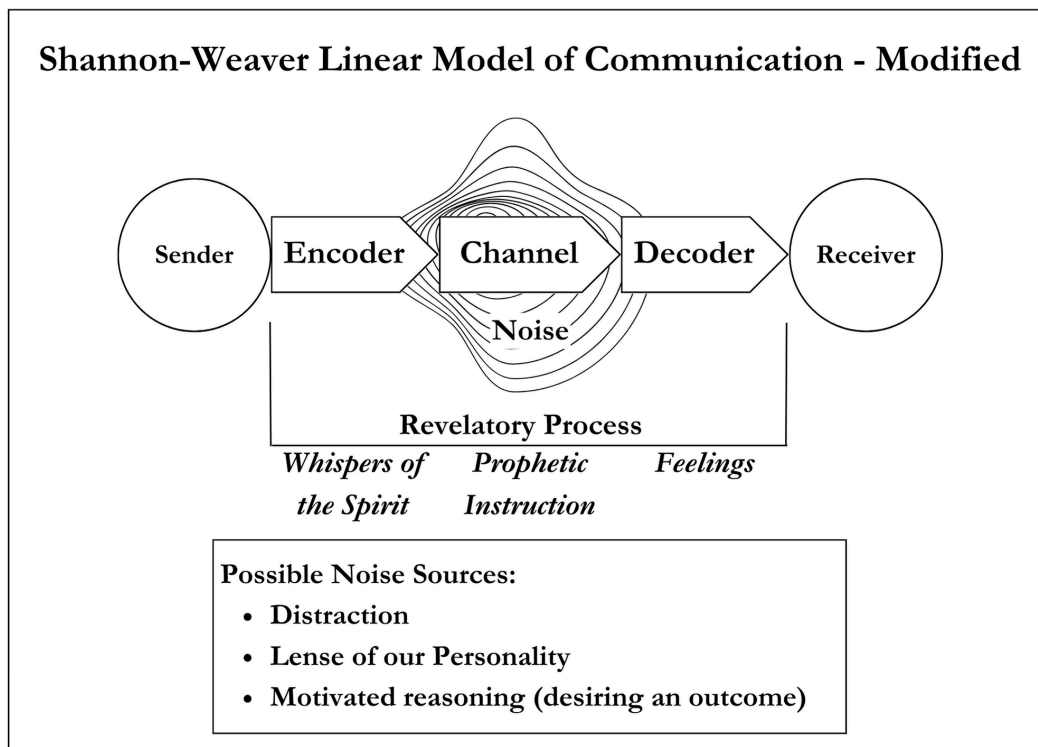


One of the earliest models of communication was the Shannon-Weaver model, or the linear model of communication.<sup>93</sup> The sender encodes a message (like writing a letter), sent through a channel (the mail service), the noise is possible ways the message can be intercepted, changed, or made difficult to interpret. The receiver decodes the message (reads the letter and understands it with their understanding of words and

<sup>92</sup> Smith, G. D. (1992). *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*. Signature Books, 76.

<sup>93</sup> Shannon, C. E. (1948). A mathematical theory of communication. *The Bell system technical journal*, 27(3), 379-423.

their experience with the sender). It is widely criticized for its simplicity and limited application.<sup>94</sup> I agree with the criticism, and that a transactional model where the sender and receiver influence each other is a doctrinally accurate model (which there are scriptural examples of – such as Abraham and God arguing over how many righteous people in Sodom there need to be for the city to be spared from destruction<sup>95</sup>) and is better at explaining behavior. For our purposes however, we will use the simplest model to clearly articulate the epistemological dilemma of receiving and interpreting the revelation of truth. A linear model will do for the purpose of information being given from a divine source that is omniscient, thus noise is not a problem for the workers on that side of the veil interpreting our prayers.



Obviously if we are distracted and not listening for revelation we will not receive it. Assuming that we are thinking straight and without

<sup>94</sup> Maras, S. (2000). Beyond the transmission model: Shannon, Weaver, and the critique of sender/message/receiver. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 27(3), 123-142.

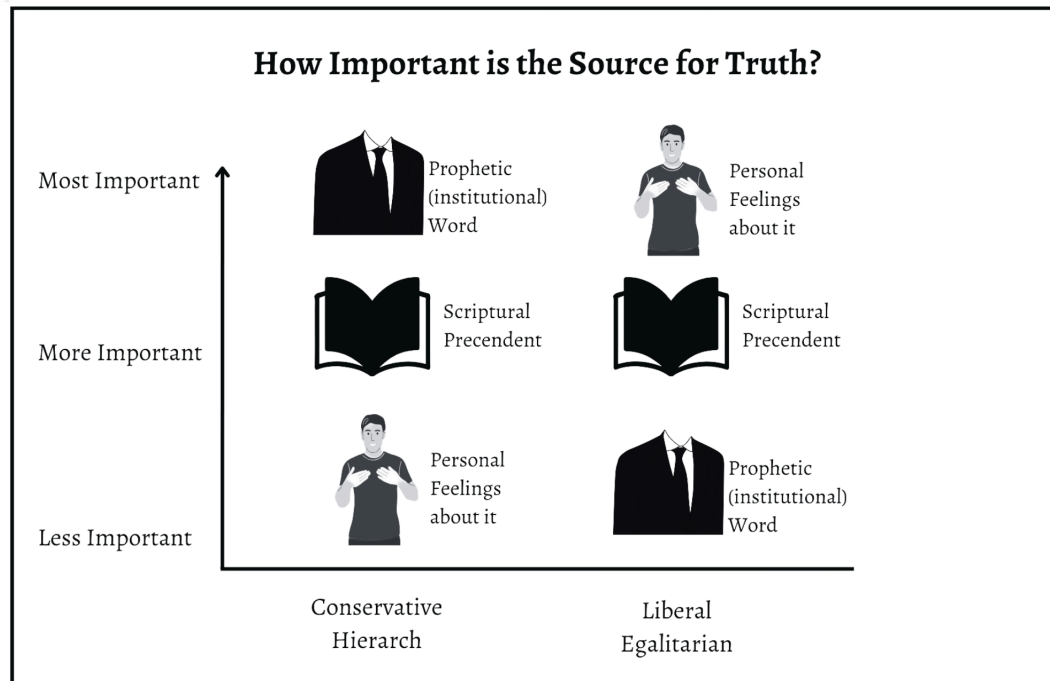
<sup>95</sup> Genesis 18:26-33

cognitive distortions that cloud our judgment, we still have our Egalitarian/Hierarchical glasses to deal with when discerning what is true and what we want to be true.

The channels that we use to receive and then decode the truths that we use in our lives are called sources of epistemology, and they can range from General Conference talks, to personal feelings and intuitions on a topic, to academic articles on geological principles. Life is a mix of signals, and often they are hard to interpret – not everything spoken at the pulpit or published in a scholarly journal have been accurate. When we are aware of this, we will order different sources of knowledge in different ways, depending on the topic.



## Levels of Epistemology and Sources of Valid Truth<sup>96</sup>



For a Hierarchian that values obedience and self-sacrifice, instruction primarily descends from the top level, and is confirmed at the personal level. Truth comes from God, which is given to prophets modern and ancient which are written down in scripture or codified into the current institutions policy and doctrine, and then is confirmed by a personal witness of the spirit. The problem that Conservative Hierarchians have to overcome while making their case to a hypothetical person that is temperamentally in the center or on the liberal side of the personality spectrum, is prophetic fallibility in the past. Hierarchs always

### <sup>96</sup> More on the Graph

*If the guidance by the institution is a pure Authority or Loyalty or Sanctity foundation instruction, then the individualizing mindset kicks in and Personal feelings trump the institution's position. The intuition's rejection assumes the institution is wrong, and reason comes in to make a justification. If the instruction from the institution is only within the individualizing Care/Egalitarian-Fairness foundations, say the prophet says "We should give some of our abundance to poor people during Christmas time to honor Christ" then the instruction is welcome on all sides, since all sides share those foundations.*

point to statements made by apostles that prophets are not perfect and can get things wrong, pointing to the race and the priesthood issue, various apostolic quotes on the lower status of black people, the “Meet the Mormons” campaign by President Monson being implicitly criticized by President Nelson who said when we call ourselves “Mormons”, it is a win for Satan, and other issues. If the Hierarchian’s emphasis on following the current prophet’s teachings holds true, then they have to also argue that President Monson was deceived by Satan with that campaign. Hierarchs will emphasize prophets as fallible in reference to past statements or attitudes while at the same time discourage anyone from thinking any of the current policies or attitudes or stances by the leaders can be misguided. This seems to be a serious breach of intellectual integrity that must be overcome if they are to convince someone looking for a logical justification to follow current prophetic guidance.

For an Egalitarian that values individual truth predicated on the moral foundations of Care and Egalitarian-Fairness, the authority of the individual and their spiritual confirmation is at the top of the legitimate sources for truth. At the top is personal witness, followed by scriptures, and at the bottom is counsel (advice) from the institution. In discussing religion with my Egalitarian friend, I was told that scriptures can be interpreted in many ways, and one person’s interpretation of scripture should not be used to invalidate another person’s personal witness of the spirit. The logical problem I see with this view is that if we do not see scripture as having one meaning that is universal to all people regardless of their temperament and experience and we cannot use it to invalidate someone’s personal witness given to them, and if everyone is on the same level to receive revelation for their own lives and how to conduct it, if in a scenario person A receives revelation that person B is to serve them for three years on their life project of building a cabin in Park City and if person B refuses person A has the authority from heaven to steal their

wallet and drain their bank account, on what grounds do you have to tell them they are wrong? Quoting scripture is not an option nor is quoting any statement from a church leader, it would be a battle between their personal witness they *believed* they received that is sanctioned by heaven, and your personal witness you believed you received that this is not a plan sanctioned by heaven. If I don't receive a confirmation of your idea, do I accept it on blind faith? This logical path forms a solid foundation for moral relativism, where truth exists, but exists because the individual believes it is truth, and their truth cannot be invalidated (unless it is by the egalitarian's two moral foundation arguments). Egalitarians take a debate strategy that ends in either relativism for justifying an individual's unorthodox view or behavior when they are acting against an institution that counseling obedience to other moral foundations that lie outside the Egalitarian's natural sense of righteousness, or moral absolutism if then institution tells its followers to get a vaccine to show care to others, if they do not receive it they are going against the prophet and against God. (Conservatives were the ones hesitant in this situation to follow the prophet, when they released in a statement that they urged everyone to become vaccinated.<sup>97</sup>) There is an element of hierarchy built into the system that we cannot explain, keys and stewardship – it is why God the Father commanded Peter, James and John to return and report to Him the conditions of the Earth, while He knows perfectly well what is happening. Elija came down and gave to Joseph Smith and others the authority of Heaven to seal relationships with a power that we cannot yet understand. There are things beyond our knowledge that we cannot control – such as perhaps the keys to bind intelligence to element in the ordinance of giving

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<sup>97</sup> O'Rullian, Ally. "Church Members Respond to Urging from the First Presidency to Get the COVID-19 Vaccine." *The Daily Universe*, 13 Oct. 2021, [universe.byu.edu/2021/10/13/the-prophet-and-covid-19-vaccines/](https://universe.byu.edu/2021/10/13/the-prophet-and-covid-19-vaccines/).

birth to a living soul. We must be conscious of this in our Egalitarian efforts to democratize doctrine.

And so, when is a prophet acting as a prophet? From what we can learn about reactions to their admonitions from Liberal-Egalitarians and Conservative-Hierarchs from prophetic counsel on vaccines or on marriage issues, is that they act as a prophet when we agree with them. In both cases, the justification for following a possibly fallible prophet in the present while treating all their guidance as infallible, and justification for how not being able to invalidate others experiences using scripture does not defeat the purpose of scripture while at the same time using feelings (which can be affected by many variables such as what one desires to be true) as the ultimate confirmation for what is truth, is a good system to order theology (and society) on. Both sides seem to dismiss the weaknesses of their own position, their own fallibility, and emphasize the fall ability of their temperamental counterpart's philosophical structure. These dimensions must be answered in a logical manner by both sides to maintain intellectual integrity.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> **Some Further Challenges**

*When is a prophet acting as a prophet? For someone who derives their theology from their personality, it is when they support their position.*

*My question to Conservative Hierarchs is, perhaps you make the argument that God blessed you because of your industriousness and it is wrong for someone else to forcefully redistribute your wealth. If I agree with that, will you then follow the multiple scriptural admonitions to be free with your substance with your neighbors and give them your excess funds that you don't need to survive on? "...be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." (Jacob 2:17) No one is forcing redistribution on you, but in your fervor to keep the prophetic counsel of the standard works it is hard to get around that.*

*My question to my fellow Egalitarian-Liberals is in regards to the law of common consent. Do we have to vote on all doctrine every year, month, or decade, or do we submit a doctrine or policy to vote on for each general conference? If people who do not have a vested interest or emotional investment in the policy or doctrinal point being voted on outnumber the vote to change it, do we count that vote as valid? If we vote on a policy or doctrine to become binding, would the people who did not vote for it to be Truth not have it be binding on them in eternity? So a person who votes that they do not consent to the Ten Commandments, specifically the one on*

Both are not good at the Truth game. Egalitarians are not good at finding truth, they are good at exploring novel ideas, which could be true. Hierarchs are not good at defending what is true, they are good at defending the status-quo beliefs they already possess, which could be true. Acting on their natural strengths, if Egalitarians had the truth they would find a new idea and move on, and if Hierarchs did not have the truth they would never change to get to it.

### **A Universal Standard of Righteousness**

If truth does exist, and we will assume it does, if Liberal-Egalitarians had it they would try and move towards a different position and adopt something else, and if Conservative-Hierarchs did not know or believe in it they would never get to it, because they would have to change their position to be in line with truth. If the truth on a particular moral issue lies in one of the Authority, Loyalty, or Sanctity foundations, Egalitarians (Liberals and Libertarians) would reject it. If evil was being enforced through those same foundations, the Conservatives would not question it. And if truth does exist, Libertarians could and often will find a way to forever doubt it. No one is good at the objective truth game, because our perception of truth is forever colored by our feelings, driven by our

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*murder being wrong, should not be looked down on for committing such an act because they are following their code they consented to?*

*Egalitarians focus their theology on being caring, the equality of blessings and nature in relation to each other, and are wary of those in power (unless those in power say something that is supportive of the Individualizing foundations). Hierarchs focus their theology on obedience, sacrificing one's desires, and a willingness to follow prophetic counsel even if you do not understand nor agree with it (unless it might conflict with one's attitudes towards something like vaccination).*

personalities, influenced by experience and biological factors that were set in motion from our conception.

So what is universal to all personalities, regardless of what they feel, and the tendency of people to look at the other person who disagrees with us and thank God we are not as wicked as them. Perhaps we might pray to God something like this: Oh God, I thank thee for showing me the light, that I am not like this person. And please help this person to see the light too, that one day they might be as \_\_\_\_ (tolerant, obedient, open to legitimizing others lifestyles, open to following the modern prophet) as I am.” Maybe the prayer we say at night is not said in this way, but maybe our attitude in which we go through life is. Our actions will be our loudest prayers to God. Maybe, the universal righteousness that transcends personality is the ability to forgive those who may for a time gain power over us, before they ask for forgiveness. Perhaps that universal righteousness is contained in the questions of truth answered by Christ to Satan, that relationships with people, all people can be the ultimate treasure in our eyes, that we use whatever power we have in our means to serve others, even if it is just us and our agency and the ability to give a compliment, and that we should be grateful for what we have and seek to listen to others and keep our minds and hearts open to learning, and to be eager to change and eager to forgive.

