

The Third Century of an Intelligent Religion¹

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This is the third time I am honored to speak to the entire BYU-Hawaii Ohana. As I pondered on what to present this time, I recalled the topics of my previous talks to our campus.

At a devotional in 2001 I discussed the potential problem of “False Images of Christ”². At a university convocation in 2005 I focused my remarks on President David O. McKay’s vision regarding BYU-Hawaii’s graduates’ role in establishing peace internationally in a violent world³.

This time I chose to revisit a theme that has permeated my writings for over two decades—my personal expectations for the not-too-distant future of the Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As far back as 1998 I have been visualizing how geopolitical, socio-cultural, and technological trends might affect missionary and temple work in the early twenty-first century⁴.

Of course, these have been mere intellectual exercises that in no way carry—nor aim for—any official endorsement from the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, President Henry B. Eyring once joked that many high priests in the Church think that they know as much or more about the future of the Church than the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve⁵.

Still, I find encouragement in the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who stated:

Expanded and edited version of the speech presented at the annual David O. McKay Lecture at Brigham Young University-Hawaii – 11 February 2020

² Martins, [False Images of Christ](#), Devotional address at Brigham Young University-Hawaii, 24 May 2001

³ Martins, [An Inevitable Paradox: Establishing a ‘Peaceable Habitation’ in a Violent World](#), Convocation address at Brigham Young University-Hawaii, 08 September 2005

⁴ Martins, [‘Into All the World’: Technological Trends and the LDS Church in the Twenty-First Century](#) – Ricks College’s Issues and Events Lecture Series, October 8, 1998. Also on video by BYU-TV, September 30, 2000

⁵ Elder Henry B. Eyring, Impromptu remarks at an employee meeting at Ricks College, circa 1998.

“It is the privilege of every Elder to speak of the things of God; and could we all come together with one heart and one mind in perfect faith the veil might as well be rent today as next week, or any other time ...⁶”

With those two statements in mind, I'm taking my chances. Maybe I will end up providing hearty laughter to the Brethren who might then send me a message saying “*Good job, Brother Martins ...! We suggest you keep it ...*”

Origin of the Theme

One evening about 15 years ago I was in my home chatting with the father of two of our BYU-Hawaii students from Brazil. He and his wife had not accepted the visit of the missionaries, but they allowed their daughters to be baptized, come to BYU-Hawaii, and later serve full-time missions.

I had served as his daughters’ Bishop, and that evening he told me that in the past he had been concerned about his daughters’ association with the Church. However, being here in Laie he attended a campus ward, saw his oldest daughter teach a large Sunday School class, and met his soon-to-be son-in-law, also a returned missionary. Both of them were graduating from BYU-Hawaii and were to be sealed in the Laie Hawaii Temple.

He then said the following: “*Brother Martins, as I saw my daughters in Church yesterday, both active and articulate, I came to the realization that whoever joins this Church only stands to gain from it.*”

Since that conversation in 2005 I have been pondering on the idea that as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we practice what I call “an intelligent religion.”

But before expanding on this theme, allow me to review my definition of these two key concepts—church and religion—by quoting from my own Convocation speech from 2005:

“Some time ago I noticed the absence of the word ‘religion’ in those revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Lord speaks to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Whenever he referred to the elements constituting his kingdom on earth the Lord used words such as: articles, covenants, doctrine, church, gospel, kingdom, and law—but not religion.

“The words ‘church’ and ‘religion’ are often used interchangeably, but for the purpose of my analysis I will establish a distinction between them. So, I will define ‘church’ as an organization established by revelation for the salvation and exaltation of the human family. It is the earthly repository of oracles, doctrines, principles ... laws, covenants, and ordinances, revealed from heaven [and the

⁶ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p.8 - henceforth mentioned as “Teachings” - “Minutes, 25–26 October 1831,” p.11, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/2>

priesthoods with their associated keys necessary to teach those doctrines, principles, and laws, to officiate ordinances, and to administer covenants.]

