

## *“Gladly, Gladly We’ll Walk in the Light”*

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**I**t is an honor to represent my colleagues in the Department of Visual Arts and to be invited to share a few thoughts about my discipline of photography with you today. During the first decade following the organization of the restored Church, the evolutionary steps leading to the invention of photography were taking place. To non-photographers it is probably just an interesting coincidence. But, as a photographer, I find it significant that photography, which literally means “drawing with light,” was invented about the same time as the light of the gospel was restored to the earth.

A photograph is created as light passes through a lens and forms an image on a substrate that is sensitized to light. The material records only the light, not the darkness. So-called photogenic drawings were miraculous to the various inventors in the first third of the nineteenth century. And they continue to mystify practitioners today.

The word *light* is frequently used in conjunction with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We use the word in two principle ways: the light that illuminates and the light that enlightens and gives understanding. As one who teaches the art of drawing with light, I have frequently incorporated the scriptural aspects

of light in my classes. I admonish my students to go to the Topical Guide and examine the scriptures that refer to light and then apply those scriptures to their lives and to their photography.

For example, the first few verses of Genesis record that God created light and divided it from darkness. While light was created on the first day, according to Genesis, it was not until the fourth day that God created the sun, moon, and stars (see Genesis 1:3–5, 16–19). It would leave one to wonder whether the light created on the first day was light that illuminates or light that enlightens.

Ecclesiastes 11:7 says, “Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” As a photographer, I seek the sweet light—light that bathes my photographs with a warm glow and unusual brilliance.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus identified His disciples as “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) and counseled them to “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). My goal as

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a photographer has been to follow that counsel. Having produced hundreds of photographs that have been seen around the world in books, magazines, exhibitions, and on the Internet, I frequently ask myself: “Are my photographs a reflection of my testimony and are they being used to promote the values that I believe in? Am I using my talent as suggested in section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants: ‘for the benefit of those who love [the Lord] and him that seeketh so to do’ (D&C 46:9)?”

I love the familiar lyrics of Clara W. McMaster’s “Teach Me to Walk in the Light”:

*Teach me to walk in the light of his love;  
Teach me to pray to my Father above;  
Teach me to know of the things that are right;  
Teach me, teach me to walk in the light.*  
[Songbook, 177; also Hymns, 1985, no. 304]

Each of the three verses ends with an admonition that seems to grow stronger in resolve and commitment. “Teach me, teach me to walk in the light.” And then, “Always, always to walk in the light.” And, finally, “Gladly, gladly we’ll walk in the light.”

Photography, like other contemporary media, has been used for both good and evil. Sadly, the evils of pornography that are frequently preached about by our Church leaders have their most common roots through the lens of a camera. The seductive influence of advertising that lures us toward evil habits frequently comes through the camera’s lens. Practices that we are counseled to avoid are often glorified by a camera. The evils of our day are portrayed as being good, exciting, and sought-after through the lens of a camera. Think about the number of times that sin is packaged or framed in beautiful and enticing photographic images.

And yet the scriptures focus on the correct picture. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon include these words of Isaiah: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;

that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20, 2 Nephi 15:20). Isaiah’s words are easily understood in this scripture. Unfortunately, photography has frequently been used more like an eclipse than as a medium to exhibit the light.

Again I ask myself, “How do I know if I am being more like an eclipse or more like the light that glorifies?”

The Doctrine and Covenants teaches:

*That which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.*

*That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. [D&C 50:23–24]*

It is an interesting question to ask about anything we do: “Does my work edify, and does it celebrate light, or does it promote and endorse darkness and evil?”

I like the counsel that Paul gave the Thessalonian Saints: “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we *are* the children of light! We have the light of Christ! Always, always, we’ll walk in the light.

A few years ago I had the assignment of supervising several students who were completing internships in New York City. Included among the interns were photographers, graphic designers, illustrators, and studio artists. They were working with some very prestigious individuals in their respective fields—individuals of considerable influence and notoriety. Part of my responsibility was to follow up with each of the internship providers and see how our BYU interns were performing. It is sometimes tempting for the interns to try to fit in and do the kind of work that is frequently seen in the world, and they are counseled to be true to their

culture and upbringing and to “be just who you are and you’ll stand out and be noticed.”

As I contacted the various mentors, I received almost the same response: “They are so refreshing. They are so culturally solid. We love having these BYU interns. Send us more.” I recall one very important and highly respected photographer—one who we felt had given us a gift by accepting a BYU intern—thanking me for sending the intern and saying, “He is so non–New York. He is so refreshing. He has changed us.” He said it three times: “He has changed us.” He then added, “And we think we’ve changed him a little as well.”