Maybe division was written into the plan from the beginning so that we could experience what it is like to bridge the gaps of disagreement and animosity with understanding and patience? Maybe when our first instinct is to force the opposition to bend to our will through methods of guilt or legislation, we take the route of serving them first. Can we be the advocates of those we disagree with before we become their accusers? Or do we remain in a state of tribal separation, unable to extend upstream grace to those beyond our pack? In speaking to those people who thought they were chosen, Jesus asked “If you love those who love you, what

reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”<sup>99</sup> Can we overcome the natural tendency to view ourselves as higher in the eyes of God than those who we see as following less of God’s word than we are? How quick we are as Egalitarians and Hierarchs to throw each other at the feet of Christ and declare, “Master, they have broken our law, they must be stoned.” Maybe he will look at us and be sad that we cannot look at ourselves from a higher point of view to view our own weaknesses, and recognize that we are to learn from each other, and our test is to see if we can learn to do that. Would that not be a test of the humility of gods in embryos, the overcoming of their own pride? Shall the hand say to the foot, I have no need for thee, or are we not all a part of the body of Christ?<sup>100</sup> Do we have itching ears, only wanting to hear voices that validate our own position, or are we eager to learn where our blind spots lie?<sup>101</sup> Careful we must be when trying to create our own heaven, because in doing so we must also create a hell to go along with it. And if we do that, we create our own God to worship, and we should be watchful towards the heavens, for when we challenge Jehovah with a God of our own making we must be ready for Him to challenge us back.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Matthew 5:46-47

<sup>100</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>101</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3-4 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears”

<sup>102</sup> *The plagues sent by Jehova were challenges to the gods of Egypt. Turning the water to blood was a challenge to the god Hapi, the water bringer and god of the Nile River. Sending in the frogs was a challenge to Heket, the goddess of water and fertility whose head was a frog. The lice from the dust of the Earth was a challenge to Geb, god over the dust of the Earth. The swarms of flies were against Khepri, god of creation and movement, whose head was a fly. Killing the livestock was against Hathor, protector of the livestock. The boils were against Isis, goddess of medicine and peace. The hailstorm of fire was against Nut, goddess of the sky. The locusts were against Seth, god of storms and disorder. These were lesser gods than Ra and Pharaoh, who were considered to be the greatest. Jehovah started with the least necessary force, challenging the lower gods, but because of the stubbornness felt the need to challenge the high gods. Jehova blocked out the sun for three days, showing His superiority over Ra, and finally showing Pharaoh that He had control over life and death itself after Pharaoh threatened the life of Moses.*

Those that have not come to terms and examined the pitfalls of their personality feel no need to question the creations of their own minds, as they think they cannot go wrong. It makes sense to them so it must be. If a woman or a man is unable to articulate the part of Christ that fights against the natural dispositions of their own personality, and seek to mold the Christ to fit their own preferences, have chosen to remain in the ignorance that lay just nigh innocence, and limit the scope of their vision from reaching beyond the weaknesses of their own powers of reason, held back by the strength of their own pride. Their testimony has not yet matured, and they withhold themselves from the eternal perspective, which comes from incorporating their opposing dispositions into their own tools for discernment. “You take the easier path.” says the Conservative as they observe the Liberal fall into their natural rut, not having the humility to see that they themselves lie firmly in theirs. Politics is a game to see who can best justify their own blindness – it is a shame it has taken its form in the religious domain as well, as well as its accompanying spite, justified in each team’s views for their cause of righteousness. Lamented President Heber J. Grant, one of the Democrat presidents of the Church, “I regret exceedingly that in political controversies men seem to lack that courtesy and that respect for their opponents that I believe all Latter-day Saints ought to have. I have never heard a Democrat make a speech that I felt was fair to the Republicans. Being a Democrat, I shall not say anything about what I think of the speeches of Republicans regarding Democrats.”<sup>103</sup> He might be saddened to observe from beyond the veil where he now stands, to watch as the Church he once tried to lead has sunk even lower into the trenches of what is called negative party politics – a hatred for the other side, beyond disagreement. President Grant continued, “From my own personal contact with dear and near friends, Republicans and Democrats, I have

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<sup>103</sup> Grant, H. J. (1981). *Gospel Standards: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Heber J. Grant, Seventh President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. Ed, 133.



not yet been able to discover the exercise of what you might call charity, if you like, for the opinions of others who oppose them politically; at least not as much charity as should exist among our people.”<sup>104</sup>

## **Sum**

The conclusions that each side may draw in response to the question of truth may not always be right, but the ways that they think are necessary for progress into the truth – and if they are both necessary, they are good. You cannot throw away the other side of a coin without tossing your side as well. We do not make our decisions based on truth itself, but on our perception of the truth, seeing darkly through the glass of our personality’s capacity and uniqueness.<sup>105</sup>

When we have an emotional investment in the outcome of a moral question, our ability for scientific critical reasoning (gather evidence, disprove the desired outcome and personal bias) is abandoned for the emotional victory-seeking reasoning, where the outcome of the question has already been decided at the subconscious level, and our strategic reasoning comes in to beat the other team’s arguments at all cost.

We are primed to seek out a team, something larger than ourselves to belong to, and then we want our team to win, making us both feel unified with a higher sense of purpose and at the same isolating ourselves into a community that shares the same blindspots, rewarding each other for keeping those blindspots a taboo.

Since this is the case, humility is required to work with the rest to inch our way towards Truth, as both Plato and Jehovah describe it – things as they really are.<sup>106</sup> While we engage in the hard dialogue with others, as well as introspecting on our own beliefs, we might apply three virtues that Krister Stendahl, the former dean of the Harvard Divinity school and

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<sup>104</sup> *ibid*

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>106</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 93:30

bishop of the Lutheran State Church in Stockholm Sweden gave at a 1985 press conference addressing protestors who were up in arms at the construction of the Latter-day Saint temple.<sup>107</sup> His three rules were as follows:

1. When you are trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.
2. Don't compare your best to their worst.
3. Leave room for "holy envy." (In other religious traditions, and we might say political traditions but really there is little difference – find things you can admire, and want to apply in your own tradition)

Practicing these principles places us in a state where we are open to truth that we might not have ourselves, by counteracting the biological drive to form groups that are not aimed at discovering truth but focus on winning by overpowering their adversaries (physically or intellectually), and prevent the cognitive distortions of overgeneralizing, dichotomous or black and white thinking (people are either good or bad), negative filtering (focusing on the negative past of another tradition), and positive filtering (only seeing the positive picture of your own tradition or group).

Let us hope to have the fortitude to resist resenting each other for possessing the strengths we do not have, and the wisdom to not see it as weakness. If we are unable to look beyond the borders of our own personality for truth, we fight over the dead body of Christ, for we prevent Him from exonerating Himself or from reproving us – and He is used as merely a tool to justify our flawed views. Shall we domesticate God into something that is comfortable for us, either as a tool we use to shut out new ideas so we do not leave our safe space of "truth" or a symbol of defiance against the establishment to remain free from voices that criticize

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<sup>107</sup> Taylor, B. B. (2019). *Holy envy: Finding God in the faith of others*. Canterbury Press.

us? Do we turn them (our Heavenly Parents) into something more of a few house pets than celestial deities whose goal is to help us progress through learning and transformation? If we cannot understand or apply this, if we look no further than our own temperamental bias for how we think God should be, then our entire religious enterprise has been in the pursuit of fabricating an artificial theological structure that does little more than to justify blind spots of our own natural disposition and crucify Jesus on the cross of our weakness. We may read the scriptures, but do we take off and inspect our glasses we use to see them with?

If there is a true religion, it must not be formed by the collaboration of one strata or part of the personality spectrum, be it Hierarchs or Egalitarians. Two requirements must be met: it must be given by revelation from a supernatural source, *and* place demands on all personalities equally. Says Elder Widstoe in his book *Evidences and Reconciliations*, “The ax hews at untruth no matter where the chips may fall. Whether Democrats wail or Republicans weep is of no consequence.”<sup>108</sup>

The Gospel of Jesus Christ as it is laid out in the restored plan, requires the understanding, appreciation, and self-development of both sides of the personality spectrum, incorporating the strengths from the hierarchical and egalitarian mindsets. It is a system where no one can transcend to higher states of being without developing the opposing strengths within themselves, so as to not allow our natural strengths to blind us.

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<sup>108</sup> Widstoe, J. A. (1943). *Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day* (Vol. 1). Bookcraft Company, 280.

*“Those who govern their thoughts and actions solely by the principles of liberalism or conservatism or intellectualism cannot be expected to agree with all of the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As for me, I find some wisdom in liberalism, some wisdom in conservatism, and much truth in intellectualism—but I find no salvation in any of them.”*

- Dallin H Oaks, *Criticism*, February 1987<sup>109</sup>

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## **The Mountain of Truth**

There is an objective truth, which sits like a mountain above a lush valley. The earth within the mountain rising above the valley stands for tradition, the elements that have lasted through all time. This is conservatism, preserving the traditions of the past and the wisdom they hand down to us. On the mountain you will find trees to give you shade, and streams to quench your thirst. You will see flowers and shrubbery, things that make the hike beautiful. These represent pure Egalitarian Liberalism, resting their roots on the soil held together by its conservative counterpart. The shapes of flowers change with the season and the plants themselves die and become a part of the mass of the mountain beneath it, forming into tradition and culture itself. Rivers erode new paths and bridges must be built to cross the new stream. The tree does not care who sits under its shade, the rocks do not ask what you have done in order for you to sit down, and the streams do not gate-keep anyone from drinking out of it. This is the unearned grace, freely given. While we ascend the climb these elements make the trek possible.

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<sup>109</sup> Given at a Latter-day Saint Student Association fireside in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on 4 May 1986. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1987/02/criticism?lang=eng>

The mountain simply standing there presents the implicit challenge: climb. The perspective it gives does not offer itself to you, you must reach it. As a hiker ascends to the top, pausing to enjoy the scenery, yet straining at the effort it takes to keep going, each switch back transforms the person into a more capable explorer, they ascend up the levels of knowledge and gain new wisdom. Each mountain has a highest point, a peak, and so does truth — a place where philosophers reached for, and where wisdom reaches its end. Its price is your comfort, your time, and your energy, but its reward is the clarity that comes from reaching the top of the ascent, a majestic view, perspective of things as they are. A view is just a view, but the journey makes it majestic. It would simply not be the same if you were dropped off by a helicopter. The pride you feel by transcending a challenge posed by something external to yourself, coupled by the elements that made the journey possible and beautiful, combine into what we might call joy. You may take a rock from the peak to bring down with you to remember the feeling of tranquility and peace that came with transcending who you were when you started the hike.

When discussing the mountain with people in the valley, some may tell you that you don't need to climb mountains, that if you do it is fine, but any activity is really no more valuable than another. Perhaps you are better off staying down in the valley from now on, or you may have been better off if you never hiked at all. You pull out the stone and remember what it felt like to have perspective, the feeling of rising above what you once were, as if you had gained the respect of the mountain itself, forming an unspoken bond with the land. Another person in the group pulls out a rock similar to yours, and says they have been to the top too. Just by them holding the rock, you know enough about them to trust who they are, someone who made the climb to the top, someone who is willing to commit, to not stop, to transcend what they were. That rock is a symbol of both your transformations, an indication of both of your unspoken

relationship to the mountain of truth, and it is through that mountain that you both have tangible evidence to form a bond with each other. Trust between two people must come from something that transcends them both, and that is truth. Liberalism gives the truth its beauty, and conservatism gives it its depth and its height. Taken together, the line of truth vibrates like a wave, and played by an instrument. It reveals the song of the ebbs and flows of an eternal line of relationships – the song of life.

# Chapter 8

## Personalities, Blind Spots, and Progression

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### **The Wolf and the Lamb?**

*“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain...”<sup>1</sup>*

When I hear peace brought up in Church, often it is referring to what I would call “Passive Peace”. It is that vision of the lion laying down with the lamb, a place where we can rest from our worries and our troubles, a peace that we ask for in the midst of a horrible trial. If only we can survive “Earth life” and make it to heaven, we can finally be at peace.

But do our Heavenly Parents exist in a state of this type of peace? No. In fact, their pain runs deeper than anything we can experience in this life. What is the source of their pain? Omniscient consciousness of the vulnerability of their children, and the eventual outcome of our vulnerability being exploited, resulting in our suffering.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 11:6-9, NIV

## **Active Peace**

### **Enoch and God (Moses 7, verses re-ordered)<sup>2</sup>**

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept...And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? (28-29)	When God looked at His creations, He cried, and Enos seeing this asked: "How can you cry, you already can see the end."
...And were it possible that man could number the particles of the earth, yea, millions of earths like this, it would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations; and thy curtains are stretched out still; and yet thou art there, and thy bosom is there; and also thou art just; thou art merciful and kind forever; And thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end; how is it thou canst weep? (30-31)	You have all the power in the universe, you are basically untouchable, you are the first cause of everything you have created, so how can it be that what you have created makes you vulnerable?
I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, (36)	It is because I am conscious of everything.
And the fire of mine indignation is kindled against them; and in my hot displeasure will I send in the floods	I am angry because of the way they treat each other, and it is so bad that I have to make them suffer to stop and remember me.

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<sup>2</sup> This is more of a message-focused translation rather than a word for word translation.



upon them, for my fierce anger is kindled against them. (34)	
these which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods; and behold, I will shut them up; a prison have I prepared for them. (38)	I can see who will die and suffer because of what I have to send, and I can predict who will end up in the state of spiritual limbo, suffering from regret –
And that which I have chosen hath pled before my face. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins; inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me, and until that day they shall be in torment (39)	Until they choose to follow the path of my Son.
wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer? (37)	How could I not be affected by the suffering of the ones I love most?

Even the God of Heaven is not impervious to something being a “first-cause” on Him (or them when talking about our Heavenly Parents). This is a radical change from the God who is described in the Second London Confession of Faith 2:1, who is “...without body, parts, or passions”, the prevailing idea of God in the age of Joseph Smith. God is the one who makes everything happen, we cannot cause an effect on the invulnerable God. Joseph Smith introduced the world to a deity that is moved by those in its stewardship. The Restored Gospel teaches us that coming to Earth was a part of our path to progression, a place to discover faith.

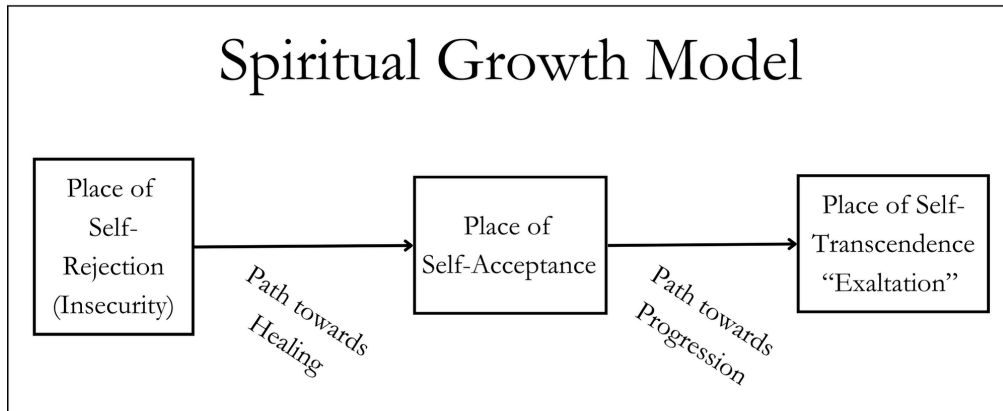
But in sending us here, our Heavenly Parents also were exercising faith. The LDS doctrine of free-will as well as the doctrine of God’s all-knowingness is that they understand us so well they can predict our actions, but they do now “know” that we will fall in the path they predict. This part of God exists in “time”. Otherwise, the Atonement of Jesus Christ would not have been a miracle, since God would have created the

conditions where Jesus's mission's success would be guaranteed. All of us, including our Heavenly Parents, watched in faith as Christ performed His mission.

While our Heavenly Parents can predict the actions of their children, seeing actions such as a boy helping an elderly person cross the road, to the atrocities enacted by the great right-wing and left-wing ideological dictators and stewards of murder of the highest degree – Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, how could they keep the plan going without shutting down the project?

With an increase of consciousness of vulnerability, as well as the natural increase of fear and hesitation that comes with it, an increase of faith must be mustered to compensate. Perhaps a plan might fail, but to cease faith altogether guarantees its failure.

