

Truth and Knowledge

MARION G. ROMNEY

I feel honored, brothers and sister, to have been invited to address this devotional assembly and dedicate the enlarged Harold B. Lee Library. It is always an inspiration to be on the campus of this great University in the presence of President Oaks, faculty members, and you students. And it is a distinct and much-appreciated privilege to pay respect to our late Church prophet, president, and my close friend and associate, Harold B. Lee.

More than any other institution, the library of a university [to quote Dr. Lyman Tyler] “is the custodian of the world’s actual knowledge and the reservoir of its potential knowledge.” It preserves and makes available the results of previous human seeking. It makes possible a fruitful continuation of that search. . . . “A quality education is impossible without a quality library.” [Brigham Young Alumnus, September–October 1961, p. 2]

I shall not here undertake to describe nor to appraise the merits of the library. Each of you have had and will yet have better opportunities to do this than will I. We are grateful for it and want to make maximum use of it as we follow the Lord’s direction to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people”

(D&C 90:15). For, said he, “it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge,” added the Prophet Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* 4:588).

The Lord also said that “the glory of God is intelligence” (D&C 93:36) and that

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. . . .

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. [D&C 130:18–19]

And again, “Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that you should . . . obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53).

Brigham Young University was established, as we all know, to facilitate our compliance

Marion G. Romney was second counselor in the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 15 March 1977.

with these commandments. A major reason for the establishment of the J. Reuben Clark Law School here on the BYU campus was that there might be an institution in which students could obtain a knowledge of the laws of man in light of the laws of God. For this same purpose the enlarged Harold B. Lee Library is to be dedicated today.

All knowledge and learning available in the library, however, is not of equal value. The knowledge in which we are particularly interested is that referred to by the Lord when he said: "Truth and Knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). Having so declared, the Lord added: "Whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning (D&C 93:25).

The resources of the enlarged library will contain much information which will contribute to a knowledge of the truth; that is, to a "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come." Unfortunately they will also contain more or less of that information which the Lord says "is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning" (D&C 93:25). Our great challenge is to be able to always distinguish between the two kinds of information. My purpose in these remarks is to review and emphasize the basic knowledge revealed by the Lord, by means of which the distinction between these types of knowledge can always be made. These bases concern (1) God—his identity and nature; (2) man—his origin and potentiality; and (3) the purpose of mortal life. An understanding of these three bases and a constant use of them is indispensable to the attainment of a knowledge of the *truth* as defined by the Lord.

As to the first base, "God himself" as described by the Prophet Joseph Smith who had seen him

was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great

secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.

[Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 345]

With respect to *man*, the psalmist, as he considered the wonders of the heavens, observing the sun, the moon, and stars moving in their glory, and contemplated the creations of the earth, the beasts of the field, the fish "and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:8, and then beheld man in his majestic preeminence among them all, cried out:

O Lord . . .

what is man, that thou art mindful of him? . . .

. . . Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. [Psalm 8:1, 4–6; emphasis added]

Perhaps no one has put the query in more picturesque language than has the psalmist. But he was neither the first nor the last to raise the question, "What is man?" "From the days of the first apostasy—the heathen in his idolatry, the savage in his ignorance, the scholar in his study, the scientist in his laboratory, the philosopher in his musings—all men—Christian, falsely so-called, and pagan—ignorant of divine revelation, have stood confounded before the question" (Anonymous). I suppose there were never so many people so confounded about that question as there are today.

I am advised that recently a member of a so-called Christian church claiming a membership of millions said that that church does not believe in man's preexistence; that it believes and teaches that God created man at the time he came into this world; that He created him out of nothing, not in the likeness of God, because God is a mystery and has no manlike semblance; that, though man will persist in some manner after death, he will not go on in eternal progression. Such ignorance of God and man's relationship to him has prepared the seedbed which has sprouted the troubles that today vex men and nations. And one of the saddest things about it all is the fact that such ignorance has been, and now is, willful and manmade. Of course, men have had guidance from Satan in their descent into darkness, but that guidance has been voluntarily accepted.

All through the ages "the light [has been shining] in [the] darkness, and the darkness [has comprehended] it not" (D&C 6:21). Men need not have been so uninformed on this most vital matter. To Adam, the first man, God revealed himself as the Father of man. And he has renewed that revelation in every dispensation since.

In the Garden of Eden, both before and after the Fall, God walked and conversed with Adam, who was his son, even as one man walks and talks with another. After Adam was driven from the Garden, he was visited and taught the truth of these things by holy beings from the presence of God.

And Adam and Eve . . . made all things known unto their sons and their daughters.

And Satan came among them, saying: I am also a son of God. [Moses 5:12–13]

This claim by Satan that he was "also a son of God" is proof that he knew Adam had instructed his children and that they knew that they were sons and daughters of God. While admitting that he and Adam's children were

the sons of God, he commanded them not to believe what Adam and Eve had taught them, "and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish. Doing so is their own responsibility, however; it is not God's because under his direction

the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost.

. . . And a [divine] decree [was] sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof. [Moses 5:58–59]

And thus it has been, and thus it will continue to be.

Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face" (Genesis 32:30). The Lord stood at the door of the tabernacle and "spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (see Exodus 33:9–11). On another occasion, the Lord told Moses that He "created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). I am not, in these citations, distinguishing between those which refer to the Father and those referring to the Son, because Paul informs us that Jesus is "the express image" (Hebrews 1:3) of God's person. And Jesus himself said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Notwithstanding the oft-repeated teaching in holy writ of the nature of God and man's relationship to him, men's understanding thereof remained darkened. To remove every vestige of excuse for ignorance in the matter, God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, in the spring of 1820 in New York State, revealed themselves anew. This they did for the sake of the whole world. Whatever doubts can conceivably arise from other accounts concerning the form and nature of God were cleared up by this superb theophany. Two heavenly persons in

a pillar of light stood before the boy prophet, Joseph Smith. One of them spoke, calling Joseph “by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith 2:17). The Son conversed with the Prophet. Later the Prophet described God as an exalted man. “The Father,” said he, “has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also” (D&C 130:22).

With respect to God and his form and nature, this is final truth. To seal his testimony of it, Joseph Smith gave his life’s blood in martyrdom. His Testimony is binding upon all men.

The fact that men had a pre-earth existence as spirits, is settled in the third chapter of Ether in the Book of Mormon. Recorded there is an account of a manifestation of the spirit Jesus Christ to the brother of Jared some two thousand years before His birth as the babe of Bethlehem. This prophet had such faith in God that the Lord, Jesus Christ, showed himself unto him and said: “Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence” (Ether 3:13). This statement is of itself evidence of preexistence because one could not be brought back into the presence of the Lord unless he had been there before.

Therefore [continued Jesus,] I show myself unto you.

Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. . . .

Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image.

Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh.

[Moroni, the historian who recorded this account, added this comment:] . . . *I could not make a full account of these things which are written therefore it sufficeth me to say that Jesus [this*

was two thousand years before He was born] showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites. [Ether 3:13–17]

We know, of course, that when he showed himself unto the Nephites he was a resurrected person, and he appeared to them in the form of a man.

That our spirits are the offspring of God the Father has likewise been taught through the ages and confirmed in modern revelation. Jesus so taught when he instructed us to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9), and when he said to Mary, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17).

Paul put it plainly when he said that in God “we live, and move, and have our being; . . . for we are . . . his offspring” (Acts 17:28). In this latter day, the Lord declared to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon that the inhabitants of all “the worlds . . . are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (D&C 76:24).

Now I have dwelt at length upon the identity, form and nature of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and men, with particular emphasis upon their relationship to each other. This I have done deliberately because a knowledge of these revealed truths is essential to an understanding of the purpose of man’s mortality.

As the offspring of God, man inherits and possesses the capability of attaining, in final maturity, to the stature of his Heavenly Father, who has a body of flesh and bones. As spirits in the spirit world, men had no such body. Mortality is the means provided by the Father for men to receive physical bodies. Mortality was also to be and is the situation in which men were to be and are now being proved to see if they are worthy to return to the Father and inherit the glory in which he dwells.

As the Lord stood among the spirits of men in that primeval realm, contemplating and planning for their growth and happiness, he said:

We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. [Abraham 3:24–26]

In this excerpt from the eternal record of heaven, the Lord refers to mortality as man's second estate—the time and place during which each person is proved. Passing or failing the test in this life is final and controlling, eternal life—joy and happiness in full felicity—being the reward for success here. The promise is: “They who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.”

With these great eternal basic truths—first, the identity and nature of God; second, the origin and potentiality of men; third, the purpose of mortality—with these great basic truths in mind, I invite you now to join me in dedicating the enlarged Harold B. Lee Library building.

Dedicatory Prayer

Our beloved Father in Heaven, in humility and thanksgiving we bow our heads and invoke thy spirit upon us in prayer. We thank thee, Father, for the Brigham Young University—for the inspiration given by thee to President Young which moved him to establish its beginnings.

We thank thee for the succeeding presidents of the Church, including President Spencer W.

Kimball, our present president, all of whom have contributed to the growth of this institution; for all members of the successive boards of trustees; for the presidents of the University, including President Dallin H. Oaks who now presides, we are grateful. We are grateful for the faculty members and the students.

We are grateful and give thanks to all who have helped finance the enlarged Harold B. Lee Library, including the tithe-paying Saints; the students, with their tuition, building fees, and through the projects sponsored by their Student Development Association; the contributions made by members of the faculty, the staff, and other employees of the University; and all others who have contributed financially.

Father, we remember with deep appreciation our late, beloved Harold B. Lee whose name the library bears. For his inspiration, love of learning, and his authorization for the construction of the enlarged building, we thank thee.

And now, Father, we call attention to the building itself—its beauty, its facilities, and its content which may be and will be used by innumerable people in their search for the knowledge thou has counseled us to seek and obtain. For all these things our hearts swell with gratitude and thanksgiving to thee.

In this spirit, Heavenly Father, and in the authority of the holy priesthood we dedicate unto thee the enlarged Harold B. Lee Library to be used by thy children for the purposes for which it has been erected.

We dedicate the land on which it stands; its walkways and other approaches; its landscaping; its foundation, walls, floors, partitions, ceiling, roofs, rooms, furnishings, other contents; and surroundings of every kind and nature. We dedicate its books, maps, and all types of teaching and learning helps. We ask thee to bless the architects, the builders, and other workmen who have labored on it, and all who will labor on and in it in the future.

Especially, Father, bless the students and others who will use the facilities of the library. Help them to never forget the great underlying bases we have reviewed here today, and to always judge the teachings of men by these truths. Bless them with the spirit of discernment and help them to remember thy declaration that "truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; and [that] whatsoever is more or

less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning" (D&C 93:24–25). Bless them, O Father, that they will not be deceived, but receive by the gift of faith a "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come."

These favors we ask, these thanks we give, and this dedication we make in the authority of the holy priesthood, and in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.