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Hugh W. Nibley

The Early Christian Church in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Papyri from Egypt

Summary:

Hugh Nibley begins by showing the interrelatedness of ancient records, regardless of their origin, a phenomenon called "patternism." He proposes that Joseph Smith presented the world with authentic ancient records. The Prophet brought forth many of the same concepts that are found in ancient temple libraries, such as the council in heaven during the premortal period, the casting out of Satan, the doctrine of the "two ways," the fallen nature of mankind, and the need for a redeemer. Accompanying the doctrines is a body of rites or ordinances, and Nibley gives special attention to the Nag Hammadi documents.

Paper

Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls

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THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF
SOME NEWLY DISCOVERED PAPYRI FROM EGYPT

This is an unfamiliar subject. They said we were going to talk about "The Early Christian Church in the Light of Some Newly Discovered Papyri from Egypt." These have all been discovered in Egypt quite recently and in quite a large number. I had a bulky briefcase full of photographs of them that I was going to bring along, but I thought, "If I ever get involved in those we will be here forever and ever," so I left them home.

This is an unfamiliar area of study entirely. It is an area in which few people today have any foundation at all. I suppose I do not have much myself, although I spent some time laying one. Yet it is specifically recommended in the revelations of the Lord to us that we should seek old records and old things; and you know the Prophet Joseph Smith supplied us with a great wealth of ancient records. Why was he so concerned with those documents? Will they hold water better than the scientific finding, and so forth? Well, you can see the advantage there. By very definition, as long as science makes progress all present conclusions are tentative and remain so, subject to change without notice. You never know where you stand there definitely. But in the documents we have an interesting control. We do not study them here at the Brigham Young University. That is nothing to be alarmed about; there are very few universities where they do--not more than four or five in this country at the most. Our library is making heroic efforts. We are actually building up in this area very well.

When the recent discoveries began—it was not until 1950 that they started being published—they caught everybody off guard; nobody was ready. Nobody had paid any attention to the corpus of documents to which these belong. In 1945 H. H. Rowley had announced that the study of apocrypha was completely dead, he being about the only person left in the world who was really interested in it. In 1953 M. R. James reissued his collection of apocrypha, in which he wrote an introduction saying these had no point whatever and they really did not interest him very much. That was the state of things in 1940.

Then in 1946 things started to happen. Two great libraries were discovered at the same time, and the picture has changed. But I say it caught everybody off guard. At that time there were two or three people in America who were interested in Coptic, and they were only interested in it for the simple reason that nobody else was. They gloried in that fact; that was the only thing that appealed to them in the subject. Now, today, hundreds of people are clamoring to get on the bandwagon, and in my old age I had to attempt to learn some of this stuff. It is very necessary today; the scene is widening out all the time.

This is in fact the most vigorous branch of scholarship today. In 1945 it was as dead as the dodo—imagine that! What happened? Well, we all know about the Dead Sea Scrolls coming out all of a sudden, discovered supposedly in 1947. They could not get at them because in 1948 they had the Israeli War, and they did not start to publish them until 1950.

At the same time in the same year, under very much the same circumstances, an equally important library was discovered in Egypt, far up the Nile at Nag-Hammadi. Later on they started exploring around; and, as in Palestine, they found more and more and more of these documents. Now there is a formidable corpus. Only a few have been published so far, mostly as photographs. The circumstances were remarkable. All of a sudden, they discovered a library in Palestine--an early Jewish library--which had been buried to come forth in a later dispensation. It was a secret; nobody was supposed to know what belonged in it except the sectaries who kept the library. It is their teaching; it is their gospel--what the Jews taught and believed in at the time of Christ and for a hundred and fifty years before. This gave us a picture of Judaism we never knew anything about before--nothing like it at all in the world--a whole library all hidden away.

Two hundred caves have been opened now. Thousands and thousands of fragments have been found--several hundred different works, some in their complete form. It is a marvelous thing we have discovered.

The first visit I ever had with Professor Albright was in his office at Johns Hopkins. He had a big table, and this Nag-Hammadi stuff--the Chenoboskian writings--were all spread out on it. He pounded the table and said, "This is the most important discovery ever made in archaeology,"--and it was these early Christian documents.

You see, corresponding with this Jewish library discovered in

Palestine was one found in Egypt. This was a Christian library; this was buried in the same way. We learn that these people saw the Apostasy coming--this was a little village church--and they wanted to preserve the teachings of the elders in their purity, so they buried very carefully the whole library--forty-four volumes neatly bound in leather bindings. They were not scrolls; they were regular books of the kind we use. Most of the contents were much older than the fourth century. There were quite a number of things from the first two Christian centuries--books from the time of the Apostles, mind you, not handed down from hand to hand to hand for centuries so that we have an awful time reconstructing them and following down pedigrees of manuscripts and so forth, but directly taken over from the first generation of the Church. This is absolutely amazing.

In the same year--they first were known about in 1947--they appeared in the same way as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They suddenly started turning up in the markets. Nobody knew where they had come from. People were very suspicious at first. They did not know about these things: here an early Jewish library turns up in Palestine and an early Christian library turns up in Egypt. They give us a picture of the Jews and the Christians totally different from that that had been accepted by the world, and so they were suspected. More fragments began to appear. Then they were traced back to their source. More manuscripts were found in the same place, proving that they had not been a hoax or a plant. So we have these very formidable libraries here.

