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 Proving All Things While Holding Fast to the Good
 

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# MODES OF BELIEF:

## DAVID WHITMER, B. H. ROBERTS, WERNER HEISENBERG

By Karl C. Sandberg

THE QUESTION PUT TO PETER AND THE OTHER APOSTLES on the day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?," presupposes a more basic question: "Brothers and sisters, what shall we believe?," which in turn presupposes one more basic still, "Brothers and sisters, *how* shall we believe?" The manner of our belief selects the content of our belief, and both together set our course and determine how we act in those things that matter most and touch us at our deepest places. Where the human questions and the religious questions are one.

At a time when talk about religious belief within Mormonism turns increasingly upon the relation of the individual to institutional authority,<sup>1</sup> three unlikely companions of the road, David Whitmer, B. H. Roberts, and Werner Heisenberg, exemplify three diverse modes of belief, among the many possible modes, which may help us to think about the question in its larger dimensions as well as in its particular Mormon context.

### THE FAITHFUL WITNESS

DAVID WHITMER (1805-1888) is remembered in the Mormon world principally for the fact that as one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, he never denied his testimony, even though he apostatized from the Church. However, if we read his last statement to the world, a pamphlet written in 1887 entitled *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, we can see that he left the Church not because he became faithless but because he remained faithful in his fashion.<sup>2</sup> Formed in a culture remote from the present, he nonetheless exemplifies a recurring way of believing and a kind of Mormonism. He represents, in sum, the type of the *faithful witness*.

The testimony of the faithful witness begins with a private experience, one not available to everyone, which sets the course for the rest of his or her life, by establishing an external authority

to which all subsequent questions are addressed. The experience of David Whitmer, so he testifies, was that an angel showed him the plates of the Book of Mormon and that he heard the voice of God declare the translation of them to be correct. Established by the experience was the Book of Mormon, which, containing the fullness of the doctrine of Christ, became the standard by which all further religious questions were to be decided.<sup>3</sup>

The eminently private character of the experience of the witness will sometimes require him or her *to stand alone against the many*. In the 1887 pamphlet, David Whitmer was ostensibly speaking to all believers in Christ, but was in fact addressing the three churches which accepted the Book of Mormon: the Church of Christ (of which Whitmer was an elder), the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Independence, Missouri, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under John Taylor in Utah. He wanted to leave a clarified testimony of the Book of Mormon before the world which would disassociate the Book of Mormon from the errors of doctrine, ordinances, and organization into which the latter two churches had fallen under the direction of Joseph Smith.<sup>4</sup> In the last year of his life, as the three Restoration churches ignored his counsel and followed their various paths, David Whitmer was left alone, like Mormon, standing against all of his generation.<sup>5</sup>

The faithful witness has the additional conviction that he or she has laid hold of *the infallible criterion of truth*, which he or she subsequently does not question further.

For David Whitmer, infallibility came from the seer stone which Joseph used to translate the Book of Mormon. It was only after giving up the stone in early 1830 that Joseph began to drift into error and speak revelations out of his own heart.<sup>6</sup> Just *why* the seer stone guarantees authenticity is a question which Whitmer appears not to have asked, but the authority of the stone runs like a leitmotif through the entire pamphlet.

For others, the infallible mark of truth might be the phrase "Thus saith the Lord," or the fact that a statement appears in a Church publication, or, for those of a secular persuasion, that the Party has decreed it thus, or that it occurs among the thoughts of Chairman Mao. Every group that lays claim to the

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truth has its seer stone.

From the notion of infallibility derives the conviction that the message is *unchangeable*. It has been finalized. Once the Word of God is written down, it becomes the standard by which all subsequent revelations are judged.<sup>7</sup> To trust in any person rather than in the written word is to put one's trust in the arm of flesh.<sup>8</sup> When some revelations were changed from their original form in the Book of Commandments (1833) and republished in the Doctrine and Covenants (1835), David Whitmer says, "as if God had changed his mind after giving his word. No, brethren! God does not change and work in any such manner as this. . . ." The faithful witness is not infallible, for David Whitmer confesses the errors he had fallen into, but he corrects them by returning to the infallible and unchangeable written word and hewing to it.

Allied to the belief in immutability is the conviction in the faithful witness of having *the fullness of the truth*, and for David Whitmer, the Book of Mormon was the fullness of God's word.<sup>10</sup> "The Book of Mormon is full concerning all spiritual matters pertaining to the Church of Christ . . . and we have no need of the Doctrine and Covenants or any other creed."<sup>11</sup> If the Book of Mormon contains a fullness, how can it get fuller? The part of the faithful witness then is not to move forward, but to abide, neither adding to the truth nor taking from it.