In the earlier chapter we talked about how a part of Joy is witnessing for ourselves our own ability to harness our agency grow, like unlocking a new part of our will-power to meet the challenges we are confronted with, and fear is feeling that our agency and abilities are not sufficient for what we face. Feeling that we are able to meet challenges head on and not be destroyed by them, feeling that we are something “that acts” and is not just “acted on”, this is confidence – this is Active Peace.



### **Sometimes We Are Not Ready**

Obviously progress is the goal of the Plan of Salvation, and during General Conference so much emphasis is placed on progressing in life that those who are just trying to find the power of their agency feel left behind by the rest of the members who seem to be doing just fine on that Covenant Path. It is made worse by statements saying that the most important thing we can be doing here is to gather Israel, go to the temple, and do a host of other things that people just are not ready for yet – for whatever reason.

While in Washington D.C. for a conference, a friend and I visited with one of her friends, who told us that though she knew the gospel was true, and that going to the temple was a good thing, and that she should be on the covenant path, but that she was not ready yet. Thankfully she had an understanding bishop who told her that she was always welcome, and that whenever she felt ready to “progress” that she could do what she felt she needed to do – but to take her time. I respect her for her awareness, and for her desires.

There are many more like her in the body of the Church, and they feel left out and under pressure. With family members urging them to be worthy to go to the temple, Church leaders warning them not to be caught unworthy as if the second coming was some sort of a pop-quiz, and their

questions on Church matters being suppressed in the church meetings while seemingly everyone expresses how wonderful it is to be a member of the Church, is it any wonder why they feel the need to remove themselves from a high strung environment? They were never told that it is alright for them to be where they are – they are always told to be better, to become perfect, to reach their potential, while they are still trying to catch their breath. We often forget that we are not supposed to run faster than we are able, and yet we expect people to be strapped with a rope to a jeep driving uphill, tell them to run, and that if they cannot run as fast as the jeep is pulling them that the Spirit will make up the rest. And when they fall face-down into the dirt we say “they must not have enough faith”. Perhaps we do not say this verbally, but those that have lied face down in the dirt can see it in how their peers act towards them. They need a safe space to recover.

## **Objections**

Many members I have spoken to about this express their concern that if they do not treat “sins” with consequences that the Church will lose its idea of what truth is, and that we will descend into a state of apostasy, a place where anything goes.

On the other side, people argue that all aspects of the Church and its gospel plan must be a safe space, that people’s self-esteem must be protected at all costs, especially those that are marginalized. They argue that the existence of rules eventually marginalizes those who do not or cannot follow them, and thus the rules ought to be done away with, and that a person should only follow the rules that work for them.

Both of these views are wrong. One leads to a Church filled with draconian enforcers where the idea of peace flies out the window since everyone is anxious to keep in line with the group, and the other leads to

the disintegration of unity, since no one can be unified unless they have a collective agreed upon system of rules – and once you do draw a line in the sand that line can be crossed. Can you guess which side is Egalitarian and which one is the Hierarchs?

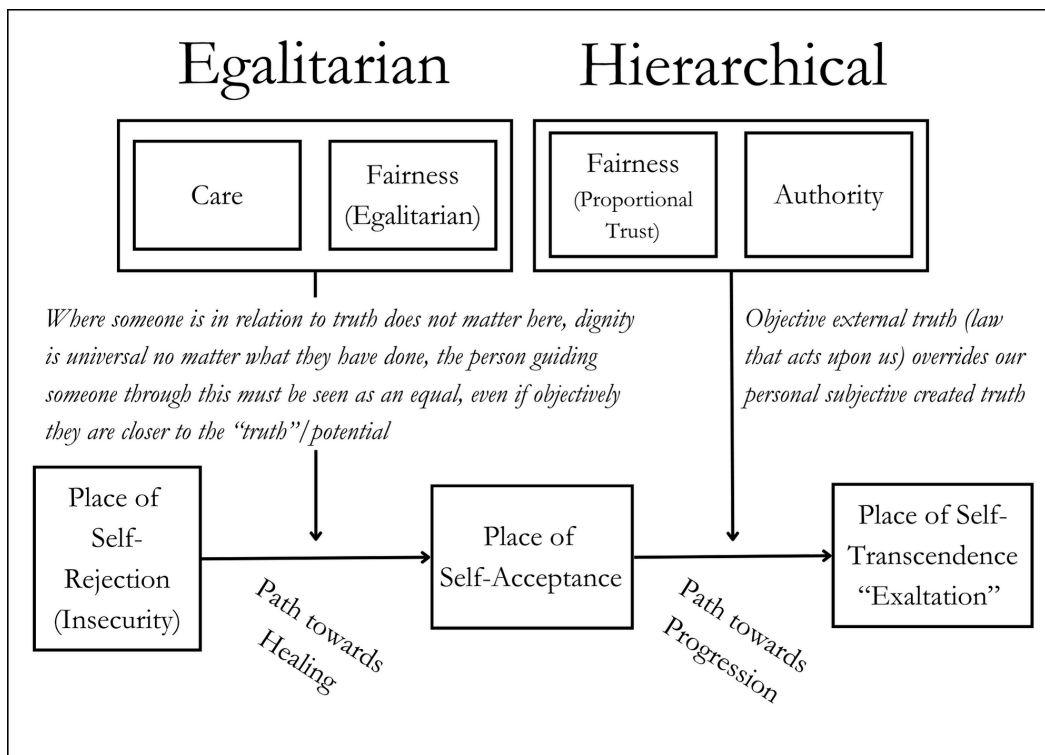
### **By Grace Ye Are Saved After All You Can Do**

Perhaps no scriptural passage in *The Book of Mormon* has been misunderstood as this – both by our critics and by the body of the Saints. The critics point out how Nephi appears to be saying that grace saves the day only after we have lived the highest possible life conceivable – as if grace is something we have to earn through our works. Certainly their arguments are validated by the massive culture of guilt that survives in the ranks of the Church, where individuals feel they fall outside the grace of Christ when they sin, their lack of dignity reinforced by the reactions of their wards who in an effort to protect the virtue of their children, consciously or unconsciously withdraw their attention and their affection for the person who has violated the group's norms. It is as unfortunate as it is understandable. I know many such people who have experienced this and left, I do not blame them. (This tends to happen in family wards more so than young single adult wards – parents are more protective of their children than a twenty-two year old is of their friend group.) A transactional paradigm of grace is as damaging to the soul as it is to a society – namely because no one deserves grace. Making people earn the unearnable forces them into a no-win scenario.

Grace does not come into play after we have lived the highest and most righteous conceivable life – because “all we can do” is the life we inevitably live. “All we can do ” is not a qualifier of better or worse than what we end up living, because however we lived was simultaneously our best – and our worst. Grace was not extended to us because of how good

we were, it was built into the plan and given to us because of how much we would fall short. We as a Church are very good at articulating paths and requirements, ordinances and rituals, rules and regulations (or policies and procedures), as well as self-policing the ranks to psychologically punish deviant behavior (including following rules that are arbitrary in nature) – but what we are not very good at is helping people feel that even when they do not choose the “higher” way, grace is still for them (and possibly more than anyone else).

### One in Purpose in the Body of Christ



*“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”<sup>3</sup> In moving on the path of*

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:21 NIV

spiritual growth and progress, both parts of the personality spectrum are needed.<sup>4</sup>

### **Treat for Shock: The Place of Insecurity and the Path Towards Healing**

These souls are often in a state of existential free-fall, suffering from the effects of trauma from both the natural tragedies that come with living in a fallen world, as well as abuse from those that have taken on themselves the identity of a destroyer, abusing the trust of others, and then breaking the victims trust in the world. While in this state we do not think straight, just as a soldier who had returned from a combat zone swerves on the freeway to avoid being blown up by a cardboard box – we can place a veil of insecurity over what in reality are benign and harmless situations.

Often, people who live here know the bad habits they have taken on, and others reminding them that they are not living up to their potential just makes it worse. They feel shame, which is guilt taken to the next level. It strikes at their core of self-perception: *I am not worth the trouble*. Even well meaning calls at them to repent push them deeper into the abyss of self-rejection. They do not need to be called to repentance, they need someone to *just sit with them* until the grace of the one who sits warms up their frozen sense of dignity.

David Middleton argues that there are three types of self-respect, “human recognition, status recognition and appraisal”.<sup>5</sup> The first, human recognition, is essential to gain before the next levels, which are based on self-observed behavior, can be achieved. We must first see ourselves as having dignity, some worth, some reason to look at ourselves no matter how we have performed and say that we have value. This is the

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<sup>4</sup> Assuming that it is the Hierarchs that in actuality have the correct understanding of the truth on the matter.

<sup>5</sup> Middleton, David (2006). Three types of self-respect. *Res Publica* 12 (1):59-76.

unconditional love offered by Christ which we call the enabling power of the Atonement. It is there for us regardless of how well or poorly we act, the undeserved faith shown by heaven on our behalf. Nothing we can do can disqualify ourselves from this type of love.

This love is what the Egalitarians, specifically the Liberal Egalitarians champion the most. This sentiment is wrapped up in the slogan “No One Is Unworthy of Love”, or “God is love”. Their goal is to help people accept themselves for who they are. This is noble, and necessary – and is one half of the journey.

Telling someone who is paralyzed from shock to start moving does them no good, and it is dangerous because the person who is telling them to move can feel a sense of righteousness for calling out sin and calling someone to repentance. We must treat people for shock before telling them to move, giving them unconditional acceptance and love, creating that safe space necessary for them to gain a sense of dignity and see themselves as worth caring for, and understand that maybe they will be in that space for the rest of this life – *and that is O.K.* Eternity is a long time, they will have as much time as they need to recover, and then to access the next phase of Christ’s Atonement, the substitution and restorative power, which sustains their growth and links them to the rest of the eternal family. We will discuss this further in the next chapter.

It always puzzles me how desperate parents seem to rehabilitate their wayward child’s testimony, as if they do not even believe in the millennium, or that for some reason grace can only be sought after in this life. Perhaps they may justify their frustration by saying that they only want their child to be happy – but then why is the phrase “empty chair at the celestial family table” a phrase in the Latter-day Saint vernacular? A layer of selfishness and fear could be lingering under the surface of goodwill.



When Jesus looked at the man who came to Him asking what more he needed to do to inherit eternal life, before Christ told him what was necessary, it reads “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...”<sup>6</sup> If Jesus was omniscient in that stage of His existence, being able to predict that the man would walk away unable to live up to what Christ told him to do, Christ still chose to love Him regardless. This love is given independently of Truth and Law, and since we focus so much in our gospel discourses on truth and law, we are often perceived as a high demand Church needing to reach levels of truth on the Covenant Path to access God’s love. This view is not without justification, those that lie face down in the dirt understand this.

Sometimes, the acceptance of others is not enough to help us overcome our sense of shame. Our self-criticism is not a force that should be underestimated, and we only tell people a fraction of the shame we feel. Only Jesus Christ understands our grief in its fullest, so that he can succor us according to what we need.<sup>7</sup> So what do a lot of us need? We need more than fellow imperfect mortals telling us that we are worth caring for. To help us in this stage of our spiritual progression Jesus Christ descended into our abyss, experienced our weakness, and persevere through it while living in truth, so that in the court of our perception of ourselves, He could be the unchallengeable voice that would act as the defense counsel for our dignity against the prosecution of our cynicism. Explains Paul Tillich,

*“He who is accepted ultimately can also accept himself. Being forgiven and being able to accept oneself are one and the same thing. No one*

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:21 English Standard Version

<sup>7</sup> Alma 7:12 “and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities”. This is emotional support for those who are struggling with what they see as their weakness, but no support is given to those who are in rebellion. Mosiah 7:29 “I will not succor my people in the day of their transgression; but I will hedge up their ways that they prosper not; and their doings shall be as a stumbling block before them.”

*can accept himself who does not feel that he is accepted by the power of acceptance which is greater than he, greater than his friends and counselors and psychological helpers. They may point to the power of acceptance, and it is the function of the minister to do so. But he and the others also need the power of acceptance which is greater than they.”*<sup>8</sup>

Treating for shock and loving/fellowshipping unconditionally as the first order of business is what we covenant to do if we intend to stand in Christ's shoes. We must create that safe space of passive peace and unconditional acceptance not simply because they deserve it, but if for no other reason because they need it. Before we have the desire to pick ourselves up and the ability to take responsibility for our lives in a healthy way, we need to see ourselves as something worth having responsibility over. We are all on the journey to find that Upstream Grace for ourselves. The writer Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe wrote in 1795, that “When we treat man as he is we make him worse than he is. When we treat him as if he already was what he potentially could be we make him what he should be.”<sup>9</sup> The psychologist Robert Leslie states “It is only in an atmosphere of loving acceptance that barriers to relationships can be lowered...first the assurance in the look of love, then the challenge”,<sup>10</sup> and then describes a wife telling him “My husband tells me that if I loved him I would keep the house picked up. How can I help him to see that the only way I can find the strength to pick up the house is through the absolute assurance that he loves me whether the house is tidy or not?”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tillich, P. (2005). *The new being*. U of Nebraska Press, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Carlyle, T. (1874). *Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship and travels* (Vol. 32). Chapman and Hall, 219.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie, R. C. (1965). *Jesus and logotherapy: The ministry of Jesus as interpreted through the psychotherapy of Viktor Frankl*. Abingdon Press, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## **Path Towards Progression and Self-Transcendence**

Once the foothold is gained and the person has been treated for shock, then a healthy foundation is laid for moving forward. One might say that out of the necessity of a situation a person should be forced into progression without fully accepting who they are, but even if the tree grows taller if the roots do not grow deeper it will eventually be blown over. “Progress” without self-acceptance and self-love may appear to work, but it only delays the existential crisis, which will only come with greater force later. Egalitarian dignity is the bedrock on which hierarchical progress rests on.

“Of course,” states David Middleton in his paper on self-respect, “to respect humans simply because they are human begs questions. What is it about humans that deserves respect? Should we respect one another simply because we managed not to be trees or insects?”<sup>12</sup>

All our actions in the gospel must be rooted in the acceptance that we are intelligences that have been co-existent with Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother’s intelligences from the beginning of that which has no beginnings,<sup>13</sup> and that our potential is to become as they are now – raising our dignity from being mere creations of a different species of a divine race to being as the same as what God the Father and the Mother are. In one sense we are not like them, and yet in another we are exactly like them. That is the revolutionary tale of the restored gospel, its unique *good news* for the human race – an eternal race.

And to be united with the rest of that race and to aid in the great project of facilitating eternal progression we do have to confront our lies we live, and venture out into the unknown corners of our mind which we hide from, shining a light on the blindspots of our consciousness. This is

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<sup>12</sup> Middleton, David (2006). Three types of self-respect. *Res Publica* 12 (1):64.

<sup>13</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 93:23,29 “Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth. . . . Man was in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be”

not a safe space, it is hell. It is always hell to confront your own inadequacy, where we are tested to see if we will hold on to the idea of our divine origin and potential destiny while releasing our sense of control and self-esteem. Christ *is in no rush* for us to leave the safe space of the boat, and *while He waits* in that eternal patience, He beckons us to step out into the storm and walk on the surface of the water, and confront our fear. The fear does not come from the surface of the water, the fear comes because we cannot see into its depths.

*“Metaphorically, water is the unconscious, and the creature in the water is the life or energy of the unconscious, which has overwhelmed the conscious personality and must be disempowered, overcome and controlled.”*<sup>14</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3, we all live out a story where we are thrust into the wilderness to be resurrected in a baptism of darkness, tested to see if we can find the light that brings us into a higher plane of existence.

