

# *“When Ye Are in the Service of Your Fellow Beings Ye Are Only in the Service of Your God” (Mosiah 2:17)*

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People, countries, and institutions usually use a motto, a short expression of a guiding principle, to identify or to represent them.

The United States, for example, is represented by a Latin motto: “E Pluribus Unum,” or “One Out of Many.” On the other hand, Great Britain has a French motto: “Dieu et Mon Droit,” or “God and My Right.” My country, Belgium, has the following: “Strength Through Unity.” Most of these mottoes express an ideal or a vision of expectation related to unity among people, and many refer to deity. Israel, for example, is using unofficially a very interesting one-word motto: “Resurrection.”

What about this institution, Brigham Young University? Passing through the west entrance to this campus, you may have seen the following guiding principle: “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve.”

To learn is to gain knowledge; to enlarge your mental faculties; to acquire new skills by receiving instruction, by studying, and, as the scriptures would say, by experimenting upon the words of God (see Alma 32:27). Experimenting upon the words of the teachers and pursuing your education to finally graduate is the goal to be achieved so that, later, you can serve.

To serve is to give a spiritual dimension to what you have learned temporally. In fact,

temporal knowledge always needs to be supported and experimented upon with spiritual knowledge to produce a true and honest contribution to the welfare of others. Spiritual knowledge has no value unless it is practiced in the service of God and our neighbor. In essence, seeking learning is not only done by study (see D&C 88:118) but must be followed by works or service.

Why is this combination of temporal and spiritual knowledge followed by service so essential for mortal and eternal progression? Knowledge is one of the attributes of God; He is omniscient. In 2 Nephi 9:20 we read, “O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it.” The purpose of life being to return and live in His presence, knowledge of temporal as well as spiritual matters becomes essential to our salvation. The Prophet Joseph Smith in his instructions was very clear: “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6). The Apostle John also mentioned the importance of divine knowledge: “And this

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is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Who is the source of that kind of knowledge? "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

How is this spiritual knowledge acquired? We must also be reminded that divine knowledge or knowledge about the divine nature of God and His plan of redemption for His children is freely available simply by asking the Lord in faith, believing that it can be received by personal revelation and by being diligent in keeping the commandments (see 1 Nephi 15:11). The Book of Mormon confirms this process as we share the experimentation on the words of the prophets by Nephi. Having a great desire "to know of the mysteries of God," he "did cry unto the Lord" (1 Nephi 2:16). The answer that he received was literally a cascade of revelation for him. The Lord did visit him and softened his heart, and thus Nephi believed the words of his father prophet and did not rebel against his teachings and prophecies like unto his brothers.

This spiritual knowledge not only helped him to remain faithful to the commandments, but through him his brother Sam and many others also enjoyed the same blessings. On the other hand, for lack of spiritual knowledge and desire to find out more and because they relied on their own natural knowledge and were turned to the world, Laman and Lemuel did murmur and rebel "because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them" (1 Nephi 2:12).

What is the source of murmuring, which then leads to rebellion? It is the lack of or denial of knowledge received by revelation through prophets. This is Satan's favorite tool of destruction of souls and testimonies. This is the purpose of his work. "And he became Satan, yea, even

the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice," said the Lord (Moses 4:4). How come? Because he does not know the mind of God, and that is why he is seeking to destroy the world (see Moses 4:6).

Once again, listen carefully how the words *know* and *knowledge* are emphasized all in one verse and related to our identity, our relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of salvation:

*And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved. [1 Nephi 15:14]*

Now that this foundation is established about the importance of learning and seeking so that we can serve, do we start to discern that to know God is the beginning of loving God and enjoying His spirit, which entices us to serve in His kingdom? Do we realize that living by His commandments and loving and serving our neighbor prepares us to live in God's presence? Again, from the Book of Mormon: "And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). After all, is this not the perfect presentation of the two greatest commandments of the law? Jesus was unequivocal in His answer to the lawyer who was trying to tempt Him with his question:

*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* [Matthew 22:36–40]

How do you—as students, as future husbands and wives and parents, as citizens, and as members and future leaders of the Church—perceive this responsibility? How do you then respond when you know the value of the word *responsible*, meaning “able to respond”?

