

-Other Sheep Indeed-

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I can't remember a Sunstone Symposium I have participated in that had so overtly religious a theme as this year. This year's topic is:

The Least of These: Embracing All

Exploring how Mormonism and the Restoration address the invitation of Matthew 25: 40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

With such a theme I feel inspired to wax scriptural, and do a little preaching as part of my contribution this year.

Mormonism¹ announced in its founding book of scripture that it is an incomplete, markedly unfinished religion searching for more truth to achieve its destiny. The completion is to be accomplished primarily by two means: restoring lost scripture and continuing revelation. But even the concept of "continuing revelation" has been institutionally curtailed. The only institutionally authorized source for revelation is a single leader. When he is not gifted with that capacity, the concept of "continuing revelation" is given lip service without any substantive proof. For example, minimal organizational adjustments in missionary ages are extolled as "revelation"² rather than merely a policy change.

¹ When using the word "Mormonism" I intend to include every denomination or individual who accepts the Book of Mormon as part of their faith, and not any particular group or institution.

² In the Press Conference held during General Conference Elder Jeffrey Holland called the policy change "inspired" and "revelatory." He explained, "God is hastening His work." See

Of all faiths, Mormonism has the greatest canonical incentive to search for and embrace truth known to others. The “keystone” of Mormonism is the Book of Mormon.³ That book alerts its readers that there are many others from vastly different places with vastly different scriptures who are nonetheless Christ’s sheep. Book of Mormon readers are expected to search for, welcome and learn from them. In contrast, institutional Mormonism of all stripes confine trustworthy new religious ideas to their authorized leaders.

Early in the text we learn that our faith, like our scriptures, is unfinished, and to anticipate a flood of additional sacred texts to help remove our ignorance. The portion of the Book of Mormon translated by Joseph Smith is carefully censored, with its greater content withheld.⁴

2 Nephi 29:11-12 states: *For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; ...* Obviously the Gods of Mormonism⁵ view Their role as all-inclusive. The entire world and all mankind belong to Them.⁶ Their global audience has received and recorded sacred

Mormon News Room video at 7:02, 8:00 and 14:20, respectively. (Available on YouTube under the title, *Press Conference for New Missionary Service Age Requirements*.) Elder Dale Evans of the LDS Seventy categorized the change as revelation, explaining: “‘The Lord has promised that revelation would come line upon line and precept upon precept,’ Elder Evans said. ‘The implication is that when one revelation is given, the next revelation is needed.’” See, *One year later: Looking back at the worldwide impact of a prophet’s announcement* (Deseret News, October 3, 2013).

³ Joseph Smith said: “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” (*DHC*, 4:461).

⁴ See, e.g., 1 Ne. 14:25, 27; Ether 4:5-6; 3 Ne. 19:32-34; 3 Ne. 26:7-9, 11, among other places.

⁵ Given Joseph Smith’s declaration concerning the “plurality of Gods” (*DHC* 6:473-479) and the material in Abraham Chapter 4, I am compelled to use the plural. Mormonism’s pantheon resembles ancient Egypt’s more than it does post-Deuteronomist Judaism. For an interesting comparison of Bible wisdom texts with Egyptian literature see Patrick Clark, *Wisdom Literature and the question of priority—Solomon’s Proverbs or Amenemope’s Instructions*, *Journal of Creation*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (2012) pp. 50-56.

⁶ Israel was scattered globally to spread covenant status far and wide. (See 2 Ne. 20:20-22.)

words directly from the Gods' "one" mouth.⁷ We have no way to define the extent to which that has happened. Nor do we have any concept of the number of sacred records that exist somewhere among unknown others, nor any idea what truths they were given that we lack.

Mormonism cannot, or at least should not, consider itself the exclusive possessor of THE sacred canon or that there is only one canon containing the Gods' teachings. There are words from heaven spread throughout our world by the deliberate planting of the Gods.

Continuing, *for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.* These "books" hold terrible importance for Mormons because we are going to be judged by the Gods based on a comparison between our "works" and "that which is written." With such a warning we Mormons ought to be humble about our claims to know more than other faiths. We should be modest in thinking we are especially graced by the Gods' words and should be anxious to scour the globe to discover the sacred texts of other cultures. In humility, we should invite them to share the truths they value most with us because we have shown that we will respect what they regard as sacred.

To clarify this further the record continues, *For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; ...* So far this describes a welcome Judeo-Christian boundary because the ancient Israelites are the backbone of the Gods' dealings with mankind. The Lost Ten Tribes continued to compose scripture, and their records will in time be recovered.

⁷ It is the unity of purpose and understanding that makes the Gods "one".

This passage continues by including yet others who are disconnected from any disclosed connection to Israel: *and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.*

Who? When? What was said?

“All nations of the earth” is broad enough to raise the troubling possibility that the Gods have spoken to others in India, Japan and China - to the peoples of Persia, Africa, and Native peoples of the Americas, Hawaii, Polynesia, and Australia. The Jaredite prophet, identified as “the brother of Jared,” had some of the greatest revelation in all history. He lived many centuries before Abraham, and therefore before there were Israelites. We know Egypt was founded “seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the first fathers in the first generation, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam[.]”⁸

If we take the Book of Mormon seriously, the ecumenicalism of the Gods may have no recognizable or comprehensible limits. The Gods of Mormonism are far more pantheistic than Trinitarian. What a cruel embarrassment that proves to be for any sect that proselytizes primarily among other Christian denominations. Imagining Gods who speak to everyone is troubling enough, but for the Gods to expect Mormons to give high regard, even canonical credibility to the records of these truly “others” begins to buckle the knees and mangle the mantras of today’s Mormons.