When presented with a goal to reach, a goal that is given to us and not self-created, only then can self-acceptance transform into self-confidence. This Truth exists independently of our ideas of truth, and we are on a quest to find it and make our peace in relation to it. Whether we like it or not, there is a law that will act on us, independent of our desires, or God’s power – the Governing Laws of Trust.<sup>15</sup>

## **Together**

One portion of the personality spectrum excels at creating that safe space of unconditional acceptance, fighting the person’s inner doubt to accept themselves for who they are, and the other portion of the spectrum excels at calling people to leave the safe space and transcend what they are

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell, J., & Moyers, B. (2011). *The power of myth*. Anchor.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Nephi 2:26

in relation to an external truth. Take one without the other and you either lose the destination on the map, or doom those who cannot accept themselves to exist in their state of self-rejection and spiritual paralyzation. All the moral foundations are necessary in navigating life, not as maxims, but as flashlights as we stumble on the dark landscape of progression. Abandon the Hierarchian's Ethos and you lose the concept of fullness, since there is nothing morally above what we are, and thus the word loses all meaning. Abandon the Egalitarian's Ethos and we run towards "truth" without dignity, and being so concerned about truth's triumph that we sell our souls to something that cannot love us back (truth). Each Ethos has its purpose and its blindspot, and only in combining the two approaches to living can we:

- a) approach a closer understanding of truth
- b) assist others in understanding and approaching what truth demands

Since our personality blinds us to parts of the Truth, and does not naturally have some of the abilities and gifts that are required to help others move along the path of spiritual progression towards truth, and since we have a biological drive to form into teams and "win" in the war to have our perception of truth and how truth ought to be enforced in society, we should be cautious of anyone who declares that their camp has all the gifts or knowledge necessary to lead people to salvation. Joseph Smith warned us that "The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have also had their false spirits; and as it is made up of all those different sects professing every variety of opinion..."<sup>16</sup> Paul comments on the variety of individuals in the body of Christ, "...its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it..."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Times and Seasons, 1 April 1842, p. 747, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-april-1842/13>

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:25,26

The fusion of these two seemingly contradictory conceptions of peace, join together to form the peace God gives. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”<sup>18</sup>

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### **The Libertarian and Authoritarian Element**

If we drill a little deeper into this concept of helping others reach a point where they feel safe to change their mind, and then their behavior, we might replace the Egalitarian and Hierarchian in the model with Libertarian and Authoritarian – since both Egalitarians and Hierarchians can be authirotarian while striving to evangelize and legislate their ideals in and on others.

### **Libertarian and Authoritarian**

In the previous chapter, we discussed how different parts of the personality spectrum have their own blindspots, and weaknesses when it comes to playing the game of discovering truth. Now we will discuss the natures of and the purpose for libertarian oriented personalities and authoritarian mindsets in the objective of helping people change and progress.

When I use the term Libertarian, I am not referring to the political defition, which is that “a person who believes that personal and economic freedom should only be subject to a minimum level of control by the government”<sup>19</sup>, although there may be overlap. The definition I use for libertarian is someone who is open to the freeflow of ideas, as well as is alright with those practicing opposing beliefs so long as their right to exist and pursue those beliefs do not interfere with others pursuits. Besides the dogma of live and let live, they believe there is more than one way to live a moral life and do not tell people they are immoral for following a different

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<sup>18</sup> John 14:27

<sup>19</sup> Oxford University Press. (2023). Libertarian. In *Oxford English dictionary*. December 5, 2023.

path than themselves. They may be moral relativists, or they may be moral objectivists, but they see truth as something that cannot be “known” in the sense that I know that a cup is on the desk in front of me. Thus they may appear to be relativists – the truth they follow is: everyone ought to allow others to find truth in their own way. In the American tradition, the libertarian ethos is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence as the right to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>20</sup> They encourage others to speak what they believe even when they disagree with it. They are egalitarian in nature.

An Authoritarian is sure of absolute truth and that their vision of the truth is in actuality – truth. Their truth extends beyond the rights of coexistence (life, liberty, pursuit of happiness) and tell others that the way to be happy, (or to receive the full version of happiness) lies in what they teach. An example of an authoritarian statement would be these excerpts from the 1968 For the Strength of Youth: “Pants for young women are not desirable attire for shopping, at school, in the library, in cafeterias or restaurants.”,<sup>21</sup> and “a ‘real lady’ does not go out in public, to the market or to shops with her hair in curlers”.<sup>22</sup> These are meant to be statements of truth beyond the liberty of finding out if these are really true on your own – and failure to live these standards deems you as immoral and not a “real lady”. They believe you should not go another way, but should change your behavior to be in line with that they are telling you is right.

I remember a conversation I had with a left-leaning (Liberal) individual, where we were discussing her efforts to make institutional changes at her

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<sup>20</sup> (1776) Thomas Jefferson, et al, July 4, Copy of Declaration of Independence. -07-04. [Manuscript/Mixed Material] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/>.

<sup>21</sup> [Pages 4,5] For the strength of youth -- LDS standards Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1968 Deseret News Press, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f3aa23a8-6289-45d3-a5b3-12feaed2de9/0/5?lang=eng> (accessed: December 5, 2023)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 6

university, as well as her conversations she had with right-leaning (Conservative) individuals. She was irritated at the lack of seriousness that Conservatives with which she interacted with expressed at her views, that they were listening only to respond and not to understand. I explained to her that it might be helpful to first fellowship them, to put their beliefs aside and form a friendship, and that in order to help others understand your point of view, you must speak in their language (referring to Jonathan Haidt's research on moral foundations), that to step into someone else's moral paradigm and see what they value and how to express your goals in a way that they could see as beneficial to what they want is an effective tool at changing hearts. She responded by saying that she did not believe in forming friendships with Conservatives, and that using "their language" would be adopting their "paradigm of oppression". I remember telling myself in the moment that this was a depressing representation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (or "Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis"), that our languages and grammatical structures, and meanings we give to words based on our context are relative and unless we are able to be bilingual in a sense, we will not be able to change others – or understand them as they understand themselves.<sup>23</sup>

The first half of the model, Self-Rejection to Self-Acceptance can be thought of as the relationship building phase, where a link of trust is built. In this phase, placing yourself as the moral superior damages the prospect of trust. It is trust that changes people. Arguments from the distrusted will be deflected and logical retaliations will be constructed, but the intuition is what guides our faith. In this phase, truth, as the authoritarian sees it, has no authority in building the link of trust. In fact, repeated attempts to logically disprove the other person's worldviews pushes them away, and diminishes the chance that they will listen with an open heart to anything the evangelizer has to say. Their very efforts to convert someone to their

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<sup>23</sup> Hussein, B. A. S. (2012). The sapir-whorf hypothesis today. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(3), 642-646.



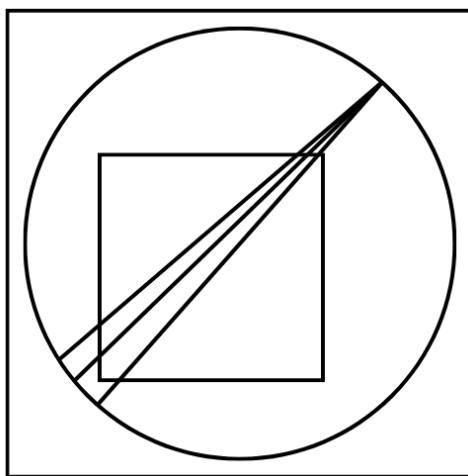
views sabotaged their objective. The Libertarian spirit, where objective truth beyond the live and let live is what is needed here. As well as an authentic Libertarian spirit, not a fake spirit of acceptance where the objective is to get them to lower their guard – we know what that feels like, a salesman. What I was taught as a salesman, (ironic I know) was that people do not like to be sold, but they do like to buy. People do not like to be sold truth, coerced into it like a morally inferior being – but they do like to explore for themselves what truth is, and the more premises and facts they know, the honest people will change their views, and at least become more tolerant and accepting of views other than their own or come to a knowledge of their own blindspots.

The rules in the first section of the progression chart are different from the rules in the second section – and biological wired as we are for consistency and a preference for the rules of either side, it is hard to walk into the other.

# Chapter 9

## Rethinking Grace and Law:

### A Reasonable Gospel



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#### **A Reasonable Gospel**

I was 12 years old when I sat at the table and watched as a missionary I was observing conversed with an inactive neighbor of mine. The question my neighbor had was why do we need commandments in response to an invitation by the missionary to cease some of his habits. The discussion turned heated as neither side gained ground over the other, and I watched as the missionary pulled out a white board and almost angrily drew stick sheep and stick wolves and a stick fence. Pointing to the fence, the missionary said with a less than subtle hint of annoyance in his voice “commandments are there to keep us safe from bad consequences”.

My neighbor shook his head. He was an immortal soul with a body that would be resurrected, why should the church declare him unrighteous and keep him out of the temple for decisions that would affect only himself? The picture the missionary was painting for him did not resonate as desirable or as true – it does not resonate with me either.

Would heaven be filled with those people who followed commandments for the purpose of avoidance or fear? What are commandments, why are they really necessary? Before we explore this question, let's go over what we have discussed in this book until now.

## **Review**

First, the present is the only point in which eternity and our agency meet.

Second, we cannot value agency if we cannot value doubt along with it, the right and perhaps the obligation to question and investigate constitutes the heart of agency's existence.

Third, the invitation of Christ to come follow Him is an invitation to descend into the unknown and be transformed by a journey into the darkness.

Fourth, our mortal bodies have an ancient brain structure evolved to make us experience the fear of threats and the unknown so we will act to survive. It influences us to seek out people we feel safe around, people that are like us. This force even seems to match our agency in its strength of influence, but through great effort it can be overcome.

Fifth, the three questions of truth, representing the **Governing Laws of Trust** posed by Lucifer to Christ in the wilderness were: are His greatest treasure His relationships to people or the temporary gratifications

He could gain (people or things), will He use His power and authority to serve others or to make Himself look good (service or status), and how does He view justice. Will he throw Himself off the temple, be caught and not have to suffer the consequences of His actions, choosing the mind of entitlement? Or will He take ownership of His agency and strive to use it the best way He can, by being eager to learn and eager to change (gratitude or entitlement)? A person who sees people as their treasure, uses their power to serve others, and can look outside themselves to learn, and makes changes in their own life, those people are those who you can trust. These are the questions of truth, or questions of trust. Sixth, the events leading up to Atonement of Jesus, including God turning away from Him while on the cross, provided Jesus with the moral authority to view Himself as a victim and justified Him if He was to lash out in resentful anger towards those who oppressed Him. He had the right to resent us because all our sins and sufferings were placed onto Him. He had the right to resent God for turning away from Him. But Jesus chose to forgive despite all the forces that drove Him to divide Himself from us and from God. His last request to God was not to release Him from the pain, but to forgive His oppressors, and in doing so He died as the only soul that lived free from serving the spirit of resentful revenge. He chose to sacrifice His justified self-pity, and experienced what it was like to be truly free.

Sixth, biological and environmental factors shape our personalities, which in turn shape how we interact with, view, and remember information and the combination of these turn into our worldview. Our personality driven worldview shapes the way we view Christ, and we assign Christ as a symbol of righteousness to fit what our personality sees as righteous, the strengths that we naturally have.

Seventh, both sides of the personality spectrum have strengths necessary to help other progress, both by facilitating the safe space of

acceptance wherein people can see themselves as worth caring for, and moving people into the unsafe space of the unknown.

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## **The God Who Exists in Relation With Us**

Process Theology is a school of thought that originated in the early 1900's, primarily from Alfred Whitehead's ideas that he articulated in his book *Process and Reality* (1929).<sup>1</sup> In this conceptualization of reality, entities act in relation to each other, using their judgments of the past to make decisions for the future, and actions have meaning because of the relationship between entities (or intelligences in our vernacular).<sup>2</sup> In doing so, they co-create reality in real-time. The idea of "co-creating" has gained traction in self-help and therapeutic popular culture recently, and for the better. It places our focus on our agency, and calls us to act responsibly in our creation of reality. God in this context, is a relational God, who leads us into a live where we are forced to respond to obstacles, so that we can discover more about ourselves and our own agency and see ourselves as something that has a place in the creation of the fabric of reality itself – a sort of eternal historical record. In this ontological perspective, or spiritual worldview, our Heavenly Parents react to us, and to our experience. They are not all powerful over reality itself, since they cannot take away their relational aspect – they cannot turn themselves into *unreacting* beings. This idea of God (which would later evolve into the idea of eternal parents) introduced by Joseph Smith with his revelation of the God who reacts in the Pearl of Great Price was the spearhead of a theological

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, A. N. (1978). *Process and Reality*. 1929. *Corrected ed. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne*. New York: Free P.

<sup>2</sup> "But no individual essence is realizable apart from some of its potentialities of relationship, that is, apart from its relational essence." *ibid.* 115

revolution that would sweep over the religious landscape – a landscape which at Joseph’s time portrayed God as the outside the fabric of reality itself, who was therefore the first cause of everything, and being outside the fabric of reality is innately unable to be affected by what He had created. This view of the immovable and impersonal God would gradually dissipate in favor of the God who resembles how we are – even in resurrected and perfected form. How God is spoken of in chapels now is in a way that makes Him more – human. We as Latter-day Saints know this is because God and man are spiritually the same species.

“And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept”.<sup>3</sup> This revelation was reality shaking in its implications. Being a higher form of the same species as us, His state of existence presents a question to us – knowing it is possible to become as He is, will we become as He is?

Our life lived in response to His manifestation is our answer to His call to us. Just how the virus of resentment manifests its symptoms in each one of its hosts, the healing and constructive power of creation will likewise manifest itself through our unique combination of traits, weaknesses, and strengths. Christ understands we were born to be different, what he is looking for is an honest heart. That is something that is binary, and objective.

### **The Origin of Grace in Reference to Law**

Grace, as a concept or even as a choice, cannot exist on its own. Grace in reference to law comes into existence as a response to a situation. To be an advocate of grace requires us to be advocates of a law that gives grace its form.

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<sup>3</sup> Moses 7:28

Think of the game tag. Imagine you are in the fifth grade, and you go out to recess and there is a group on the field playing tag. You join them, and while running from the person who is it, you run into the sandbox.

“You can’t do that!” yells one of the kids some thirty feet away from you.

“You have to stay on the field!” shouts another.

The group looks at you as you walk back onto the field. Upon breaking the rules the group is using to play the game, the group decided that even though you broke the rules, you can still play.

According to Latter-day Saint theology, intelligences progress to exaltation or Godhood, where they possess the same keys of creation as our divine parents. What are laws, the bedrock foundations of truths that intelligences must adopt? We are told in the scriptures by those privileged to interact with divine beings that laws govern progression, and that truth is defined as things as they are, were, and will be. What is truth, and why does it exist in the first place?≥

Two kinds of truth are *truths of essence*, and *emergent truths*. A truth of essence would be that our spirits are fine matter, or that we were once in a premortal realm that after we die we will go somewhere else, or that water conducts electricity. Truths of essence do not require something external for it to be true. This was Descartes’s project, to find the truth that cannot be reduced. Emergent truths are truths that arise from behaviors—ways that things act or react. The fact that if you had ten pounds of gold and ten pounds of carbon and can sell the gold for substantially more money on the market is an emergent truth. Because of what gold is used for, and its relative scarcity in relation to carbon, people will pay more money for it than the element that comprises roughly eighteen percent of the human body.

Here is a question. The Word of Wisdom was not a commandment that was always required for a temple recommend – nor did Joseph Smith follow it while he was translating the Book of Mormon, a task that required a level of spiritual purity above anything we are asked to do in the temple as lay members of the Church today. Is the Word of Wisdom truth, as defined in Doctrine and Covenants 93:24 “Truth is a knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come”? Is there something essentially wrong with the unholy bean soaked in water? When Jesus was resurrected and went to organize the missionaries in the spirit world, did he instruct them to teach those who have died in the flood of Noah’s time, that one day they will have perfect bodies, and to remember not to drink green tea? Or in regards to alcohol, to not to attempt to do so in spirit form nor to do so in a resurrected body of flesh and bone that lacks blood, while all arguments raised by apostles against alcohol have to do with the effects of blood-alcohol levels?