It is necessary as a prologue here to mention that documents

of the past have not been found individually or separately. Very rarely do you find a text turning up separately. If you find that kind you suspect that there are at least a thousand years between the author and it and the text, because all our really early finds have come from libraries, beginning a hundred years ago with Layard's discovery of the library of Assurbanipal. Since then we have discovered dozens and dozens of whole libraries--sometimes as many as 30,000 tablets in one library. The great library at Nippur; the great Royal Archives at Amarna, discovered in 1887; the great libraries at Ras Shamra, beginning in 1929; the library at Pylos in the Minoan Script B, discovered and deciphered since the last war; the state archives at Boghaz-Keui, in Turkey; the Hittite records and annals--these huge collections burst on the world all at once. We get whole civilizations suddenly emerging. It is not that you have painfully to reconstruct things by finding a document here and there. Knowledge comes in deluxe packages. It is quite a marvelous thing.

This is part of the picture, these two libraries being discovered. There is nothing freakish about that. But as these many libraries are studied and we see how expansive they are and how vast their scope, they begin to meet and overlap and fuse. It turns out to be one big collection, because, for example, the Hittite collection--much of it--is concerned with correspondence with Egypt, with the Greeks, with the Mycenaeans, and with the Canaanites. We go to the Canaanitish library, and we find texts that concern the Greeks. We go to Egypt, Amarna, and find letters that all the little kings in Palestine wrote to Pharaoh, along with the very letters that the kings of the Hittites wrote, written in

Babylonian, of all things. It is a funny thing--it is not written in Egyptian or Hittite, the common languages of the time (1500 B. C., back in the age of the Patriarchs). Well, these all spread out and start interlapping; and before you know it, you have one big library on your hands, one vast thing. So the specialist can no longer glory in his splendid isolation.

That is why I say that the more that is discovered, the more you have to learn. You can no longer specialize. For example, if you are going to make a serious study of Greek epic, you must now take the Old Testament into account. That was not thought necessary a while ago.

We used to think that there was such a thing as an original literature--you see, Greek was fresh. Homer, the first poet, Thespis was the founder of the drama, and so forth. But all those dramas we find in Rasharna, 1500 B.C., in Canaanitish, a language very close to Hebrew, they were doing the same things and talking about the same things the Greeks were a thousand years later. And now, since the war, they've filled the gap, because the Minoan language, the Minoan script B, is the common idiom between the two. We're dealing with one culture. You could take the writings of Jeremiah and his contemporary, Solon, in Athens, and shift them around, and you couldn't tell which one was writing in the Old Testament and which one was the Greek poet. They use the same language, they talk about the same thing, the same idiom.

Well, we've never noticed this before. How could we fail to notice anything so obvious? This is because of the tradition of

classical literature, the snobbery of classical scholarship. It's a reconstruction from documents found mostly from the eighth and ninth centuries in chests, in monasteries in Europe, at ____?____ and Constance, and well, a lot of them brought from Constantinople, and so forth; but most of them had to be painfully reconstructed, and the classical world produced an image of its own that was completely false. It lost sight of the unity of the ancient world. The first great scholars, men like Scaliger and Lepsis(sp) and Castlebone(sp) realized that. It's hard to believe, isn't it, that, (let's see, Scaliger died in 1608) that long ago, 350 years ago, there were scholars who knew more languages, and knew them better and could read them better, had access to more ancient records than anybody in the world today. And that was 350 years ago today in Europe--they were way ahead of us. We lost sight of all that, it was one of the sad things that happened. But they paid the price for their snobbery. I remember the foremost classical scholar in the world; we were having tea at his place one evening; and he was very much interested, and his wife was fascinated to learn that Mormons do not drink tea, and after that they never forgot me. Professor Jager never forgot me; we were the best of pals forever after because I didn't drink tea. That was the only merit I had, I assure you, as a student. He said that he liked the old Testament better than the New Testament, but he never would allow himself to become involved in any oriental studies at all. At that time I was studying Arabic--he thought that was rather alarming for a classical student to do something like that because it destroyed the architectonic simplicity and perfection of the classical structure. You looked upon Greek civilization as a monolithic thing, independent, pure of itself, so that Homer was

the first poet, and Aeschylus was the first dramatist, and so forth, and even though it was false, it was at least something you could handle, something you knew how to deal with. And they erased this unity, this amazing uniformity which is being discovered today. The impurity of the classical text studies, since they have been copies of copies of copies, and they studied them for hundreds of years, had trained scholars into the habit of thinking of any ancient document as suspect. No ancient document could possibly mean what it said, because all the documents they had had to handle for hundreds of years since the time of the renaissance were tenth and twelfth and fifteenth hand copies and had been unbelievably corrupted; and to get back to the original text took great perspicacity and skill; and above all, you never regarded a text as anything but highly suspect and probably exceedingly corrupt. So when you get new libraries, fresh original sources, it rather knocks you off the Christmas tree. Where do you start? How can you start tearing it to pieces? Maybe these people really believed what they said. The antiquity of these two libraries is staggering. They come so near the people that wrote them; in fact, they were written by the people who wrote them. They say, well, why? You say, why of course, what else would you expect? When you consider that the average classical source, the oldest source you have, is 800 years from the original writer--such a thing is unheard of--a person doesn't just write a letter and here it is. I mean, you never heard of anything like that, but that's the way it is. We actually have letters today written by the hand of Simon Bar Kochba, who led the last great revolt there in ____?____ Cave, there they've discovered his letters, written by him, not a 25th hand copy of a legend going back to him, or something like that.