An unfortunate Mormon truism is the mistaken idea that we have a better and more complete religion than *all* others. ‘WE have the most recent revelation, because the Gods spoke last to us’ (...uh, well, so far as we know). Therefore, we can be prone to think of “the least of these” as all others who have failed to embrace Mormonism. This paper explores the possibility that we

⁸ Abr. 1:26.

have vastly overrated the scope of our religion, and underrated our ignorance. Perhaps we have *no* reason to ever consider those outside of Mormonism as “less than” Mormons, or “the least” worthy before our Gods.

This humbling revelation of the Gods’ universal attention to all mankind is reinforced by Christ’s words to the Nephites at Bountiful. He declared to them in 3 Ne. 16:1-4: *I have other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.* His declaration was every bit as disorienting to the Nephites as was His mention of “other sheep” to the Jews. Both the Bible and Book of Mormon make it clear that bodies of sheep who have the Great Shepherd standing before them are perplexed at the idea that He has yet others He loves as much as them. Are there no favorites? The sheep probably considered, at least passingly, “You **MUST** love us best because you’re here visiting us, right?” But any thought that audience was special is dashed by the Lord’s next sentence:

For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them. But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them. Christ was interested in unifying His sheep. He sought for “one” fold that followed only Him. There is no “Number One” fold among them. No upper class, or special distinct body towering above others.

Our gentile culture is stratified. We divide into haves and have-nots, upper class and lower class, winners and losers. Everything is ranked, from sports teams to television shows, mileage to price-per-ounce. We **WANT** to

have comparisons made: to be more and have more. That is one of the most persistent character flaws of ‘gentileness.’

Gentile Mormons were not at Bountiful when the Lord appeared and taught the Nephites. But we would like to have at least a derivative advantage by assuming the Nephites were more special than all the other sheep. We hunger for prominence, and our ambitions extend into all things, even the Gods’ regard for us.⁹ We reason that the Nephites were apparently visited first after the Jews. And the Jews killed Him,¹⁰ so really the Nephites were the first **worthy** audience and therefore more special. And this matters because we gentiles are the ones to whom the Book of Mormon was given.¹¹ So we are sort of first and therefore more better, or Mormon.¹² And, *ipso facto*, all others are less to the Gods.

That line of reasoning comes to naught when we realize Christ’s visit to the Nephites was over eleven months after His crucifixion.¹³ He ministered for

⁹ Luke 22:25: “And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.”

¹⁰ 2 Ne. 10:3.

¹¹ The Title Page of the Book of Mormon explains, “to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile[.]”

¹² Joseph Smith wrote a letter stating: “I may safely say that the word Mormon stands independent of the learning and wisdom of this generation.—Before I give a definition, however, to the word, let me say that the Bible in its widest sense, means *good*; for the Savior says according to the gospel of John, ‘I am the *good* shepherd;’ and it will not be beyond the common use of terms, to say that good is among the most important in use, and though known by various names in different languages, still its meaning is the same, and is ever in opposition to *bad*. We say from the Saxon, *good*; the Dane, *god*; the Goth, *goda*; the German, *gut*; the Dutch, *goed*; the Latin, *bonus*; the Greek, *kalos*; the Hebrew, *טוב*; and the Egyptian, *mon*. Hence, with the addition of more, or the contraction, *mor*, we have the word MORMON; which means, literally, *more good*.” (*Times and Seasons*, 4:194 (15 May 1843).)

¹³ Christ’s death was accompanied by a great storm in the Americas. The dating of that storm, and therefore His crucifixion, is given in 3 Ne. 8:5: “in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm[.]” His appearance to the Nephites took place at the end of that year, as dated in 3 Ne. 10:18-19: “And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon

40 days around Jerusalem after His resurrection,¹⁴ but He had nearly eleven months to visit undisclosed other sheep before the people of the Book of Mormon. We have no basis for thinking we have the record of those the Lord visited first, after His resurrection. For all we know we have the record of those he visited tenth, maybe eleventh. If He took as long with each group as He took with the Nephites, He had time to visit with dozens of other unidentified flocks of His sheep.¹⁵

Following His resurrection, as Christ visited with the Jews and Nephites, none of them had enough curiosity about “other sheep” to inquire about them. The account continues, *And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they who have seen me and been with me in my ministry, do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy Ghost, and also of the other tribes whom they know not of, that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, ...* It is perhaps a good thing Christ commanded them to “write these sayings” so we have a record clarifying that “other sheep” are indeed people completely out of view from any scripture in our possession. They exist. They were visited by Christ. They were taught by Him. They recorded what He taught. And we know nothing about any of it, apart from Christ confirming that He did visit and minister to scattered bodies of other sheep post-resurrection. He wanted them to become “one” and understand

their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them[.]”

¹⁴ Acts 1:3: “To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God[.]”