And it is on the conviction of the fullness and the unchangeableness of the Book of Mormon that David Whitmer came out from the Saints and testified of the errors of the LDS and RLDS churches.<sup>12</sup> The errors of Joseph and others were many, and in the pamphlet we get a picture of what Mormonism would be like if it had been shaped by the faithful witness holding to the unchangeable original views expressed in the Book of Mormon.

First, there would be no prophet, seer, and revelator to the Church because neither the primitive church in Jerusalem nor the Nephite church on the American continent had one. The members of the Church received the revealed will of God individually by the gifts of the Holy Ghost. If any of you lack wisdom, let *him* ask of God, and not ask the prophet, seer, and

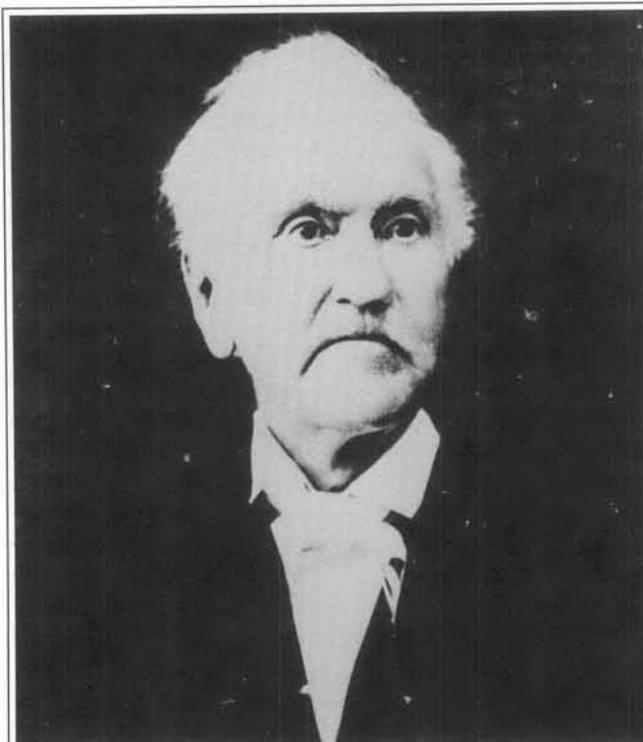
revelator to inquire for him.<sup>13</sup>

A Book of Mormon Mormonism would have no high priests, since nowhere in the New Testament or the equivalent parts of the Book of Mormon is the office of high priest mentioned as an office or a calling in the church—Christ himself is the only high priest.<sup>14</sup> The church organization among the Nephites included elders, priests, and teachers, but no high priests.<sup>15</sup>

A Book of Mormon church would have no polygamy, for the Book of Mormon is an anti-polygamy document. Here David Whitmer bears down hard on the contradiction between the Book of Mormon and later books purporting to be scripture, for the Doctrine and Covenants says that God approved of the multiple wives and concubines of David and Solomon (D&C 132:38-39), whereas the Book of Mormon describes them as being abominable to God (Jacob 2:24).

David Whitmer goes on to cite the errors of publishing early revelations when they were commanded not to,<sup>16</sup> changing or adding to revelations published in the 1833 Book of Commandments when they were republished in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835,<sup>17</sup> changing the name of the Church from the Church of Christ, which name had been stipulated by the Book of Mormon, to the Church of the Latter-day Saints (1834, under the influence of Sidney Rigdon),<sup>18</sup> and of undertaking too hastily to build up the New Jerusalem in Jackson County when the Book of Mormon teaches quite explicitly that the New Jerusalem is to be built up by the seed of Lehi, with the Gentiles and others of the House of Israel merely assisting them.<sup>19</sup>

In this light and seen from the inside out, David Whitmer's separation from the Church appears not as an apostasy but rather as an expression of his testimony. The year of 1838 was a time of moral crisis for a believer in the Book of Mormon, which glories in openness and plainness (2 Nephi 25:4, 33:5,6) and speaks of oaths and secret combinations as coming from the devil (Helaman 6:26), because here in Missouri a secret organization (the Danites) was being formed which bound members by oath to support the leaders of the Church in everything they should teach, and affixed penalties