So this changes things considerably. And then we find, as I say, these two libraries are interchangeable. What's written in the Christian library in Egypt might just as well have been written in the Dead Sea Scrolls in Palestine, and the other way around. In fact, Professor Schechter, Solomon Schechter at Cambridge today still firmly believes that those old Jewish writings, written 150 years before Christ, and some of the back to 400 and 500 years before Christ, are Christian--that they were written late by Christian forgers, because they are full of Jesus Christ, they are full of the Gospel exactly as you get it in the New Testament. They had no business using that sort of language 100 or 200 years before Christ. That's Book of Mormon language--that's no fair! But they do. And the same thing is true. Philenkyenko, a professor at Strasbourg believes that the documents in the Christian library must be written by Jews, because this is the way Jews talk, this isn't the way Christians talk. It's true, they are full of the gospel, but that's Christian interpolation, because in all these other things these people think and talk like old Jews. You cannot tell the Jews from the Christians.

You start comparing all the other libraries, and the same thing happens. First you notice that the parts become largely interchangeable. As I say, you could take a writing of Solon and interchange it with Jeremiah, his contemporary. You would never know which was which. You can do this very extensively. Before you know it, the whole business is interchangeable. We have just one culture here.

Such texts can be switched not only in place, but in time.

None of these literatures is original. None of them pretends to be. They all say, "We are derived from somebody else," and if you ask them who, they will tell you who they think they came from. They are all derivative. Now, this is an alarming thing. There is nothing pristine in any ancient documents that you can find, no matter how far back you go--nothing fresh or original. They are simply repeating what has already been said before and what they know has already been said before.

This is an alarming thing to Classical students. They wanted, as I say, to think that the Greeks were the first civilized people. There is a new book by Cyrus Gordon out on that subject. We always thought of the Greeks as the philosophical people, the critical, the open-minded, and so forth, and the Jews as the poetic and the prophetic. The Greeks are just as poetic and prophetic, and the Jews are just as philosophical and open-minded. They knew each other very well. There were constant interchanges between them. The purpose of Cyrus Gordon's book is to show that we are dealing, really, with just one civilization here.

Now when you come down to modern literatures, of course, they are highly derivative. There is nothing more derivative than American literature, as you know. We do not have any great original writers. Our literature is reportorial; it is homilistic. We preach. It is biographical; a writer can only write well when he is talking about himself. It is adolescent; he talks about his adolescent experiences. You will find in every great work, whether it is Hemingway, Mark Twain or Woolf, that our writers are always mouthing about their adolescent experiences. In other words, they

are not devising or composing anything fresh or original. But do not worry, you will not find that anywhere.

Well, what is so important about that? This is what is important about that: Along came Joseph Smith, twenty-three years old, in the backwoods of New York. He produced records from all these periods that are supposed to fit into this business. Now, you see, if anyone tries to forge an ancient record, you have all sorts of controls. You just start pressing the button and then the lights start flashing and the relays start smoking, and your old I. B. M. machine is at work on the project. Joseph Smith did not know what he was letting himself in for. He walked right into a situation of which no one would have dreamed twenty years ago, even, because now we can control these things. What does he do? In the Pearl of Great Price he reaches back into an earlier period and an older language than any yet known in the world of his time. Nobody could read Egyptian then. The first poor, feeble attempt at an Egyptian grammar was in 1838. So he gives us the Pearl of Great Price with all this stuff in it. Now see what this implies.

When you go back to a literature like this, you do not just deal with the plot of the story. A people's thought forms, their types of expression, their peculiar idioms, their ways of putting things, their ways of looking at things--you cannot mistake them. They are as characteristic as a person's physiognomy. In the Doctrine and Covenants Joseph Smith comes along and opens the door to the original Gospel of the original Church. This is the way it was in the time of Jesus Christ. This is the way they did in the old Church. This is the way it was in the Church of the Apostles.

That is an interesting thing.

Then in the Book of Mormon he comes along, and he cuts a great big slice right out of the middle of the richest period of ancient literature, when everything was fused together out of the time and the place. Carl Jaspers calls this the Axial Period. It was about 600 B. C. that the perfect fusion took place between all these cultures. You cannot tell one from the other. It was very rich. You see, this was the last revival of the Babylonian Empire. This was the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the last big literary revival. They were terrific antiquarians. They dug into the records. They brought everything out; Nabonidus boasts about it. They produced these tremendous libraries at that very time.

The same thing was happening in Egypt under the Twenty-sixth Dynasty--the great revival. Tremendous archaistic movements--they dug up all the old records. They got everything going. And Israel was right in the middle, right in the midst of all this. We know this from Canaanitish records, and so forth.