¹⁵ Yet Christ said He would continue His post-resurrection ministry even after the Nephites by going to visit “lost tribes of Israel.” 3 Ne. 17:4. Did He visit with some, but not all, before the Nephites? Did He visit with non-Israelite “sheep” during the first eleven months, and put off visits with the Ten Tribes until after the Nephites? His statement does not clarify, but instead emphasizes our ignorance of that part of Christ’s work.

“plain and precious things”¹⁶ that have been lost from our present, limited version of scripture.

What if they are also all gods to whom the word of God has been given?¹⁷ What if the Gods intend to spread knowledge of how to attain divinity among all people?¹⁸ That would indeed be a task worthy of the Gods!

Consider that for a moment. Have we gentile Mormons been told of the Gods’ other sheep for some important reason? If so, is it to alert us that we are no more special, nor in any greater possession of Gods’ words, than many others who have been scattered around the world and are known to the Gods, but unidentified to us? Is it to make us more careful about how we regard strangers? Ought it to suggest there are other religious equals in the world? May it suggest there are perhaps religious superiors in the world? In other words, have we received news of other sheep to help keep Mormons humble?

If these words from Christ are not enough to make us cautious about dismissing others, in the Book of Alma there is another reminder of how the Gods deal equally with all mankind. Alma 29:8 states, *For behold, 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; ...* The Lord is concerned about “all nations” and not merely Israelites in their scattered condition.¹⁹ Each nation, in its own tongue, has been given a portion of His teaching. It is measured according to what He “seeth fit that they should have.” I do not believe this means that ‘while God gives everyone something, we have the

¹⁶ See, e.g., 1 Ne. 13:28.

¹⁷ John 10:34-36.

¹⁸ Moses 1:39.

¹⁹ The word “nations” generally means the scattered tribes of Israel. However, given that the lost tribes forgot their identity, intermarried with other groups, and are now unidentifiable, the term should be applied more broadly to include all nations of the world. Israel’s blood is likely to now be found among all nations. See Abr. 2:11 “all the families of the earth” are to be blessed by “the literal seed of thy [Abraham’s] body.”

most.’ I think it instead means, ‘everyone is remembered by God, and when you close down revelation, you get less—humble people get more.’ This more probable meaning is suggested by Alma 12:10 which explains, *he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until he know them in full.* It is abundantly clear that Mormons do not know the mysteries of God in full. The farther back we look in human history the more appears to have been lost. Earlier stages, including the patriarchal era, knew God and therefore understood His path better. How else would Enoch and Melchizedek have achieved their heavenly breakthroughs? Like mankind, institutional Mormonism continually atrophies, knowing less and less, year by year. However significantly this may impact the truth-claims and arrogance of Mormonism, we must at least allow for the possibility that there are “other sheep” who are much better informed than are any of us Mormons.

The Alma 12 material helps clarify the remaining statement in Alma 29:8: *therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.* The Gods’ wise counsel does not regulate dispensing truth on things external to us, but on what is internal to us. We determine whether we have hard hearts or open hearts.²⁰ One of the ways to determine if our hearts are open and not hard is the degree to which we regard those who are “other,” not only with respect and charity, but also curiosity.

²⁰ Anciently the “heart” was considered the seat of understanding rather than emotion. Therefore an “open heart” belonged to the seeker, the asker, the knocker on the door. (See, e.g., Matt. 7:7-11.)

Mormon revelation helpfully defines knowledge of the Gods' mysteries as "riches."²¹ That definition helps explain a prophecy about the coming return of other sheep. Newly awakened dormant prophets in the north countries will lead scattered flocks to the boundaries of the everlasting hills. They will bring with them "rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim" who will welcome them.²² This will not merely be a reunion, but an exchange of treasured wisdom, or in other words revelation, between those who have preserved sacred knowledge. That reunion, however, will depend on a body of believing Ephraimites established in the everlasting hills that will welcome such riches. These prophetically described people must be humble enough to be taught, and willing to appreciate sacred information from outside.

Think of Mormonism more expansively and you may begin to share its founder's vision for the faith. Joseph Smith explained to the editor of the Chicago Democrat that Mormons "believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all men."²³ Joseph's list compares favorably with the five traditional Buddhist vows of non-harm to others, truthfulness, non-theft from others, sexual propriety and avoiding intoxicants. Buddha confronted the issues of life by segregating our challenges into "the truth of suffering." Life is filled with suffering from birth until death.

²¹ D&C 11:7: "Seek not for riches but for wisdom; and, behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich."

²² D&C 133:26-32: "And they who are in the north countries shall come in remembrance before the Lord; and their prophets shall hear his voice, and shall no longer stay themselves; and they shall smite the rocks, and the ice shall flow down at their presence. ..And they shall bring forth their rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim, my servants. And the boundaries of the everlasting hills shall tremble at their presence. And there shall they fall down and be crowned with glory, even in Zion, by the hands of the servants of the Lord, even the children of Ephraim."

²³ Taken from Joseph Smith's letter to John Wentworth in which he quotes the Apostle Paul.

Struggling vainly to relieve ourselves from suffering causes us yet more suffering.

To understand our suffering we need to recognize the true “cause of suffering.” The cause is found in our desires, appetites and passions. We cause our suffering by what we seek.

