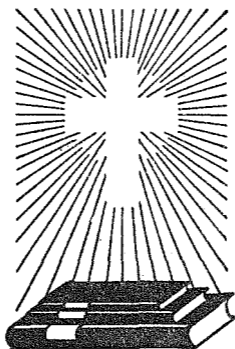

THE GREAT RESTORATION

BY ELBERT A. SMITH



REORGANIZED CHURCH
OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER DAY SAINTS

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The Great Restoration

Texts: "I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder."—Isaiah 29: 14.

"This is the lesson science has to teach theology—to look for the action of the Deity, if at all, then always; not in the past alone, nor only in the future, but equally in the present. If his action is not visible now, it never will be, and never has been visible." — Sir Oliver Lodge, in "Science and Immortality."

This church believes in present-day revelation. It is not enough to look for the manifestation of God in the past or in the future alone. Look for it now.

Jesus came and organized a church. He said: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."—Matthew 16: 18.

In one sentence he announced that he would organize a church, and intimated that all the powers of hell would attempt to destroy it, but in the end should fail.

The Great Apostasy

Following the death of the Master there ensued a great apostasy. It began during the lives of the apostles and progressed to completion during the "Dark Ages."

This apostasy was clearly foretold by the prophet. Paul said that for three years, with tears, night and day, he warned the church. (See Acts 20: 28-31.) Other texts may be studied, as follows: 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3, 4; Galatians 1:6-10; 2 Peter 2: 1-3; Amos 8: 11, 12; Isaiah 60: 2.

Both secular and ecclesiastical histories record this dark apostasy. The light of literature, art, and religion went out. The world reeked with corruption. The church became as bad as the world, even selling indulgences to commit sin.

This apostasy must be admitted by all Protestants—otherwise there is no excuse for the existence of Protestant churches.

The Way of Recovery

What was the way of recovery from this condition? The gates of hell were not to prevail, though they seemed to do so for a time.

Two ways suggest themselves: Reformation or Restoration. For those who did not believe in continued revelation the only course was reformation. We believe in continued revelation and in restoration.

If a man had married a lovely bride and had gone to a far country and during his absence his wife had been driven away and her place taken by a degraded wanton—when the time came to return, which would he choose, reformation or restoration?

John says (Revelation 12) that he saw a beautiful woman, clothed in the glory of the sun. She represented the church, the Bride, the Lamb's wife. A monster made war against her so that she fled away to a place prepared for her. The church was taken away. He saw her place taken by a dissolute woman (Revelation 17) sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, herself decked in gaudy colors, having a cup in her hand filled with abominations. Another church had taken the place of Christ's church.

Would Jesus want this church reformed to be his bride? Or does he, too, stand for restoration? Undoubtedly the latter.

The Reformation

There can be no question that the reformers were, many of them, brave and noble men. But they did not claim to restore the church. And they seemed to look for something in the way of a great restoration.

John Wesley said that the time of "latter-day glory" would come when God would "arise to maintain his own cause, and set up his own kingdom."

Roger Williams said: "I conceive that the apostasy of anti-Christ has so far corrupted all that there can be no recovery out of that apostasy till Christ shall send forth new apostles to plant churches anew."

Alexander Campbell said: "Do not . . . the practical result of all creeds, reformations, and improvements and the expectations and longings of society—warrant the conclusion that some *new revelation*, or some new development of the revelation of God must be made, before the hopes and expectations of all true Christians can be realized, or Christianity save and reform the nations of this world? We want the *old gospel back, and sustained by the ancient order of things.*"—*Christian System*.

The Restoration

Walter Rauschenbusch says of the prophets of old: "They went to school with a living God who was then at work in his world, and not with a God who had acted long ago and put it down in a book."

Another such a prophet arose in modern times. He has been called "The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century."

A great revival service in which the leading denominations co-operated had been held in what is now western New York. This revival, happily begun, ended in a shameful quarrel over the division of converts. The young prophet-to-be had been "converted," as the term is, and was greatly distressed over this glimpse of internal darkness and dissension. He says:

"While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: '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.'

"Never did any passage of Scripture

come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. . . . At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs; that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to 'ask of God,' concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

"So in accordance with this my determination, to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

"After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God.

"I had scarcely done so when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and

had such astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

“But exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction, (not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had such a marvelous power as I had never before felt in my being,) just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun; which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

“It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, (pointing to the other,) ‘This is my beloved Son, hear him.’”

The Keynote

That was the keynote of the message: "Hear him." It is the keynote of our message today: "What does Jesus say? Hear him."

To his surprise the young prophet, then only fifteen years old, was told that the creeds of the day were wrong, and that he should join none of the churches. God was moving to restore his church.

Three years later he received another vision, described in part as follows:

"When on the evening of the above-mentioned twenty-first of September, [1823] after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him; for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one.

"While I was thus in the act of calling upon God I discovered a light appearing in the room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside

standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor.

“He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant; his hands were naked, and his arms also a little above the wrist. So also were his feet naked, as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom.

“Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person.

“When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni. That God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil, among all nations, kindreds, and tongues; or

that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.”

The Church Organized

Many things were told him regarding the coming forth of the great work of restoration. Subsequently the right to represent God in the ministry (priesthood) was restored by angelic ministration.

And on the sixth day of April, 1830, the church was organized by direct commandment from heaven, the only church in modern history so organized.

The prophets had predicted such a restoration. Isaiah had said that following the “gross darkness” of apostasy the Lord would arise and shine upon the people (Isaiah 60: 2). A “marvelous work and a wonder” was to be done in the latter day (Isaiah 29). An angel was to come, bringing back the everlasting gospel to all people in the day of God’s judgments (Revelation 14: 6, 7).

Reader, the prophet’s name was Joseph Smith. Do not reject his testimony because of prejudice. Have you heard his name slandered? The angel told him it should be had for good

and evil in all the world. Remember, most true prophets have been slandered and killed. Jesus commented on that fact (Luke 11: 47-49). The very thing happened to Joseph Smith that you might expect to happen if he were indeed a true prophet.

Be that as it may, we ask you to believe the work "for the very work's sake." We present to you a restored church. A church teaching all the original Christian doctrine. A church organized with all the original officers, including apostles, prophets, elders, evangelists, bishops, pastors, teachers. A church enjoying all the ancient gifts and blessings: such as wisdom, knowledge, healing, and prophecy. A church that has returned religion to the present tense and looks for the revelation of God now and not in the past alone. A church that believes in the Fatherhood of God and in the brotherhood of man in a real, vital, practical way. A church that is trying to build Zion today.

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