The Book of Mormon, then, cuts a big slice right out of the middle of this world's religious and cultural tradition, when they were fused. They were fused at this time and place as never before or since. This was a time when certain idioms were formed, when forms of expression were fixed, and so forth. Joseph Smith gives us a generous sampling of documentation from three crucial periods: from the age of the Patriarchs (the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price); from this Axial Period of 600 B. C.--the most significant in literary production (At that time almost every one

of the major Greek writers was alive, except Homer, who had just died. It's amazing--everybody was living then. That is why Jaspers calls it Axial: every great philosopher, everything really basic, the religious thinkers flourished right around that year 600. Whether it is East or West, that is the axis around which all history pivots, according to Carl Jaspers.)--and, thirdly, he gave us a generous sampling of the Apostolic Age--the time of the Apostles, the time of Jesus Christ.

In the 1930's came the first great discoveries, what they call today the rediscovery of the age of the Patriarchs. They began discovering that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not solar myths, but real people. Today, for the first time, the Axial Period is being recognized. I mentioned Cyrus Gordon, I mentioned Carl Jaspers, and people like that. You could interchange the writings from any country at this time, and everybody would be completely at home, because the world was completely covered with a network of universities in that time. Hugo Winkler showed this some years ago.

You had to travel from one university to the other. This system of traveling around from school to school--having to receive your education at certain seats of learning and not just staying home--was fixed and established at that time, and everybody conformed to it. It was a world-wide culture. The records say there was one world-wide language predominating, and so forth. You see this in everything.

Then, since the 1950's, the time of Christ has been discovered

for the first time. We really know now what the Jews believed; we did not know before. We really know now what the Christians believed; we did not know before. One of the striking things in this is that there are not any evolutionary developments here. The greatest works are always at the first; the rest is just marking time. The greatest works do not pretend to be original, as we have said before. They are handed down. They are the writing of the fathers, "the words of the gods," that have been handed down.

We have been conditioned to look for a growth and development in everything, and this has crippled the study of the humanities, as you know, in many fields. Music is not better today than it was in the time of Bach; it may be different, but it is not better. This is true with these written documents, too. The greatest comes first. The experts are forced to admit that it is always the same Gospel--this came out with the discovery of the age of the Patriarchs--that there is no development among the prophets from a ritual type of religion to a prophetic type, to a poetic type, or the other way around; that what Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob preached in the beginning is just what the prophets were preaching later on; it is just what you find in the New Testament. In other words, the same Gospel and the same theology and the same morality are characteristic of these three periods.

If you go back to the earliest documents we have, so-called Shabako Stone of Egypt or the Babylonian Enuma Elish, you will find there the basic themes of the Gospel. What do you find in all of these records?

Remember, these libraries are nearly all temple libraries. They are court libraries, but they are kept in the temples. That is one of the purposes of the temple--to keep a record of all the past. They are ritual texts. They are doctrinal texts. So we have plenty of religious material to go on--thousands of documents. No one has begun to read even a fraction of this material. We do not even know what is in most of the stuff this day.

This is what you find there: They are all about the pre-existence, the council in heaven, the controversy that took place there, the casting out of Satan, and the Two Ways. We find many documents under that name; this life is Two Ways, a time of probation: here at every moment of your life you are faced with a choice between this and that; it is never too late to make a right choice as long as you are living upon the earth. You may have made the wrong choices every day for fifty years, but right now you can still make the better choice, while you are here. That is a great blessing. This is the doctrine of the Two Ways, that you will be judged at the Judgement according as you have chosen here.

Men are prone to fall because the devil is here at work, and so they need to be cleaned up; they need a redeemer, even when they decide to repent--and all need to repent. Who is to clean them up? Who is to take care of the poor, miserable, fallen human race? They all talk about the fall in various terms. They are aware of it. They have to bring in the redeemer here.

With the doctrine of redemption comes a body of rites and ordinances, and the purpose of all this theological stuff is to

explain the rituals and ordinances of these temples. Now we know what the rites and ordinances of these temples are. They have been compare widely. Again, this is new. It was not until 1930 that a number of people at Cambridge who had been working in different areas decided to compare notes and compare the rituals of a dozen different cultures at the earliest times, and. lo and behold! they were all the same ordinances and same rites. So they gave it a name; they called it "Patternism." Their emphasis is on the royal rite, the coronation, the place of the king as chief priest, father of the nation, and so forth.

Behind the doctrine of pre-existence, the council, the fall, the redeemer, is the necessity of men participating in certain rites here upon the earth. What were these rites? Baptism--I mean real baptism. There have been several recent studies written on the baptism of Pharaoh; he was really baptized.

Along with that, after baptism, there is always the washing and anointing. A good deal is said about that. In this Christian library that has come out, some texts speak a great deal about "sealing." This we first became aware of in 1906 with the discovery of the Odes of Solomon in Mesopotamia. Since then, this strange early Christian obsession with sealing has puzzled the experts.

After the baptism a person receives a special garment, and then he participates in a feast, in a sacramental meal, which is the sacrament, looking forward to the coming of the Savior, the Messiah. It is all there. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we have all

this before the time of Christ, so that Professor Cross calls it the Church of Anticipation--it is all there, but it is an anticipation.

Doesn't the Book of Mormon say that? "We knew that salvation did not come by the Law of Moses, but we did these things because they pointed our minds forward." These things were a type and a shadow of things to come. This is why these people at Qumran--the Dead Sea Scrolls people--did these things. They were waiting for the prophet of Aaron and Israel to come, as they say. They had gone out there to prepare the way, to live so purely that the Lord might restore the rites of the Temple in their purity. They tell us that that was their purpose in going there.