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to deviations therefrom. All those who refused to take the oath were regarded as dissidents from the Church.<sup>20</sup> One senses David Whitmer's repugnance at the thought of swearing to do vengeance in the name of the Lord.<sup>21</sup> When he tried to show these people their error, he said, his persecutions became such that he was forced to leave the community. According to Whitmer, as he rode out of Far West in June 1838, "God spake to me again with his own voice from the heavens, and told me to 'separate myself from the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do to me, so should it be done unto them.'"<sup>22</sup>

#### THE MAGNIFYING DISCIPLE

**B**H. ROBERTS (1857-1933) is remembered among Mormons as one of their foremost defenders of the faith, rising to defend the cause of Mormonism in any situation where it was challenged<sup>23</sup> and always stating and confronting the strongest criticisms that could be raised against it.<sup>24</sup> He exemplifies a second mode of belief. Roberts overcame the adversity of poverty and a bleak adolescence in a mining camp in Park City; he experienced Mormonism as a counterbalance to the downward drag of his environment.<sup>25</sup> He became the type of the *magnifying disciple*.

He summarized his mode of belief himself in a 1906 article in *The Improvement Era*. He first quoted Josiah Royce as saying that

Disciples and partisans, in the world of religious and of philosophical opinion are of two sorts. There are, first, the disciples pure and simple—people who fall under the spell of a person or of a doctrine, and whose whole intellectual life thenceforth consists in their partisanship. They expound, and defend, and ward off foes, and live and die in one formula. Such disciples may be indispensable at first in helping a new teaching get a popular hearing, but in the long run they rather hinder than help the wholesome growth of the very ideas they defend; for great ideas live by growing, and a doctrine that has merely to be preached, over and over, in the same terms, cannot possibly be the whole truth. No man ought to be a mere disciple even of himself. We live spiritually by outliving our formulas and by thus enriching our sense of their deeper meaning. Now the disciples of the first sort do not live in this larger and more spiritual sense. They repeat. And true life is never mere repetition.

On the other hand there are disciples of a second sort. They are . . . attracted to a new doctrine by the fact that it gave expression in a novel way to some large and deep interest that had already grown up in themselves, and which had already come, more or less independently, to their own consciousness. They thus bring to the new teaching, from the first, their own personal contribution, and the truth that they gain is changed as it enters their souls. The seed that the sower strews upon their fields springs up in their soil, and bears fruit—thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold. They return

to their master his own with usury. Such . . . are the disciples that it is worthwhile for a master to have. Disciples of the first sort often become as Schopenhauer said, mere magnifying mirrors within which one sees enlarged, all the defects of a doctrine. Disciples of the second sort cooperate in the works of the spirit; and even if they always remain disciples rather than originators, they help to lead the thought that they accept to a truer expression. They force it beyond its earlier and cruder stages of development.

Roberts then comments,

I believe Mormonism affords opportunities for disciples of the second sort; nay, its crying need is for such disciples. It calls for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of its truths, but will develop its truths and enlarge it by that development. Not half—not one-hundredth part—not a thousandth part of what Joseph Smith revealed to the Church has yet been unfolded, either to the Church or to the world. The work of the expounder has scarcely begun. The Prophet planted by teaching the germ-truths of the great dispensation of the fullness of times. The watering and weeding is going on and God is giving the increase, and will give it more abundantly in the future as more intelligent discipleship shall obtain. The disciples of Mormonism growing discontent with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and departing from mere repetition, will cast them into new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development.<sup>26</sup>

The magnifying disciple thus sees the world as dynamic, not static, and is ready to respond to changing situations. The fundamental law of the universe is in becoming, not in being. Moreover, for Roberts the genius of Mormonism was not that it possessed a fullness of anything, but that it held the key to increase. In a conference address he said, "In the truth of principles we have received from God we are strong; not so much, either, because of the little truth that has been revealed to us; the little knowledge to which we have attained, but more because of the great ocean of knowledge we have access to, through one of the great principles we announce as a doctrine to the world, namely: revelation."<sup>27</sup> For this disciple, the truth, the vitality, and the value of a doctrine are not in what it states but in what it implies, and it is the disciple's task to draw out its implications.

The disciple should therefore expect that a doctrine will change as it is magnified. Faith is best defended by living and growing in response to the flux of the world and its permutations, even if it entails casting off old suppositions or forms.

If the disciple fulfills the task of seeing the doctrine in increas-

ingly larger perspectives, he or she will be a perpetual candidate, in Ionesco's phrase, for the total doctorate. The magnifying disciple has the same taste in the mouth, the same hankering, as Orson Pratt felt when he undertook to preach a "Funeral Sermon for All Saints and Sinners, and also the Heavens and the Earth." Being so moved, the disciple cannot *a priori* eliminate or refuse to contemplate any facet of human existence or refuse truth from any source.

