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Beyond Politics

HUGH NIBLEY

In most languages the Church is designated as that of the last days, and so this speech, which is only a pastiche of quotations from its founders, is unblushingly apocalyptic. Did our grandparents overreact to signs of the times? For many years a stock cartoon in sophisticated magazines has poked fun at the barefoot, bearded character in the long nightshirt carrying a placard calling all to “Repent, for the End Is at Hand.” But where is the joke? Ask the smart people who thought up the funny pictures and captions: Where are they now?

For all of us as individuals, the fashion of this world passeth away; but the Big Bang is something else. How near is that? Should we be concerned at all? The problem may be stated in the form of a little dialogue:

We: Dear Father, whenever the end is scheduled to be, can't you give us an extension of time?

He: Willingly. But tell me first, what will you do with it?

We: Well . . . ah . . . we will go on doing pretty much what we have been doing; after all, isn't that why we are asking for an extension?

He: And isn't that exactly why I want to end it soon—because you show no inclination to change? Why should I reverse the order of nature so that you can go on doing the very things I want to put an end to?

We: But is what we are doing so terribly wrong? The economy seems sound enough. Why shouldn't we go on doing the things which have made this country great?

He: Haven't I made it clear enough to you what kind of greatness I expect of my offspring? Forget the

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statistics; you are capable of better things—your stirring commercials don't impress me in the least.

We: But why should we repent when all we are doing is what each considers to be for the best good of himself and the nation?

He: Because it is not you but I who decide what that shall be, and I have told you a hundred times what is best for you individually and collectively—and that is repentance, no matter who you are.

We: We find your inference objectionable, Sir, quite unacceptable.

He: I know.¹

My story goes back to the beginning, and to some very basic propositions. This world was organized in the light of infinite knowledge and experience and after due thought and discussion to offer multiple facilities to an endless variety of creatures and especially to be the home and dominion of a godlike race who would take good care of it and have joy therein. Being a highly favored breed, much was expected of them, and their qualifications for advancement were to be put to the test by allowing an adversary, a common enemy to God and man, to tempt them and try them. It was decided before even the world was that if man should yield to this temptation and thus lower his defenses and make himself vulnerable to repeated attacks of the adversary, steps would immediately be taken to put into operation a prearranged plan to restore him to his former status.²

1. [This first part did not appear in the *BYU Studies* version but was likely Nibley's introduction to the address. —Eds.]

2. When man yielded to the temptations of the adversary, certain drastic corrections had to be made; the original plan and design for the use of the earth would not be scrapped at any rate, since it is not only the best but the only plan that will work here. No, the original plan was to be preserved as a beacon, and the minute fallen man realized his fallen state, every inducement would be given him to turn his back on that condition and make his way back to the presence of God and to the only kind of life that is endurable

What God tells us in effect is “Now that you have fallen and forfeited your paradise by deliberately, knowingly disobeying me, I will give you another chance, a chance to get back to that paradise by deliberately and knowingly obeying me. To get back where you were and beyond, you must repent—forever give up doing it your way and decide to live by the law of God, or by the law of obedience, which means doing it my way.” Adam agreed to do it God's way, though Satan lost no time in trying to sell him on another plan. Adam's own children and their posterity, however, chose to achieve salvation *their* way, not God's way, and ever since then there has been trouble. The Lord Jesus Christ told the young Joseph Smith in the first vision that men were no longer doing things his way, that as a result that way was no longer upon the earth, but it was about to be brought again: “I was answered that I must join *none* of them, for they were all wrong; . . . that *all* their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were *all* corrupt” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19, emphasis added). The Lord's actual words were (according to the 1832 version in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams) “Behold the world lieth in sin at this time and *none* doeth good *no not one* . . . and mine anger is kindling against the inhabitants of the earth to visit them according to this ungodliness.”³ The message of the restored gospel is that one phase of the earth's existence is coming to a close, and another phase, a phase in which God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven, is about to become the order of life on earth.

throughout eternity.

3. The 1832 recital of the first vision as dictated by Joseph Smith to Frederick G. Williams. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 157, emphasis added; compare Dean C. Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision,” *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 280.

Politics, as practiced on earth, belongs to the ways of men; it is the essential activity of the city—the city of man, not the city of God. As used by the Greek writers, the *polis* is “the community or body of citizens”—that is, a body of citizens not taking orders from anyone else. *Politeia* is “a well-ordered government, a commonwealth.” Politics, *ta politika*, is concern for the social order, things done civilly or courteously, “the weal of the state.” In practice the emphasis has been on civility. Thus in modern Greek, civilization is *politismos*, a civilized person is *politismenos*, etc. Even at a superficial view, if it is not God’s way, it is still not all bad, and we can understand why God approves of men engaging in politics and even encourages the Saints, at times, to participate.

The problem of conflicting obligations to the city of man and the city of God is basic to every dispensation of the gospel. We have Abraham in Egypt, Joseph in Egypt, Moses in Egypt, not as enslaved subjects but as top government officials, high in the favor of Pharaoh, serving him faithfully for years until the inevitable showdown. The classic treatment of the theme is found in the book of Daniel. Daniel’s three friends were not only in high favor with the king—he made them his special advisers, his right-hand men (Daniel 1:19-20)—for years they served him devotedly and they owed all they had to him. Daniel was made, next to the king himself, the highest official in the state, and he showed all respect and reverence to Darius. But then in each case came the showdown: jealous and ambitious men contrived special laws forcing the king’s hand and forcing the king’s favorites to take a public stand between serving God and serving the king. In each case it was nothing more than a public gesture of loyalty, which anyone might make without hypocrisy. The three young men who bowed

to the king each day were asked to bow to his image when the band played in the Plain of Dura at a great public testimonial of loyalty. Why not? Didn’t they owe all to the king? It was only a symbol! Yet here they drew the line—they would be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than make this one simple concession. Daniel insisted on continuing with his private prayers after a bit of trick legislation, a mere technicality, had made them illegal for one month. The king pleaded with him, but to no avail; Daniel chose the lion’s den. In all this there is not a trace of jaunty defiance or moral superiority on either side: the king is worried sick—he refuses to eat or listen to music, he can’t sleep, and before daybreak there he is outside the lion’s den, biting his nails and asking Daniel if he is all right, and Daniel respectfully wishes him good morning: “O king, live for ever” (Daniel 6:21). Nebuchadnezzar personally appeals to the three young men to change their minds, but they cannot change their position, and he cannot change his. The moral is clear: The children of God can work well with the men of the world, and bestow great blessings by their services, but there comes a time when one must draw the line and make a choice between the two governments. Such a choice was forced on the Mormons very early, and a very hard choice it was, but they did not flinch before it. “We will go along with you as far as we can; but where we can’t we won’t,” and no hard feelings.