Too many today, because of a wrong perception of this responsibility, become irresponsible—meaning that they do not respond anymore to the righteous perception of things as they are, as they were, and as they are to come. Instead, they are tempted to respond to their own feelings and inclinations and the philosophies or theories of the world to please their egos or pride.

Is this the problem? Indeed it is. Let us have a quick look at the present philosophy of the world that creates spiritual irresponsibility leading to self-love and self-service instead of to the love of God and the love of your neighbor.

The problem can be summarized by an old Latin saying: “*Vox populi vox Dei*,” or “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” This was written originally by Alcuin of York, a British cleric remembered as the most brilliant member of Charlemagne’s (Carolus Magnus) entourage. He was an educator, scholar, administrator, statesman, priest, and poet. In this letter of advice to the emperor written in A.D. 800, we need to read the context to understand the real meaning of this saying: “We would not listen to those who were wont to say the voice of the people is the voice of God, for the voice of the mob is near akin to madness” (*Admonitio ad Carolum Magnum: Works*, Epis. 127, quoted in Burton Stevenson, *The Home Book of Quotations* [New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1956], 1480:15).

Through the centuries, however, this saying, now a proverb, has come to mean that the voice of the people can and ought to replace the voice of God. Translated in our day, this saying means that the so-called dictatorship of Christianity has to come to an end.

Let me quote some things that have been written recently about Christianity in the United States:

*While the United States is recognized as one of the few industrialized countries where religion is still strong, its culture often seems at odds with traditional religious values. In a recent editorial, James Hitchcock discussed this apparent paradox and concluded [that] “Americans tend to value religion insofar as they regard it as supportive of their personal lives but not when it seems to “interfere” in their lives and make demands on them. They are deeply religious in a sense, but their commitment proves fragile when it fails to provide the emotional support they seek.”*

*In support of his argument, Hitchcock cites evidence from a number of recent studies. In one survey of Christian teens, Jesus ranked fifth on their list of most admired persons (after Lincoln, Washington, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr.). A detailed survey of Christians in Minnesota found that 90 percent believed in life after death, but only 69 percent believed that Jesus actually rose from the dead. National surveys have found that 71 percent of adults believe in heaven, but only 53 percent believe in hell. Hitchcock comments, “The orthodox belief that human beings survive after death is warmly accepted by believers primarily insofar as it promises personal happiness, not insofar as it threatens punishment.” Three-fourths of all Christians think that people should determine their own beliefs independent of any organized religion.*

*The area in which traditional teachings diverge most from the beliefs of many of the people in the pews is sexual morality. In contrast to Christianity’s traditional teachings on the critical importance of chastity, the Minnesota study of practicing Christians found that 85 percent of them accepted divorce,*

60 percent abortion, 36 percent premarital sexual relations, and 39 percent homosexuality.

In his concern over what he perceived as the growing gap between traditional Christian teachings and personal beliefs, Hitchcock averred:

*“The very religiosity of American culture is often turned against Christianity, in that the entire world has now been made to seem like a spiritual garden in which people can browse as they see fit, plucking the flowers that smell fragrant. Plucking them does not require accepting the church’s discipline—literally becoming a disciple—but merely savoring the scent and leaving the rest. The ultimate test of religious authenticity is now thought to be personal feelings, which are among the few things the culture still regards as sacred. Religion has value insofar as it makes the individual feel good.”*

[See James Hitchcock, “Christianity American Style,” *Touchstone* 14, no. 10 (December 2001): 3–5, as quoted in “American Christianity,” *Information Center News* 12, no. 1 (14 January 2002): 1]

It seems that we are reliving what happened in the fourth century during the rule of the Roman Empire, when by decree of a Roman emperor the pagan gods of antiquity were suddenly replaced by a unique and personal God: Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. Today that unique Jesus Christ and His gospel of self-imposed discipline is now being replaced by the voice of the people denying His role as Savior and Redeemer of the world, rejecting His resurrection, opening the gates of immorality by refusing the consequences of sin because there are no more rules—and thus no more sin. This creates a time of uncertainty and imbalance because people in their great majority still believe in God and even Jesus Christ because of their past, but they want to be released of the commitment pattern or from being bound by the covenants in the name of individualism and pragmatism. The new mottoes are “Be Yourself and Love Yourself”; “Live Your Life in a Better Way, a Selfish Way”; and

“Your Way Is the New Thinking and So-Called New Morality.”