The highest of these ordinances, of which they have a good deal to say--and this is one thing that has been coming out, just really in the last three or four years--is marriage. There is great emphasis on marriage as the culminating ordinance of all--the celestial, eternal marriage which leads to exaltation.

These things are becoming familiar today. This scheme is standard. In its royal rites it has received the title, as I say, of Patternism. You find it everywhere the same. In this Egyptian-Christian library, these motifs predominate.

There are two dominant themes in the early Church. The first is the apostasy. They are expecting the end; that is why they bury this library, just as the Jews at Qumran, when they saw the Roman soldiers moving in, expected the end and hid them up, buried them

up as you bury a mummy in the desert--to come forth at a later time, in a later dispensation. The writings themselves tell us this today. This has only been recently realized--they were deliberately laid up with that in mind.

This is true of this Christian library, too. They saw that the Church was going sour, and they knew--and this is quite common--that the Lord had taught that it was only to be there for two generations; so they were laying this up for a later time. After it, there would be plenty of Christians, of course--"Many will come in my name," the Lord said. "They shall do many things in my name. And at that time," he says, "they shall say, 'Lo, here is Christ,' and , 'Lo, here,'--but believe none of them." At a time when everybody will be paying lip service to the name of Christ, do not believe any of them.

Well, they knew all that. They knew that the name would survive and the forms of the Church. The imagery they used is that of an inferior tower, a second-class church with the forms which would take their place. But the ancient rites, the Apostles, the knowledge of things, would pass away completely. There is a great deal written about this.

They are constantly insistent on the apostasy, then, and their awareness of it--the future of the Church. Where do they get this information?

The other one is the resurrection. Everyone was already denying the resurrection. This is the thing we learn from the

Egyptian Christian texts--they really believed in the resurrection. The Lord did come and visit them off and on for six weeks after the resurrection--for forty days. This is a thing the later Church would never take. They threw it out. This is what the big fight is about. They waged a terrific combat about that. As it was predicted, those that believed this were finally stamped out completely. They expected to be.

What has been the reaction to these discoveries? This is the interesting thing. They are quite recent. It is too soon to say, but definite phases have already appeared. There have been marked phases since 1947--let's say 1950, when the first photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls were published at Yale.

Well, first of all, everything was brushed aside. They said, "Well, this is just Gnostic stuff." Then it started piling up, and today in recent studies--well, as Harris says, "If this is Gnosticism, would that all Christians were Gnostics!" Van Unnik, the Dutchman, says, "Look. Every time you call something Gnostic, you look in the new Testament and it is there, too." You see, you can check this stuff because we have a canon to check it against.

"Gnostic" was once a useful word to condemn anything you did not like, but now nobody knows exactly what was Gnostic. We can no longer brush this stuff aside, saying, "Gnostic." Today we say, "Well, it may be Gnostic, but it is what the early Christians believed."

The next phase was a great concern for originality. If these

are genuine Christian documents and genuine Jewish documents, where is the originality of Christ? This is the thing that worried the Roman Catholic writers, especially, because they liked to think of the Gospel as having the originality and uniqueness of a one-act play in which the human race having fallen, Jesus Christ came and established the kingdom of God on earth, so that the triumphant march of the Church through the world is to be the future of history.

Well, that is not the story we read in any of these early documents, which teach instead the doctrine of dispensations. This is a thing that everyone is talking about today--dispensationism. People are concerned about originality here. The Dead Sea Scrolls, for example: How did it happen that people before Christ had baptism, that they had the sacrament, that they talked about Christ--of course Messiah was the name they used--all the time and called him Joshua and the Savior, and all these things just like the church of Alma? Whence this church of anticipation?

The Dutch for a while suggested a theory. They said, "This comes from an old pre-Christian Gnosis. There was a Gnosis in pre-Christian times, and this is what it is." That broke down after about ten years, and they gave it up. I do not think many today subscribe to the doctrine of a pre-Christian Gnosis.

The next phase was to deny that these things are significant. They lack the majesty, we will say; they lack the simplicity, they lack the spirituality of the Gospels. But now, as these documents accumulate, we realize that the Gospels also lack the majesty, the

simplicity, and the spirituality of the Gospels. They are not majestic and simple at all. They say Jesus was not a great teacher at all. He had a totally different message. He is not giving them moral precepts at all. This is the thing that everybody is saying now.

You take every major announcement of Christ in the Gospel of John, for example, every time he announces his calling or says something really basic, what is the reaction of his hearers? If it is the Jews, they try to stone him. If it is the Apostles, they get angry and fight among themselves. They desert Him. They cannot understand Him, and they are puzzled. They say, "What does He mean by this; what does He mean by this?" What kind of a great teacher would enrage and puzzle his students every time he opened his mouth? He is not giving them moral instruction; they would understand that.

Incidentally, this is an argument that is being used a lot today. The very oddness of all this stuff shows it must be genuine. People are not going to come together and, of their own will and volition, invent a gospel and a concept of the Savior that is a slap in the face, as Carl Holl says, to everything that has ever been taught before or everything that human reason has conceived ever since. Its very offensiveness shows that nobody invented it. Nobody wanted it. Nobody wanted to believe in the resurrection, as you know.