National Geographic photographer Dewitt Jones described the difference between being the best *in* the world and being the best *for* the world. To be the best *in* the world, all of the attention is focused on the individual. To be the best *for* the world, the attention is focused on others. (See *Celebrate What’s Right with the World*, VHS and DVD [Saint Paul, Minnesota: Star Thrower Distribution, 2001].) These interns—and, hopefully, all of us—are preparing to be the best *for* the world. Always, always we’ll walk in the light.

I love to read the account of Moroni’s visit to the Prophet Joseph Smith on the night of September 21, 1823. In detail Joseph described the light that filled his room and surrounded the heavenly being. He described three visitations consuming the entire night. When each ended, the Prophet observed:

*The light in the room [began] to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark, except just around him; when, instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared. [JS—H 1:43]*

The light that both illuminated and enlightened the young prophet is also the light that the angel ascended upon. It appears to me

that in the presence of the angel Moroni—a resurrected being full of light—Joseph’s capacity for understanding and recall was greatly enhanced. He knew when the messenger was quoting scripture and when Moroni’s words varied a little from the way it reads in the Bible. It would seem to imply that Joseph knew word for word what had been told to him after hearing it three times that night and once again the next day. It would indicate, as the Doctrine and Covenants says, that “if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things” (D&C 88:67). Teach me, teach me to walk in the light.

May I share with you some examples of the light that has illuminated some of my photographs?

While en route to an appointment with a very important photographer, I passed a stand of trees with morning light streaming through the fog and the trees. With a dutiful commitment to being on time for my appointment, I drove past the scene. The image of the trees and the light etched deeply in my mind as I drove until it hurt more to go past the trees than it did to think that I might be late for my appointment. “Go toward the light,” I heard myself saying. I turned the car around and went back, hoping that it had not changed and also hoping that the photographer with whom I had an appointment would understand the priority of the photograph.

Gratefully, I found the light unchanged and I made the photograph. Later, when I drove by the trees after my appointment, the fog was gone and the light had changed and the magic had disappeared. The beauty had been in the light.

A few hundred yards from Ansel Adams’ home in Yosemite Valley is a grouping of five trees. I took a workshop with Mr. Adams in 1974 and would get up each morning to go out and make photographs. Coming upon these

trees in the pre-sunrise glow that illuminated them, I began to set up the large-format camera as quickly as I could. It is a cumbersome process that after years of experience I have been able to reduce to approximately five minutes. At that time, however, it took me from 10 to 20 minutes to set up and to make the tedious adjustments to the camera.

During the setup time, the sun came up. The trees were the same, but the light was different. The light had changed from soft brilliance to harsh contrast. The ethereal morning light had quickly changed, and I missed my opportunity. Without making an exposure I put everything away. The next morning I returned to the same spot 30 minutes earlier and again set up the camera. By the time light readings were taken and the exposure calculated, the sun had fully risen and I missed the shot again. The third morning I came even earlier. Again I set up the camera and calculated the exposure. This time I was able to make the photograph. It is a photograph that is still very important to me, one to which in hindsight I can apply President James E. Faust's counsel: "If you can't be on time, then be early."

I have to admit that the style of my photographs is not readily accepted in contemporary art circles. The mainstream art community summarily rejects photographs that celebrate the beauty of the land as being overly romantic and derivative. In a recent exhibition of my landscape photographs I wrote the following artist statement:

*I recall a discussion in a seminar class during my graduate studies. In it the instructor quoted from an article that went something like this: "When everyone was 'hot,' I was 'cool.' When everyone was 'cool,' I was 'hot.'" I feel my work—my career—is summed up in that quote. I have been doing "cool" color photographs for twenty years while black and white has been "hot." I have been "out" doing pristine photographs of the landscape while contemporary photographs of dirt and grit and decay have*

*been "in." I have never been part of the current trend in photography, but I continue to produce the work that I am passionate about. My photographs are about beauty and the ephemeral things of the world. While I photograph the landscape that seems eternal and unchanging, I am more interested in the light and weather that is constantly changing and fleeting. I am interested in things that humans did not create and have no control over—things that humans stand in awe of in spite of the fact that they have been seen hundreds of times: the colors of autumn, the glow of the land under the ethereal light of sunrise, an emotion-filled sky before and after a storm.*

*In a world where we are preoccupied with challenging the intellect, I choose to nurture the soul. I choose to celebrate the positive things of our world.*

Again, quoting from National Geographic photographer Dewitt Jones: "Instead of complaining about what's wrong with the situation, as we often do, ask what's right with it. By celebrating what's right, we find the energy to fix what's wrong" (see *Celebrate What's Right*).