“I ... refer to these elements as ‘components of the church.’ And I ... define ‘religion’ as the lifestyle developed by individuals and families as they follow or practice the components of the church.⁷”

Therefore, we can say that while the “church” has a divine origin, the “religion” practiced by members of the Church in their daily lives has a largely human origin—and it can be attributed to a social group, with their contact with, and understanding of, their sacred texts and experiences guiding their behavior and worldviews.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began in 1830, but the religion associated with it—or the human response to a contact with the divine⁸—began when Joseph Smith Jr. had his first vision and conversation with God, the Father, and his Son, Jesus Christ in 1820, and had his worldview and his personal assessment of his behavior and expectations forever affected by that heavenly manifestation.

In the title of my remarks I use the term “intelligent” as a derivative of “intelligence,” defined in divine revelation as “[the] glory of God ... light and truth.⁹”

As you can see, my theme is not about the next century of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an organization, since without official prophetic insight it is virtually impossible to predict future organizational developments.

As a new convert almost half a century ago I used to hear other members of the Church state that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was “perfect”, and that it had “answers to all kinds of questions.” Today, rather than claim structural perfection—which by nature is unchanging and static—I prefer to say that the organizational structure of the Church will always be perfectly and dynamically adapted to the needs of its worldwide membership as they participate in the divine work of salvation under a myriad of local circumstances. And I sense that, in general, we have reached a level of maturity that allows us to state without concern that there are quite a few important questions for which we still have no answers.

Therefore, rather than focus on organizational matters, I will share with you my current vision of possibilities that will no doubt be available to my grandchildren and two generations of my family after them.

Let me start by explaining in detail my rationale for calling the individual religious practice of a faithful Latter-day Saint an “intelligent religion”.

⁷ Martins, [An Inevitable Paradox](#), 2005 – Brackets added with a more recent refinement.

⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1923, 1936.

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 93:36

Years ago, as I reflected on our traditional approach to proselytizing and conversion, I was impressed in a new way by Moroni's invitation to future readers of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ:

“... I would exhort you that when ye shall **read** these things ... **ponder** it in your hearts.

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would **ask** God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true

“[And] if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.¹⁰”

I still find it remarkable that the first two steps in Moroni's invitation are to read and ponder. Language and analysis are then followed by prayer and eventual divine revelation. And what I find even more remarkable is the knowledge that the Almighty God wants to communicate with his beloved children in intelligible ways.

I recall a conversation with a colleague from another faith in my hometown, Rio de Janeiro, back in 1986, in which he expressed his disagreement with the concept of divine revelation. He said: “*If God were to speak to me, there's no way I would be able to understand what he would say. That would be impossible.*” I tried to assure him that that was not the case, to no avail. In fact, he was so adamant on his disbelief that he threatened to end our friendship if I were to insist that I had been the recipient of heavenly communication.

And yet, that's precisely what the Lord stated in these latter-days:

“Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. ...

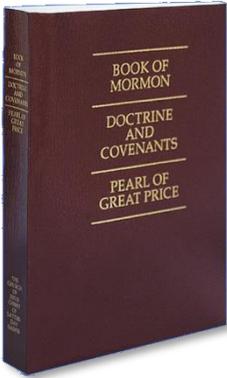
“Now, when a man reasoneth he is understood of man, because he reasoneth as a man; even so will I, the Lord, reason with you that you may understand.¹¹”

And the Lord doesn't stop there. He inspires his children to higher levels of reasoning through the power of the Holy Ghost:

“For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.

¹⁰ Moroni 10:3-5

¹¹ Doctrine and Covenants 1:24; 50:12



“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.

“And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you, which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world.¹²”

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;

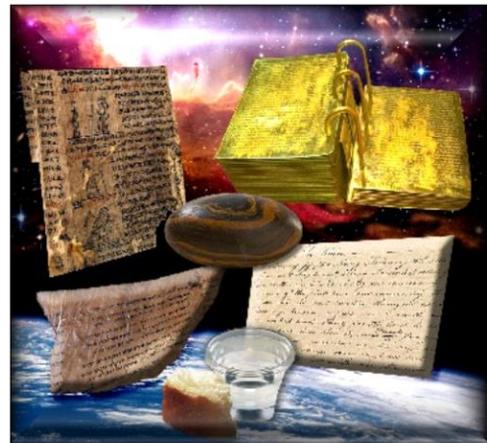
“And ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. ...¹³”