What are the truths that the missionaries taught the spirits? The truths that transcend the realms and times and dimensions? The truths that govern spirits while they progress and bind Gods? Perhaps the most important distinction in doctrine between the Book of Mormon and the Bible is that there are laws that bind God, and if He ceased to follow them that age would cease to be God. “Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.”<sup>4</sup> This is a bold doctrinal statement, and shows us that there is a limit to God’s control. He can do all things that are allowed under the conditions of this law.

Let us look at events logically in succession. First there are intelligences, then the intelligences decided what they would be doing together (a game) and how to act (rules). As soon as the first intelligence broke the rules of the game, grace came into being. One may make the

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<sup>4</sup> Alma 42:22



argument that the idea of grace was thought of as soon as the rules were formed and so it was always existing, but grace could not be thought of in a specific way without the formation of specific rules to indicate when the grace could be exercised. Stepping into the sandbox is the indicator to the group that grace can now be exercised.

### **The Old Model of Grace and Law**

In Sunday school I was taught that law and grace are opposed to each other, and that each must have its requirements to be met. Elder Boyd K. Packer in 1977 gave a talk in General Conference titled The Mediator, the same year that *Star Wars: A New Hope* was released. The Church must have enjoyed both, because they then released a film to visualize Elder Packer's talk depicting a boy who looks similar to Luke Skywalker who worked on a farm and wanted to live a life of adventure who then got himself into some trouble and had to be bailed out with the help of a wiser and more competent man for whom the boy became indebted to.

Elder Packer says that we are the foolish boy who took out loans to live the life he wanted, but could not pay the debt when it was due. In the film it depicted the young man leaving his farm and hop on a wagon with his friends, presumably to head to a young singles ward dance. Required by the law to pay back the loan or else the creditor will take our possessions and we will go to jail, we look to someone to bail us out. At this point Christ steps in, pays an annoyed looking creditor representing God, and owns our debt. He extends the contract length, and judging by the tone in the video, probably raised the interest rate. Nevertheless, the obedience owed legally to the creditor is now the obedience legally owed to Christ.

I understand this parable, but it does not resonate with me. It does not explain why the debtor could not forgive the debt, he looked well enough off to do so. The debtor would also have known about the

person's desire to bail him out if he could not pay back the loan before he signed the contract. To me, this story is focused on obedience for obedience's sake, not something my Egalitarian nature can accept. Logically, it is shallow. I am not saying the scriptures Elder Packer quoted are false, but I believe this model (the Penal-Substitution theory) lacks what makes the gospel desirable beyond a paradigm that avoids pain or to reconcile with an angry impersonal God. To quote a source I almost always disagree with, one of the four horsemen of New-Atheism Christopher Hitchens, this paradigm shows us a plan of salvation where "we are created sick and commanded to be well".<sup>5</sup> This view is called the Penal-Substitution theory of atonement, a view that has dominated Christianity for the bulk of its existence, and is held by mainly conservative Christians.<sup>6</sup>

This paradigm of a hyper focus on law, with there being a price to pay, is most likely created by Hierarchians filling the roles of those that pass down teachings since the ancient days. It is understandable, I would pick Hierarchians over Egalitarians to do so as well for the sake of preservation, but the focus on laws has created the guilt complexes many members face. In this Hierarchian paradigm, law is the focus and grace comes in to save the day, but to restore us as if we never broke the law. The focus is not on us, not on Christ, but on the law. The Hierarchian will tell me, of course Christ is the focus, that's why we focus on the atonement of Christ. Yes, but you focus on the Atonement of Christ as a means to make us one with the law. Christ is the means to an end. And with Egalitarians, Christ is too often used as an emotional pacifier, a social care worker that leads us to the ultimate form of exaltation which is a state where everyone feels good about themselves. Egalitarians will pick a few scriptures out of the

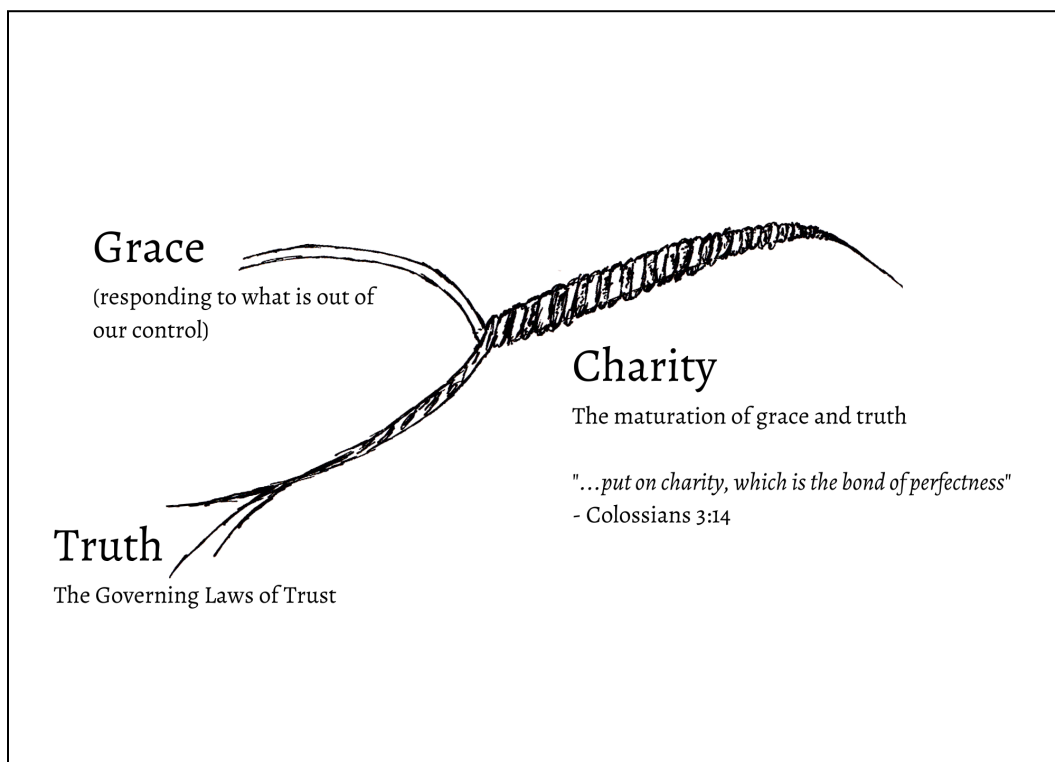
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<sup>5</sup> Hitchens, C. (2012). *Arguably: Selected Essays*. Signal.

<sup>6</sup> We should note that the word atonement was not used often in the early Church (of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) nor in the early Christian church. The LDS Church has not adopted a formal theory of atonement.

New Testament to depict a Christ that acts like your friend, and will ignore the Hierarchical Jesus of the Doctrine and Covenants and Old Testament, which is why you may hear the question posed in class: “I cannot understand the difference between Jesus in the Old and New Testaments”. Both paradigms do not resonate to my doubt. Is the truth that the law separates us and grace unites us? Why then have laws in the first place?

### **The Purpose of Law and Grace**



Law does exist. Gods are bound by it. It affects us in the end. We are judged by our works and we reap what we sow. If law does not exist, or if it does exist but we are not affected by it, that would render the Atonement of Christ as unnecessary beyond the resurrection aspect of it. So what is the purpose of law, and the purpose of grace?

Let us go back to the game of tag scenario. What is the purpose of the game of tag? Or how about this question? Why do you run away from

the person who is it? Because it keeps the game going. The rules in the game of tag exist so that the game can continue to be played while maximizing the enjoyment and difficulty to avoid not being tagged. There are certain limits designated at the beginning of recess when the game is started so that people can play the game *together*. If people are too far spread out then chasing down one person and if they evade you, running four minutes in the other direction to get close to the next person is no fun. The amount of fun to be had matches the level of difficulty posed to the person who is it and to those who are not. Finding the right amount of difficulty prevents it from being boring and people just quitting the game. The rules are there to keep the game going. What if everyone had their own set of rules? If you tagged someone, and they kept running away from you shouting “you actually have to tag me twice”, you would be frustrated. What if you caught them and tagged them again, and they said “actually if you tag me twice, it makes it so I can never be it.” “That’s not how the game is played” you say, to which they respond “it is how I play it, my rules allow me to change the rules for me, but maybe you can go tag someone else.” The game would descend into chaos and be unplayable. How about if no one forgave each other when rules were broken? The game would cease to be played.

The goals of law and grace are not different, they both work together, to keep us together. The sociologist Emile Durkheim called our need as people to have a common rule system or common objective we all strive towards as mechanical solidarity and the collective consciousness, the thing that unites us.<sup>7</sup> Truth comprises the rules that the exalted intelligences follow to be unified and maintain each other’s trust, and forgiveness and grace come when people deviate from the rules. Religion, or rather exaltation, is the pursuit to learn, and apply these rules of the divine game, not to be in line with the rules, but so that we can feel the

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<sup>7</sup> Durkheim, E. (2004). *Readings from Emile Durkheim*. Psychology Press, 29.

kinship that comes from being together with other people working towards a animist goal, and for God(s) it is to bring to pass the eternal life and immortality of man.<sup>8</sup> Law and grace work towards us being at one with each other. Light builds on light, acting in accordance with light given brings more light.<sup>9</sup> The heavens watch us, eager to bestow more knowledge, but are let down when we cannot apply what light we have been given. This is the law of added stewardship, for we are stewards over the light we have been given. What do we do with what is in our control, our means and our knowledge? How do we handle that which is outside of our control, can we respond with grace? Both of these things reveal if we have the heart of a creator, if we can create trust that lasts. We cannot get far on law without forgiveness, because we will ultimately divide ourselves for living in different ways. We cannot live together without laws either, that is chaos and we descend into fear and competition. We cannot live on just forgiveness and no enforcement of law and its consequences, because then we become doormats, and cooperation becomes impossible when people differ on how to order their lives with no desire to create a common social story or goal.

What Hierarchians get right is that laws are necessary, but they go wrong with making being in harmony with the law as the ultimate goal. People are the goal, specifically reconciliation with others, and laws help us reach that harmony. Egalitarians sense this, that there must be something beyond the law that is the focus of our existence and by extension exaltation, but they go wrong when they say that law is thus unnecessary or that all are free to create their own laws and there are no universally binding laws (that lie outside the Individualizing traits). You have heard the saying “missing the forest for the trees”. The Hierarchian’s weakness is that they can too easily miss the forest of relationships and togetherness by

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<sup>8</sup> Moses 1:39

<sup>9</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:40

focusing on the trees of rules and laws, while the Egalitarian's weakness is that they too easily fall into the trap of saying that everyone is imagining their own forest!

Rather than being at odds with each other, law and grace are two cords in the same rope, and only together are they strong enough to hold relationships between individuals with different personalities and tendencies together. Grace and law are not the ends, they are the means to the end, and that end is a trusting relationship, and in a trusting relationship there is peace.

In regards to trust, you will discover that trust is not something you can control, it is something that is co-created by two individuals or entities and their interactions with each other. It is the result of a chain cal reaction, where the chemicals are the agentic choices of both parties. What can you control? Your faith. You can choose to put faith in someone who has broken the rules for the game you were both playing before (friendship rules, co-worker rules, business transaction rules, etc.) and if they follow the rules of the game, you will find that trust return. You cannot force trust, it must be earned, that is the truth that overrides emotional desires and the urge to go your own way. An act of faith, met with a response of cooperation, leads to the result of trust. It cannot be done any other way, than the one Alma described in Alma 32. The first steps to knowledge and trust are to pass through the doors of doubt and faith.

I hope you are asking where Christ fits into this picture. We have discussed that Christ shows us *the way* that leads to joy, that it lies on the path through mists of darkness where we are assigned the spirit as our guide. We have discussed that Christ shows us *the truth* of what it takes to create trust, by answering the three fundamental questions of how we use our agency, the fundamental thing we control, do we choose to see others as the ultimate treasure, use our power to serve others, and be grateful and

remain eager to learn and change. Jesus showed us *the life* that comes from being able to release our resentment, even when it is justified, and choosing forgiveness for what happens that is out of our control. Resentment demands our agency, it traps us, while forgiveness and charity inspires our agency and sets it free. This is the way, the truths, and the life Christ's story teaches and brings us, and now it is time to finish that scriptural passage, that no one comes unto the Father *except through Him*.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Recruiter**

Imagine Jesus as a job recruiter working at the local university. He has been there for a long time, watching students grow and learn, fail, and study. He has more than just recruited though, he regularly guest speaks in classes on everything from economic theory to overcoming PTSD. He has helped former students grow their ideas into successful businesses that contribute much to their communities. The owners of the companies come to Jesus and tell Him, "Jesus, we have these positions open and we want them to be filled with good candidates. We trust you so much that whoever you tell us would be good for the role, we will hire them no questions asked. We trust you, so if you trust them, we will trust them too.

Jesus patiently watches us take tests, fail tests, party and neglect our studies, congratulate ourselves when we receive a passing mark and give ourselves a hard time when we know we could have done better. He does not care about our ending grades per se, He is interested to watch for when we grasp what we want to do, and figure out how to successfully do it, even if it is on the last day of the semester. Our final grade could be an F, but if He sees we finally grasp the material that grade does not matter. He walks up to us and tells us he has a job lined up at a successful company and He thinks we are a good fit. We may protest and tell Him we would

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<sup>10</sup> John 14:6

never get it. One look at our transcript and they would turn us away immediately. The Master responds, “I know you now finally grasp it, and I’ve seen what it took for you to get here. As far as the interview goes, don’t worry about it. They have full trust in who I refer to them, their trust in me is your transcript.”

In this story, justice is fulfilled since we cannot take the position until we have grasped the knowledge and competency required for the position. If Jesus referred us to the company without us knowing what we are doing, the owner would no longer have complete and total trust in Jesus as a recruiter. Grace is exercised because once we are referred to the position by Jesus, our past no longer matters, it is wiped away through the power of the trust in Christ. The role of a divine recruiter could only be taken up by Jesus Christ, who’s status as a God gave Him the ability to return from the dead, and the Atonement worked because He is “full of grace and truth”.<sup>11</sup> Perfect in his character, meaning he never planted the seeds of resentment that lead to a corrosion of trust, and he was constant in His forgiveness when justice allowed Him to withhold it.

To be a creator in the universe demands we follow a certain pattern of being, and its demands for the job are unalterable. The universe demands you to be at the highest level of perfection in regards to The Governing Laws of Trust, it evaluates you with every possible standard of scrutiny. It does not care about weakness or what level you are able to live at, it cares that the plan of salvation works. Christ, however, takes you where you are, and judges you according to your ability, and through His Atonement, He knows what you are capable of given your circumstances and maturity, and holds you accountable for what He deems as your limit. Some may object and quote Paul’s words to the Corinthians, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is

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<sup>11</sup> John 1:14



faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”<sup>12</sup> The context of this letter is that Paul was referring to common temptations, sexual misconduct and the like, as was common in a sea port town like Corinth where sailors came to be – entertained. I doubt Paul was referring to keeping your resentment down as your children are thrown into gas chambers, as the Nazi’s did during the Holocaust. That is an uncommon temptation, I’m sure Christ knows each person’s ability, and judges them accordingly. Or else, why do we have verses that say, to those that are given much, more is demanded of them, both in stewardship and in following truth?<sup>13 14</sup>

Our word gets us nowhere. But Christ’s word, His trust is what is shown to the universe, and is accepted. He fulfilled all expectations, and He extends to us His grace so that we can experience what it is like to be included in the great council of creators – being one in purpose and in stature with The Father and the Mother.

## **The Shapeshifting Jesus**

Since we each have our own genetic makeup, both physical and spiritual, which makes us perceive truth in different ways, and by extension perceive Christ in different ways, Jesus Christ will appear different to each of us. The primary task we need to embark on is to develop a relationship with the Jesus that appears to us, and accept that since we cannot perceive Jesus the way someone else does, allow grace for that difference. There will be differences, but the patterns described in the Governing Laws of Trust

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13

<sup>13</sup> Luke 12:48 NIV “But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

<sup>14</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 82:3 “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.”