This leads to the way to “cease suffering” by forsaking our desires. Or, in a rather Buddhist mantra found in the Mormon temple ceremony, our “desires, appetites and passions are to be kept within the bounds the Lord has prescribed.” Buddha would welcome the Mormon temple mantra as part of the third great truth.

Buddha offers us a final solution found in the noble path: the right view, right thought, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Or, if you are a Mormon, the 13th Article of Faith covers similar ground using different language. Apparently all truth **can** be circumscribed into one great whole.

So are the Buddhists in possession of truths Mormons ought to consider acquiring? Do they have sacred texts they have guarded for generations that will be brought to the attention of Mormons only if we show enough respect and restraint so that their owners share their pearls with us? Does our swine-like arrogance and conceit²⁴ prevent them from casting their most valuable pearls our way?

Why aren't people from around the world eager to teach Mormons? What would it be like if Mormons sent out missionaries to inquire if others had any great truths to share with us? We cannot learn anything new when the only sound in the conversation is our own voice. Mormons are a very hard audience, hard of both head and heart. Most Mormons “know the church is true” and so

²⁴ See, e.g., 3 Ne. 14:6; Matt. 7:6 where Jesus advised by the Jews and Nephites against sharing sacred truths with the unworthy and unappreciative.

what else could possibly matter to them? It calls to mind Hugh Nibley's observations about BYU's students:

Our search for knowledge should be ceaseless, which means that it is open-ended, never resting on laurels, degrees, or past achievements. "If we get puffed up by thinking that we have much knowledge, we are apt to get a contentious spirit," and what is the cure? "Correct knowledge is necessary to cast out that spirit." The cure for inadequate knowledge is "ever more light and knowledge." But who is going to listen patiently to correct knowledge if he thinks he has the answers already? "There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance." "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 [If I] go into an investigation into anything, that is not contained in the Bible . . . I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry 'treason' and put me to death." But, he asks, "why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain?" True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does. One thinks of the dictum: "We are not seeking for truth at the BYU; we have the truth!" So did Adam and Abraham have the truth, far greater and more truth than what we have, and yet the particular genius of each was that he was constantly "seeking for greater light and knowledge."²⁵

Think about the impression we have made upon the Native Americans with our traditional Christian rivalries and contentions. It was Christian behavior that provoked Nez Perce Chief Joseph to declare: *We do not want schools: They will teach us to have churches. We do not want churches: They will teach us to quarrel about God. We do not want to learn that. We may quarrel with men sometimes about things on this earth, but we never quarrel about God. We do*

²⁵ See, *Zeal Without Knowledge*, originally published in *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1978, subsequently republished in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (1978).

not want to learn that. Mormons have not distinguished themselves as being any more tolerant or interested in learning Native American wisdom than the contentious general rank of Christians out of which Mormonism emerged.

I have been greatly impressed with Hinduism. There is a significant overlap in beliefs shared by Mormons and Hindus. But it would be almost impossible to have the average Mormon-in-the-pew acknowledge such overlapping beliefs. Many Mormons won't investigate to discover truth if it isn't correlated and approved by the top leaders. Institutional Mormons trust leaders to tell them everything worthy of notice. Their leaders, however, demonstrate every six months just how utterly incomplete and superficial their command of the restoration gospel remains.

Hinduism teaches, *The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed.*²⁶ This compares interestingly with Joseph Smith's statement found in D&C 93:29: *Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be.*²⁷ There may be important potential Hindu contributions on the topic of the eternal nature of man's existence that could be of worth to Mormons—if we did not regard them as deluded pagans. Rather than invite a Hindu over to listen to our family home evening lesson, we may obtain greater benefit by asking them over to teach us a lesson.

Long before the Sermon on the Mount taught us to bless those who curse us, and do good for those who hate us,²⁸ The Dhammapada taught, *Let us live in joy, never hating those who hate us.*²⁹ And when Christ said in that same

²⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, Katha 1.2.18, (Harper, New York: 1994) p. 73.

²⁷ See also, Abraham 3:18.

²⁸ Matt. 5:44.

²⁹ *The Dhammapada* is a collection of Buddha's sayings in verse form and is considered one of the earliest texts for the faith.

Sermon on the Mount: *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*³⁰ Several centuries earlier the writings of Buddha put it this way: *Do not give your attention to what others do or fail to do; give it to what you do or fail to do.* What higher light illuminated Buddha when he spoke these words? Was it the same light that illuminated our Lord? Well, our Mormon scripture puts all light and truth into one, singular source for this world. That source is God the Son.³¹

Consider the very ecumenical nature of the following revelation given to Joseph Smith: *For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.*³² Notice this is without any restriction on who can receive the light of the Spirit. "Every man that cometh into the world" receives equally. There is no individual, in any corner of the world, who does not have equal access to obtain "truth" and "light" from that same source, who is Jesus Christ. If any soul in any age hearkens, or listens and follows the "voice of the Spirit," they are in communication with Jesus Christ. To them He bestows light.

Compare the following sample of Biblical Proverbs with corresponding quotes from Buddha:

Proverbs 23:7 – *For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*

The Dhammapada – *We become what we think.*

Proverbs 15:1– *A soft answer turneth away wrath.*

³⁰ Matt. 7:3.