And so, for the last 200 years the Lord has been leading his people along by direct communication. At first, he spoke—or sent heavenly messengers to speak in his name—only to Joseph Smith Jr. Then, to both Joseph and Oliver Cowdery. Not long after that, he added David Whitmer and Martin Harris to the list of latter-day recipients of heavenly communications. After the organization of the Church, the Lord offered his revelations to the entire membership, as the Prophet Joseph declared:

“...God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.¹⁴”

I like this prophetic statement very much. Yet, it seems to me that often members of the Church tend to focus almost exclusively on the last part of the statement, by repeating the old cliché “*We are not prepared for greater knowledge.*” I utterly reject that belief.

Contemplating the world around us, and the amazing—almost miraculous—technological developments of the last century, how is it possible that we cannot be prepared for greater



¹² Doctrine and Covenants 84:44-48

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants 78:17-18

¹⁴ Teachings, p.149 — “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 2 July 1839, as Reported by Willard Richards,” pp.17-18, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-2-july-1839-as-reported-by-willard-richards/3>

spiritual insights? How can we see as normal the fact that we have reached such developments in multiple sciences, and yet remain kindergarteners in gospel scholarship?

So, yes, I believe that the Lord in his infinite wisdom has fixed priorities on what to reveal to his children. But I also believe that we are mentally and intellectually prepared for ever-increasing levels or magnitudes of light and truth, or intelligence, from on high, if it be the Lord's will to grant them to us.

As we consider the currently available scriptures and the words of living prophets, we often hear longtime members say that *"it's always the same old stuff"*, but I believe that if we study in greater detail the knowledge we have already been given, that "same old stuff" can prove to be surprisingly "fresh."

But how can we see these "same old" concepts become surprisingly fresh or new to us? Allow me to focus on one fundamental aspect of gospel scholarship—the divine language.

Unveiling the Divine Language

I suggest that we will find this greater intelligence "veiled" in the symbolic language found in the scriptures and in the words of latter-day prophets. Just as in the case of the Savior Jesus Christ's parables, this method of teaching encapsulates, or veils, divine insights and perfect principles in earthly symbols that can be easily understood and explored in ever-increasing depths by mortal minds. This is for our eternal benefit, as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits. This is good doctrine. It tastes good.¹⁵"



Language is so central to God's work of salvation that the Lord Jesus Christ is known as "The Word" (or "The Verb" in some translations), and he stated that all things were created by the word of his power¹⁶. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions become tools—like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle—in the great school of heavenly matters. Titles,

¹⁵ Teachings, p.355 — "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]", p.1974, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/346>

¹⁶ John 1:1-4; Moses 1:32-33

metaphors, and allegories demand intelligent analysis in order to unlock and reveal the eternal truths about God’s relationship with, and designs for, his children.

The entire spiritual dimension of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ—which include divine guidance, spiritual gifts, and the exercise of priesthood power and authority—requires language. All sacred ordinances, covenants, and revelations provided to mortals are presented through language. Communication with God through prayer—even when in thought—is mediated by language.

The exercise of the priesthood itself is inextricably linked to language. Key terminology in sacred ordinances function as a kind of “source code” to bless the human family and implement the saving mission of the Church of Jesus Christ in mortality. Other key words and invocations unlock powers, honors and privileges, some yet to be completely understood.

Adam and Eve likely had such language in the Garden of Eden, by which they named animals¹⁷, and Enoch and the Brother of Jared had such language by which they altered the course of rivers and moved mountains.¹⁸

Since spoken word is ephemeral, it can be given permanence by writing and the power of the Holy Ghost. At times the scriptures describe language being used in some rather thought-provoking ways.

