

# *Out of Obscurity*

ELDER TOMOHIKO FUNAI

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*But the Lord's promise still stands firm.  
He will ... bring His work forth "out of obscurity and out of darkness."*

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It is awesome to have living apostles and prophets in our midst. As I had received and followed the inspired counsel from the past General Conference, I have received greater sense of peace and happiness in my everyday actions. I pledge my life and my obedience to accomplish Lord's purpose.

Although the principles taught in the both April and October Conference are of equal importance, I particularly look forward to the April Conference. As you know, at every April General Conference, the Church presents the statistical report from the previous year. As I have pursued my profession in Statistics, I've learnt to understand and appreciate the significance of these statistical data. In the field of Statistics, we say that the data is *statistically significant* when the observed effect on the subject is so large that its effect could not have happened by chance. This means that there had to be some other variables; we call lurking variables, which are affecting the changes in the population of interest other than the chance variable. On the other hand, we say that the data may not be *practically significant* because though the observed effect is large enough to be *statistically significant*; it is not large enough to be *practical or important*.

Though the world may see do not see the growth of our Church as *practically* and *theoretically significant*, I testify that it is both *statistically, theologically* and *spiritually significant* that it could not have happened, and it cannot be happening even right now, by chance variations alone. I testify that the hand of the Lord is in this growth of the Church. And there is no unhallowed hand that can stop this work from progressing.

But why is there so much ignorance? Have you ever wondered why so many significant spiritual events usually go unnoticed by the secular? Similarly, unlike our time, ancient nations and cultures were often unaware of each other. Furthermore, many great spiritual events are unseen by eyes spiritually untrained. President Joseph F. Smith said, "There are those--and they abound largely in our midst--who will shut their eyes to every virtue and to every good thing connected with this latter-day work, and will proud out floods of falsehood and misrepresentation against the people of God."<sup>1</sup>

There many individuals who never come inside the Church to receive revelatory and resplendent truths. These are the people who constantly misunderstand the Church. They end up believing things that they want to believe, thus they are never become aware of the "still small voice."<sup>2</sup> Some come up with their reasoning to our gospel doctrines. Some prefer to believe the worst rather than to know the truth. Some intentionally cover their eyes to see the truth pass the unapproved assertion of principles and doctrines, and refuse to see "things as they really are."<sup>3</sup> Others simply look "beyond the mark,"<sup>4</sup> thus becoming blind and become "past feeling."<sup>5</sup> One simply cannot understand the Church by remaining outside. President James E. Faust recollected a story with his personal correspondence. Joseph Hamstead, a lecturer at London University, had talked about the Church and its youth and family programs to fellow lecturers at that great university. One of them said: "I like all of this, what is being done for families, etc. If you could take out that bit about an angel appearing to Joseph Smith, I could belong to your church."<sup>6</sup>

The secular history is usually silent concerning spiritual things. Chinese people were busy cutting stones with hands and building the Great Wall of China, while they had in mind about Prophet Daniel's stone cut out of mountain without hands.<sup>7</sup> The history books are also quiet about why Pilate and Herod were at enmity between themselves when Jesus was about to be crucified.<sup>8</sup> After all, although Pilate was an

important individual to the community, he was not a Caesar! He even amnesties Barabbas instead of Jesus; a sinner instead of the Savior of all the sinners was released. Furthermore, in the book of Acts, we read about the Apostles' great success with the missionary work; yet the early Church members were merely known to the public as "the sects of Nazarene."<sup>9</sup>

We see such secular indifference and irony today. People were busy listening to the arguments among different denominations while 14 year old Joseph Smith was conversing quietly with God the Father and His Son in the grove not so prominent. When Elder Uchtdorf and Elder Bednar were sustained by millions of members with uplifted hands, hundreds of thousands of people questioned President George Bush's position as the President of the United States. Although we may have more than 122 temples in operation, the majorities of the people in the world do not even know, recognize or comprehend the blessings that are available therein. Even the great Atonement, the greatest event in the history, went unnoticed by the secular, because it was happening in the obscure Garden of Gethsemane, and on obscure hill of Calvary. These are of only few examples of spiritual events that undergo unseen.