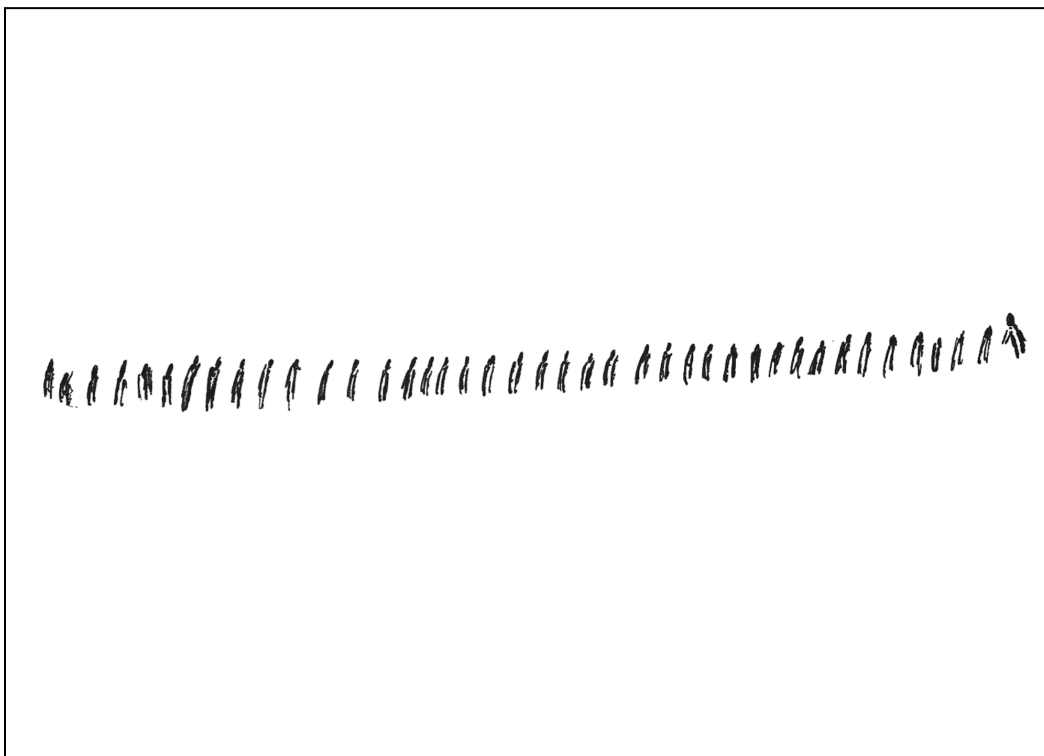
will remain the same. In chapter two, we discussed how we cannot perceive truth in its entirety with our limited powers of observation. We can, however, see truth's reflection in the form of an example. To make ourselves one with Christ is possible, who can return our deviation. It is this return of devotion that we observe the "oneness" that the gospel tells us is our ultimate endeavor. But to make ourselves one with "truth" is not possible, and even if it was, it would not be possible to perceive if we were at one with something that does not react to us. All endeavors to compare ourselves to an abstract idea of "truth" leads to insecurity, because we chase an unreachable, and unperceivable goal. We can never receive truth's approval, or disapproval, therefore we never have had, nor will have a relationship with "truth". But we can and always do have a relationship with Christ, who appears to us in His unique way, and in the way that we need it. All philosophical inquiry therefore, should be in the pursuit of creating relationships with those entities that can have a relationship with us.

### **The Equalizer**

There are egalitarian and hierarchian aspects to the Atonement, and each personality will want to focus on the part of the Atonement that they understand and resonate with most naturally – but alone neither side is sufficient for progress. The enabling power of Christ's Atonement gives us permission to believe in ourselves and a place to stand against our ever present will-to-doubt that stems from our consciousness of our own inadequacy – while the substitutionary and restorative power of Christ's Atonement makes us at-one with those who we want to be with, and reach our potential.

Hierarchians are naturally inclined to defend laws that keep everything stable, but are not adept at helping those who lie outside that law want to follow them. Christ is the **equalizer** of relative righteousness

because we all wait in the same line for His grace. From Christ's point of view, the only difference between a saint and a sinner is how the words are spelled. Arguing for who should be at the front or back of the line avails no productive end.



(Artwork is my own)

### **The Conduit of All Trust**

Because we are all equalized through Him, and He is the one that presents us to the Father and the Council of Creators, Jesus Christ became the conduit for all trust between the intelligences. To fully place our trust in Christ means we will also fully place our trust in those He puts His trust in as well. It requires a complete abandonment of our resentment for others, and Moroni warns us that “for with that same judgment which ye

judge ye shall also be judged.”<sup>15</sup> If Christ asks us “Do you trust me?” And we respond “Yea Lord”, and He brings to us the person whom we have not yet released our resentment for, and extended upstream grace towards, and asks us “Do you trust this person whom I also trust?” How can we hide our thoughts? We will have to say we do not, our resentment prevents us from accepting them as our equal. A sad Christ will then tell us “You are not yet ready nor would feel the joy that comes with celestial relationships that are full of grace towards those who they know justly deserve resentment, forgiveness is my law as much as the other commandments are. Maybe you need to work on forgiving yourself, and then forgiveness towards this person will become not an obstacle, but a byproduct of the way you live. If not, then you do not really know me,<sup>16</sup> and you do not really trust me.” And “...they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> The trust of Jesus Christ is the law. In the eternal economy of relationships, trust is the currency; and the only universally accepted currency is the trust of Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth.<sup>18</sup> This I call the Theory of Atonement for Trust. The Atonement’s purpose is to make us At-One with ourselves, and At-One with everyone else.

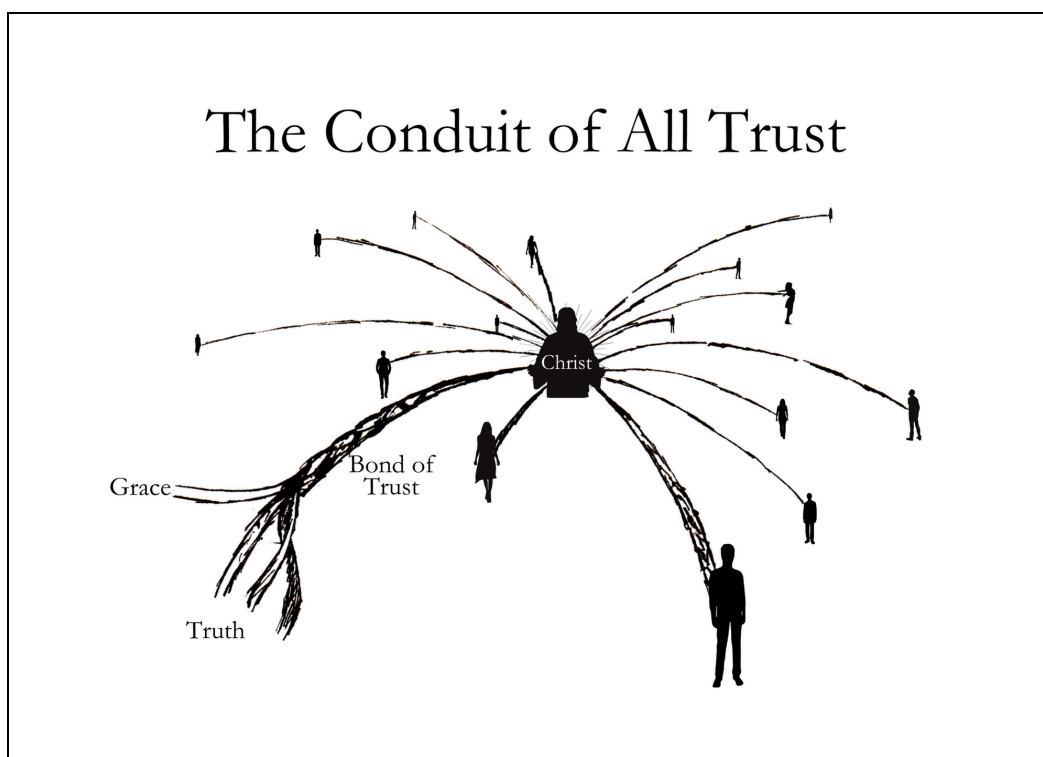
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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 7:2

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 7:21-23

<sup>17</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:21

<sup>18</sup> John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.



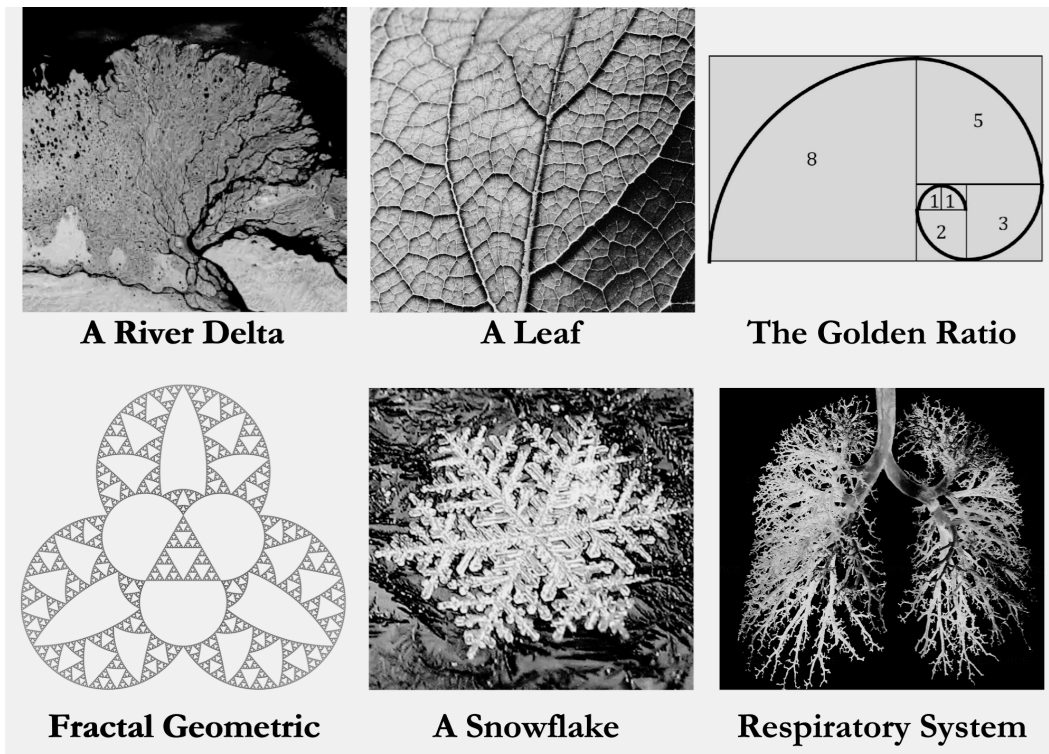
Being tied to Christ, and having His grace flowing through us, and being expressed by us, we have become “like Him”. C.S. Lewis described this endeavor as “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”<sup>19</sup> Fractal Geometry (coined by Benoit Mandelbrot in 1975<sup>20</sup>) is the study of both the mathematical and natural phenomenon of shapes and objects (or land forms), “...that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole.”<sup>21</sup> For example, think of a few feet of coastline. If you freeze time, and observe how the shapes of the waves against the sand appear, then if you zoom out you will see that what you observed is a miniature version of the whole coastline. This

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, C. S. (2001). *Mere christianity*. Zondervan, 177.

<sup>20</sup> Mandelbrot, B. B. (1975). *Fractal objects: shape, chance and dimension*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> ÇUBUKÇU, K., & Erdoğan, G. (2011). The Space-filling Efficiency of Urban Form in İzmir: A historical perspective using GIS and Fractal Dimension. In *April 29th-30th, 9th Meeting of AESOP*.

realm of patterns, or as Mandelbrot called it, the “fractional dimension”.<sup>22</sup> It is here where the universe has a mind of its own, and is doing something of its own accord. It may seem random, but there is a deep pattern that it follows – its truth.



It is impossible to comprehend the divine lineage we come from, the endless rounds of creation, the countless Gods who have presided and facilitated the progression of countless intelligences, their glory being the immortality and eternal life of all those who came before you and I in an infinite family tree. (Maybe this is why family temple work is a thing?) The story I live is a fraction of the story of a whole, each story being an echo and reflection of the drama of the universe. We share in that everlasting heritage, sent here to discover that unseen spark that connects us all, the animating web of trust, fellowship, and sealed lineages. Perhaps they watch me – seeing in me a part of them, championing me from places I cannot

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<sup>22</sup> Mandelbrot, B. B., & Mandelbrot, B. B. (1982). *The fractal geometry of nature* (Vol. 1). New York: WH freeman.

see. In precious moments when the veil is thin, I have felt eternity move through me, and sense a bond that is beyond my ability to explain; only that I wish to remain there forever connected to this source that feels like – life.

### **About Joy**

Simply put, those that have joy are those that feel at one with themselves, being comfortable with their powers of agency, and who feel at one with others. We were created for companionship, and when the first person was placed on the earth it was said it was not good for them to be alone.<sup>23</sup> Life's victories ought to be shared with life's friends, and the celebration draws us together. That is why we must be willing to be glad for others' success, or else we become the person where joy stops, the gatekeeper of happiness. To be one with others is equally as important to be one with ourselves, collaborating and coalescing the desires that lay within us to move in one direction to a fixed point which we call truth. Abraham Lincoln said to a nation at war with itself that a house divided cannot stand. If we remain divided, with our multiple inner faculties working at odds with each other, we will feel ourselves going nowhere. Our inner disharmony spills into our outside lives. We do not perform well, and for that we cannot feel pride in ourselves, and if left unchecked we will begin to resent ourselves — eventually the universe. But if we can align our desires into a unified force, the things we can accomplish will amaze us. We must seek to dwell in this state of self-amazement. Those that live their lives there, the space they inhabit exists between the infinities, are constantly on the edge of death and rebirth, between their past and their potential. What makes time go by so fast is the speed of transformation, when positive transformation happens so rapidly, as for time you wish there was more of it.

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<sup>23</sup> Genesis 2:18

While inhabiting this space no one asks is life worth it? Or what is the point of living? They do not have the time for such questions, they are too busy living — Creating more trust in themselves, and in sharing their agency, more trust with others. This is the Celestial Kingdom, the place where this happens.

In the first chapter we reviewed “chedva”, one Hebrew word for joy. This word has a different inherent meaning for joy than other words like “simcha” (which is closer to excitement than joy). “Chedva” is a joy that comes from knowing that your joy is reciprocated by someone else, it means the joy of unity – trust. “Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”<sup>24</sup> They who feel the trust of God feel a love that overpowers their ever present voice of self-criticism that leads them to abandon the road upward and lose sight of their origin and by extension their dignity. Or as Nephi puts it, through the bond of trust (Atonement) that exists between us and Christ, God “...delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil (who wins by sowing distrust), and death, and hell”.<sup>25</sup> The fullness of joy exists not in just trusting (passive peace), but in being trusted themselves – because then they see themselves as an active member in the relationship; they are co-creators.

Joseph Smith taught that the “same sociality (the same Governing Laws of Trust) which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory”.<sup>26</sup> “Blessed are the meek (praus/πραυς), for they shall inherit the earth.”<sup>27</sup> Praus means controlled power, agency under discipline, a person who is an agent unto themselves. This discipline is only developed by the successful adoption of a moral code, and when that moral code is the same as God’s pattern, the same pattern by which we may “know (and judge) the spirits in all cases under

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<sup>24</sup> Nehemiah 8:10 NIV

<sup>25</sup> 2 Nephi 9:19

<sup>26</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 130:2

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 5:5



the whole heavens”,<sup>28</sup> we have the trust, the unity, the full reciprocated joy of God. We are One. Blessed are those who are trusted by our Heavenly Parents, they will be Co-Creators with Them.