For example, during the Apostle John’s great vision of the throne of God and the future of the earth, at least four times he heard “voices” accompanied by thunderings, lightnings, and earthquakes.¹⁹ He also saw and heard resurrected alien animals speaking and praising God.²⁰

“Enoch ... spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled, even according to his command; and the rivers of water were turned out of their course ... and all nations feared greatly, so powerful was the word of Enoch, and so great was the power of the language which God had given him.²¹”

In the Book of Mormon, we read that King Benjamin had the contents of his great final speech written and later read to the multitude²². Yet, when the resurrected Savior

¹⁷ Abraham 5:20-21

¹⁸ Moses 7:13; Ether 12:30

¹⁹ Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:15, 19; 16:18

²⁰ The Prophet Joseph Smith explained: “I suppose John saw beings there of a thousand forms, that had been saved from ten thousand times ten thousand earths like this ... John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them ... they were seen and heard by John praising and glorifying God.” - *Teachings*, p.291 – “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p.1523, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166>

²¹ Pearl of Great Price - Moses 7:13

²² Mosiah 2:8

Jesus Christ visited the Nephites and Lamanites, a multitude of about 2500 people testified that Jesus prayed to the Father speaking great and marvelous things which they “saw and heard²³”.

These statements have been in my mind for a long time—voices associated with thunder, lightning, and earthquakes; a powerful language that commands changes in the physical environment; and “seeing and hearing” a prayer from a member of the Godhead.

Some might say that I am interpreting these passages too literally. But one of the lessons I learned when I retranslated the Book of Mormon into Portuguese in the early 1980s is that we must trust the terminology used by the prophets. At times, some of those words and expressions may not make much sense in our days, but they may convey ideas that will be understood and appreciated by others years or decades later. That reminds me of the words from the Prophet Joseph Smith about the powerlessness of the existing mortal languages:

We must trust the terminology used by the prophets.

“[The] things that are written are only hints of things which existed in the prophet’s mind, which are not written concerning eternal glory.²⁴”



“Oh, Lord, when will the time come when ... we may stand together and gaze upon eternal wisdom engraven upon the heavens ... until we may read the sound of eternity, to the fulness and satisfaction of our immortal souls?”

“Oh, Lord, deliver us in due time from the little, narrow prison, almost as it were, total darkness of paper, pen and ink—and a crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language.²⁵”

Yet, the Lord wants his people to be educated about “things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth” and He added: “... That ye may be prepared in all things ... to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you ... by study and also by faith²⁶”.

²³ 3 Nephi 17:16-17

²⁴ Teachings, p.304 – “Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p.[213], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-may-1843-as-reported-by-willard-richards/3>

²⁵ History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1:300 - <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letterbook-1/16> - accessed 04 July 2019

²⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 88:77-80, 118

That being the case, how can we use our imperfect mortal languages to explore the seemingly infinite domain of earthly and heavenly things, and serve the Lord in magnificent ways?

Fortunately, the Lord provided means for us to accomplish those learning objectives. Throughout the history of the world he has taught his prophets by way of parables, “signs ... wonders ... types, and shadows²⁷”. The Prophet Alma declared: “... all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.²⁸”

Therefore, we are surrounded with symbolic elements that, once studied in detail, can give us greater views about God, his kingdom, our familial relationship with him, and the glories he has in store for us through his plan of salvation.

Allow me to list a few of the most obvious symbols for our personal study:

| Symbolic Elements for Further Study* | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| The Human Body Aspects of the Atonement, Righteousness and Mortal Conditions | | Institutions & Activities Aspects of God's Kingdom and Relationship with his children | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arm • Blood • Bone marrow • Bowels • Digestion • Eyes • Feet • Fingers • Flesh • Hand • Head • Heart | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kidneys (a.k.a. Reins) • Lips • Navel • Neck • Nose • Reproduction • Rib • Running • Sleep • Tendons • Walking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bride • Cloud • Fold • Garden • Groom • House • Mansion • Marriage • Mountain • Names | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenthood • Pasture • Pillar • Rock • Sea • Sheep herding • Sleep • Tent • Tower • Wall |
| * Not a complete list | | Dr. Marcus H. Martins, 2020 | |