The question arises, If we decide to do things God’s way, will not all discussion cease? How could there be a discussion with God? Who would disagree with him? If we go back to our basic creation story, we are neither surprised nor shocked to hear that there was free discussion in heaven in the presence of God at the time of the creation, when some suggested one plan and some another.

“In the beginning was the *Logos* [counsel, discussion], and the *Logos* was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it” (John 1:1, author’s translation). Satan was not cast out for disagreeing, but for attempting to resort to violence when he found himself outvoted. If we cannot clearly conceive of the type of discussion that goes on in the courts on high, we have some instructive instances of God’s condescending to discuss things with men here on earth. “Come *now*, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18, emphasis added), he invites the children of Israel. Accordingly, Abraham and Ezra both dared, humbly and apologetically, but still stubbornly, to protest what they considered, in the light of their limited understanding, unkind treatment of some of God’s children. They just could not see why the Lord did or allowed certain things. So he patiently explained the situation to them, and then they understood. Enoch just couldn’t see the justification for the mass destruction of his fellows by the coming flood; he too was stubborn about it: “And as Enoch saw this, he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: *I will refuse to be comforted*; but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your heart, and be glad; and look” (Moses 7:44).

God did not hold it against these men that they questioned him, but loved them for it: it was because they were the friends of men, even at what they thought was the terrible risk of offending him, that they became friends of God. The Lord was not above discussing matters with the brother of Jared, who protested that there was a serious defect in the vessels constructed according to the prescribed design: “Behold there is no light in them. . . . Wilt thou suffer that we shall cross this great water in darkness?” (Ether 2:22). Instead of blasting the man on the spot for his

impudence, the Lord very reasonably asked the brother of Jared: “What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?” (Ether 2:23). So they talked it over and, as a result, the brother of Jared prepared some beautiful fused quartz that was as clear as glass but could not shine by itself. Again he went to the Lord, almost obliterated with humility, but still reminding the Lord that he was only following orders: “We know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually [a vivid reminder of the gulf between the two ways—that our ways are not God’s ways]; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires” (Ether 3:2). So he screws up his courage and asks the Lord to do him a favor: “Touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, . . . that they may shine forth in darkness” (Ether 3:4). The sight of God’s finger quite overpowered the brother of Jared, knocked him flat, and that led to another discussion in which the Lord explained certain things to him at length. Moroni, recording these things, also recalls, “I have seen Jesus, and . . . he hath talked with me face to face, and . . . he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things” (Ether 12:39).

Note the significant concept of humility set forth here—humility is not a feeling of awe and reverence and personal unworthiness in the presence of overpowering majesty. Anyone, even the bloody Khan of the Steppes, confesses to being humble in the presence of God. Plain humility is reverence and respect in the presence of the lowest, not the highest, of God’s creatures. Brigham Young said he often felt overawed in the presence

of little children or any of his fellowmen—for in them he saw the image of his maker. Even so, God is willing to discuss things with men as an equal “in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). Note that God, far from demanding blind obedience, wants us to *understand* his commandments.

A discussion with God is not a case of agreeing or disagreeing with him—who is in a position to do that?—but of understanding him. What Abraham and Ezra and Enoch asked was “Why?” Socrates showed that teaching is a dialogue, a discussion. As long as the learner is in the dark, he *should* protest and argue and question, for that is the best way to bring problems into focus, while the teacher patiently and cheerfully explains, delighted that his pupil has enough interest and understanding to raise questions—the more passionate, the more promising. There is a place for discussion and participation in the government of the kingdom; it is *men* who love absolute monarchies; it was the Israelites, the Jaredites, the Nephites who asked God to give them a king, overriding the objections of his prophets who warned them against the step. Leaders of the Church have repeatedly taught that earthly rulers exercise their authority illegitimately; that the only legitimate authority upon the earth is that which is founded and recognized by God, whose *right* it is to rule.⁴

As John Taylor points out, it is the priesthood that should rule: “Some people ask, ‘What is Priesthood?’ I answer, ‘It is the legitimate rule of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth’; and it is the only legitimate power that has a right to rule upon the earth; and when the will of God

is done on earth as it is in the heavens, no other power will bear rule.”⁵

Politics, at best, is the free discussion of people running their own common affairs. Until men are willing to accept God’s way, he is willing that they should do their best on that lower level and even encourages them in such activity. “All regularly organized and well established governments,” said Joseph Smith, “have certain laws . . . [that] are good, equitable and just, [and] ought to be binding upon the individual who admits this.”⁶ At the same time, “It is not our intention . . . to place the law of man on a parallel with the law of *heaven*; because we do *not* consider that it is formed in the same wisdom and propriety; . . . it is [not] sufficient in itself to bestow anything on man in *comparison* with the law of heaven, even should it promise it.”⁷ In an important statement in 1903, the First Presidency of the Church said that the Church

does not attempt to exercise the powers of a secular government, but its influence and effects are to strengthen and promote fidelity to the law and loyalty to the nation where its followers reside. . . . It is solely an ecclesiastical organization. It is separate and distinct from the state. It does not interfere with any earthly government. . . . The Church, therefore, instructs in things temporal as well as things spiritual. . . . But it does not infringe upon the liberty of the individual or encroach upon the domain of the state. . . . The Church does not dictate a member’s business, his politics or his personal affairs. It never tells a citizen what occupation he

4. See John Taylor and Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:221–33; 8:101–6, respectively.

5. *Journal of Discourses*, 5:187.

6. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 49.

7. Smith, *Teachings*, 50 (emphasis added).

shall follow, whom he shall vote for or with which party he shall affiliate. . . .

Sermons, dissertations and arguments by preachers and writers in the Church concerning the Kingdom of God that *is to be*, are *not* to be understood as relating to the *present*. If they . . . convey the idea that the dominion *to come* is to be exercised *now*, the claim is incorrect.

Meantime:

Every member of the organization in every place is absolutely free as a citizen. . . . In proclaiming “the kingdom of heaven’s at hand,” we have the most intense and fervent convictions of our mission and calling. . . . But we do not and will not attempt to force them upon others, or to control or dominate any of their affairs, individual or national.⁸

It is precisely because we never for a moment think of the two systems as competing with each other that we can make the most of the one until the other is established. They are in the same game, they are in the same arena, though both have rules and both require qualities of character in their players.

The governments of men and their laws are completely *different* from those of God. “We do not attempt to place the law of man on a parallel with the law of heaven; but . . . the laws of man are binding upon man.”⁹

When God establishes his way among men it is by special divine messengers who come to men well prepared, “of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness” (Moroni 7:30). Every

restoration of the gospel has been accomplished through a series of heavenly visitations and glorious manifestations, with the divine plan fully and explicitly set forth for that dispensation, with all the divine authority and revealed knowledge necessary to establish the kingdom at that time. But since Satan is given explicit permission to tempt men and to try them, it is not long before a familiar trend begins to appear, a weakening of the structure as discussion deteriorates into power politics and political skulduggery:

Christ . . . proposed to make a covenant with them [the Jews], but they rejected Him and His proposals. . . . The Gentiles received the covenant, . . . but the Gentiles have not continued . . . but have departed from the faith . . . and have become high-minded, and have not feared; therefore, but few of them will be gathered.¹⁰

Man departed from the first teachings, or instructions which he received from heaven in the first age, and refused by his disobedience to be governed by them. Consequently, he formed such laws as best suited his own mind, or as he supposed, were best adapted to his situation. But that God has influenced man more or less . . . in the formation of law . . . we have no hesitancy in believing. . . . And though man in his own supposed wisdom would not admit the influence of a power superior to his own, yet . . . God has instructed man to form wise and wholesome laws, since he had departed from Him and refused to be governed by those laws which God had given by His own voice from on high in the beginning.¹¹

8. Cited in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:79, 82 (emphasis added).

9. Smith, *Teachings*, 51-52, compare p. 50.

10. Smith, *Teachings*, 14-15.

11. Smith, *Teachings*, 57.

Here we learn that over against the perfect way of life which God proposes for us and entirely removed from that way are all the other ways that men have proposed for themselves. These last are not equally good or bad, but some are much better than others, and God encourages and even assists men in adopting the best ones.

There is, then, virtue in politics even at the human level. The energy, the dedication, courage, loyalty, selflessness, zeal and industry, the intelligence that have gone into the political actions of men are immense, and the excitement, color, dash, and humor bring out some of the best in human nature. But as we have just noted, there are various levels at which the political dialogue takes place—all the way from *The Federalist Papers* to the local crackpot's letters to the editor; and many arenas and different forms of the game, differing as widely as a chess match from a slugging contest. Let us by all means retain the drive and dedication of politics, but do we still need the placards and the bands, the serpentine parades, funny hats, confetti, squabbling committees, canned speeches, shopworn clichés, patriotic exhibitionism, Madison Avenue slogans—to say nothing of bitter invective, the poisonous rhetoric, the dirty tricks and shady deals, payoffs, betrayals, the blighted loyalties, the scheming young men on the make, the Gadianton loyalty, the manipulated ovations and contrived confusion of the last hurrah? The furiously mounting infusion of green stuff into the political carnival in our day is enough to show that the spontaneity is not there, and even if some of it may remain, those running the show know very well from tried and tested statistics that all that sort of thing is to be got with money—lots and lots of money—and with nothing else.

An important part of the message of the restored gospel is that God's way has now been restored to the earth and is available to men; and that there is no excuse for their not embracing it inasmuch as it is entirely within their capacity to receive it and live by it, beginning, of course, with a complete turning away from their own ways:

I think that it is high time for a Christian world to awake out of sleep, and cry mightily to that God, day and night, whose anger we have justly incurred. . . . I step forth into the field [said the Prophet] to tell you what the *Lord* is doing, and *what you must do* . . . in these last days. . . .

. . . I will proceed to tell you what the *Lord* requires of all people, high and low, . . . in order that they may . . . escape the judgments of God, which are almost ready to burst upon the nations of the earth. Repent of all your sins.¹²

Even at its best, man's way is not God's way:

Some may pretend to say that the world in this age is fast increasing in righteousness; that the dark ages of superstition and blindness have passed, . . . the gloomy cloud is burst, and the Gospel is shining . . . [and] carried to divers nations of the earth [etc.]. . . .

But a moment's candid reflection . . . is sufficient for every candid man to draw a conclusion *in his own mind whether this is the order of heaven or not*.¹³

The best of human laws leaves every man free to engage in his own pursuit of happiness,¹⁴ without

12. Smith, *Teachings*, 14, 16 (emphasis added).

13. Smith, *Teachings*, 48-49 (emphasis added).

14. At best man's laws are negative—"Congress shall make no law . . ."

presuming for a moment to tell him where that happiness lies; that is the very thing the laws of God can guarantee. At *best*, the political prize is negative.