And so it is with our personal spiritual experiences: our personal conversion, answers to prayers, advancement in the priesthood, receiving a calling, serving missions, baptisms, temple visits, etc. These are of great spiritual significance, causing us to have "mighty change."<sup>10</sup> But despite the significant influence to inner self, outer atmosphere remain unchanged and ignorant because they are caught up with secular involvements. They assume the *practical insignificance* to these marvelous events. The scriptures plainly teaches us that the "cares of the world... chokes the word," meaning that the secular events dilutes the spiritual matters, and "reject the word."<sup>11</sup> Though some of these gospel lights are small, the adversary knows what they signify, hence his disproportionate efforts to dim them. Satan will vigorously resist all efforts to spread the light of the gospel because this is his world. For instance, today we are witnessing an unending assault on marriage and the family. They seem to be the adversary's prime targets for belittlement and destruction. In a society marriage is often shunned, parenthood avoided, and families degraded.

Joseph Smith quickly became aware of this resistance at the beginning of the Restoration. Joseph observed: "How very strange it was that an obscure boy... should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling." But as the Prophet commented, "strange or not, so it was."<sup>12</sup>

The adversary will spit his fire especially when the spiritual event is very visible and powerful. Jesus declared who he was, and many disbelieved him, but the unclean spirit in Capernaum recognized him and said: "I know thee who thou art."<sup>13</sup> Satan and his legions are alert; they know Christ's Church is what it is. The adversary was aware. Therefore, it should not surprise us that as the Church becomes larger and more visible we will sail our rougher waters.



Though it was of great significance to the Latter Day Saints, the rest of the world still does not know that two new Apostles were called to witness Living Christ.

While Holy Ghost is constantly opening the eyes of ones who are lost "because they know not where to find [the truth],"<sup>14</sup> Satan will influence the minds of the leaders of the community to dim the spiritual events. On April 6 1845, the Twelve Apostles issued a proclamation which included these words:

As this work progresses in its onward course, and becomes more and more an object of political and religious interest and excitement, no king, ruler, or subject, no community or individual, will stand neutral. All will at length be influenced by one spirit or the other; and will take sides either for or against the kingdom of God.<sup>15</sup>

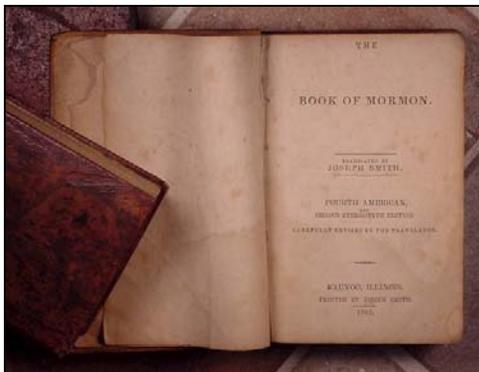
Thus when we are spotlighted, it will not always be for us to take curtsies and bows; sometimes the spotlights will be searchlights. Elder Richard G. Scott also observed.

Much of the world is being engulfed in a rising river of degenerate filth, with the abandonment of virtue, righteousness, personal integrity, traditional marriage, and family life.... Satan skillfully manipulates the power of all types of media and communication. His success has greatly increased the extent and availability of such degrading and destructive influences worldwide. In the past some effort was required to seek out such evil. Now it saturates significant portions of virtually every corner of the world.<sup>16</sup>

How do we then combat against it? First, we must believe that the Lord's promises concerning the latter days still stands firm. He taught in at least five different dispensations how he will bring his Latter-day work forth "out of obscurity and out of darkness."<sup>17</sup> The word obscurity denotes something generally unknown or something withdrawn from the center of the attention. Thus the Lord implied that he will Latter-day work known to the world more than ever before. He even has promised that our Church will shine forth to the ends of the earth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun."<sup>18</sup> We must take faith in this. The Lord is fully "able to do [His] ... work" and to bring all His purposes to pass.<sup>19</sup> His divine determinations are guaranteed, since whatever he takes in his heart to do, he will surely do it.<sup>20</sup>

After all, the devil will not support those who follow him anyway.<sup>21</sup> Taught Alma the younger to his son Helaman: "And now, my son, we see that they did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed, and thus far the word of God has been fulfilled; yea, their secret abominations have been brought out of darkness and made known unto us."<sup>22</sup> The devils and their works will be manifest! Truly, as prophesied, The Lord will shake the kingdom of the devil to stir some souls unto repentance.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, we must not be dismayed if others take advantage of our personal errors and work on our individual weaknesses and pounce upon our failures—even though we may never become accustomed to untrue and unjust criticism of us. We must have faith and patience to bear the pointing fingers<sup>24</sup> and "be patient in afflictions, [and] revile not against those that revile."<sup>25</sup> President Smith, who endured so much of that persecution, did what we must also do. He said of such detractors, "I forgive them for this. I leave them in the hands of the just Judge."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, as the Church comes "out of obscurity", the choices more obvious, and the issues more irrepressible, this condition will, in fact, help those who otherwise might delay making a right choices or who might make a wrong choices if the issues remained obscured.