²⁷ Mosiah 3:15; Doctrine and Covenants 88:61; 101:43

²⁸ Alma 30:44

| Symbolic Elements for Further Study* | | |
|---|---|--|
| Accessories Characteristics & Effects of Priesthood Power and Authority | Food & Drink Facets of the Atonement and Covenants | Animals Facets of the Atonement, Power, and the House of Israel |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonds • Brass • Burning • Cuts • Fire • Glass • Incense • Iron • Key • Keywords • Language • Light • Music (1) • Rod • Seals • Smoke • Staff • Stake • Stubble • Sword • Tongue • Veil (as in Curtain) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cap (as in Headwear) ○ Cloak (a.k.a. Mantle) ○ Footwear ○ Girdle (a.k.a. Sash) ○ Robe ○ Veil (as in Headwear) • Colors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blue ○ Gold ○ Green ○ Purple ○ Red ○ White • Mathematics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Angles ○ Circle ○ Infinity ○ Line • Vibrations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Earthquake ○ Music (2) ○ Thunder ○ Tremor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread • Butter • Fat • Fig • Flour • Grape • Honey • Milk • Olive oil • Pomegranate • Salt • Water • Wine • Yeast |
| * Not a complete list | | Dr. Marcus H. Martins, 2020 |

Observe how diverse disciplines like Agriculture, Anatomy, Animal Science, Anthropology, Architecture, Biology, Clothing and Textiles, Food and Nutrition, Geography, Geology, History, Law, Mathematics, Medicine, Metallurgy, Music, Physics, Physiology, and Sociology—all provide detailed insights that can become vital information for our study of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

I recall past conversations with several colleagues from multiple academic disciplines about some of these elements.

Professors Susan Barton and Russel Carlson refined my understanding of the mathematical concept of infinity. I once shared with Professor Daniel Scott my speculation about the interaction between matter, time, and priesthood power²⁹. Thinking about the Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement that spirit is a “substance ... more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body³⁰”, I asked Professor Michael Weber if he

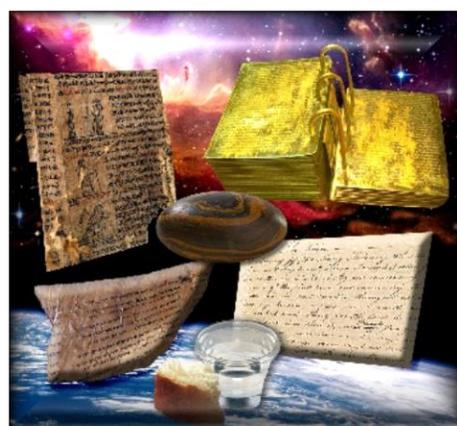
²⁹ [“To Be Learned is Good”: A Meditation on Priesthood and Time](#) - BYU-Hawaii’s Honors Night – 30 May 2017

³⁰ The Prophet Joseph Smith stated: “[The] spirit is a substance; ... it is material, but ... it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body; ... it existed before the body, can exist in the body, and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it.” *Teachings*, p.207 – “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November

could educate me on the physics of elasticity. Considering Moroni's invitation to ponder, I often think of Professor Neil Anderson's convocation speech on increasing metacognitive engagement, or as he stated, "thinking about thinking."³¹ And professors Matthew Bowen and Daniel Sharp have enlightened me many times regarding key terminology used in the original languages of the Bible.

Since heavenly manifestations sometimes include music performed by celestial beings³², I wonder what personal impressions professors Darren and Jennifer Duerden, and Daniel Bradshaw would have to offer about a connection between music and heavenly power. Could earthly sound waves, enhanced by the power of the Holy Ghost³³, resonate with the priesthood itself? Would it be possible for those sanctified vibrations to cause spiritual and physical effects on both body and spirit?

Multiple academic disciplines can help us learn details about all these symbolic elements and expressions used in the scriptures and other sacred texts and narratives. Then, through the power of the Holy Ghost we can enlarge our understanding of how they function as symbols in God's curriculum for salvation and exaltation, how they help us comprehend the language of the Godhead, and perhaps even how we might better exercise our discipleship and the authority of the priesthood in the divine work of salvation.