For B. H. Roberts this notion implied acceptance of the truths of science no less than the truths of revelation. A challenge has not been answered, he felt, until it has been stated in its strongest terms and answered on its own grounds. To leave out the truths established by science would mean leaving out a large portion of Mormonism.

In the composition of Roberts' magnum opus, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, and in the controversy surrounding its proposed publication (ca. 1928-31) we can see the role of the magnifying disciple being acted out as well as its disjunction with the way of the faithful witness.

Around 1926 Roberts encountered Herbert Spencer's comprehensive account of the earth and human life within a framework of Darwinian evolution, as rendered by Will Durant in his *Story of Philosophy*. Durant recognized the implications of the Darwinian world view as the most profound and powerful challenge to any and all religions in the twentieth century especially as Spencer had extended the principle of evolution from biology to politics, economics, ethics, and aesthetics, making it the basis for a total explanation of humanity's relation to the cosmos. Spencer first concluded that since knowledge cannot overstep experience, we have no knowledge of any of the ultimates, whether scientific or religious. Within this framework, Spencer's succeeding volumes examine the evolution of life, mind, and society, ending with the ethics implied in the materialistic view. And the final word is grim—individuals, societies, races, and species will grow and then disintegrate. The earth itself will wind down and dissolve. On the cosmic scale, everything will begin again, endlessly. Defeat of the human enterprise is written into the elements.<sup>28</sup>

Roberts was horrified at the gloom and profound pessimism of the views Spencer had worked out over forty years and ten volumes, and he wanted to get into the ring with him to see how Mormonism would measure against this new world view.<sup>29</sup> For Roberts as a defender of the faith, it was imperative to respond because "religion, to be effective, must appeal to the understanding as well as to the emotions of man."<sup>30</sup> He consequently shaped *The Truth, the Way, the Life* into a response to the Spencerian view of man and his world, even to following the general organization of Spencer's work.

Like Spencer, Roberts begins with knowledge, but makes a place for revelation, thus furnishing a larger context than materialistic evolution for the formation of the earth and the development of life. Spencer's notions about the evolution of societies are leavened by a dispensational view of history with the infinite atonement of Christ at the center of it. And like Spencer, he concludes with a consideration of ethics ("the Life") implied in the previous views. What Spencer had done with materialistic evolution, B. H. Roberts would do with Mormonism, but on a grander scale.

To get a coherent picture of human life, Roberts had to part company with the 6,000-year-old earth. He accepted the record of the rocks as a repository of truth which cannot be ignored or explained away, and which, reaching back hundreds of millions of years gives evidence of human-like races that peopled the earth long before 4000 B.C. Roberts therefore introduced the concept of pre-Adamites that were destroyed in some general catastrophe, leaving the earth empty and ready to be replenished, much as in the time of Noah after the flood. And

thereby hangs a tale.

*The Truth, the Way, the Life* did not get published, because of the opposition of another defender of the faith, Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, who possessed all the characteristics of the faithful witness. Though the entire world might oppose him, he held firmly to the concept of an infallible and immutable scripture and to a world view formed in Mormonism in the 1830s. His conclusion was that the 6000-year-old earth was the lynch pin of the Plan of Salvation. The atonement of Christ depended



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on there having been a Fall, and the Fall depended on there having been an Adam and Eve who introduced death into the world. Since the scriptures indicate that Adam and Eve lived 6,000 years ago, nothing could have died before then, and no fossils could be more than 6,000 years old without overturning the Plan of Salvation. Smith felt that no responsible apostle could dissent publicly from this position. Since Roberts refused to delete the offending passages from his work, the two men fought a long and bitter battle over its publication.

During the controversy about publishing *The Truth, the Way, the Life* neither side was able to satisfy the other, and the First Presidency, whose permission was necessary because of Roberts's stature as a Church spokesman, concluded that continued public discussion of the matter would lead simply to "confusion, division, and misunderstanding."<sup>31</sup> In order to avoid controversy *The Truth, the Way, the Life* was not published.<sup>32</sup>

This confrontation provides some basis for reflecting on the two modes of belief involved. Had the work been published, it would have had to have been corrected. The science upon which the work was based has changed. Moreover, the theology upon which it was based has also changed. In getting the world peopled, Roberts developed an elaborate scheme whereby those who were less valiant in a pre-existence, i.e., the blacks, would be denied access to the priesthood. This priesthood policy was supposedly written into the very structure of the cosmos, but the change of policy in 1978 unhinged this particular theological notion. The test of the way of the magnifying disciple as defender of the faith would then be seen in the degree that it provides for self-correction.