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Sharing the Trust and Heart with God</b>	<b>Becoming Co-Creators with God</b>
Jacob 5:75	And blessed art thou; for because ye have been diligent in laboring with me in my vineyard, and have kept my commandments, and have brought unto me again the ‘natural fruit, that my vineyard is no more corrupted	behold ye shall have joy with me
Matthew 5:5	Blessed are the meek	For they shall inherit the earth
Doctrine and Covenants 52:13	he that is faithful	shall be made ruler over many things.
Matthew 25:29 (NIV)	for whoever has (the trust of God)	will be given more (responsibility)

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<sup>28</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 52:19

Doctrine and Covenants 71:5-6	Now, behold this is wisdom; whoso readeth, let him understand and receive also;	For unto him that receiveth it shall be given more abundantly, even power.
There are more verses, go discover them for yourselves.		

### **The Mind of a Destroyer**

Those who corrode trust are in the Destroyer's mindset. They give in to the sweet seductive siren call of self pity, and gratify their desire for spiteful revenge, over the seemingly weak and timid act of forgiveness and humility. And while enveloped in the attitude of unyielding despair, they mock those who dare to hope, saying that to have faith is a luxury for the stupid, and for those who "haven't lived life enough". And with the attitude of belittling, they gratify their self pity, and dig themselves deeper into the heaven of doubt, the paradise of those that mourn. Their prize isn't in creating a beautiful world, but in destroying the joy of others, and the best prize of all, stealing away the hearts of belief, and capturing the joy that is reserved for the saints.<sup>29</sup> Misery is the company and revenge is the main course at the banquet of the proponents of the gospel of unrelenting skepticism. The best descriptor of hell I can come up with is a community devoid of grace, no intention to forgive, and no intention of letting anyone forget their past – thinking that by tearing others down they build themselves up. This is a vision I see rapidly coming to fruition, and great will be that day when the prince of forgiveness comes to show the majesty

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<sup>29</sup> Enos 1:3

of what mercy and truth combined become over the proponents of malice and resentment.

If nihilism, depression, and a crippling anxiety from believing that our universe was built for destruction and us along with it are the prizes that await for me in the heaven of unyielding despair and unbelief then I would much rather spend my life in the hell of faith with those who believe we ought to forgive. And if grace is an illusion it is one I would rather indulge in over an endless round of communities built on what can be called at best benevolent selfishness, and at its worst, corrupt by the spirit of revenge.

The destroyers claim two rights: the right to criticize everything and the right to be shielded from criticism. Incapable of critical thought, they shut out all opposing voices than the ones which validate them, first by rationalization and then eventually in civil legislation. The civil intellectual martial law they would support is but a reflection of the martial law they rule over within themselves, psychologically suppressing any internal critical examination. They do not seek truth, but power. This is the damp cloth placed on top of the light of Christ. Furthermore, winning is not enough for them, they take it a step further – they seek to humiliate. They want their defeated opponent to castrate themselves and flog themselves over their sins, grinning within themselves with a sick warmth as they watch. When someone takes more pleasure in deconstruction than construction, it leads to resentment. Resent leads its host to desire the humiliation of their enemy, to light a fire in their holiest of holies. They demand public apologies but they have no intention of forgiving, and no regard for their dignity either, because they view them as inherently less, tainted by original sin. The cries for justice are calls for revenge hidden by a mask of virtue. They have no intent on forgiving because they have no desire to connect, they are not a person with worth, but merely an object one can use to raise their own sense of self virtue, thus we have reached the

deepest analysis of sin we can reach, *the categorical reassignment of intelligence to element out of the motivation of resent*. How shall this person act with the keys of creation? (Which very well may be the same keys to deconstruct and disorganize intelligence.<sup>30</sup>)

The message of Christ is clear, before any other type of power should be sought, the primary goal is the power over one's own mind, to set at liberty their soul. The majesty of the plan of salvation and LDS theology is that laying out a paradigm of eternal creation, keys, and responsibility and theosis, is better equipped than any other theological system to demonstrate the eternally destructive force of resentment. It takes evil and shows why it is doomed to end. It shows what freedom really leads to, and the fullest conception of joy that could be dreamt of. Studies in psychology show us that the pinnacle of the human experience is felt when we live in a state of creation – calling on the full power of our agency in a state of flow, where time itself seems to warp and bend to the person who experiences it. This state of creation is a state of active peace, a peace that is never still and is always moving between the states of past and potential, it is the movement that is felt between states of relationships, with our past self, and with others. The increase in power is an increase in trust, and trust is something that can be eternally created, forever deepening in its roots. While all the amount of intelligence and element remain the same, neither created nor destroyed, trust is the only thing in the universe that is created ex-nihilo, springing forth into existence out of nothing. Trust is the miracle, and to discover and live in that miracle as an active participant is Joy.

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<sup>30</sup> Exodus 7:8-13, *Jehova turning a staff of dead wood into a snake that acts for itself. We can think of creating and destroying, or organizing and disorganizing intelligence (such as us, see Abr.3:21) into element as an ordinance. We could not organize ourselves into a different state above what we progressed from – that was done by some power of priesthood. This is why Elder Holland argues that procreation is sacred because it is using a power derived from priesthood power – an act of organizing shared with God.*

[Holland, J. R. (1987). Of souls, symbols, and sacraments. *People*, 111.]

- To have joy is to be a creator, increasing trust with others and with self, a state of *at-one*.
- To be a creator is to facilitate progress in ourselves and progress with others.
- Progress demands both halves of the personality spectrum be developed in order to help others progress.
- This requires humility.
- We would prove ourselves as untrustworthy by our actions so Christ had to be the one through whom all trust flows through by living perfectly the Governing Laws of Trust. We cannot save ourselves because our word is not valued at the same level as Christ's.

### **Differences and Reconciliation**

True strength, a strength that can last, is not to enforce a union through the erasure of difference, which would be a genocide of the essence of free-agency, but it is a unity that exists in spite of difference, only capable by things that can act for themselves. Unity in the presence of difference is the ultimate expression of charity, and it never faileth, because it only needs to express itself to claim its victory. It is the mission of The Church of Jesus of Latter-day Saints to safeguard the knowledge of the plan of salvation to show us the purpose of this unity itself, without such a vision, then unity, love, justice, honesty, and compassion are random points on a map. To be a Creator demands something of us, to become something, a new being, born again from weakness into strength. The Governing Laws of Trust are not arbitrary concepts that a far off God made to test us, but they are the standards by which They maintain their power.<sup>31</sup> But to participate in creation itself shows us the way, the truth,

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<sup>31</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 29:36 and Alma 42:22

the life, and the unity that binds all generations of time in one, and holds together eternity itself. The grace of God is free, forgiveness was always unconditional, and that opened the door for Jesus Christ, total forgiveness embodied, to become the conduit for all trust, all faith, and all hope, the link that connects all to one, and one to all.

It is that grace that should give us the confidence to see how far we can reach, giving us the confidence to stretch the wings of our soul to explore the dimensions of truths and lies. But why move into the darkness while we were meant to come back into the light? Is that not simply salvation with extra steps? No. We should not confuse naivety and innocence with virtue and strength. It is within the cover of darkness that we can see for the first time the strength of our own light, it's in the struggle with hardship that we behold the power of agency, and it's in the wrestle with doubt that we witness the majesty of faith. In these things combined do we behold the power of a god in embryo,<sup>32</sup> and catch a glimpse at a glorious potential destiny of a fire that each divine spark was lit for, which destiny is made possible by the atonement of the God of heaven and the love of his parents for us. This path to power is the road to Liberty, and an eternal life worth living.

Our task if we so choose it is to find those who our grace does not naturally flow, and create. This will be our ultimate test. Without this ability, all we will create in eternity will not only be infused with our right views, but our wrong ones, because we were unable because of our unwillingness to uproot the weeds of resentment that grow in our garden of Eden. We were so used to seeing these weeds we mistook them for shrubbery and when someone looked at our garden to tell us of their

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<sup>32</sup> *"An intelligent being, in the image of God, possesses every organ, attribute, sense, sympathy, affection, of will, wisdom, love, power and gift, which is possessed by God himself. But these are possessed by man, in his rudimental state, in a subordinate sense of the word. Or, in other words, these attributes are in embryo; and are to be gradually developed. They resemble a bud — a germ, which gradually develops into bloom, and then, by progress, produces the mature fruit, after its own kind."* [Pratt, P. P. (1855). *Key to the Science of Theology*, 8.]

existence, we felt as if they offended our Tree of Life, and our Tree of Knowledge came to justify our offense. Will we, as Hierarchs or Egalitarians, inclined to be religiously conservative or liberal, and anywhere on that spectrum, fall into the natural person's tendency to give our forgiveness and fellowship only to those who appear, talk like, and act like us, and refuse our forgiveness and fellowship to those who we believe do not deserve it? That is the same as if when we receive someone's rotten oranges we in turn give them our rotten apples, and congratulate ourselves for not growing citrus. No one is happy, and the resentment builds and then no one has anything good to eat. This corrosive resentment cannot exist in the kingdom of perfect forgiveness, God's kingdom.

Because of this fact, you will learn that justice and freedom alone together lead to division and chaos, only unearned and unconditional grace can heal that.

Christ came to heal the broken hearted, and redeem the oppressor. To him they are the same, to him they are different. May we live life with the sword of truth and the shield of faith, with the ointment of relief and the herbs of healing. And whatever tool we lack, may we have the discipline and humility to forage for the herbs on the highest mountains and the depths of gorges, the patience to weave the bandages for the wounds of leaking faith, the endurance to pound out metal of the sword and carve the wood of the shield.

To be a defender of God's law we must likewise be a defender of God's grace. If on that last day we stand in that line for grace and Christ asks us, what do you feel towards this person, who spitefully used you, betrayed you, your family, what is your desire for them? If our answer is I want them to have joy, it will be well with us. If the same type of grace that Christ displayed is found in us, when we step into the presence of the King of grace, we will stand in a familiar place. In this familiarity the scripture "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God" will come

true.<sup>33</sup> But, you might say, that scripture precedes that phrase with talking about the law, “let virtue garnish thy thoughts”. That is true. Charity is the phenomenon that emerges from the successful synthesis of the law and grace, as the way we look at intelligences changes because the Governing Laws of Trust have become a part of our ultimate desires. If the grace of Christ, that gift that comes from Him, is found in us, peering at that grace through the microscope of reason we will find His law, only fully matured. The goal is not perfection, the goal is confidence – and through that confidence in ourselves and in others, and their confidence in us, we find perfection.

We carry on in a war between those who choose to use their resentment as their motivation, and those that have discovered, implemented, and incorporated Charity as their motivating force in their existence. Christ had to be crucified to witness the power of the truth he stood for, the Governing Laws of Trust – the Laws of Creation, the strength manifested through eternity, which binds Gods and intelligence. If we must fight, let it be on the hill of unyielding forgiveness and under the cross, to defend the hanging body of Christ from those who wish to steal Him away to crucify Him on the crosses of their own resentment. And of those who make their final stand there, may the blood of their wounded souls be their final prayer to God, their own New Testament of who they chose as their King. In this war it will not be a Muslim versus a Catholic, nor a Baptist versus a Latter-day Saint. We will watch it as a fight within the ranks of each tradition: as the Muslim fights the Muslim; the Catholic is against the Catholic; the Baptist versus the Baptist; and the Latter-day Saint against the Latter-day Saint. Charity knows no institutional boundary, and neither does resentment. On that last day, it is those that are found with Charity that will be at peace, prepared to take the next step across the veil holding the Hand of Jesus, the conduit and

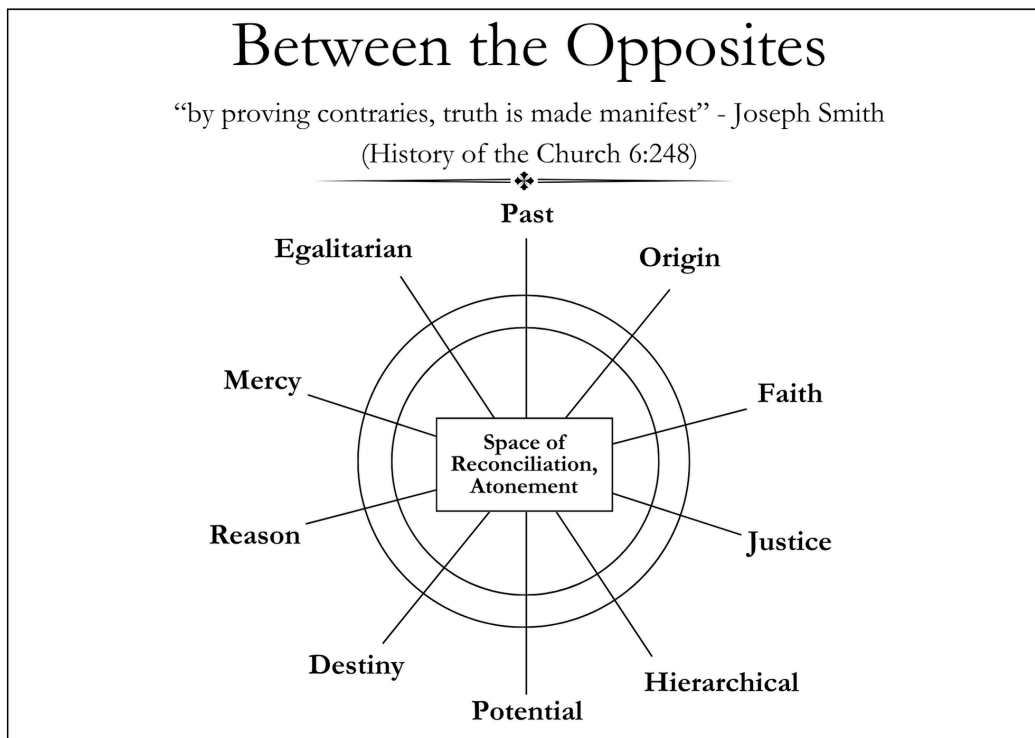
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<sup>33</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 121:45



holder of the Keys of universal trust. Do we fight a war? Yes, but the requirements to claim a victory are different from a battle for dominance. In this spiritual war, unity is and was the first and last goal – truth serves this purpose. The goals of domination-based warfare differ from the war our Heavenly Parents are fighting. Theirs is a mission of reconciliation, a war against each person — and for each person.

Division was written into the plan from the start, both in intellectual paradoxes and in temperaments; in finding truth and helping others, both the Egalitarian and the Hierarch have their part to play. They are built differently at the genetic and neurological levels – they witness events, pictures, and texts differently. Their disagreement provided the necessary conditions for grace to emerge, and it is only in the dialogues of grace that each has for the other that progress and unity can be preserved. It was designed to be so that we could discover for ourselves the strength and the freedom to be found in using the same grace He harnesses in our own lives, and so we could find Christ in the *dialogue of the difference*.



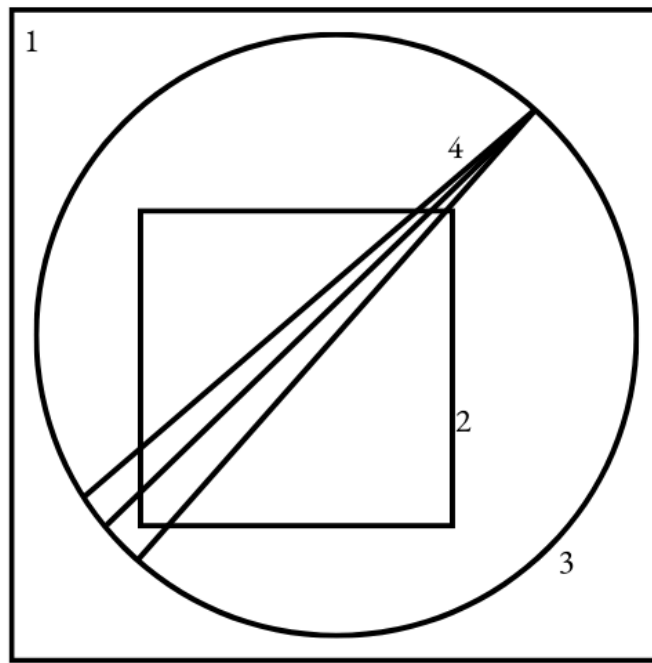
Christ is to be found at the center of the dialogue of complexity. The Atonement helps us exist in that space, giving us the safety and the freedom to explore the dialogue for ourselves to gain our own true witness of what is truth and what is not. Through the spirit of pluralistic cooperation, argumentation, the dynamic web of intellectual checks and balances, as our individual biases are exposed to our collective intellect, the totality of human desires can inch closer to the throne of truth – or things as they really are. Christ waits for us at the gates of Hell at the edge of consciousness, bidding us to come follow Him, and with everlasting patience asks us if we would like to change our story to one that is greater than what we have thus discovered.