Or, putting in other words, all matter on this earth was created first spiritually³⁴, and as the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "... all things may have their likeness, and that they may accord one with another—that which is earthly conforming to that which is heavenly ..."³⁵ Based on this we understand that there are spiritual and celestial counterparts to all these symbolic elements used in the ordinances and ceremonies of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

By faith we follow the divinely revealed instructions on how to employ these earthly symbolic elements, which through the official exercise of the authority of the priesthood in ordinances and other sacred ceremonies are connected with their heavenly counterparts by the power of the Holy Ghost³⁶. The effects of that connection between

1838–31 July 1842],” p. 1307, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/481>

³¹ Neil Anderson, [Increasing Metacognitive Engagement](#), Convocation address at BYU-Hawaii, 27 September 2018

³² Job 38:7; Revelation 5:9; 14:3; 1 Nephi 1:8; Alma 36:22

³³ Elder James E. Talmage wrote: “Gravitation, sound, heat, light, and the still more mysterious and seemingly super-natural power of electricity, are but the common servants of the Holy Ghost in His operations.” - [Articles of Faith](#), p.166

³⁴ Moses 3:5, 7

³⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 128:13

³⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 84:20-21; 20:60; Moroni 3:4

the earthly and the heavenly often are not visible to mortal eyes, but exercising what ancient prophets called “an eye of faith³⁷,” we visualize those effects, and in time we acknowledge them in our lives as blessings and miracles.

Earthly Imitations of the Divine Language

Again, using the Apostle John’s account as an example, he saw animal symbols also used by the adversary as imitations of the symbolic divine language³⁸. By this, John was being warned to dangers that would lie ahead. We likewise can only avoid being deceived if we understand the meanings conveyed by the true divine symbols.

Since the beginning of the mortal phase of the plan of salvation, the adversary has been usurping authority and introducing false imitations of the divine symbolic language via all kinds of apostate religious practices. As the years go by prior to the second coming of the Savior Jesus Christ, we can expect ever more sophisticated attempts by the adversary to introduce “secular imitations” of true eternal principles, created by “dressing up” ever-changing mortal social norms and traditions with a veneer of scriptural passages to give them an air of religiosity.

If believed, these “secular look-alikes” of divine principles could cause a reduction in the power and solidity of a person’s faith. Only proper understanding of the symbolic representations of true principles can avoid that.

Allow me to provide two examples of these “secular look-alikes”—one focusing on love and another on authority—both examples taken from my forthcoming book on the doctrine of the priesthood³⁹.

Limited Earthly Versions of Love

There are several definitions and dimensions for “love,” but in the righteous aspiration to become sons and daughters of God—or those who are heirs of his kingdom according to eternal laws and covenants⁴⁰—the highest or purest description of love was given by the Savior Jesus Christ himself:

“I am the good shepherd ... I lay down my life for the sheep. ... Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.⁴¹”

³⁷ Alma 5:15; 32:40; Ether 12:19

³⁸ This is just a passing remark, since the Prophet Joseph Smith stated: “It is not essential for the elders to have knowledge in relation to the meaning of beasts, and heads and horns, and other figures made use of in the revelations; still, it may be necessary, to prevent contention and division and do away with suspense.” - Teachings, p.287 – “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p.1522, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/165>

³⁹ Martins, The Priesthood: Earthly Symbols and Heavenly Realities, forthcoming

⁴⁰ Mosiah 15:11-13

⁴¹ John 10:14-15, 17-18

The Savior's mission involved consecrating his body—including his desires, appetites, and will—to accomplish the will of God the Father, by suffering the full measure of the wrath of God to atone for the sins of the human family. Our mission involves consecrating our bodies to accomplish the will of the Father in faith and obedience to his commandments and service in his kingdom.

That leads us to define love as a feeling expressed, in its highest and most refined form, through virtues perfectly exemplified by the Savior during his ministry, in ways that will lead us to "... become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him ...⁴²".

Based on the doctrine of the priesthood, we can say that love—both romantic love as well as the familial love between parents and children—is a divine gift, not only for the mere enjoyment of a wonderful feeling, but also to refine, uplift, perfect, and one day exalt a man and a woman sealed together by the authority of the priesthood, and their family, in the highest heaven of the celestial glory⁴³. This love, in its purest form, produces relationships so refined that their participants will desire them to last forever, and that will inspire them to enter into and honor eternal laws and covenants.

On the other hand, if a true principle like love is defined and practiced in a way that disconnects it from the doctrine of Christ and the priesthood, that love, even though satisfying, is an earthly imitation of the perfect divine love. Manifestations of this love, like romance and friendship are beautiful and satisfying, but without the power of the Savior's atonement it cannot neither completely perfect nor sanctify us. And without the authority of the priesthood and a firm connection to heavenly power through sacred covenants, one would fail to fully appreciate the eternal possibilities that await the faithful in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage and possibly in other still unknown eternal associations.

