

Hi Dave,

I taught the Abrahamic Covenant in Gospel Doctrine class last Sunday. Spent the last ten minutes reading the first few verses of Abraham 1. It hadn't occurred to me to read the Pearl, that's to bad, it would have been a good idea. I also avoided bringing up the question of intelligence and that sort of stuff. What I did do, was equate Abraham's sequence with the Beatitudes. "Prince of Peace," and "rightful heir" with "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." The non-Mormon scholars I am reading say that the ancient Israelite coronation anointing was a dual ordinance, making one the adopted son of God and also making him king. Therefore as "son" he could legitimately sit upon the throne of his Father. So Abraham's words and the Saviour's are essentially the same. The qualification is to be a "peacemaker". The consequence is to become a son and a king — a prince of peace.

Sunday, while I had a few minutes before church started, I picked up a book, almost at random, opened it at random and read something which took my breath away. (10 minutes later) I just went down to Special Collections to get a copy of the page I wanted to quote to you. The book is reported missing from the stacks and the Special Collections copy is the only one the library now has. I was only going to give you a sentence or two, but reread it and decided to take the time to type the whole paragraph. Nibley has put in print things I would only dare speak to my closest friends. So here it is -- but you know me well enough to know I can't read a paragraph to you without putting in my own bit here and there. So if you want the Nibley, I'm afraid you'll have to put up with my inserts as well. I'll put the Nibley paragraph in quotes and mine in brackets--but I suspect you could tell the difference anyway!

"Moses takes us back to the beginning--but which beginning?"

[Now that is thee question. Most L.D.S. people I meet sort of suppose our beginning was at the time of our birth--with, of course, some nebulous place/time (well, maybe time?) called the "pre-existence" — "but we don't know much about that." For Nibley to suggest in print that there were other beginnings, is refreshing beyond words. So I set out to count the few I know about. In addition to our birth here, there was the beginning called spirit birth, and another which preceded the Council in Heaven, and another called intelligence, and certainly another before that, and so many (I suspect) in the billions of years between then and now that it staggers my poor unschooled imagination. But then to wonder how each of those beginnings was followed by long periods of conscious, productive time in which one actually did things, and made decisions, and received and administered ordinances, is marvelous. Wondering, asking questions, is the beginning of formulating more relevant questions with an occasional sparkle of answer in between. So much for that, back to Nibley, who has no intention of answering those questions in this paragraph, but who has the glorious audacity to ASK some questions, and suggest others.]

"Nothing in the restored gospel is more stimulating to the inquiring mind than the infinitely expanding panorama of time and space it spreads before us. Our existence is viewed not as a one-act play, beginning with instantaneous creation of everything out of nothing and ending with its dissolution into the immaterial nothing from which it came (as St. Jerome puts it), but as a

series of episodes of which for the present we are allowed to view only a few. The play has always been going on and always will be: The Man Adam played other roles and was known by different names before he came here,”

[Besides that, Nibley is incredibly clever and meticulously accurate. “The Man Adam” is the name of our first parent. It is also a deliberate redundancy used in ancient writings. “Man” and “Adam” having the same generic meaning = “human being.” By saying, “The Man Adam” rather than being specific, “Adam,” he makes his subject the universal of mankind. So “The Man Adam played other roles and was known by different names before he came here,” must, by the way it is worded, refer to every one of us.]

“and after his departure from mortal life assumes other offices and titles.”

[Hamlet: “There is more to heaven and earth, Horatio, than is dreamed about in your philosophy.”]

“Even in this life everyone changes from one form to another, gets new names and callings and new identities as he plays his proverbial seven parts --but always preserving his identity as the same conscious living being. The common religion of the human race centers around that theme: the individual and the society pass from one stage of life to another not by a gradual and imperceptible evolution but by a series of abrupt transformations, dramatized the world over in Rites of Passage, of which birth and death are the prime examples coming not unannounced but suddenly and irresistibly when their time is ripe; other passages, as into puberty and marriage, follow the same pattern.” (Hugh Nibley, Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless, BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978) p. 21

There, I thought you would enjoy that as much as I did. I’m only sorry the conversation has to be so one sided.

I understand your frustration with church services. There have been times when I was delighted that I had the excuse of taking sanctuary in a clerk’s office rather than listening to hybrid doctrine which was neither scripturally sound nor sociologically current. So when I didn’t have any legitimate recourse to my sanctuary, I would go into class and just sit quietly, read my scriptures, or sometimes just be very over-aware of how much I wished the chairs were not so hard.

I got set straight once by a friend who told me that I was wrong. He said there are two reasons to go to church. The first is to take the Sacrament. The second is to be of service. The third, if you are so fortunate as to have a third, is to receive something which will make you think more clearly than you did before. He said that my responsibility was to make sure that others got that third reason satisfied, whether I did or not. He explained that one intelligent comment from me in Sunday School may be sufficient to satisfy that requirement for others, but if I didn’t attend, or just sat and sulked, then I was denying others the thing which they had come to church for, because I had refused to give. I took that very seriously (Actually I didn’t have much choice, the spirit said I must.) So now I talk in Priesthood meeting and teach a Sunday School class. Interestingly, I think I get as many favorable comments about my comments as I do about my teaching. In both I try to stimulate questions (not controversy) rather than try to give some

definitive answer. (What people think as they listen is more important than what they actually hear.) So there you are -- I have a great deal of empathy for the way you feel, especially since I suspect that you, as I, will probably feel that way for most of your life. And I'm glad you will talk to be about it, I actually enjoy your dumping on me about it. But neither the empathy nor the discomfort of the hard chairs will dilute the sense of responsibility which we brought with us into this world, nor the integrity with which we must carry it out.

That wasn't a preachment by the way — at least it wasn't intended to be — It was a way of saying thank you for talking to me; and I love you dearly; and I wish I were where you are, so my empathy could be made a more meaningful and realistic with a hug.

That's also true of your story about the better-than-thou med. student in your ward whom you told me about. But I've got a story to match yours. When I was in grad school I was also in the bishopric. A fellow grad student - he was in psychology - surprised me one day by giving me a book as a gift. It was by Stephen Covey. It was one of those How-to-Win-Friends-and-Influence-People types, but I don't remember what the title was. On the inside cover the grad student had written something like this: "I am not giving you this book because I like you, but because I don't. Please read it, you need it more than anyone else I ever met!" I didn't read it, but to show how correct he was, I seriously considered underlining his words in red and returning the book and its sentiment to him. As the years passed, I learned that our little episode was only one symptom of a very disturbed mind.

You are about the right age to be my son, and I sometimes think of you that way. May I give you some fatherly advise: Be happy, things could get worse, and probably will. It doesn't matter. The first covenant the Lord made with Adam after he put him in the Garden was : If you eat the fruit you will surely die. There is a way out of this; and we don't have to stay here forever. We just need to do our bit while we are here.

I love you with all my heart

LeGrand