The effect of not publishing also shows implications for the way of the faithful witness. Holding fast to a finalized doctrine resulted in a *de facto* repudiation of science in its principles and findings. Although John A. Widtsoe as an apostle continued to present a view compatible with science in the *Improvement Era* during the 1940s, the tide had turned, and the official church presented the picture of withdrawing behind a wall to assume a strictly defensive posture, culminating in the publication of Joseph Fielding Smith's *Man, His Origin and Destiny* in 1954 and in Bruce McConkie's attempt to stake out and delimit Mormonism within a strictly dogmatic theology in *Mormon Doctrine* (1960).

To the extent that it repudiated science, the Church lost both the ability to speak with the part of society dominated by science and the ability to exercise the prophetic role of challenging the secular society, since the challenge must necessarily be in terms which the society can understand. It began a current which ended in the standardization of the missionary plan and in the standardization of all Church lessons and programs through the Correlation Committee, whereby controversy is avoided by not asking the pertinent questions and by providing the predetermined correct answers to the ones it does raise. Something may have been gained by avoiding controversy, but certainly much was lost. During the nineteenth century, Mormonism met every challenge head on, from sectarian

attackers to the U.S. government. In confronting the most important and far-reaching intellectual challenge of the twentieth century, it flinched. Let us own the debt.

#### THE UNFETTERED SEEKER

AFTER a certain amount of eavesdropping on the family discussions and tensions in the household of faith and reason, it is refreshing to get out of the house and take a walk with someone unconnected with the family to see the questions from a new perspective. Such a friend is Werner Heisenberg, one of the key figures in the "Copenhagen group" of physicists who developed quantum physics during the 1920s and effected a revolution in scientific thought. The formation of this body of theory made possible the development of nuclear energy, the new biology (DNA), and the microchip.<sup>33</sup> In attempting to explore the atomic and subatomic world, physicists of this group concluded that the Newtonian principles and models which had served so well for exploring visible nature for over 200 years were not sufficient for the new task, and they proceeded to rethink the whole enterprise of science. At a time when a positivistic, deterministic science dominated Western thought generally, the Copenhagen group came to reject determinism and objectivity as principles, demonstrating that material reality depends in part on how we choose to observe it and that the cosmos is in a fundamental way open and participatory.<sup>34</sup> Heisenberg himself is remembered for having established the uncertainty principle—that it is impossible to know both the location and the velocity of a subatomic particle at any given moment. Without dipping deeper into the bottomless sea of quantum physics, I would like to consider only the qualities of mind and spirit that made Heisenberg a type of believer, the *unfettered seeker*.

In his intellectual autobiography, *Physics and Beyond*, Heisenberg describes himself coming into young manhood in the aftermath of World War I. Far from being the defender of a faith, he belonged to a generation which had seen all of the ready-made, received values of religion, society, and ethics fall as casualties in the trenches.<sup>35</sup> After much casting about, he settled on physics as a field of study—at a time and place where everything visible was in disorder, the theories of relativity of Einstein and the work of Max Planck and Niels Bohr had opened up unexplored territory, making physics a promising field for pushing closer to a knowledge of the "central order."<sup>36</sup>

To consider the biblical question, "what does it profit to gain the whole world if one loses one's own soul?", it is helpful to see what is left when one has lost the whole world and still has one's soul. Heisenberg's example is therefore pertinent, in that he shows what resources of belief are possible outside a framework of revelation or dogma after one's inherited, traditional beliefs have been destroyed. The way of the seeker begins with the realization that his or her baggage has been cast overboard and with an act of faith that even when the visible foundations have been shaken, whatever they be, there is an order which is more fundamental still and which undergirds

everything.