"I saw an angel in the stone," said Michelangelo, "and carved to set it free" (see *Celebrate What's Right*).

Early in my tenure as a faculty member at BYU, I began photographing the historic buildings of the Church. These included the old tabernacles and meetinghouses found mostly in Utah and Idaho. When I am standing within the walls of these sanctuaries, I feel their pioneer builders' spirit of testimony and commitment. Working almost exclusively with the native materials that were found near their homes, they transformed inhospitable environments into places of worship where the Light of Christ could be felt. Their devotion to their religion and to their God is seen in the craftsmanship exhibited in every detail of these buildings. The stained glass, the intricately carved woodwork, and the hand-painted pews, doors, columns, and railings all invite the Spirit.

One such example is seen in the Provo Tabernacle. On the rostrum, located behind the pulpit, is a detailed carving created by Thomas M. Allman that extends the entire width of the stand. In the center is a beautifully carved rendering of a sego lily. During the first winter following the arrival of the Mormon pioneers to these valleys, sego lilies growing wild on the hillsides of the Wasatch Mountains gave needed relief to the destitute and starving Saints. Like manna in the desert, sego lilies fed the children of God. Seen in the Provo Tabernacle behind the pulpit, behind the speaker, it is a reminder that a loving Father in Heaven feeds us both physically and spiritually.

In addition to the tabernacles and meetinghouses, I also began photographing our beautiful temples. Everything we do in the Church today eventually directs us toward the temple. Nothing we build—save possibly the family—is more important than our temples.

I have had the privilege of doing several books with my friend and colleague Dr. Susan Easton Black, noted professor of Church history and doctrine. In making the photographs for these books, I have been blessed with the opportunity of traveling to significant Church history sites like the following and seeing them in the most incredible light and ethereal conditions imaginable:

- The Smith family log home where Joseph was living at the time of the First Vision and also where the visitation of the angel Moroni occurred.
  - The Sacred Grove. (I have photographed trees all over the world, but none are more important to me than these trees.)
  - The log home of Peter Whitmer, Sr., where the restored Church was organized on April 6, 1830.
  - The beautiful and significant valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman in Missouri.
  - The Seventies Hall in Nauvoo, which was the original Missionary Training Center.
  - Joseph Smith’s Red Brick Store, where the Relief Society was organized in March 1842 and where the first presentation of the endowment in this dispensation was given in May of that same year.
  - The newly rebuilt Nauvoo Temple seen from Parley Street—the view that Wilford Woodruff had when he wrote:
 

*I was in Nauvoo on the 26th of May, 1846, for the last time, and left the city of the Saints feeling that most likely I was taking a final farewell of Nauvoo for this life. I looked back upon the Temple and City as they receded from view and asked the Lord to remember the sacrifices of His Saints.* [Wilford Woodruff, ed. Matthias F. Cowley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 248]
- Also done with Susan Easton Black was a book on the Holy Land that included these photographs captioned with the scriptures:
- Shepherd’s Hill in Bethlehem: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).
  - The Mount of Beatitudes: “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them” (Matthew 5:1–2).
  - Sunset on the Sea of Galilee: “When they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship” (John 6:19).
  - Jerusalem, the Holy City: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood [but] ye would not!” (Luke 13:34).
  - Thorn bush at sunrise: “And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head” (John 19:2).

- And, finally, the Garden Tomb: “Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him” (Mark 16:6).

One of my journal entries from the Holy Land reads as follows:

*I find myself wondering, “Did I walk today where Jesus walked?” My intellect tells me no. But my heart and soul wants to believe that I did, and so wills it to my mind.*

*We came to Jerusalem, to Israel, hoping to draw closer to Jesus, wanting to walk the paths where Jesus had walked. Many times during our stay we lamented that we were not feeling of His presence. The schedule was too hectic or the noise or other distractions got in the way. While there were many times when we were touched emotionally and even spiritually, even to the point of tears, yet there was something more we wanted—something unfulfilled.*

*While sitting on the Mount of Olives, and again while looking into the tomb in the peaceful garden, an answer came to me, similar to the one given to Mary when she came looking for Him: “He is not here, [He] is risen” (Luke 24:6).*

*Simple, yet so profound. We find Him today where He promised we would. We find Him when we partake of the sacrament. We find Him when we are gathered together in His name. We find Him in His holy house. We find Him in keeping His commandments. I came to realize that the important question is not “Did I walk today where Jesus walked?” but rather “Am I walking today where Jesus would have me walk?”*

I invite each of you to join with me in the resolve that “Gladly, gladly we’ll walk in the light.” In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.