Though we all have different experiences, the emotions that we feel are the same. Our journeys are less a path of events and more a path of emotional progression, and thus we are all on the same journey together. The patterns we all experience are the same – awakening into a state of consciousness, confronting the awareness of vulnerability, mobilizing the power of agency, gaining confidence in ourselves, helping others do the same, then sharing in the joy of community.

Since we all stand in that same line for His grace, we are all the same to Him, and we should think no more of ourselves than those around us. No matter what we do we cannot save ourselves through our efforts for salvation to earn back the lost trust of the universe — thus *what we do means nothing*. And yet, since we are destined to become as God, to be a Creator demands we transcend what we are and become what we were destined to be. Thus, since our destiny and origin are that of becoming — *what we do means everything*.

Gloria in excelsis deo.

### **An Explanation of the Symbol**



- 1) The outermost square is perception. Everything is contained in the square because we are contemplating all these things.
- 2) The inner-square is time – it is also a veil because we cannot see past a certain point in time into that vector of eternity.
- 3) The circle is for the eternal story – a never ending round of moving between the known world and the unknown world.
- 4) The three Governing Laws of Trust, that extend into the infinite past and extend into the infinite future, remaining constant.
- 5) Grace – it is there, but I will let you try and find it.

# Chapter 10

## End of my Disfellowshipment: Closing Thoughts

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### **The End of My Disfellowshipment**

Walking out of my bishops office having been cleared for full membership, one emotion ran through my mind – peace. The question that he and I came to agree on was that though my repentance process had been completed a while back, there was still something else the Lord wanted me to go through, and that perhaps the repentance process was not the real trial. The real question was, having been from my perception wrongly sentenced by my ecclesiastical superiors, feeling immense pain towards the hierarchical structure of the Church, the confusion over competing spiritual promptings over worthiness, what type of life would I choose to live? If I had to remain outside the Church for unknown reasons, what type of person would I be? What morals and facts did I believe in for myself without the Church telling me what is good or not? What did I choose to do with the parts of my life *that I was in control* of?

It has been a long journey from last year until now, but it has also been very precious to me. I had an opportunity to witness for myself what my true desires were, what *did I really believe?* While in this period I re-examined all my beliefs, where I came into possession of them, and to question them, one by one. Deconstructing your belief system that you

have operated on for so long is a very painful, and tedious process, and yet I believe it is a necessary process that everyone must go through in order for them to really discover true faith. It is a gift to be able to see you for who you really are, or a curse if you choose to view it that way too – then you see where you are deficient while confronted with your own vulnerability and naivety.

Imagine a well-lit room filled with light bulbs for you to choose from. How do you know which one is the brightest when the environment does not allow you to see if it is bright or not – all you can see is that it is on. Assuming we are not using electrical equipment to test them, taking each lightbulb into a dark room and seeing how bright the light shines is the only way to see their effectiveness. We must see how well ideas hold up to measure their truth. This pragmatic approach is what Alma the Younger prescribes to everyone who searches for truth.

Placed into the dark room, from my perspective trapped in there with someone else holding the key, I was forced to put ideas to the test. Now at the end of it, or at least that round of hardship, my confidence in the light I have chosen is stronger than it could have ever been had I not been left to learn it for myself. But as Alma goes on, I cannot lay aside faith altogether, with each question answered at least two more present themselves. But with each door successfully unlocked, my confidence in the key I use increases, and we were not sent to earth to be perfect, we were sent here to become confident, and our confidence in Jesus Christ, and the story that He lived and gives us, we live in perfection.

Looking back on my experience, an experience filled with anger and pain, I only remember the points where Christ came into my life and changed my heart, my intuitions which guided my reasoning. The Church, the keys, the power behind it all seems to me more real, more genuine, and in the future I can be an aid to faith for those who find themselves on the receiving end of a membership council. When I meet

others who went through a similar situation, I feel a kinship with them, a deep respect for their conscious choice to remain in the faith, and for those I meet that left it, understanding and a love that requires nothing in return. And if I ever become too prideful in my own sense of righteousness, I can always go back to the time when I was on the outskirts of Zion, peeking my head through the window praying to be let back in.

In retrospect my testimony and faith I place in the Church has deepened from this whole experience. My faith is not the simple faith I had as a teenager, because I do not see the Church as I did back then. I see the human nature element working throughout it – in the halls of a Church building to the decisions for campaigns or policies that emerge from headquarters – and I still believe in it. I can see more clearly the Church for what it really is, Its story is not the romanticized narrative of flawless service and told to me by members who live life with eyes wide shut and have never explored anything outside of what they are taught by their Sunday school teacher. Nor is it the caricature of vindictive and malicious conmen and women put forth by the critics. So often it is testified from the pulpit of countless buildings from countless individuals that the Church is true – and now I see with more clarity the true nature of that true Church. It is one where its modern prophets contradict each other, where doctrine has changed (not just policy that extended out of it), where many decisions are made not by inspiration but based on experience, bias, and preference – and yet it holds the keys to seal relationships on Earth and in Heaven. When you find out more about a person, the more opportunity you have to reject or accept them given your deeper understanding. People want to be accepted, we yearn for it, but to be truly accepted is to be seen for what we are, to be known for who we are, not just our facade. And when that other person sees us, and accepts us, then we are truly loved, and we feel that “chedva”, the joy of reciprocation. You cannot have full faith in something you do not fully know. It is the exercise

of the greater faith, the faith that can only exist coupled with awareness, it is the more precious part of faith. I can see the imperfect Church, and I accept it.

**Does The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have an Exclusivity on Truth?**

It depends on what you mean by truth. I caution anyone that claims we have the exclusive secret to finding joy that can exceed the joy felt by those in other faiths. Are we the only religion that has taught that joy comes from relationships? No, perhaps the Evangelicals teach it better than us. Are we the only religion that teaches that freedom comes through forgiveness? No, perhaps the Buddhists teach it better than us. Are we the only religion that teaches that eternal laws are necessary? No, perhaps the Catholics teach it better than us. Are we the only religion that teaches that service makes a community better? No, definitely the Amish teach it better — and practice it better than us.

Anyone claiming that being a member of the restored Church somehow makes them more righteous or more worthy of the trust of God or more worthy of the guidance of the Holy Ghost must rethink their paradigm. An endowed Latter-day Saint who is resentful towards their friend or their sister is less in tune with the heart of Christ than an Atheist who forgives everyone. That Atheist who possesses charity will be in a much better state at the judgment day than someone who holds a temple recommend and prides themselves on not drinking coffee but who neglected treating their child with compassion.

Many things have been said about the inspiration received from God to those of other faiths traditions. In a statement from the First Presidency in 1978, Spencer W. Kimball and his counselors wrote “The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, 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."<sup>1</sup> Alma reinforces the point, saying that "the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have".<sup>2</sup> I believe that God sent people here to be great leaders in their respective faiths, to lead their congregations and institutions in righteous ways, not to be converted to the Latter-day Saint faith. Most of the good that is done in the world happens outside the actions of Latter-day Saints, and no Latter-day Saint has access to more knowledge about what is considered virtuous, lovely, or praiseworthy than a member of another faith because there is nothing new in regards to what is considered to be "righteous" in the Doctrine and Covenants or the Pearl of Great Price or The Book of Mormon than what is contained in the Holy Bible – since we argue that our truths contained in our restoration scriptures is in harmony with the Bible. If we argue that  $A = B$  we cannot argue that  $A > B$ .

How should we interpret statements such as the restored church teaches the fullness of the gospel? One way is that the story of the plan of salvation, souls becoming creators, and the role of a creator putting requirements on the mind and heart of those wanting to ascend to that role, gives us a possible explanation for why truth is truth. Trust requires certain laws to be followed. The other is that the laws of trust and the heart of Christ is taught clearly in The Book of Mormon, and revelations of covenants and keys are appendages to that.

### **Ritual Ascent**

The purpose of rituals are two fold, to help us learn complex ideas, and to bind us together into a group. All organizations have at least one

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<sup>1</sup> *Statement of the First Presidency regarding God's Love for All Mankind*, 15 Feb. 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Alma 29:8



ritual. Simply showing up could be considered a ritual. In the business world, going through an HR lead company tour upon being hired is a ritual, signing a non-disclosure agreement is a ritual, going out to lunch on Friday with your coworkers is a ritual. Families watching fireworks on the Fourth of July is a ritual, and a nation celebrating a holiday with fireworks across the skyline is a ritual. Rituals bind people together. They help us remember the last, and create bonds in the present.

Rituals and ordinances in the restored Church exist to teach us the way, the truth, and the life. Baptism is where we enter into the way, the path to wisdom, signifying our desire to learn more, for which we are given the gift of the Holy Ghost to aid in that quest. The truth is taught to us fully in the temple, the Laws of Sacrifice, Obedience, Chastity, and Consecration. But learning does not make someone more righteous, application does. Life is as much an experience as it is a lesson. It can only be experienced in response to a situation where grace is an option, and the lesson can only be fully learned after one discovers the freedom of letting resentment go. These lessons can be learned by anyone, the light of Christ guides us into them, and it does not require the rituals of the restored Church to discover them. Books written by rabbis, pastors, and monks will teach these same principles.

So what need do we have for an institution? Perhaps it is to remain a custodian for truths, to be sure wisdom is not corrupted through time. Perhaps Elija and Peter, James, and John giving Joseph Smith the keys to perform the ordinances provide solid evidence for us that the principles being taught are really sanctioned by Heaven. Perhaps, in an ideal world, knowing someone is endowed signifies to us that they have sufficiently transformed who they are to such a level of living, and the endowment or the garment is a signal to others that this person has a similar mind and heart as you. Like badges on a uniform, you may not know the woman or the man personally, but seeing a patch or a rank is indicative of the

transformations that person has gone through to earn that title, and allows you to know they can be trusted with certain questions or tasks.

### **Consider the Prophets**

It has been shown that prophets and apostles have taught incorrect doctrines and principles over time. General Authorities have been divided since the beginning on race and the priesthood, the Adam God theory being hotly debated by Brigham Young and Orson Pratt, different opinions on evolution in the early 1900's,<sup>3</sup> and the list goes on. Different personalities will have different reactions to different statements made by leaders in the church. Perhaps it is our response to the words of the prophets that reveals where our hearts are. In hearing counsel that go against what we currently believe, do we automatically dismiss it, or seek to also question ourselves? Do we fall into the tendency of personality driven theology? Or do we seek to challenge not only our views, but how we arrive at our views?

### **Criticizing the Church**

I am in no way saying that it is wrong to criticize the Church institution, I support the idea that we should have in-house critics who believe in the founding narrative. If we are not the toughest on ourselves then we will definitely leave that role to the cynical rather than the simply critical.

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<sup>3</sup> *General Authorities that have attended higher education (college) tended to believe that some form of evolution had happened, and did not believe in the Young Earth Creationist theory (that the Earth was created six-thousand years ago. Elders B.H. Roberts fiercely debated Joseph F. Smith that pre-Adamites existed, and Elders Talmage and Widtsoe continued Robert's position. Church President David O. McKay quoted Charles Darwin at the funeral of May Anderson, June 14, 1946. Pres. McKay also told Sterling McMurrin at the University of Utah, "I believe in evolution." [Sterling W. McMurrin, "Account of Events of 1952-54."] See more in Greg Prince's biography of David O. McKay, page 46: [Prince, G. A., & Wright, W. R. (2005). David O. McKay and the rise of modern Mormonism. University of Utah Press, 46.]*

Hugh Nibley, a scholar who wrote vast amounts of literature defending the Prophet Joseph Smith, The Book of Mormon, and other topics, was a heavy criticizer of the Church, and even shot fire at BYU while a professor. Being asked to give the commencement speech in 1983, and after a seven-minute praise by then President Jeffrey R. Holland who was the president of BYU for Nibley's devotion to the defense of Zion and willingness for open debate and dialogue, Nibley remarked that they stood there wearing the robes of a false priesthood, and if you did not know what that meant it figures because, he joked that they are "not to question things at the BYU".<sup>4</sup> Neal A. Maxwell once commented that Nibley with his criticism stood out above the fray, because his defense of the kingdom was so apparent, that his criticisms were taken more seriously.<sup>5</sup> Criticism is always worth its weight in gold, but criticism coming from those who only show a tendency to criticize will be taken with less enthusiasm and thoughtfulness and ingested with a pile of Lot's wife. Praise received by someone who has no courage to criticize is also seen as less valuable to the receiver – it is to be expected.

Some people also enjoy deconstructing things because it makes them feel superior to that which they deconstruct. If you can point out a problem you must be above the problem itself. Always remember that the tools used to deconstruct views, as well as the people holding the tools, can be deconstructed as well, and they do not enjoy it when the methods they use on others are used on them as well. These people are cynical, not critical.

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*"I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. Growth comes of correction. Strength comes of repentance. Wise is the man who can acknowledge mistakes pointed out by others and change his course. I*

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<sup>4</sup> Nibley, H. (1983). *Commencement Address at Brigham Young University. Leaders and Managers.*

<sup>5</sup> (1985). *Faith of an Observer* [Film]. Brigham Young University and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

*am not suggesting that our conversation be all honey and blossoms. Clever expression that is sincere and honest is a skill to be sought and cultivated.*

*What I am suggesting and asking is that we turn from the negativism that so permeates our society and look for the remarkable good in the land and times in which we live, that we speak of one another's virtues more than we speak of one another's faults, that optimism replace pessimism, that our faith exceed our fears."*

- Gordon B. Hinkley<sup>6</sup>

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## On Leaving the Church

There are legitimate reasons for leaving the Church, just how there are legitimate reasons for doubting its veracity or the veracity of The Book of Mormon. I'm keeping true with the principle of opposition in all things, for faith to have any real meaning sufficient evidence and reason must be given to come to the conclusion that the story of the restoration could be false (just how there is enough evidence that it could be true). We must note that a person who's official church record says they are active, endowed, and hold a current recommend for not indicate that this person is saved in Christ.

Our eternal task is to accept Christ on the grounds of our own faith and our own choice, thinking for ourselves and acting as an individual agent. If that really is the case, then those who leave behind the safe naivety of the faith that was handed down to them, and upon thinking for themselves decide to leave – their choice should be looked at in the same way we view the fall from the Garden of Eden. It was downwards, but forwards.

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<sup>6</sup> From Gordon B. Hinkley's Brigham Young University Devotional "Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled", October 29, 1974

## **To the skeptic**

You may listen to your will-to-doubt everything. You may say that you have no real way to confirm the experiences of your senses, that all you perceive is a deception, both as you look at a stoplight and as you feel that swelling inside you telling you that joy can be found. Maybe it is, and if it is, then your response to the illusion will be your creation, and your reality. The source of this illusion, call it God, or the universe, that Being that perceives you as you perceive this page, watches you to see what reality you create. How will you manifest your “*I Am*”?

I mentioned in the first chapter that I had made sense of my situation, being disfellowshipped and receiving spiritual promptings that contradicted institutional guidance. I suppose that was my time hanging on the cross when Heaven turned away. It was my opportunity to declare what my desires really are, to witness for myself *who I* really was. When God withdrew His presence from Christ, that was the moment we could see His light the brightest, He chose to forgive – He chose to remain a Creator.

In discussing the situation with my bishop, I told him that if it was the case that I was not let back into the Church, for some extreme and improbable reason, the things I had written were the principles I would choose to live by. I would choose to replicate God’s way because it is good. It is what I want independent of God’s desires for me. And that was what he had also felt was my test. It was as if God asked me the question: if you were left to your own devices and desires, what type of Creator would you choose to be? This book is my answer to that question.