Important in the record of the dispensations is that when men depart from God's way and substitute their own ways in its place, they usually do not admit that that is what they are doing. Often they do not deliberately or even consciously substitute their ways for God's ways. On the contrary, they easily and largely convince themselves that *their way is God's way*. "The apostasy described in the New Testament is not *desertion* of the cause, but *perversion* of it, a process by which 'the righteous are removed, and none perceives it.'"¹⁵ The wedding of the Christian church and the Roman state was a venture in political dialectics, a restatement of the age-old political exercise of demonstrating that our way is God's way. "There's such divinity doth hedge a king"—*vox populi, vox Dei*, etc. The Lord told the apostles that in time "whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). The horrible fiasco of the Crusades went forward under the mandate of the *Deus Vult*—God wills it: it is his idea; the Inquisition was carried out by selfless men "for the greater glory of God."¹⁶ In every

age we find the worldly powers hypnotized by the image of the world as a *maydan*, a great battleground, on which the forces of good and evil are locked in mortal combat.¹⁷ True, there is a contest, but it is within the individual, not between ignorant armies—that solution is all too easy.

Recall the statement of Joseph Smith that "every candid man . . . [must] draw a conclusion in his own mind whether this [any political system] is the order of heaven or not."¹⁸ Banners, trumpets, and dungeons were early devised to help men make up their minds. But God does not fight Satan: a word from him and Satan is silenced and banished. There is no contest there; in fact, we are expressly told that all the power which Satan enjoys here on earth is granted him by God. "We will allow Satan, our common enemy, to try man and to tempt him." It is man's strength that is being tested—not God's. Nay, even in putting us to the test, "the devil," to quote Joseph Smith, "has no power over us only as *we* permit him."¹⁹ Since, then, "God *would* not exert any compulsory means, and the devil *could* not,"²⁰ it is up to us to decide how much power Satan shall have on this earth, but only in respect to ourselves; the fight is all *within us*. That is the whole battle. But how much easier to shift the battle to another arena and externalize the cause of all our misfortune.

It is easy enough to see how a world willingly beguiled by the devil's dialectic is bound to reject God's way and continue with its own. Even the Saints are guilty: "Repent, repent, is the voice of

(First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States). "The laws of men," says Joseph Smith, "may guarantee to a people protection in the honorable pursuits of this life, . . . and when this is said, all is said. . . . The law of heaven is presented to man, and as such guarantees to all who obey it a reward far beyond any earthly consideration. . . . The law of heaven . . . transcends the law of man, as far as eternal life the temporal." Smith, *Teachings*, 50.

15. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 172 (emphasis in original). "The Christian masses do not realize what is happening to them; they are 'bewitched' by a thing that comes as softly and insidiously as the slinging of a noose" (p. 172).
16. For a more detailed treatment of this theme, see Hugh W. Nibley,

"The Ancient Law of Liberty," in *The World and the Prophets*, ed.

John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 182–90.

17. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," in *The Ancient State*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 99–147.

18. Smith, *Teachings*, 49.

19. Smith, *Teachings*, 181 (emphasis added).

20. Smith, *Teachings*, 187 (emphasis added).

God to Zion; and strange as it may appear, yet it is true, mankind will persist in *self-justification* until all their iniquity is exposed, and their character past being redeemed.”²¹ As in every other dispensation, the world will continue to go its way, which is one of *progressive deterioration*:

The great and wise of ancient days have failed in all their attempts to promote eternal power, peace and happiness. . . . They proclaim as with a voice of thunder . . . that man’s strength is weakness, his wisdom is folly, his glory is his shame.

. . . Nation has succeeded nation. . . . History records their puerile plans, their short-lived glory, their feeble intellect and their ignoble deeds.

Have we increased in knowledge or intelligence? . . . Our nation, which possesses greater resources than any other, is rent, from center to circumference, with party strife, political intrigues, and sectional interest; . . . our tradesmen are disheartened, our mechanics out of employ, our farmers distressed, and our poor crying for bread, our banks are broken, our credit ruined. . . .

What is the matter? Are we alone in this thing? Verily no. With all our evils we are better situated than any other nation. . . . England . . . has her hands reeking with the blood of the innocent abroad. . . . The world itself presents one great theater of misery, woe, and “distress of nations with perplexity.” *All, all, speak with a voice of thunder, that man is not able to govern himself, to legislate for himself, to protect himself, to promote his own good, nor the good of the world.* [After all is said, there is nothing for

it but to accept God’s way—nothing else will work.]

*It has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world, and is His purpose now, to regulate the affairs of the world in His own time, to stand as a head of the universe, and take the reins of government in His own hand. When that is done . . . “nations will learn war no more.”*²²

Here the Prophet lays it on the line:

The world has had a fair trial for six thousand years; the Lord will try the seventh thousand Himself. . . . To bring about this state of things, there must of necessity be great confusion among the nations of the earth. . . .

. . . God is coming out of His hiding place . . . to vex the nations of the earth. . . . It is for us to be righteous, that we may be wise and understand; for none of the wicked shall understand. . . .

As a Church and a people it behooves us to be wise, and to seek to know the will of God, and then be willing to do it. . . . *Our only confidence can be in God.* . . .

. . . We have treated lightly His commands, and departed from His ordinances, and the Lord has chastened us sore. . . .