The Book of Mormon has the power to convince and clarify the divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Restoration and the Second Coming.

Thirdly, let us take comfort in knowing that, as Elder Packer has promised, the Book of Mormon will testify of the Restoration for us. He described: "We do not have to defend the Prophet Joseph Smith [or more even so, our Church]. The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ will defend him for us. Those who reject Joseph Smith as a prophet and revelator are left to find some other explanation for the Book of Mormon."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the Book of Mormon was needed as an added witness in these decades of deep doubt. The Book of Mormon is an endless treasure of wisdom and inspiration, of counsel and correction, "adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest [among us]."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the revelations in Palmyra puts to overthrow all the speculations about the historicity of Jesus; it ended all the theological uncertainty about the nature of the Godhead.

The Lord said of the scriptures and the words of his prophets something that is so fundamental about the ecology of belief. He said, "He that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am."<sup>29</sup> Thus the Book of Mormon came like a thunderbolt on the stage of history—to be a second witness for the divinity of Jesus Christ "to the *convincing* of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ."<sup>30</sup> Note the word

"convincing." The Bible often initiates and helps to sustain faith in Jesus, but the Book of Mormon *convinces* and *clarifies* the truth. Isn't it ironical in this regard that there are some who still wonder if members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are Christians?

Lastly, we must be consciously aware that the Lord will use us as his "instrument" to bring his restored gospel out of obscurity, and bring people "to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct."<sup>31</sup> The Lord taught: "It is a *light thing that thou shouldst be my servant* to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel... that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth."<sup>32</sup> Thus, we must strive to reduce our personal errors which enemies could exploit. The Savior taught the Jews and to the Nephites that we are evaluated by our fruits.<sup>33</sup> We are also told that our works are the indicators of our faith.<sup>34</sup> Thus, we are to be examples. Many are the lessons taught by those who "serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things."<sup>35</sup>

Paul warned the whole Christian world of the bad examples:

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed ... Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition ... Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.<sup>36</sup>

Let us conquer the weaknesses which critics could work upon. What we assert may not be accepted, but unasserted convictions soon become deserted convictions.

When we begin to yield our hearts to God will we begin to be fully useful to God! How can we sincerely pray to be an instrument in His hands, if the instrument seeks to do the instructing? Only our humility can allow us to sing the hymn more honestly, "More holiness give me... more used would I be."<sup>37</sup> I know that God chooses weak, despised, foolish and imperfect people like you and me to roll forth Prophet Daniel's stone and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness. Of this *spiritual* and *statistical significance* I gladly testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## References

1. Quoted from Maxwell, Neal A., "The Inexhaustible Gospel," p.55.
2. 1 Nephi 17:45; D&C 85:6; see also 1 King 19:12.
3. Jacob 4:13; D&C 93:24.
4. Jacob 4:14.
5. 1 Nephi 17:45; Moroni 9:20; see also Ephesians 4:19
6. See "Lord, I Believe; Help Thou Mine Unbelief," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 19.
7. See Daniel 2:31-45.
8. Luke 23:12.
9. Acts 24:5.
10. Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:14.
11. Mark 4:19; D&C 40:2.
12. Joseph Smith History 1:23.
13. Mark 1:24.
14. D&C 123:7.
15. Messages of the First Presidency, p. 257.
16. How to Live Well amid Increasing Evil," *Ensign*, May 2004, 100.
17. See for example Isaiah 29:18; 2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Nephi 22:12, 2 Nephi 27:26, 29; Mormon 8:16; D&C 1:30, 109:73.
18. D&C 109:73.
19. See 2 Nephi 27:20; see also Romans 4:21.
20. Abraham 3:17.
21. Alma 30:60.
22. Alma 37:26.
23. 2 Nephi 28:19; see also 1 Nephi 22:23.
24. See 1 Nephi 8:31-33.
25. See D&C 31:9.
26. *Gospel Doctrine*, p.337.
27. "The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ—Plain and Precious Things," *Ensign*, May 2005, 6.
28. D&C 89:3.
29. Ether 4:12.
30. Title page, Book of Mormon; emphasis added.
31. Alma 17:9.
32. Isaiah 49:6; 2 Nephi 21:6; emphasis added.
33. See Matthew 7:20; 3 Nephi 14: 16, 20.
34. See Moroni 7:5.
35. Hebrew 8:5.
36. 1 Corinthians 10:6, 8-12.
37. *Hymns*, no. 131.