Heisenberg also shows another characteristic of the unfettered seeker—being moved by an ultimate seriousness about truth, he or she is never satisfied with secondary questions or partial explanations and thereby joins the seeker in the realm of religion. This characteristic also explains why Heisenberg turned away from the positivistic science of his time. It left too much out. It equated “understanding” with “predictive ability,” but one can predict the path of an airplane in flight, he said, only if we understand the intentions of the pilot, and a discussion of “intentionality” is ruled out *a priori* by the positivistic ethos.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, positivists have tended to turn away from universal questions to experimental questions of particular facts. The great values of the positivistic mode have been bought at the price of renouncing discussion of wider issues.<sup>38</sup> Science no less than religion turns away from confronting basic or general questions, thereby often turning away as well from the only means available for the solution. As Heisenberg later pointed out, “the genuine solution of a difficult problem is neither more nor less than a glimpse of the wider context. . . .”<sup>39</sup>

The unfettered seeker must nonetheless cope with established authority. In the 1920s the Copenhagen group, which today is recognized as the creators of modern physics, was looked upon as a kind of lunatic fringe. The field itself was dominated by those who believed that Newtonian physics gave a complete and adequate account of the physical world. The Copenhagen group therefore not only had to contend with the intellectual problem of exploring the nature of matter in new and unimagined ways, they also had to contend with the ubiquitous authority of the scientific establishment. After constructing a larger system that did not so much negate as subsume Newtonian physics—the Mediterranean world did not cease to exist after Columbus, but it did cease to be the entire world—there remained the task of persuading their colleagues that the traditionally established concepts and models did not work in the subatomic realm and that the new ones proposed by quantum theory did. Even Einstein, for example, was never entirely

convinced by the theory of quantum mechanics and went no further than finally giving a grudging, *ad hoc* acquiescence to it. The new theory gained ground only by demonstrating its worth. Every foot of ground was contested.<sup>40</sup>

This example gives a helpful slant on viewing authority, which works in political and scientific arenas as well as in the religion. Authority never gets in place without first filling and continuing to fill some necessary function. The mischief is that its role is most often oriented to the present or to the past; it is of limited value, and is often a hindrance, in grappling with new problems which concern the future. The unfettered seekers may be carrying no excess baggage, but are nonetheless constrained by circumstance to contend with authority by demonstrating the value of what they are doing.

The chief difficulty in the struggle to explore and describe the subatomic order was that people had to learn to think in fundamentally new ways which sometimes seemed to violate the very laws of thought. A tough-minded empirical scientist would have difficulty following the dictum of Niels Bohr, “The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the ability and the courage to rethink the fundamentals of one’s world, to accept that the world is not the equivalent of any of the forms people use to think about it or live in it, may be the most salient characteristic of the unfettered seeker. The greatest achievement of Columbus in discovering America, said Heisenberg, was not in believing the earth was round or in sailing west to get to India or that he had prepared carefully or rigged his ships

expertly. Others had thought or done as much. “His most remarkable feat was to leave the known regions of the world and to sail westward far beyond the point from which his provisions could have got him back home again. . . . In science, too, it is impossible to open up new territory unless one is prepared to leave the safe anchorage of established doctrine and run the risk of a hazardous leap forward.”<sup>42</sup> Usually science is not so hazardous and requires no more than the acceptance or elaboration of new ideas (in the manner of the magnifying



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disciple), but at the frontiers, when there are new problems to be solved, sometimes the very structure of scientific thought may have to be changed. The mettle of the seeker will be tested by hearing people all around saying that others have tried it, and they really did sail off the edge of the world.

### CONCLUSIONS

WE have then, in summary, the picture of three types of believers. The faithful witness has the infallible criterion of truth and a fullness of the unchanging message of truth. The magnifying disciple has a core of truth and the key to getting more, from which to draw out the implications of truth in response to the challenges from without. Both work within a framework of revelation. The unfettered seeker has no revelation and therefore no core, but is moved by the faith and the desire of penetrating to the central order of things, a task which is always in process and which will eventually entail rethinking the basic suppositions of the system, whatever it is. Though unfettered in mind, the seeker is nonetheless constrained by circumstance to demonstrate the pragmatic value of his or her supposed advances.

The example of David Whitmer as the faithful witness shows forth plainly the subjective character of the spiritual experiences that are the headwaters of belief and provides the basis for three remarks.

The first is in the form of a question: How shall we respond to the experience of someone who affirms an immediate experience and communication with divine beings? We cannot know the experience subjectively, although we may have our own subjective feelings about it. We cannot replicate it. We cannot get inside of it to see it from the inside out. On the other hand, if we approach it analytically and objectively, we find ourselves outsiders, much like the men who accompanied Saul of Tarsus to Damascus. They saw Saul fall from his horse and heard him speaking with a voice that they did not hear. Subjectively, Saul saw the resurrected Jesus and heard him speak, but all that those with him could see, practicing empiricists as they were, was a man hallucinating in the sun. For Saul, the reality of the experience was such that he spent the rest of his life trying to understand it and to live out its implications. The men with him presumably went back to Jerusalem, and having put in their time, drew their pay.