In regard to the building up of Zion, *it has to be done by the counsel of Jehovah, by the revelations of heaven.*²³

From these sayings of the Prophet, one would hardly expect the world to have improved since his day, and the words of Brigham Young are eloquent in describing the steady deterioration that has continued unabated up to the present

21. Smith, *Teachings*, 18–19 (emphasis added).

22. Smith, *Teachings*, 249–51 (emphasis added).

23. Smith, *Teachings*, 252–54 (emphasis added).

moment. No wonder “thinking men, inquiring minds, ask whether it is really necessary for the Government of God to be on the earth at the present day; I answer, most assuredly; there never was a time when it was more needed than it is now. Why? Because *men do not know how to govern themselves without it.*”²⁴ “I acknowledged to him [Colonel Thomas Kane] that we have the best system of government in existence, but queried if the people of this nation were righteous enough to *sustain its institutions. I say they are not, but will trample them under their feet.*”²⁵

But is not Satan a politician with his love of confusion and controversy? Isn’t the adversary an arch-politician? “There shall be no disputations among you,” said the Lord to the Nephites, “for . . . he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:28–29). Let us make one thing clear: contention is not discussion, but the opposite; contention puts an end to all discussion, as does war. *Cedant leges inter arma*, said the Romans—when war takes over, politics are in abeyance. The most famous dictum of Clausewitz is that war is simply a continuation of the political dialogue in another arena, but—as he points out at great length and with great clarity—it is an arena in which the appeal is all to brute force and in which any talk of laws or rules or principles cannot be anything but a strategic ruse.²⁶ In reality a declaration of war is an announcement that the discussion is over. War is beyond politics, and God has said: “I . . . will that all men shall know

that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion” (D&C 1:35). That is the end of politics for now.

God discusses things with men “in all humility” for the sake of our enlightenment. Satan too loves to “discuss,” but what a different type of discussion! He is not teaching but laying traps; his whole line is a sales pitch with his own advantage as the end. He is not enlightening but manipulating. He does not reason, but bargains: his proposition as put before Adam, Cain, Abraham, Moses, Enoch, and the Lord himself is the same one he puts to Faust and Jabez Stone: “For if you will worship me I will give you unlimited power and wealth—everything this world has to offer—all you have to do is sign away your rather dubious expectations for the other world.” If his proposition is refused outright, he has no other resort but to have a tantrum, falling down, rending upon the earth, screaming madly, “I am the Son of God! Worship me!” (compare Moses 1:19), for his sole objective from the beginning has been to be Number One.

There are men who . . . wish to destroy every power in Heaven and on earth that they do not hold themselves. *This* is the spirit of Satan that was made so visibly manifest in Heaven and which proved his overthrow, and he *now* afflicts *this people* with it; *he* wants to dictate and rule every principle and power that leads to exaltation and eternal life.²⁷

To be Number One is to be beyond politics. It is his command of the ultimate weapon that places Satan—like God—beyond politics.

24. *Journal of Discourses*, 10:320 (emphasis added).

25. *Journal of Discourses*, 12:119 (emphasis added).

26. Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics, and Power*, trans. and ed. Edward M. Collins (Chicago: Regnery, 1967), 64–65, 83, 85.

27. *Journal of Discourses*, 10:97 (emphasis added).

A piece appeared in the press noting that businessmen are insisting with increasing zeal on searching the minds and the hearts of their employees by means of polygraph tests. If any arm of government were to go so far, they would be met by horrified protests at this vicious attack on individual freedom, and rightly so. What is it that gives ordinary businessmen a power greater than that of the government? It is the capacity for giving or withholding money—nothing else in the world. This is the weapon that Satan chose from the beginning to place him and his plans beyond politics, and it has worked with deadly effect. There is only one thing in man’s world that can offer any check on the unlimited power of money—and that is government. That is why money always accuses government of trying to destroy free agency, when the great enslaver has always been money itself.

We do not have time here to review Satan’s brilliant career in business and law: how he taught Cain the “great secret” of how to “murder and get gain” while claiming the noblest motive, “saying: I am free” (Moses 5:31, 33); how he inspired the Jaredites and then the Nephites “to seek for power, and authority, and riches” (3 Nephi 6:15); how he tried to buy off Abraham (in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*) and Moses and Jesus by promising them anything in the world if they would only worship him; how he coached Judas in the art of handling money; how he corrupts the Saints by covetousness and the things of the world; how his disciple, Simon Magus, offered Peter cash on the line for the priesthood. To be beyond politics does not place one, in President John Taylor’s words, “above the [rule] of Mammon.”²⁸ Only a celestial order can do that.

28. John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 70, quoting a hymn of the early Church, “Adam-ondi-Ahman.”

Largely because of this dominion, the human dialogue has a tendency, as many ancient writers observed, to deteriorate unless there is divine intervention;²⁹ and since men normally insist on rejecting such intervention, the end result is periodic catastrophe. This is the standard message found in the apocalyptic literature. “Every system of civil polity invented by men, like their religious creeds, has been *proved by experiment wholly inadequate to check the downward tendency of the human race.*”³⁰

When this downward tendency passes the *point of no return*, the process accelerates beyond control, ending in general catastrophe, to be followed by God’s intervention and a new dispensation. “Wherefore, I the Lord, *knowing the calamity* which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments” (D&C 1:17). Joseph Smith intended to follow those commandments: “The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in *just what He* tells us to do.”³¹ “One truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence.”³² “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. . . . All will suffer until they obey Christ himself.”³³ “The sinner will slay the sinner, the wicked will fall upon the wicked, until there is an utter overthrow and consumption upon the face of the whole earth, until God reigns, whose right it is.”³⁴

The Church has been put to great trouble and expense through the years by its insistence on

29. Compare, for example, Hesiod’s law of decay. This is, incidentally, the basic principle of apocalyptic literature.

30. *Millennial Star* 17 (27 October 1855): 675 (emphasis added).