³¹ See D&C 84:45-46; 88:6-13; 93:2, 9-10.

³² D&C 84:44-46.

The Dhammapada – *Speak quietly to everyone, and they too will be gentle in their speech.*

Proverbs 16:32 – *He that is slow to **anger** is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

The Dhammapada – *One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield.*

The Gods of Mormonism literally mean it when they proclaim, *he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.*³³ All, even those swarthy heathens, are included within the ambit of the Mormon Gods' concern. They speak through the Spirit the same truths to all mankind and have done so since the beginning of creation. To Mormons the Gods declare: *I am no respecter of persons.*³⁴ To the Hindus the Gods declare: *none are less dear to me and none are more dear.*³⁵ Both the Mormon and Hindu Gods respect all mankind equally.

At one time the account in Genesis read: *This is my work, to my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.*³⁶ The Gods of Mormonism take seriously their commitment to the eternal advancement of mankind. That means ALL mankind, including the heathen, and none are above others.

This raises the question of “chosenness” of the Gods’ special people. Israel, after all, was at one point “chosen” by the Gods as Their special people. But that does not mean what we think it means. Being “chosen” means we are

³³ 2 Ne. 26:33.

³⁴ D&C 38:16.

³⁵ The Bhagvad Gita.

³⁶ This was the earliest version of the language.

put on display as either the faithful servant, elevating others, or the unwise steward who is condemned, beaten with a rod,³⁷ and made the display of Divine ire.

Christ explained He was sent to serve, not to be served. Taoism makes the same observation about how “chosen” ones are to demonstrate their “chosenness” in words that parallel the Lord’s.

The Lord:– *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*³⁸

Tao Te Ching: – *If the sage wants to be above the people, in his words, he must put himself below them; If he wishes to be before the people, in his person, he must stand behind them.*³⁹

The Lord:– *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*⁴⁰

Tao Te Ching – *The unyielding and mighty shall be brought low; the soft, supple, and delicate will be set above.*

The Lord:– *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.*⁴¹

Tao Te Ching – *The sage does not hoard. The more he does for others, the more he has himself; The more he gives to others, the more his own bounty increases.*

Likewise the Mohawk wisdom: *A good chief gives, he does not take.*

Like Taoism, quotes from what Christ taught also have parallels in Hindu teachings:

³⁷ See, e.g., Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19.

³⁸ Mark 9:35

³⁹ The Tao Te Ching is a fundamental text to Taoism. Its authorship and date of origin are debated and uncertain but is known to date back at least two millennia.

⁴⁰ Luke 14:11

⁴¹ Luke 6:38.

The Lord – *[H]e that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*⁴²

The Bhagavad Gita – *Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfillment of your desires: this is the promise of the Creator.*

The Lord – *If ye love me, keep my commandments. Abide in me If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.*⁴³

The Bhagavad Gita – *[T]hose who worship me with love live in me, and I come to life in them.*

Interesting comparisons can be made between the Hindu belief in “karma” and the Mormon teaching of “pre-existence.” Karma includes the belief that what was done (or not done) in both this and previous states of existence will determine a person’s condition now and in the future existence. Whatever blessings or burdens you encounter are of your own creation by your deeds. Your suffering is merited and deserved. But by doing well, acting justly, and showing kindness you can deserve to inherit a better existence in the next state.

Mormonism includes the declaration that what we experience now and in the future is based on our heed and diligence to the Gods’ pathway.⁴⁴ While the Hindu karma has a robust body of teaching, Mormonism’s explanation of pre-earth events is spartan: The spirits of all mankind lived as separate personalities before birth.⁴⁵ This world was planned before it was created and people were assigned roles to fulfill in this creation. Some souls were more

⁴² Matthew 10:39.

⁴³ John 14:15; 15:4,10.

⁴⁴ “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” D&C 130:18-21.

⁴⁵ D&C 93:29-30.

noble and great than others.⁴⁶ Prophets were chosen to have a role to “rule” or to teach in this lifetime.⁴⁷ Christ was chosen to be the Savior of mankind in the expected event they fell from grace and required saving.⁴⁸ Lucifer rebelled and others followed him.⁴⁹ All souls were free to make choices before coming to this stage of creation.

We can infer from these few, settled Mormon ideas that all our choices made before this creation mattered and affect us here and now. Likewise, all choices we make now will follow us into the hereafter and affect things there.

Both the Hindu teaching of karma and the Mormon teaching of “judgment” make us, not God, responsible for the outcome of eternity. Joseph Smith said plainly, “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. ...The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone.”⁵⁰ In the most expressive description of God’s judgment in Mormon scripture, God is doing nothing to cause the man’s suffering. Man is feeling the “torment of disappointment” Joseph described.⁵¹ Similarly, karma puts all responsibility for all consequences on the choices freely made by mankind. God is immune from responsibility for our self-

⁴⁶ Abraham 3:21-22.

⁴⁷ Id., v. 23.

⁴⁸ Id., v. 27; Alma 12:25, 30; Moses 5:57.

⁴⁹ Abraham 3:28. Rev. 12:4; D&C 76:25-27.

⁵⁰ *TPJS*, p. 357 (2006 leather bound edition).