John Howard, of the World Congress of Families, wrote:

*For thirty-five years, the New Morality has been tearing down and replacing the accumulated wisdom of Western Civilization. The cherished ideals and standards of proper behavior were, it was said, out-moded nuisances that had to go. Previously, just as Americans would learn the language as an automatic part of growing up, they also learned how to behave responsibly, living by standards of right and wrong woven into the culture and taken for granted by the citizens. Now those standards have been so thoroughly trashed that many, many Americans live their lives deciding for themselves how to live and behave, oblivious to any sense of community responsibility. [John Howard, “Into a New Wilderness,” *World Congress of Families Update* 2, no. 37s (18 September 2001), The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society, online at [http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF/Archive/wcf\\_update\\_237s.htm](http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF/Archive/wcf_update_237s.htm)]*

This new kind of behavior is also meant to replace the two great commandments to love the Lord and to love our neighbor with the motto “Love Oneself and Serve Oneself.” There are no more duties to be considered; life is too short to be bothered by them. There are only individual rights, no more community or individual obligations. The first and more important commandment is to love oneself! We are transiting from a culture of discipline and obedience to a culture of total choice of action to decide for ourselves—to literally become our own kings. This may remind us of the last verse of the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Modern revelation found in section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants confirms what is happening today:

*And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people;*

*For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;*

*They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall. [D&C 1:14–16]*

The end result of this change of spiritual mentality and morality is a clear rejection of dogmatism and prescriptive or normative authority, where authority was giving precepts and rules to regulate life through judgments of value—the authority being represented by God delegating His authority to His prophets. It can be summarized by what a young Catholic said after attending the last meeting with the pope: “I am spiritual but I am not religious.” Once again it seems that the personal experience is more important and prevails against what religion is teaching. Where does it come from? Very simply, it comes from a lack of religious education and a lack of personal testimony. That modern spirituality—a new trend of spirituality without dogma, without reflection, without responsibility—is not religion. And thus everything becomes possible—every spiritual skidding is possible because there is no other control at the wheel than the control of the individual. The institutional control is gone, and so anything can replace the church and God.

This is totally contrary to the teachings of the gospel of the incarnated Son of God, Jesus Christ. His gospel is a gospel of salvation requiring love of God and love of our neighbor. It is a gospel of sacrifice and obligations and service. It is a gospel of love and joy and peace and

happiness by seeking to do what is right in the eyes of our Heavenly Father for ourselves and for others.

Let us conclude this examination of the problem of our day and age with the words of warning of the prophet Isaiah:

*Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin:*

*That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*

*Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. [Isaiah 30:1–3]*

It is now time to address the solution to the problem of modernity versus religion and the role that you will play as students receiving education so that you can serve in a spiritual way. You have entered this institution of learning to receive true knowledge about things as they are, as they were, and especially as they are to come so that you might go forth to serve your God and your fellowmen.

As declared before, our perception of what life is and how to live a better life leading to eternal life must be based on a true knowledge of divine and spiritual things—which is absolutely essential to our salvation. The scriptures and the living prophets have been given so that the people might have knowledge of the things of God. These things have been given, as the Lord has said, so that “you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness” (D&C 93:19). In modern language, the gospel is not a salad bar where you can pick and choose what you like!

Knowledge is one of the endowments of the Holy Ghost and one of the gifts of the Spirit. That

is why spiritual perception becomes vital, associated with spiritual knowledge and followed by obedience. That is why temporal knowledge always needs to be associated and guided by spiritual knowledge so that we can serve God.