31. Smith, *Teachings*, 332 (emphasis added).

32. Smith, *Teachings*, 338.

33. Smith, *Teachings*, 357.

34. *Journal of Discourses*, 2:190.

sticking to its long and awkward title: plainly the second part of the name is very important—the Church of the *latter days*. These are the *last days*—the last days of what? Neither we nor the outside world have ever bothered to explore or argue definitions about that—because the answer is obvious: it is the perennial message of the apocalyptic teaching, which is now recognized as the very foundation of the Old and the New Testaments. The last days are the last days of everything as we know it. “The Lord declared to His servants, some eighteen months since [1833], that He was then withdrawing His Spirit from the earth; . . . the governments of the earth are thrown into confusion and division; and *Destruction*, to the eye of the spiritual beholder, seems to be written by the finger of an invisible hand, in large capitals, upon almost every thing we behold.”³⁵ “God hath set His hand and seal to change the times and seasons, and to blind their minds, that they may not understand His marvelous workings.”³⁶ “While upon one hand I behold *the manifest withdrawal of God’s Holy Spirit*, and the *veil of stupidity* which seems to be drawn over the hearts of the people; upon the other hand, I behold the judgments of God . . . sweeping hundreds and thousands of our race, and I fear unprepared, down to the shades of death.”³⁷

At the present time the political dialogue throughout the world has deteriorated catastrophically. In most countries it has degenerated into such mechanical and stereotyped forms that it is no longer profitable or meaningful—it is no longer a dialogue at all. If you are a private citizen, you just do not “discuss” things with colonels, commissars, or corporations—you do what

they tell you to do or at best manipulate you into doing. Has it ever been different? Not much, but on 17 October 1973, the junta in Chile officially put an end to *all* political activity of any kind or by any party. This is something unique, a final step by rulers who do not even make a *pretense* of consulting the ruled. Where do we go from here? We are beyond politics indeed. Another and even more fateful development has recently come to the fore in our midst, indicating beyond question that we have at last reached that point of no return³⁸ which heralds the last of the last days.

God has never given us a time schedule for the developments of the last days. There are a number of reasons for this; for example, if we knew the time and the hour, we would gauge our behavior accordingly and conveniently postpone repentance—whereas God wants us to live *as if* we were expecting his coming at any moment. He comes as a thief in the night: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour” (Matthew 24:42). But though he does not give us dates and figures, he does give us unmistakable signs of the times and urges us to pay the closest possible attention to them. Simply by looking at a fig tree, for example, one can estimate quite closely about how far away the harvest is. The word *historia* was borrowed by Hecateus from the medical profession, the *historia* being progressive symptoms of a disease or illness; just as there are signs by which the doctor can tell how far along the patient is and how long he has to go, so there are such signs in the body politic of any society.

Specifically, if we want to know the sure sign of the end, we are instructed to look for *ripeness* or *fullness*. The end comes when, and *only* when, “the time is *ripe*,” when “the harvest is *ripe*,” when the people are “ripe in iniquity.” Or, to use the

35. Smith, *Teachings*, 16 (emphasis in original).

36. Smith, *Teachings*, 135.

37. Smith, *Teachings*, 13–14 (emphasis added).

38. The point of no return marks the stroke of doom in classical tragedy.

other figure, when “the cup of His wrath is *full*,” which will be when “the cup of *their* iniquity is *full*.” Or, to combine both terms, when the world is *fully ripe* in iniquity. Fruit is fully ripe at that moment when further ripening would not mean improvement but only deterioration. (“And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe, and then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot.”)³⁹ And a vessel is *full* when nothing more can be added to it, when its contents can no longer be improved or damaged by adding any more ingredients. When the fruit is ripe, there is no point in letting it remain longer on the tree. And when the cup is full, nothing further remains to be done about its contents. Ripeness and fullness are that state of things, in short, when nothing further remains to be done in the direction of filling or ripening, and the process has reached the end.

A society has reached such a point when it can no longer go in the direction it has been taking, when the only hope of motion lies in a change or a direct reversal of direction, and repentance is that change of direction. It is when men reach the point of refusing to *repent* that they have reached the point of fullness: “And it shall come to pass, because of the wickedness of the world, that I will take vengeance upon the wicked, for they will not repent; for the cup of mine indignation is full” (D&C 29:17). The moment Adam found himself going in the wrong direction because of the Fall, he was to repent and call upon God forevermore—that is, to reverse his course; and ever since then “the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened. . . . For he gave commandment

that all men must repent” (2 Nephi 2:21). The reason that our lives are extended as they are beyond the age of reproduction is to allow us the fullest possible opportunity to repent. Therefore, when men have lost the capacity to repent, they forfeit any right to sojourn further upon the earth; the very purpose of this extended span of life being to practice repentance; when men announce that they have no intention of repenting, there is no reason why God should let them stay around longer to corrupt the rising generation. “And now cometh the day of their calamity, . . . and their sorrow shall be great unless they speedily repent, yea, very speedily” (D&C 136:35).

There is a time limit, then, and I believe that the time limit has now been reached—the cup is full. For we have in our time the terrifying phenomenon of men who refuse to repent. Why should they repent? Because God commands it. “Behold, I command all men everywhere to repent” (D&C 18:9). “And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless” (D&C 19:4). “Therefore, I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth. . . . For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:15-16). “Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power. . . . And I command you that you preach naught but repentance” (D&C 19:20-21). “Wherefore, I will that all men shall repent, for all are under sin, except those which I have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of” (D&C 49:8). “Hearken and hear, O ye inhabitants of the earth. Listen, ye elders of my church together, and hear the voice of the Lord; for he calleth upon all men, and he commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (D&C 133:16).

39. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7, lines 26-27.

[Nibley used the phrase *day to day* instead of *hour to hour*. —Eds.]

Yet throughout the world today, few, it would seem, have any intention anymore of repenting. That is the ominous note! Mormon describes this condition as marking the last stand of the Nephites:

And now behold, my son, I fear lest the Lamanites shall destroy this people; for they do not repent. . . . When I speak the word of God with sharpness they tremble and anger against *me*; and when I use no sharpness they harden their hearts against it; wherefore, I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them. . . . I cannot any longer enforce my commands. And they have become strong in their perversion, . . . without principle, and past feeling. . . . I pray unto God . . . to witness the return [repentance] of his people unto him, or their utter destruction. (Moroni 9:3-4, 18-20, 22)

They sorrowed at the loss of their wealth, “but behold this . . . was vain,” Mormon continues, “for their sorrowing was not unto repentance . . . but . . . because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13). “And I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually” (Mormon 2:15). When the day of repentance is past, so is the day of grace. They had reached the *point of no return*. This is what the Greeks called *atē*, and it is the telling moment of tragedy.