Spiritual experiences are supremely authoritative for the one who has them, as William James points out, but not for others.<sup>43</sup> We can only know our own experiences, and the responsibility for the significance we attach to them is total. Whether we be the fiddle upon which the forces of the numinous world improvise in their revels, or whether we be among those in whom that cord is unstrung or broken, the testimony of the faithful witness causes us to look inward. To what, and on what basis, will we stand as witnesses? If we pledge to remain true and faithful, on what basis will we answer the questions, to whom? to what? and why? In terms of the religious life, these questions may turn out to be more valua-

ble than ready acceptance of what the witness testifies. "With the endless burrowing," said Henry Miller, "a certitude develops which is greater than faith or belief."<sup>44</sup>

The second remark we may make about David Whitmer is that in observing the changes in the new church, he was right. The forms of Mormonism—doctrines, organization, and ordinances—had changed in important ways between 1828 and 1838, and have continued to change right through the present time. But in assuming that the flood of revelation could be turned back once it had started, he was egregiously mistaken. A continuing revelation turns out to mean in practice that every revelation is in some way partial and to that extent tentative, often with the effect of triggering a new revelation to elaborate the old one, making change inevitable.

A third remark is that the faithful witness, who finalizes and then holds to a fixed truth at all costs, cannot accommodate change. The type has nonetheless recurred many times in Mormonism, as elsewhere—the mode remains constant and only the content of belief changes. David Whitmer could accept the Book of Mormon but not the Doctrine and Covenants. Others, such as William Marks, could accept the Doctrine and Covenants up to but not including section 132. John Taylor could accept section 132, but could not imagine a Mormonism without plural marriage as the very bones of the world, and many tenacious and courageous souls since that time have also acted out the part of the faithful witness maintaining the pattern of the nineteenth-century church at all costs. And it may be that we also partake of this mode any time that we say "I have a testimony of \_\_\_\_\_" and mean thereby that we have baked the ship's biscuit so hard that we hold unimproveable views.

It is at times when the flux of the world is most evident that the shortcomings of the stance of the faithful witness are seen most clearly. In a church undergoing change, David Whitmer, who held faithfully to what was immutable and infallible, lasted ten years. In the end, the sure way to prove unfaithful to a doctrine is to try to finalize it and to hold to it exactly. One thinks of the late Bishop Pike's rendition of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me, not even the best idea you have of me."

In contemporary Mormonism, the same difficulty awaits the magnifying disciple: what he or she says is likewise never more than partial, and in responding to the challenges of changing times, there is the risk that the faith will merely be absorbed by the prevailing fashion, with all of its vagaries and faddish transiency. Nonetheless, it is only individuals or churches imbued with the spirit of the magnifying disciple that can exercise the prophetic calling of challenging a changing and secular world, because they are the only ones who have the means of understanding it in its own terms and thus speaking with it.

A further observation is that both the mind that believes it possesses a fullness and the mind that believes it possesses only a core to be added to are permanent features of Mormonism. Neither will completely displace the other, and the loss would probably be immense if either prevailed totally. But

a more interesting question is whether the metaphor of the tensions between the way of the faithful witness and that of the magnifying disciple adequately express what Mormonism is about. As Mormonism encounters new cultures in its missionary outreach, we may think of the white man who took a stick and drew a circle, saying, "This is what the Indian knows" then, drew a larger circle around it and said, "This is what the white man knows." The Indian took the stick, and drawing a huge circle around both, said, "This is where the white man and the Indian know nothing." Heisenberg as Indian will not let us forget that there are still other dimensions and questions of belief and unbelief in the twentieth century—such as those centering around the world views of science and the disappearance of traditional ways of belief—that have not been explored or delimited. Mormonism at one time turned away from them or did not encounter them, and yet it must eventually face them if it is to fulfill its professed mission.

Expressing the situation in these terms suggests yet another Heisenbergian aspect of belief. When the movement toward specialization in science and the separation of faith from secular knowledge in religion have resulted in an intellectual and cultural fragmentation, it is reassuring to have the picture that Heisenberg gives of a mind always moving toward the discussion of larger issues and toward the connectedness of knowledge. His example also suggests that in enlarging one's view of the world in the manner of the magnifying disciple, there comes a point when what seem to be fundamental views have to be rethought in new ways, when there must be new wineskins for new wine. What happened in the scientific world of the twentieth century has already happened at other times in religious contexts, e.g., Jesus and the religious traditionalists of his time. The same kind of situation currently seems to be urging, even forcing itself upon Mormonism, and Heisenberg's approach is as much a part of Mormonism as the Golden Plates.