Read those passages in the New Testament. When the women reported that they had seen the risen Lord, they laughed at them;

they said, "No, this is absurd." When they saw Him they were afraid; they tried to run away. And He said, "Look. I am going to give you a demonstration here." Thomas was not present for the demonstration. Remember, He ordered them to bring food--fish and honeycomb--and he ate with them. He lighted a fire on the beach. (One Roman Catholic writer said, "This is absolutely incredible. The Lord of heaven and earth comes; he sits down and eats coarse vile food with a lot of greasy, dirty, ignorant apostles; he eats their filthy food with them.")

They did not want to believe it either. The Apostles were very reluctant to believe it. They would run away; they would argue against it; they would laugh at those who brought them the news. You know what Thomas said, who was absent at the first demonstration. He had to be given a private demonstration. Then he saw that that was so.

In other words, this has never been a popular doctrine. The Christians were so eager to get rid of the doctrine of the resurrection that by the time of Augustine they threw it out completely. It was a "spiritual" resurrection they settled for. These things were not invented, you see; no one would accept these doctrines, let alone invent them. No one would accept them unless they had very good credentials. Nobody wanted to believe this stuff. Nobody wanted to believe this gloomy, terrifying picture of the Church.

Almost all of these Egyptians records, incidentally, have to do with the teachings of the Lord to the Apostles during the forty

days after the resurrection. Did He really come to them and teach them? Well, they would not have invented these teachings--this is pointed out today. At the time of the resurrection, the Apostles were not ready to hear the gospel, let alone preach it. Remember when the Lord came to them, he rebuked them for their hardness of heart and their blindness.

In the last chapter of Luke, He says that, beginning with Moses and the prophets, He explained everything to them out of the scriptures. Then, he tells us, their eyes were opened and they began to understand. We do not have a word of what He told them after the forty days. All of these newly-discovered writings claim to be that teaching. Are they genuine or aren't they? Well, for one thing, they hang together beautifully. They give a very consistent picture of the gospel.

These are not odds and ends in the manner of the Gnostics, who take tatters of oriental philosophy and everything and throw them together into patchwork systems. This is a very consistent gospel, exactly as we have it ourselves.

Back to the present trends, then. There is a totally new trend in all the churches today--Catholic, Protestant, and all the rest--the realization that there may be something behind these things.

Our library, incidentally, has been very conscientious in subscribing to the main journals, and we have a pretty good collection now, running for the last fifteen or twenty years. They

cover the ground pretty well. About 1955 the journals started saying, "Now, look. We may not like what these things say. We may think the primitive Christians were just about as primitive as anybody could be, but they were the Christians; and if we are going to call ourselves Christians, we had better do something about it. How can we accommodate our teachings to theirs? If we are going to call ourselves Christians, we must believe what they believed."

They said, "Well, this is terrible. We cannot bring ourselves to that."

"No, but Jesus Christ himself believed that. Can we," they say, "call ourselves Christians and renounce the things which He firmly believed in?"

This is a thing that is worrying everybody today. Everybody is talking about rediscovery today. This has led to a general liturgical and doctrinal reappraisal. Behind what is happening at Rome--the Ecumenical Council there--and what is going on everywhere else among the Protestants, are these new documents. They are the driving force behind it. People are beginning to suspect--reluctantly at first, but now they cannot deny it any more--that the early Christian Church is not what we thought it was, and the Jews did not preach what we thought they did at the time of Christ.

This general liturgical and doctrinal reappraisal is a very interesting thing. It is so fundamental. They are changing all sorts of things today. They realize that their liturgy is impoverished. Of the seven duties of the Catholic Church, only two

have any references whatever to the early Church. They include confession, festivals, and things not mentioned anywhere in the Bible or anywhere in early Christian literature.

What is mentioned there? These rites we have been talking about. For example, just last year the Roman Church renounced an ordinance which has been in effect ever since the second council at Constantinople--the extreme unction. That was a Gnostic practice. In its place they have restored anointing of the sick, anointing with oil. This is a thing that they have never had before. The other Christian churches are doing the same thing.

Why? These documents are full of it. They are full of anointing the sick with oil. One of the most interesting of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the Genesis Apocryphon or the Book of Lamech, which gives a fuller account of Abraham in Egypt. Abraham gets on the good side of the Pharaoh because when he is in Egypt, Pharaoh is sick. It is reported by one of the important men around him that there is an important man in the country who can heal the sick by laying hands on them. Abraham puts oil on Pharaoh's head and heals him and blesses him. That is what put him into good favor with Pharaoh. It is why Pharaoh was willing to exchange favors with him and let him sit on his throne and wear his crown and so forth. That is not told there. It is in the Pearl of Great Price. He did want to exchange priesthoods with him; he did want Abraham's authority, and in return he would give him his.

Today they are all talking about rediscovery; we talk about the rediscovery of the Patriarchal Age. That began in the 1930's.

Then they talk a lot about the rediscovery of the Church. What had happened to the Church? You mean you have now rediscovered it?

Look what you get in the eighth tablet of the "Serek" Scroll--what used to be called the Manual of Discipline--you get the description of a society of Jews out in the desert. They have a "bishop" at their head. There is something like a presiding bishop who goes around and visits their camps. Each "church" has a formal organization of twelve elders at its head who are presided over by a presidency of three, who have to be priests with authority from the line of Aaron. Everything is done by the presidency with consultation of the twelve, and then all the community vote on it. This organization was before the time of Christ. You can see why they said that it threatens the originality of Christianity.