Take that greatest of tragedies, *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus had in his youth committed a terrible compound crime; but he had done it unknowingly and was therefore given every opportunity, not only to repent and be forgiven, but also to achieve higher glory than ever. The question was not whether or not he was guilty, but whether or not, being guilty, he would repent. At the

beginning of the play, he drops hints that betray a subconscious awareness of his guilt; he, as the king, insists on a thorough investigation. Then, as more and more evidence accumulates against him, he insists even more loudly that he has done no wrong; he looks for one party and then another to fix the blame on, but each time it becomes clear that it could not have been that person. In the end even his wife cannot deny his guilt any longer and pleads with him to drop the case; his reply is to blame her for everything in a fantastically forced and vicious argument. When finally he is forced to recognize that he and he alone is the enemy he seeks, the results are terrible. His whole trouble is that he will not repent: after his meteoric career, his matchless fame, his unfailing cleverness, and strong character had held the reins of power for twenty years, he was in no mood to repent of everything. The last words spoken to him in the play are significant when his uncle (brother-in-law) Creon says to him: “Don’t think you can be *number one* all the time.”⁴⁰ This is also the tragedy of Lear, that most tragic of tragedies, of Richard II, and of King Laertes in *The Winter’s Tale*: each king, because he *is* the king, cannot tolerate the idea of repenting—that would be a fatal confession of weakness—and so each one digs himself deeper and deeper into a devastating situation from which he cannot escape: because the only escape hatch is repentance. In each case the trouble is the insistence on being Number One—and this takes us back to the primal tragedy and the character of Lucifer, whose example all our tragic figures are following. “Now, in this world,” said Joseph Smith, “mankind are naturally selfish, ambitious and striving to excel. . . . Some seek to excel. And this was the

40. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, line 1522.

case with Lucifer when he fell"⁴¹—he had to be Number One. Since all have sinned, there is no question of whether one has done wrong or not, but only of whether one will repent. But what is now the approved school solution? Since all have sinned, why should anybody be the goat? Why should anybody repent?

When President Harold B. Lee said that the Saints are above politics, he was referring to the brand of politics that prevails in the world today. "The government of heaven, if wickedly administered, would become one of the worst governments upon the face of the earth. No matter how good a government is, unless it is administered by righteous men, an evil government will be made of it."⁴² Men caught red-handed, charged, tried, confessed, and convicted now come forth to plead innocent: they were merely carrying out orders, they were doing what everyone does, they have done no wrong. The winningest of slogans when the national conscience became burdened with the guilt of relentless shedding of innocent blood day after day, month after month, and year after year could only be the slogan *We have done no wrong!* Any politician foolish enough to so much as hint at a need for repentance certainly was asking for the drubbing he would get. King Claudius and Macbeth were bloody villains, and they knew it, and even in their darkest hours speculated with a wild surmise on the possibility, however remote, of repentance and forgiveness. The fatal symptom of our day is not that men do wrong—they always have—and commit crimes, and even recognize their wrongdoing as foolish and unfortunate, but that they have *no intention of repenting*, while God has told us that the first rule

that he has given the human race is that all men everywhere must repent.

Joseph Smith tells us that there are crimes and sins which are wrong no matter who does them or under what condition: they are wrong in and of themselves, at all times and at all places. You cannot deceive one party to be loyal to another. "Any man who will betray the Catholics will betray you; and if he will betray me, he will betray you."⁴³ Compare this with Mr. Stone's declaration that he found nothing shocking in public officials' lying under oath, since they were trained to do that very thing. "All [men] are subjected to vanity," according to Joseph Smith, "while they travel through the crooked paths and difficulties which surround them. Where is the man that is free from vanity?"⁴⁴ Granted that, it is still true that "all men have power to resist the devil,"⁴⁵ which leaves them without excuse.

The dialogue between men has always been remarkably superficial, devoid of any substance and depth, since men must always be on the go and only make brief contact, like jet planes passing in the night as each goes about his business, looking out first of all for his own interests, with little time left over for the common interest. Busy modern men and women feel they are too busy for the rigors of serious discussion necessary for genuine politics. Senator Proxmire deplored the fact, as all public-spirited people always have, that very few people take a real and active part in the political process. How could it be otherwise? Politics by its very nature is superficial: the practitioner can never go into depth because too many things have to be considered. If in physics the problem of three bodies has been solved

41. Smith, *Teachings*, 297.

42. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:177.

43. Smith, *Teachings*, 375.

44. Smith, *Teachings*, 187.

45. Smith, *Teachings*, 189.

only by approximation, how can we expect to cope wisely and fully with the infinite complexity of human affairs? Politics, in the proper Greek sense, was a full-time job for the citizen, who spent his day in the Agora and his nights in long discussions and debates, while servants and slaves took care of petty and menial matters.⁴⁶ Even that, however, was an ideal which neither the Greeks nor anyone else could live up to. After all, the first interest of every citizen is to make money: “*O cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum est; virtus post nummos!*”⁴⁷ And so politics degenerated quickly into subservience to private interests—it yields subservience to wealth. If Greece produced the most enlightened politicians, it also, as Thucydides informs us, produced the most sordid. Politics is often a forlorn and hopeless affair, because it is not really a dialogue unless it is strictly honest, and the ulterior motives of power and gain always vitiate it in the end. It is then the tricky lawyer who takes over. Eventually someone seeks a stronger tool than mere talk—we start talking and end up condemning and smiting. “Man shall not smite, neither

shall he judge” (Mormon 8:20) is the final wisdom of the Book of Mormon. “Man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh” (D&C 1:19) is the initial wisdom of the Doctrine and Covenants. What was to be a meeting of the minds often degenerates into a trial of arms. Politics gravitates in the direction of an ever-stronger clout, inevitably leading to the trial of arms. Someone seeks a stronger tool than mere talk. Consider again Clausewitz’s famous dictum that war is the natural end of politics—and also that war lies beyond politics. It is the arena that smells of death—and we are trapped in the arena.