[Earthly Imitations of Authority](#)

The foundational principles of priesthood government are radically different than those traditionally employed in most imperfect worldly institutions throughout human history. The mortal exercise of power employs what we might call an "apostate" or "distorted" form of governance, a principle called by Korihor, an Anti-Christ in the Book of Mormon, as "the management of the creature"⁴⁴. But instead of the contemporary meanings for that word, in Korihor's false philosophy "management" implied unrighteous coercive control by man, and according to the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of the original record, Korihor stated that such coercive control was directed towards "the creature," not "fellow beings".

⁴² Moroni 7:48 – brackets added

⁴³ Doctrine and Covenants 131:1-2; 18:15-16

⁴⁴ Alma 30:17

Throughout history we find that in imperfect worldly institutions men, and at times women, exercised this “management of the creature” by inflicting public humiliation, extreme physical pain and discomfort, death, or the mere fear of those actions, over their fellow human beings whom members of any self-proclaimed “dominant” social class refused to regard as their equals. Hence, all kinds of brutal and inhumane devices were employed and justified to control or subjugate the masses—tyranny, slavery, and torture, with the associated racial, ethnic, and class prejudices that supported those practices by giving them a false veneer of rationality and legality.

The divine filiation and potential for exaltation of human beings makes the principles of priesthood government and leadership be egalitarian in nature, in stark contrast with those of the fallen world, as expressed in the prophetic counsel: “... Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another ...⁴⁵” Even in the exercise of religious authority, this principle states: “... the priest, [did] not [esteem] himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal ...⁴⁶”

These two examples show how significant it is for us to understand the symbols embedded in the divine language, so we can avoid exercising our faith in mere earthly resemblances of eternal principles and virtues.

Heavenly Power Embedded in Divine Language

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained the importance of obtaining knowledge through divine revelation, saying:

“In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because he has greater knowledge; and hence he knows how to subject all other beings to Him.⁴⁷”

“A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.⁴⁸”

Therefore, we see that a more detailed understanding of the divine language used in the scriptures and other revelations contained in the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ will help us avoid putting our faith in limited earthly imitations of glorious eternal

⁴⁵ Mosiah 23:7

⁴⁶ Alma 1:26 – brackets added

⁴⁷ Teachings, p.288 – “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1522, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/165>

⁴⁸ Teachings, p.217 – “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda,” p. 63, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 26, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-addenda/63>

principles, and thus keep a faithful person exercising love and other principles in ways that will lead to exaltation and eternal life.

The quality and durability of our religious practice, or our discipleship, depend on our understanding of the divine language. The weapons to safeguard our individual faith cannot be deployed in Church offices and meetinghouses, because the battle for our souls is waged in the innermost recesses of our hearts and minds.

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Expectations for the Third Century

Two hundred years ago young Joseph Smith started a new personal religious journey and practice after a glorious vision of the Father and the Son. As we approach the beginning of the third century of this religious practice, we eagerly await the fulfillment of great prophecies about spectacular and miraculous events that will usher the second coming of the Savior Jesus Christ. Looking at the conditions of the world around us, we may be justified in expecting these events to happen within the next 100 years. These events will no doubt cause great changes to our personal religious practices, and especially those of our descendants.

Imagine, for example, the future restoration of additional ancient scriptures, like the those contained in the brass plates⁴⁹. We need to better understand Isaiah, so we can be ready to appreciate Zenos, Zenock, Neum, and many others⁵⁰.

Imagine also the return of Enoch and his city of Zion. If we are to associate with the people of Enoch⁵¹, we need to prepare by learning enough so as to have meaningful conversations with members of a 5,000-year-old society, and learn about the changes in their bodies that allowed them to have power over death⁵², or about the urban design, public utilities and other systems of their millennia-old city, including the interaction of priesthood power and gravity that enabled their entire city to be translated.

An intelligent religion brings together seemingly mundane elements to help mortal minds to have a limited but highly desirable view of God's environment. That allows mortal individuals to endure the crosses of the world while they wait to obtain the promised heavenly rewards.