They once thought that the Church grew up in later centuries of reminiscing about Christ--from the first to the fourth centuries. This has long been the theory. Now we realize that all the basic patterns of organization were there from early times.

The sacrament is a good example. Less than a year ago Alfred Adam, a German scholar who lives in Palestine, showed that the sacrament went back to the shewbread of the Temple, for which the people were divided into twelve groups. There was a loaf for each group. Everyday at the opening session of the temple, those who would administer in the temple that day would go to the east end, to a little room behind the east door of the temple which nobody ever used, and partake of the twelve little loaves spread out on a table. That is why they are called the shewbread. They were on

display there; they were visible.

Each of these would partake of a loaf of bread, representing one House of Israel. But first of all, they would have to bathe, be washed and baptized. Then they would partake of this bread for each of the Twelve Tribes. Incidentally, as Adam showed, this was in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. This was the banquet of the Messiah they were celebrating, looking forward to the time when they would partake of it with Him. This was in the temple before the time of Christ.

You will read in 3 Nephi, when they partook of it with the Lord in this country, how it was arranged in the New World. He ordered them the night before He was to come to get ready for Him, and He ordered the Apostles to divide the people into twelve. Each Apostle was to instruct one of the twelve groups. Every individual, whether or not he had been baptized before, was to go down and get baptized in preparation for the Lord's feast. When Jesus came, he multiplied the loaves and blessed them, and the Apostles distributed the loaves to them by twelves. It was all done in sections of twelve. This was the way the sacrament was administered anciently, as Professor Adam discovered in 1963.

There is a very interesting writing discovered in 1913--one of these Egyptian Coptic writings--called "the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," in which the sacrament, after the resurrection, is described. It is exactly as in 3 Nephi. It includes the blessing of the children. It includes the Lord going aside three times and praying. This is what they said He did after the resurrection: He

prayed. The first time His face was shining. The second time He came back and blessed the Apostles, and their faces were shining. The third time He went and came back, and there was a general Pentecost; the countenances of all the people were shining. They had received of his glory as He prayed to the Father in three steps. He went apart and prayed three times. He does that in 3 Nephi.

Think of the boldness of trying to reconstruct what the Lord did after the resurrection! You do not have a word about it in the Bible. Think of having to do that.

Joseph Smith says, "Look, Jesus Christ came here after his resurrection!"

"Oh? So what did He do; what did He say? You just try to tell us that."

Wouldn't that put anyone into a nervous sweat, trying to answer that one? "No," I would say, "I'd better not talk about that now!"

Joseph Smith tells us in 3 Nephi what happened after the resurrection. What would Christ do? Who would ever guess that that is the way things would be carried out? That is the way it was in the Old World, apparently, during those forty days. That is what these documents tell us about. You can see that everybody is quite upset and wondering what to do with them.

They are talking about the rediscovery of the gifts today, especially the gift of Prophecy. In the Episcopal Church they want it back again. And speaking in tongues--there are societies now in the Methodist and Episcopal Churches, and so forth, of glossalalia, where they come together and see if they cannot speak in tongues.

And the rediscovery of the ordinances--some churches are seriously thinking of marrying for time and eternity because this is mentioned in these texts again. And anointing the sick--we mentioned that. Catholics are doing that again.

They talk about the rediscovery of the doctrines. In the last Bull issued by Pius XII--the "Mediator Dei Bull"--he speaks of this life as an exile. We are strangers in the world. Of course, if this is the only life you ever knew, you would not be in exile. In other words, they are moving in on the doctrine of pre-existence, which is very conspicuous in these early Christian teachings. We know today--it is not denied at all--that the early Christians believed firmly in the pre-existence. Well, the Christian world does not. Philostorgius in the fourth century included it among the worst of heresies. In 553, at the council of Constantinople, it was declared a damnable heresy, and it has never been used by churches since. Yet we get a recent pope saying, "How about it? This life is an exile. This is not our real life. We have been cast out of somewhere else, a pre-existence." They are moving in on these, too.

Now this literalism is the astonishing thing. There is so much being written now on the literal resurrection, trying to

explain it away; and yet the Christian church has always paid lip service, as you know to the literal resurrection. It is part of their creeds. How can they confess it and still not believe it? It has been tongue in cheek with all of them. Saint Augustine fixed it when he said, "We believe it is a spiritual resurrection." "And nobody in his right senses," as Jerome says, "no intelligent person could possibly believe a thing like that. And we don't either."

Another thing they are talking about it is the rediscovery of the Gospel. Now you say, "Just a minute here. Rediscovery of the gospel is pretty steep, isn't it?" In terms of dispensations, it has been here before; Adam had it all; Noah had it all; Moses had it all. But they did not give it all to the people; it did not all come down, and it was necessary to restore it from time to time. This is what a dispensation is. Today you get pamphlets in your mail denouncing the pernicious trend of dispensationism in the churches. I got one quite recently on that. People are coming to think of their religion in terms of that--it must be valid; it goes back to those early dispensations. They had the gospel then. Now this is what had been restored to us. You see how this all casts light on our belief. These are the very things that Joseph Smith was persecuted for teaching.

