



Type: Magazine Article

The Keystone of Our Religion

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 68, No. 6 (June 1965)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 500–501

Abstract: This article testifies that those who seek truth may find it in the same way Joseph Smith did. The way has been prepared through the Book of Mormon, it is the witness of the divinity of the work of Jesus Christ and his Church.

"The Keystone of Our Religion"

President Bruce R. McConkie
Of the First Council
of the Seventy

There are in the world great hosts of upright and good people, men and women of goodwill, who desire in their hearts to know the truth about religion. They see conflicting claims everywhere, claims supporting both the philosophies of the world and the various religious systems.

These truth seekers feel in their hearts that there ought to be unity where religion is concerned, unity based on complete, ultimate truth. They see movements afoot to bring organizational unity into the Christian world, and yet they find those who give lip service to unity crying, "Lo, here is Christ, or there. . . ." (Matt. 24:23.) They wonder why men do not come to a unity of the faith, why they do not find the ultimate truth about religion, just as men come to a perfect knowledge of truth in scientific fields.

Well, this condition has prevailed over the years. It existed in the days of Joseph Smith. He was in the midst of a religious revival on the frontier area of America. He heard the cry that here was salvation, or there. He reached the conclusion that ". . . the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible." (Joseph Smith 2:12.)

Then he read these glorious words in the book of James: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him," followed by the counsel, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." (James 1:5-6.) As the Spirit worked upon him, he, meditating upon these words, was led to offer that prayer which ushered in this great, final gospel dispensation.

Now, every person of goodwill, every honest truth seeker, every person with a devout desire to find the truth in the field of religion is faced with the same problem which confronted Joseph Smith, and every person can find the answer in the same way he found it; for God, who is no respecter of persons, in whose sight a soul is just as precious today as it ever was, will give wisdom, will give light and truth and revelation to those who ask in faith.

We are the children of God our Father; he loves us, has an intense interest in our well-being, and desires to see us progress and advance until we become like him. He is willing—provided we pay the investigator's price—to give us wisdom and knowledge, to reveal to us the truth about religion so that we can walk in that course and way in which he would have us go.

In view of this, may I mention a specific way and means which will enable men to get in tune with the Lord, to get themselves in the frame of mind to exercise the necessary faith, the faith which will bring a personal manifestation from him as to the truth and divinity of this great latter-day work.

Remember, we proclaim to the world a message, the message of the restoration. This message is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that salvation is in him, that because of his atoning sacrifice all men are raised in immortality, and those who believe and obey his laws are raised unto eternal life. This message is that in our day, primarily through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, there has been a restoration of the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of salvation. And this message is, further, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as now constituted, is the Church and kingdom of God on earth, the one place where salvation is found, the place where men can come to learn the eternal verities in the fields of religion and salvation.

Now, the Lord has placed in our hands the way and the means to present this message to the world, to present it in such a way that every honest truth seeker can be guided and enabled to know where the truth is. By using this means every truth seeker can learn how to get in communion with Deity and how to get personal revelation from that God who does not upbraid and who desires to see his children come to the light and truth of heaven.

This way and means, given of God to establish the truth of his work, is the Book of Mormon. May I call your attention to the inspired words of Joseph Smith, words written by the spirit of prophecy and revelation on the day the Church was organized in this dispensation. In them the Prophet first announces that the Church has been organized. Then he says that ". . . through faith, God ministered unto him by an holy angel, whose countenance was as lightning, and whose garments were pure and white above all other whiteness"; (D&C 20:6.)

He then says he was given commandments, and also the power ". . . by the means which were before pre-

pared, to translate the Book of Mormon." (V. 8.) Then of that book he says: It ". . . contains a record of a fallen people, and the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to the Jews also;

"Which was given by inspiration [meaning that the original prophets who wrote it were inspired of God], and is confirmed to others by the ministering of angels [meaning that angelic ministers delivered it to men on earth in this day], and is declared unto the world by them—" (Vs. 9-10.)

And now these words that follow are the key: "Proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation, as well as in generations of old; "Thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever." (Vs. 11-12.)

Now, in every age of the earth's history, when the Lord has had a message for people, he has sent his servants to testify and bear witness of it. They have spoken by the power of the Holy Ghost and have certified of the truth of the revelation. We do this today, most solemnly and soberly, as it has been done in this conference; and I add my personal witness that I know by the revelations of the Holy Ghost to my soul that this work is true. But for our day and our generation, an era in which the Lord is cutting short his work in righteousness, in which he is hastening it in its time and in its season, he has given something additional. He has placed in our hands a volume of scripture which is both ancient and modern and has provided that it will be the sure proof, the conclusive evidence, the added witness of the divinity of the work.

As all who are acquainted with this matter know, if any person will read this book in accordance with Moroni's promise, having faith in God, and ask the Father in the name of Christ if it is true, that person will learn by the power of the Holy Ghost that it is. (See Moroni 10:3-5.) The still small voice will whisper to the spirit that is within him, telling him in a way that he cannot deny or misunderstand that no man could have written that book, that it is the mind and word and will of God.

Now, if this book is what we say it is, Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God; Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the one by whom salvation comes; and this Church and kingdom was set up, ordained, and established by the opening of the heavens, by the principle of revelation. The Book of Mormon has been given to the world to prove the divinity of the work, and our challenge is that men of goodwill, upright and good people everywhere, will take this book and learn what is in it and then

ask God whether it is true.

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.)