But here someone will surely cry out, "Could there even be a Mormon Heisenberg? Doesn't the very fact of accepting membership and discipleship impose fetters?" And the answer is, "No, not necessarily." Fetters can take the form of creeds or of attitudes. Now the idea is old in Mormonism that creeds are an abomination in the sight of God, not because they are false creeds, but because they are creeds. This idea about creeds is as old as the idea of authority, to which it stands in tension. As for the intellectual fetters abetted by the social pressures and expectations of the group, we may remember that just as the limits of the oppressor are always set by the oppressed, so fetters of mind and spirit are always self-imposed. But can one unfetter oneself comfortably and safely within the bosom of the Church? No, but Joseph Smith, probably the most unfettered Mormon, could not do it comfortably and safely, either.

But isn't such a statement fanciful, one might ask, when the whole Church appears to be acting out the part of the faithful witness, endlessly repeating the same message in the same terms, as if the current manuals had arrived at a definitive statement of truth? It would seem so when one visits wards across the land and around the world and hears the same pre-formed ques-

tions asked and the same pre-formed answers read as the appropriate response of the class members.

On the other hand, when the role of the magnifying disciple with its accompanying independence of thought was eased out of the official church, it merely went underground like the Snake River, to emerge at a different point downstream in such forms as *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, SUNSTONE, and the new generation of Mormon historians. There is good reason to believe that the intellectual activity of Mormonism has never been livelier, and that the forces moving within Mormonism and the larger society will inevitably bring a recasting of yet more forms that were once thought to be unalterable, which brings us to a final surmise.

Mormonism is not identical to or synonymous with any or all of its forms. None of its views are unimprovable. Its genius is to push beyond. Its scope will be enlarged by those who are drawn by the tug of its spirit and who will combine the attributes of the magnifying disciple and the unfettered seeker, who will not wait further for the Church to give them what God has already given them. The Apostle Paul said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). In a time of thinking anew, the urgent task of the seeker and the believer is to ask, "Which is the treasure, and which the vessel?"

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### MY YELLOW LIGHT

Darkness takes the room,  
First the table, then the rug,  
Walls, books, pushing my  
Yellow light to the window  
Then dumps it  
Down  
Into the street.

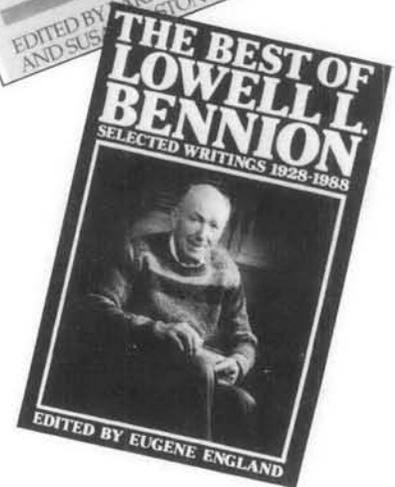
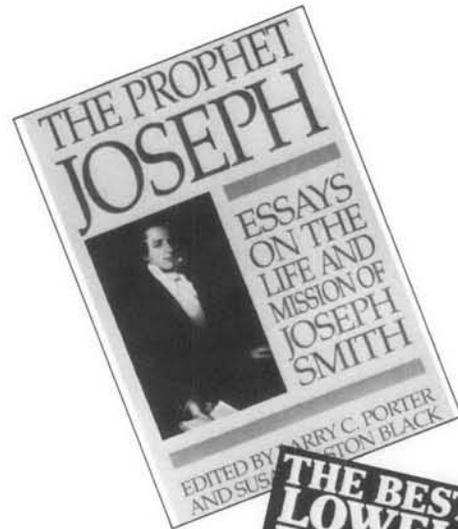
I stumble into the hall,  
Down the black stairwell,  
Then out the door  
Onto the sidewalk where  
My yellow light lies quivering,  
Trying not to slide  
Down  
The storm drain.

I put my foot on its tail  
And grasp it by the scruff  
Of the neck and carry it back  
To my room and spread it  
Liberally on the walls  
and ceiling, tacking it with  
Nails to keep the darkness  
From pushing it back  
Down  
Into the street.

—GAVIN DOUGLAS

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