This new realism, for example, is the most significant thing. The Christian world has been reconciled for centuries to the belief that certain things were "spiritual" rather than "historical": the physical resurrection, the literal return of the Lord, supernatural gifts and manifestations, prophecies and revelations. They have

been ruled out. You have no idea how vigorously they have been ruled out. They have been the very essence of heresy. That was the essence of heresy in the Reformation. When the Reformation started out they tried to get back to these things. Then Luther, after a very bitter experience, gave it up; so did the great Reformers. They said that they would have to turn back to scholarship, just as Saint Augustine and the rest of them did, because they could not deliver the goods. They wanted the prophecy; they wanted to get the spirit again; they wanted these gifts and beliefs; but they were out of the church.

Luther would never use the word "church." Every man has "priesthood," according to him. It is a thing that enters the heart. The return of Christ, like the resurrection of Christ, is a spiritual experience. He is resurrected to us existentially. This is the line that is being fought out today. It is the Lutherans, more vigorously than any others, who are holding the line against this literalism. They are against it more than anybody else. But they are losing, just the same.

Centuries of hard work have been devoted to deeschatologizing and deliteralizing the New Testament; and now come new papyri saying that that will not do. That is not the way the early Christians talked about it. This was the world's quarrel with Mormonism for all these years.. This was the real issue.

If they now go about trying to reconstruct things in the light of new documents far more ancient than any they possessed before and far more authentic, they will certainly have better guides than

they have had before, but the result will only be an artificial reconstruction. Joseph Smith gave his life because he said that certain things were so.

Remember what Lehi says in blessing his son Jacob. "Remember, my son," he says, "these things are real." It is very hard for us to realize that these things are real--that the resurrection really took place, and the Lord really came and ate with them--unless we have had experiences like that ourselves.

How long did it take Thomas to be converted? About three seconds, didn't it? When he fell down and said, "My Lord and my God," he recognized Him then. Three seconds before that he would have given you ten thousand to one that nobody could be resurrected in the flesh, that nobody had been. That is all it took to convert him.

All you have to do is have these gifts. If you pretend to have the gifts and do not have them, you can work for them and pray of them. The Lord has put them on the earth and made them available. The Christian world will be held responsible if they do not recognize them.

We encourage them in these things. Brigham Young used to say, "Any time they want to imitate us, any time they are approaching us in any way they can, we wish them more power."

Another thing is the rediscovery of the priesthood. This has them worried. There is a group in the Episcopal Church that wants

to restore the twelve apostles. Well, now, that horse has been stolen for an awfully long time: I do not know why they want to shut the barn door now. The Twelve Apostles disappeared long, long ago. They cannot be reformed into existence; they can only be restored.

This is another very interesting thing. You notice that that word "restoration," was not used a few years ago. They did not like "restoration." The Church was all there, they said. You do not have to restore anything. That has been their argument against our idea of a falling away and an Apostasy. "We have always had the Christian church," they said, "because the Christian name has always been here." So they did not use the word "restoration"; they always used the word "reformation."

But as Paul tells us in a letter to the Hebrews: "If they have fallen away, can they renew them again to repentance?" No! They cannot. He gives the example of Esau, who lost the birthright. It was his legitimately, but once he lost it he could not get it back again, "though he sought it carefully and with tears." He wept for that, he wanted it back so badly. It had been his, but he had lost it. "When you have once lost it," he says, "you will never get it back again. You can never get it back for yourself."

He is talking about apostasy: Once we have had the Holy Ghost, once we have had these revelations, if we again fall back into darkness, can we renew ourselves unto repentance again? He knew it was going to happen. He says, "No, we cannot."

So it has to be a restoration. This is another clue to the literature today. It is not the Mormons; it is everybody else who is talking about restoration today. A bad word a few years ago-- now they are all using it today. It is a strange thing, is it not?

This is due to the pressure of these documents. They have come forth, I believe, in the due time of the Lord. Consider that for centuries these documents have been burned by the peasants right around Chenoboskian and Nag-Hammadi to heat their huts in the winter time, and that all the Dead Sea Scrolls, which number tens of thousands of fragments, were discovered within fifteen miles of Jerusalem in territory that has been gone over with a fine-tooth comb for hundreds of years. How could they possibly have missed them? And all of a sudden it all pops out.

In the two libraries discovered the same year, under very much the same circumstances, we find not documents that have to be painfully reconstructed and traced back to their source, but a whole Jewish library in Palestine that shows us what the Jews were thinking at the time of Christ and a whole Christian library in Egypt that shows what the Christians were thinking when the curtain came down on the end of the Church, as they were expecting--on the end of the dispensation. The time of darkness, they called it; the Wintertime of the Just; the rule of the Cosmoplane--the man who leads the world astray--the coming of the false Christ; the time of the deceivers; and so forth. They had more names for it.

That was the end, so they left us their whole library. Now we have something to go by, and we should be able to wave this under

the world's noses. This is not a polite or a sporting thing to do, is it? It is not magnanimous to deal this way. So we will not be churlish and say, "We told you so."

Remember what the Lord told Joseph Smith. He said, "I will make the Gentiles bring forth the proof." It is not for us to prove the Book of Mormon in these things. We can go on and read it and believe it, but the world will prove it for us; and we thank them for that. We also thank the Lord for having given us revelations and prophets in these days and the leaders over us. I pray that we may increase in our testimonies, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Address delivered at Brigham Young University Tri-Stake Fireside,
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