Well, as the keystone of our religion, it is the thing upon which we stand or fall. If it is true, this whole system of religion is true because God's hand is in it; if it is not true, then our system of religion is false. But thanks be to God, this book is true! And thanks be to him also, he is willing, desirous, anxious, by the power of his Spirit, to bear record of that fact to all honest truth seekers in the world, in which event they then know of the divinity of the work; and if they are willing to abide and walk in the light, having the courage of their convictions, they come and join with the Saints of God and get on the path leading to eternal life.

May I quote the words that God himself said in bearing record of the divinity of the Book of Mormon, and make them my testimony also? He said of Joseph Smith, "... he has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true." (D&C 17:6.)

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Field White to Harvest— South America

President A. Theodore Tuttle
Of the First Council
of the Seventy

My dear brothers and sisters:

Within the month Sister Tuttle and I stood in the mountain fastness of the Andean highlands. We were visiting among the Indian people, where recently we have established the Church.

They live today much as they lived in centuries past—in the age of the hand scythe and the crooked stick for a plow. Acres of ground are still cultivated by a farmer using his foot plow with two handles, designed in the days of the Incas.

High in the Andes the Indians cultivate small farms which, like a patchwork quilt, cover the mountains from the crest to the river. Adobe mud huts, with their thatched roofs showing shaggy-like, dot the landscape. Judged by our luxurious standards, their huts are pitiful indeed. For hundreds of thousands existence is bare.

In many places in the Cordillera

[Andean mountain range] they thresh as in the days of the Savior. Oxen tread the grain, and it is winnowed in the wind. Burdens are carried on colorful llamas or burros or, more likely, the human back.

The women's blouses of bright hues are softened by the earth tones of their homespun skirts. Long black braids, often interwoven with bright strips of cloth, are topped by a white straw hat or a colored felt derby, denoting their clan or city. In addition to their *manta*, or shawl, they always carry a baby wrapped in a blanket deftly tied across their shoulders, with often another child or two trotting at their side.

Men and boys wear knee-length trousers and plain short jackets of homespun, with undershirts of once bright colors. Knit caps with ear flaps and the necessary poncho complete their attire. If sandals are worn, they are cut from old tire treads. More often than not the men go barefoot.

Their hillside plots produce crops of corn, small potatoes, grains, and vegetables. Everybody works. Old women tend the babies, spin and knit, cook the meager meals. Small children scantily dressed in oft mended clothing carry water and help gather herbs for food. Always there is the tending of flocks of llamas which graze with the sheep on the rocky hillsides or eat tethered in the fields. An occasional team of oxen and the ever present burro completes the landscape scene in the high Sierras. There is evidence of poverty everywhere.

But it was not always so.

The Book of Mormon is the word of God and is a record of his ministry among the ancestors of these Indians. Columbus named them Indians. He thought he had discovered the Indies. In reality they are Lamanites. They are descendants of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. The account of their religious experiences was written in hieroglyphics upon plates and handed down from one generation to another, overspreading a 2,600 year period.

The Book of Mormon recounts the departure of these Israelites from their homeland. It says they built ships; crossed the ocean; erected cities; constructed highways; engaged in merchandising, industry, and shipping. It tells of their growth from a few families to hundreds of thousands of people.

It describes their destructive wars and warns of the decline of this once enlightened people. But their prophets foresaw a restoration of their former blessings after the restored gospel is taught to them.

Most important, however, this ancient scripture declares unequivocally that the Risen Christ walked and talked with the people on this the American continent. This religious record relates the calling of the Twelve

Apostles and the establishment of his Church on this hemisphere. The Book of Mormon sets forth in clarity and plainness the teachings of the Resurrected Lord as he sojourned with these people for a brief season. It has rightly been called the Bible of the Western Hemisphere.

Today Indian legends still contain fragmentary accounts of a great Personage who long ago visited among them. Known among different tribes by a variety of names, he is nevertheless always described in similar terms.

Today these people, whose ancestors saw the Risen Christ, number in the millions. They range from Canada to la Tierra del Fuego. In North America many dwell on reservations. Thousands are scattered throughout Mexico and Central America. In South America they live in the jungle and on the tops of the Andes. The blood of this chosen people flows in the veins of many of those who live south of the Rio Grande.

There is a gradual awakening of responsibility to the Lamanites. Their governments have helped. Roads are being opened to their formerly inaccessible retreats. Land reforms are becoming effective. Rudimentary education is filtering down to them.

Private foundations such as the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, the Peace Corps, and some universities are working among them.

Unfortunately their religion, the influence that should have been the greatest, rather than redeeming, has subjugated them.

Our efforts among these Lamanite people in South America are just beginning, but hold great promise. They are ready to accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. They are disenchanted with their present subjugated conditions. They are eager and capable of providing their own leadership. They love to learn, to act, to speak, to teach, and to sing. They have an insatiable thirst for knowledge. But they have no books, no equipment, no notebooks, no classrooms, no teachers.

From our past short experience we know that we can provide much that they need. We have the plan and organization to meet their needs.

Through the priesthood quorums the brethren have and can sponsor projects which demonstrate the practical application of theology to daily life—something these people have never seen. Simple projects like making windows in houses to let in not only physical but spiritual light, hanging doors, planting flowers, and erecting centers for education—this is religion in action.

The women's Relief Society organization provides opportunity for girls and mothers to learn home management, baby care, cleanliness. It opens up vistas of service heretofore unknown. The Relief Society motto, "Charity