⁵¹ “[W]hen the Lord shall come, yea, even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, yea, in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God—then will ye say that there is no God? Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you.” (Mormon 9:2-4.)

inflicted fate. The Shawnee tribe also believed, *Each person is his own judge*. Egyptians conceived of a death interview, wherein the individual's heart was weighed to determine where they would go next.

How much might Mormons yet discover if we are open to learn! The truth is or should be our goal.

We fear what we do not understand. Mormons derive security from knowing we are better informed about the Gods than others. No one likes the idea of being surprised by failure because we were too ignorant to avoid a cataclysm. Particularly if our failure is because we thought we understood what was on the test, but in fact never studied what we were being tested on. (That is an old high school nightmare many of us share.)

John the Beloved explained the relationship between two opposing forces: *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*⁵² The opposite of faith and love is fear. Fear lies at the root of our hatred, our revulsion, and our unkindness to one another. We fear the “other” because we do not understand them. They are different and we fear they might even be toxic.

It is foolish to assume we can be righteous when we allow fear to inform how we react to others. Second Ne. 9:40 teaches, *I know the words of truth are hard against all uncleanness; but the righteous fear them not, for they love the truth and are not shaken*. Truth can be painful because it cuts away our vanity, pride and foolishness. A righteous individual confident in his honest search for truth should be capable of listening without fear to the beliefs of others and to respond respectfully.

No matter who we are, we are all in the same predicament and facing the same challenge. We will all give a full accounting of what we did with our lives

⁵² 1 John 4:18-19.

here. Our thoughts, deeds and words that result from our search for heavenly truth will be the basis for that evaluation. As to that coming accounting, the Book of Mormon describes it this way: *And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation; being on a parallel, the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand; according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ, who was before the world began.*⁵³

This brings to mind yet another Mormon-Buddhist parallel. This one from the Book of Mormon:

Mosiah 4:30 – *[I]f ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, ...ye must perish.*

The Dhammapada – *Guard your thoughts, words, and deeds. These three disciplines will speed you along the path to pure wisdom.*

If how we treat even “the least of these, my brethren” is a measure of how we treat Christ, then how carefully ought we form our thoughts? How kindly should we express our words? How gentle and careful ought deeds be done to others?

Thought is driven by what we know of the Gods. And thought precedes our spoken words. Thought precedes our acts. Therefore the battleground is in our thoughts. On this front the Bible and Buddha agree:

Proverbs 23:7 – *For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.*

The Dhammapada – *[W]e become what we think.*

There are “other sheep” belonging to Christ about whom we know nothing. I wonder if they think their “church is true” also, or if they look

⁵³ 3 Ne. 26:4-5.

condescendingly at others who do not have their ‘Book of Mormapada’ (or whatever it may be titled). What if the “fullness of the mysteries of God” have been scattered, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, worldwide among remnants of believers who have received truths in different times and places? What if the only thing preventing mankind from coming into the unity of faith Paul hoped would be achieved by Christians,⁵⁴ is our fear of others? Paul’s hope for unity of the faith and knowledge of God until we are perfect and each exhibit the stature of Christ’s fullness⁵⁵ clearly has not been accomplished in Christianity before, and neither in Mormonism. Indeed the accelerating rate of Mormon fracturing leaves any reasonable expectation for Mormon unity in the future as unlikely as reuniting Protestants and Catholics⁵⁶ and then reunifying these with the Eastern Orthodox Christian fragments. What if that goal is unachievable because it is too little, not too much, to hope for? What if the unity of faith and knowledge can only be accomplished when our fears of others are replaced by our curiosity about Christ’s “other sheep?”

If there are others whom God loves as much or more than us, then we have some things to ponder:

If God gives liberally to all who ask,⁵⁷ what have they asked that we have not?

If God has been determined to “*grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they*

⁵⁴ Eph. 4:13

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ But the Lutherans and Catholics have reconciled one contentious issue, faith vs. works, in their recent *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church*. This first step may provide incentive to these two institutions to accomplish more.

⁵⁷ James 1:5.

should have”⁵⁸ did God see fit to give other sheep something more than has been given to us?

If, *he that will harden his heart, and same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until he know them in full,*⁵⁹ do these others have more open hearts than do we? If so, do they know greater of the Gods’ mysteries than we do?

All of this leads to the cautionary moral: we ought to be careful about how we deal with others. We may be thinking of them as understanding less, when they may, in fact, understand more than us. In thinking of the Sunstone theme for this year, the irony of the selected scripture is that we are probably not open to learning from others precisely because we are not willing to learn from the Lord. We have arrived at this point because of the inherited, aggregated xenophobia of the generations who went before us. If we fail to awaken to our awful plight, we do not just perpetuate it, we add to it. Sacred books of different traditions warn us that when we begin with small errors they will eventually bind us into great errors:

In Mormonism: *[Y]ea, and [the devil] leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.*⁶⁰

In Buddhism: *Little by little a person becomes evil, as a water pot is filled by drops of water.*⁶¹

But there is the converse, and that is a happy note indeed. If we allow the “light of Christ” to enter us little by little, it will eventually fill us as well:

⁵⁸ Alma 29:8.

⁵⁹ Alma 12:10.

⁶⁰ 2 Nephi 26:22

⁶¹ The Dhammapada.