The insights gained through a more detailed study of elements of the divine language may help us better understand what the Lord has been trying to communicate through his commandments and covenants, and thus obtain greater resilience to our faith and

⁴⁹ 1 Nephi 5:18

⁵⁰ 1 Nephi 19:10; also 13:23

⁵¹ Moses 7:62-63

⁵² 3 Nephi 28:38

greater trust in God’s living prophets, in light of future challenges of an increasingly troublesome fallen world, and also possible organizational changes and doctrinal developments that very likely might happen within the next century of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I cannot predict the future, but I believe in the prophecies contained in the scriptures, and in the words of latter-day prophets about events yet to come. For example, I’m always thrilled when I read the words and vision provided by President John Taylor at the thirty-third anniversary of the organization of the Church on April 6, 1863:

“We believe that this people will excel in literature, in science and the arts and in manufactures. In fact, there will be a concentration of wisdom, not only of the combined wisdom of the world as it now exists, but men [and women] will be inspired in regard to all these matters in a manner and to an extent that they never have been before ...

“The people will be so perfected and purified, ennobled, exalted, and dignified in their feelings and so truly humble and most worthy, virtuous and intelligent that they will be fit, when caught up, to associate with that Zion that shall come down from God out of heaven.

“[It] is evident that some great revolution, some mighty change has got to transpire to revolutionize our minds, our feelings and judgment, our pursuits and action, and, in fact, to control and influence us throughout, before anything of this kind can take place, and hence it is when the light of heaven come to reflect upon the human mind, when we can see ourselves as God sees us and comprehend ourselves as he comprehends us, and understand our position as he understands it, we should have different views of ourselves than we have when unenlightened by the Spirit. ...

“[This] being a fact and these being part of the things we expect to accomplish, there must be a beginning somewhere ...⁵³”

At the beginning of 2020 some might doubt and say: “That’s going to be tough ...” to which I’d say “Leave it to the next generations. After all, you and I may not be breathing oxygen 75 years from now.”

Concluding Remarks

Before I conclude, allow me to add a personal note. This is quite probably the last time I will have the honor of addressing our entire BYU-Hawaii Ohana in a formal manner, and this year of 2020 will bring significant milestones not only for our Church, but also for the Martins Family. My wife and I will celebrate 40 years of our sealing, 30 years of our arrival in the United States, and 20 years of our arrival at BYU-Hawaii.

⁵³ Journal of Discourses 10:146-148 – April 6, 1863 – Brackets added

On behalf of my family I express gratitude to the good Lord for remarkable blessings and experiences. I also thank him for blessing me with wonderful neighbors, colleagues, 539 missionaries, and 10,338 students.

Perhaps what I have of most value to conclude is my testimony—not a testimony about the personal interpretations and expectations I presented in this speech—but a testimony of the reality of the existence of God, and that He is a perfectly loving Eternal Father who has a great plan of happiness for all his faithful sons and daughters. I also testify of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and the reality of his atonement and resurrection, and that He is the Only Begotten of the Father, and the Father of our Salvation. I know they live, and that they appeared to the young Joseph Smith and called him to be his prophet. I testify that we are led by true prophets, seers, and revelators. I testify of the truthfulness of the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon.

My membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is fast approaching half a century, and my faith and determination to strive to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ are as vivid today as on the day of my baptism. I pray the Lord's choicest blessings upon all of us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thank you very much.

Marcus H. Martins is a professor of religion and leadership and former dean of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii. He wrote the book "Setting the Record Straight: Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood", and the manuscript "The Priesthood: Earthly Symbols and Heavenly Realities". He has spoken at conferences and events in the United States (where he has lived since 1990), Brazil, China, England, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Portugal, Qatar and Singapore. Brother Martins joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1972 and became the first Latter-day Saint with Black African ancestry to serve a full-time mission after the 1978 Revelation. He served twice as bishop, seven times as stake high councilor, three times as temple worker, translator of the Book of Mormon, and president of the Brazil Sao Paulo North Mission with his wife, Mirian Abelin Barbosa. The couple has four children and eight grandchildren.

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