What is this essential spiritual knowledge that is needed? It is first to know the answer to the question that Jesus asked His disciples when they were together on the coast of Caesarea Philippi:

*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

*And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

*He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

*And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

*And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. [Matthew 16:13–17]*

It is then—after knowing that He is the Only Begotten of the Father—knowing also that He atoned for the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and that He atoned for our sins in the Garden of Gethsemane. Further, it is knowing that He is the resurrected Christ. This is summarized in His own words as He was teaching about the emblems of the Atonement: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

Once this personal revelation is received, it is to be safeguarded and applied—and it always must be followed by service. Again, another question, this time from the people:

*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*

*Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. [John 6:28–29]*

And then come the well-known words of King Benjamin: “And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Certitude about the identity and the Atonement of Jesus Christ is the essence of our religion. Listen to the words of Isaiah, the messianic prophet, when he announced 2,700 years ago the birth of Jesus with such majestic unforgettable words: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Listen to the words of Alma, a prophet of the Book of Mormon: “For behold, I say unto you, I know there is a God, and also that Christ shall come” (Alma 30:39).

Listen to the voice of a modern prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, when he declared in the April general conference:

*We live in a world of uncertainty. For some, there will be great accomplishment. For others, disappointment. For some, much of rejoicing and gladness, good health, and gracious living. For others, perhaps sickness and a measure of sorrow. We do not know. But one thing we do know. Like the polar star in the heavens, regardless of what the future holds, there stands the Redeemer of the world, the Son of God, certain and sure as the anchor of our immortal lives. He is the rock of our salvation, our strength, our comfort, the very focus of our faith.*

*In sunshine and in shadow we look to Him, and He is there to assure and smile upon us. . . .*

*. . . Man would walk the ways of the world and sin and stumble. But the Son of God would take upon Himself flesh and offer Himself a sacrifice to atone for the sins of all men. Through unspeakable suffering He would become the great Redeemer, the Savior of all mankind.*

*With some small understanding of that incomparable gift, that marvelous gift of redemption, we bow in reverent love before Him. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Look to Christ," Ensign, May 2002, 90]*

Confronted by such professions of faith, of spiritual knowledge, contrasted to other temporal, rational, or so-called politically correct statements trying to usurp revelation, it seems that the words of Alma are as applicable today as they were in days past: "The great question which is in your minds is whether the word be in the Son of God, or whether there shall be no Christ" (Alma 34:5).

It is so easy to change the reality of Christ into a myth and not a fact. It seems that the testimony of a factual, resurrected living Christ cannot be accepted as it is or as it was. It is still the eternal conflict: the antagonism between agnosticism and faith, between atheism and revelation. It marks the difference between temporal daily despair and spiritual eternal joy by either denying or accepting the spiritual reality of Christ, His mission, and His gospel.

Indeed, the spiritual knowledge of Jesus, the testimony of Christ, is not a matter to be left in the hands of doubters or unbelievers. The spiritual knowledge of the true nature and mission of Christ is given for a specific purpose: the salvation of mankind. There should not be a crisis of faith or a cry for faith in the world about the way, the truth, and the life that He represents, but there should be a cry of faith that, yes, He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Finally, the love of God, which is a commandment, is never disassociated from serving Him in the name of Jesus Christ and by association serving our neighbor. You former missionaries will easily recognize this mark of true discipleship:

*Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.*

*Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work. [D&C 4:2–3]*

You sisters may remember the recent general Relief Society meeting where President Faust of the First Presidency said:

*Our theme tonight is "Lord, here am I; send me." This profoundly simple statement is so appropriate as I address you sisters this evening because so very many of you demonstrate so well this willingness to step forward and serve. You are all heaven sent. You are the beautiful adornment of the human race. Your role as sisters is special and unique in the Lord's work. You are the nurturers and the caregivers who have, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "feelings of charity and benevolence" [Teachings, 226]. [James E. Faust, "You Are All Heaven Sent," Ensign, November 2002, 110]*

Sisterhood is as divine as priesthood. It has the same source, and both have the same purpose to serve others. The basic charter for both has, by the way, the same motto: "Charity Never Faileth" (1 Corinthians 13:8, Moroni 7:46).

Working and serving together is a result of our faith in Jesus Christ. Faith must always be followed by works.

The result of service is a crowning blessing, as the Lord promised:

*I . . . delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.*

*Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory. [D&C 76:5–6]*

I testify of this truth today that God lives, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God appointed and called as our Savior and Redeemer. May the Lord bless you as you have entered this institution to never forget the purpose of what you are learning: to use your knowledge in service to God and our fellowmen to produce the fruit of eternal reward. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.