In Mormonism: *That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light growth brighter and brighter until the perfect day.*⁶²

In Buddhism: *One must develop small moments of insight and understanding each day. These small, daily bits of enlightenment accumulate over time, until they culminate in a sudden flash of great enlightenment.*⁶³

We are here to learn. We should rejoice at any chance the Gods give to us to become better informed about Their mysteries. But it is easy to become trapped by what we know to be familiar and to allow our fears to keep us imprisoned. The beliefs keeping us bound are like the old story of how the trainers control the elephant. A large, adult elephant can be controlled by nothing more than a small rope tied to its front leg. No chains or cages are needed. It is obvious that adult elephants trained this way could at any time break away from their bonds, but they do not. When they are very young, and much smaller, the same small rope is used to tie them. At that early age it is enough to hold them. As they grow, they are conditioned to believe that they cannot break away. They believe the small rope is still enough to hold them, and so they never try to break free. The adult has the strength to be free at any moment, but their belief in their captivity keeps them under control.

One of Islam's great thinkers taught: *We ought not be embarrassed of appreciating the truth and of obtaining it wherever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. Nothing should be dearer to the seeker of truth than the truth itself, and there is no deterioration of the truth, nor belittling either of one who speaks it or conveys it.*⁶⁴ This beautiful sentiment is the opposite of institutional Mormonism. Rather than truthful content,

⁶² D&C 50:24.

⁶³ Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

⁶⁴ From Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn 'Isaq as-Sabbah al-Kindi ("al-Kindi") (801-873), known as the father of Islamic or Arab philosophy.

Mormonism has been led to believe the focus must be upon authorized sources. Mormon authorities, many of whom are devoid of understanding, vacuous in teaching, and unacquainted with God are trusted. And if truth dares speak up, the contrast it provides is condemned as a counterfeit.

I envision a future for Mormonism where some few believers are willing to seek diligently to recover the truth. That search begins by mining the lost truths of Mormonism itself, of which there are a surprising number of unrecovered teachings. When the effort to recover a lost and compromised “restoration” has advanced far enough, the search for the “other sheep” can begin in earnest. Eventually if those believers are true to Christ’s teachings, and open to welcoming all truths, wherever found, the truth will search out those Mormons. It will draw into it from every nation, kindred and people, and all nations will come up to the house of the God of Jacob. The truth, or “rich treasures” from around the world will come to those who will welcome it.

The seed for that new, more open body of believers is being planted. But until it has an opportunity to grow and take form, it is doubtful the larger body of Mormonism, much less the world will recognize it. But great things often have a small beginning. Like a stone broken out of a mountain that seems obscure and unimportant, until it triggers a greater landslide that eventually fills and alters the whole landscape.

There is a Cherokee prayer: *Oh Great Spirit, help me always to speak the truth quietly, to listen with an open mind when others speak, and to remember the peace that may be found in silence.*

We speak too much and too loudly and we listen too little. The restoration has filled Mormonism with factions holding unstable and shifting beliefs that are loudly declared in words of certainty. But fractious Mormonism has anything but a stable form. Today, every form of institutional Mormonism

is hardly related to the faith practiced by Joseph Smith. These deformities and unhealthy mutations are explained as “continuing revelation.” While they do reveal a great truth about the instability of Mormonism, instability is no evidence of revelation. We can hope that somewhere in the bizarre assortment of mutated Mormon offspring there can be found a healthy descendant. However recessive that gene may prove, that hope ought not to be abandoned.

I have been laboring for years to attempt to reinvigorate the original. Thankfully institutional Mormonism is so well informed by their conceit that they doubt such a thing can be accomplished. Today’s Mormon intellectual cabals are bemused that the idea an original Mormonism has virtue. They assume wife sharing and bed hopping was a fundamental part of Joseph Smith’s legacy, ignoring all he did to denounce and oppose such things. Polygamy is Mormonism’s most revealing ‘inkblot test’.⁶⁵

The search for authentic, original Mormonism is the quest to find a belief system that confidently searches for truth, wherever found. It does not claim to possess all truth, only to be searching openly to find it. As the original Mormon, Joseph Smith explained:

Mormonism is truth, in other words the doctrine of the Latter-day Saints, is truth. ...The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Like the Rorschach inkblot test, which uses vague images to expose what is inside the one being tested, the vague and contradictory history of plural marriage allows Mormons to envision Joseph as anything from virtuous and innocent to promiscuous and guilty.

⁶⁶ Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, pp. 53-54.

The response of an authentic believer in Mormonism to the discovery of some new truth should be excited gratitude. There is too much fear in the world, and Mormonism has taken that spirit with gusto. A new revelation is greeted with suspicion and dread because the source from which new revelation springs is invariably considered heterodox. Those in control of the most successful brands of the faith are content to count their money. If the road from Jerusalem to Nicea was calamitous, the downward trek from Nauvoo to Salt Lake is typified by the barren landscape itself: from a watered paradise beside the largest river in North America to a desolate salt flat. That descent into desolation has been as much theological as environmental.

Institutional forms of Mormonism want to claim that God has finished His work for our day and given His authority to a select group of professional clergy.⁶⁷ Their jealousy and envy keep them out of the kingdom, and those under their control are prevented from entering God's kingdom.⁶⁸ What an odd outcome this is for institutional Mormonism when the religion was founded on the relentless search for truth, anywhere it may be found.

What then ought we do? Can we still embrace an original once the original has been so deformed and disfigured? Can Mormonism, whose visage has been so marred by its adherents, yet bring Jacob again to God?⁶⁹ Can Mormonism provide a covenant of the people for a light of the gentiles?⁷⁰ Can it again be a marvelous work among the gentiles of great worth to both them and the House of Israel?⁷¹ Are there any with the inclination or desire to deal prudently with the marred visage of Mormonism so that some believers will yet

⁶⁷ See 2 Ne. 28:5.

⁶⁸ Matt. 23:13.

⁶⁹ 1 Ne. 21:5-6.

⁷⁰ Isa. 22:6-7; 1 Ne. 21:8.

⁷¹ 1 Ne. 22:8-11

see and consider the depth and breadth of the religion hidden from them?⁷² Will Mormonism ever arise from the dust⁷³ and become evidence that the work of the Father has begun to prepare mankind for the glorious return of His Son?⁷⁴ It cannot be done unless those who accept the challenge of Mormonism become as a little child. We must return to the innocent, child-like quest for the truth where “others” are not dreaded but welcomed with curiosity. We should attract, not repel others by the interest we have for discovering whatever truth they have to offer. Plato observed, *We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy is when men are afraid of the light.* How can Mormonism ever achieve its destiny if it fears both the dark and the light, insisting that it knows only **it** can be true? We should rouse ourselves to vindicate Joseph’s view of what constitutes true Mormonism:

...the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity--thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men. How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations--too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God.⁷⁵

There are indeed other sheep who belong to God; they should be welcomed, not scorned. If we do our part, we can awaken and arise and seek

⁷² 3 Ne. 20:43-46.

⁷³ 2 Ne. 26:13.

⁷⁴ 3 Ne. 21:1-7.

⁷⁵ *TPJS*, p. 137.

for a covenant from God, and then receive in turn from them “rich treasures” of knowledge.

In their present form, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Taoism have not preserved a Christ-centered tradition. Perhaps if we were to recover earlier writings from these faiths in an unadulterated form we would find Christological centers were once part of them all. The post-resurrection visit to the Nephites suggests that possibility.

Avicenna said, *The world is divided into men who have wit and no religion and men who have religion and no wit.*⁷⁶

Mormonism is only a “starter” religion based on an incipient planting by the Gods. It remains wanting. We Mormons should be people of wit and religion, willing to consider and value all truth from whatever source it springs. The greatness of Mormonism has not been realized in any of its past, and those who have managed to profit from organizing institutions based on its mere beginning are threatened by the idea that there is yet much more to be added.

Mormonism has been a dismal underachiever. Its most wealthy sect is riddled with errors, controlled by an oligarchy of priestcraft, jealous of their power, wealth and influence. It has a criminal past, an unstable present, and an insecure future. That empire is diversifying its portfolio into land development, banking and business enterprises⁷⁷ to replace the now diminishing tithing cash-stream upon which the empire was built.

The second largest sect has so watered down its teachings and principles that it can hardly be distinguished from any of the weak and diminishing liberal Christian sects. It barely gives lip service to Joseph or the Book of Mormon.

⁷⁶ Islamic philosopher Avicenna lived from 980-1037 a.d. and authored many books.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., *LDS Church makes large timberland purchase in Florida Panhandle*, Nov. 10, 2013, Deseret News; *Mormon Church to Expand Development in Philadelphia*, Feb. 18, 2014, NY Times.

The scatterling polygamist sects are hardly Mormon at all, practicing what the Book of Mormon identifies as an abomination that has broken the hearts of wives and lost the confidence of their children.⁷⁸ All forms of institutional Mormonism are easily compromised because they have adopted a structure engineered by Brigham Young. Joseph established at least four bodies equal in authority,⁷⁹ making it impossible for one to rule and reign with blood and horror over others. Brigham destroyed that balance and promptly began to reign with blood and horror. He even succeeded in persuading Mormons to openly practice an abominable form of plural marriage as a sacrament in his deformed version of the faith. With Brigham Young at the helm, the twelve traveling ministers assumed authority over organized stakes for the first time. It was only a matter of time before their ambition overtook their righteousness. Emboldened by isolation and under the leadership of Brigham Young, Mormons engaged in such excesses, abuses, whoredoms, murders and criminality that the heavens have stared aghast at the wretched spectacle Mormonism made of itself! Marred visage indeed!⁸⁰

The greatness of Mormonism has been hijacked. It is time for devoted believers to find the virtue, glory and aspirations of the original. The disillusioned critics do have a point. But their point is aimed in the wrong direction. Mormonism's institutional factions, critics, apostates, and activists all seem too distracted by what is now Mormonism to contemplate what Mormonism promises ultimately to become. It is that unrealized destiny that ought to fire our imaginations and thrill our hearts. Because of its self-declared lack, the original version of Mormonism, with its confidence and curiosity,

⁷⁸ Jacob 2:28, 35.

⁷⁹ See D&C 107:22-37.

⁸⁰ 3 Ne. 20:44-45.

remains the only faith with any potential to unite within it all truth; therefore, by extension, the unrealized potential to also unite all people.

The End