The wide difference, amounting to complete antithesis, between men’s ways and God’s ways should always be kept in mind. If we would remember that fact, it would save us from a pitfall that constantly lies before us—especially here at Brigham Young University. Nothing is easier than to identify one’s own favorite political, economic, historical, and moral convictions with the gospel. That gives one a neat, convenient, but altogether too-easy advantage over one’s fellows. If my ideas are the true ones—and I certainly will not entertain them if I suspect for a moment that they are false!—then, all truth being one, they are also the gospel, and to oppose them is to play the role of Satan. This is simply insisting that our way is God’s way, and therefore the only way. It is the height of impertinence. “There have been frauds and secret abominations and evil works of darkness going on [in the Church], . . . all the time palming it off upon the Presidency, . . . practicing in the Church in their name.”⁴⁸ Do you think these people were not sincere? Yes, to the point of fanaticism—they wholly identified their crackpot schemes with the Church and with the gospel. Some of the most learned theologians,

46. This was their genius and the secret of their success. Whether the Greek pursued philosophy, art, religion, pleasure, science, or money, he was willing to give the search everything he had—sacrificing every convenience and amenity: the ideal of the Greeks was the *sophos*—completely selfless, oblivious to his own comfort, health, appearance, and appetites as his mind came to grips with the problem of achieving one particular objective. That is why the Greeks were anciently way out in front of others in almost every field of human endeavor—and still remain unsurpassed and even unequalled in many of them. The Greek citizen not only spent the day in the Agora, but in the evenings at home he carried on the dialogue in discussion and study groups, for the Greek citizen knew that the only work worthy of the name, a work a hundred times harder than the repetitious routines and seemingly virtuous bootlicking that we call work, was the terribly demanding and exhausting task of cutting new grooves and channels with the sharp edge of the mind. He felt that if politics was all that important, it was worth our best hours.

47. Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.53–54.

48. Smith, *Teachings*, 127–28.

such as Bossuet, have shown from every page of the scripture that God is an absolute monarchist, while others, equally learned and dedicated, have formed religious communities dedicated to the equally obvious scriptural proposition that the Saints are Communists. You can search through the scriptures and find support for any theory you want, and it is your privilege to attempt to convince yourself of any position you choose to take—but not to impose that opinion on others as the gospel. God certainly does not subscribe to our political creeds. The first issue of the *Times and Seasons* contained a lead editorial to the elders: “Be careful that you teach not for the word of God, the commandments of men, nor the doctrines of men nor the ordinances of men; . . . study the word of God and preach it, and *not your opinions*, for no man’s opinion is worth a straw.”⁴⁹

We may seem to be speaking out of order because we insist on bringing into the discussion of political science certain theological propositions which are simply not acceptable to those outside of our Church. But I am speaking for myself. There is the basic proposition: “The Spirit of God will . . . dwell with His people, and be withdrawn from the rest of the nations.” Accordingly, among the Saints, “party feelings, separate interests, exclusive designs should be lost sight of in the one common cause, in the interest of the whole.”⁵⁰ If the world cannot accept such a proposition, we are still committed to it—wholly and irrevocably—whether we like it or not. “The government of the Almighty has always been very dissimilar to the governments of men. . . . [It] has always tended to promote peace, unity, harmony, strength, and happiness,” while on the other hand “the greatest acts of the

mighty men have been to depopulate nations and to overthrow kingdoms. . . . Before them the earth was a paradise, and behind them a desolate wilderness. . . . The designs of God, on the other hand, [are that] . . . ‘the earth shall yield its increase, resume its paradisaean glory, and become as the garden of the Lord.’”⁵¹

How you play the game of politics is important, but the game you are playing is also important. It is important to work, but what you work for is all-important. The Nephites, “by their industry” (Alma 4:6), obtained riches—which then destroyed them; “[for] the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for *money* they shall perish” (2 Nephi 26:31). Work does not satisfy wealth, as we try to make ourselves believe. The zeal and intelligence that our political commitments demand—to what should they be directed? At present we have a positive obsession with the *economy*—the economy is all. But the Lord told Samuel the Lamanite that when a people “have set their hearts upon riches, . . . cursed be they and also their treasures” (Helaman 13:20).

While listening to Senator Proxmire’s address, I was impressed by the clear-headed intelligence and zeal he brought to his task: it made one almost think that the show was going on—that there still is a genuine politics after all. What then of the prophecies? Both in manner and appearance the senator recalled to mind certain dashing, wonderful men who, during World War II, used to brief the various units of the 101st Airborne Division which they were leading into battle. (The classic Leader’s Oration before the Battle enjoyed a revival in airborne operations where the army, a short hour before the battle, could sit quietly on the grass one hundred miles from the enemy and listen to speeches.) It was

49. *Times and Seasons* 1/1 (1839): 13 (emphasis added).

50. Smith, *Teachings*, 231.

51. Smith, *Teachings*, 248–49.

the high point of their careers, the thing they had been working and hoping and looking forward to all their lives—to lead a crack regiment or division into battle, and they made the most of it. The feeling of euphoria was almost overpowering—they were smart, sharp, vigorous, compelling, eager, tense, exuding optimism and even humor, but above all excitement. Invariably General Maxwell Taylor would end his oration with: “Good hunting!” It was wonderful, thrilling; you were ready to follow that man anywhere. *But* before the operation was a day old, every man in the division was heartily wishing that he was anywhere else, doing anything else but that; everyone knew in his mind and heart that he was not sent to earth to engage in this nasty and immoral business. The heroism and sacrifice were real—the situation was utterly satanic and shameful; the POWs we rounded up to interrogate were men just as good as we were, the victims of a terrible circumstance that the devil’s game of power and gain had woven around them.

So I like Senator Proxmire—like General Taylor, a splendid man. I admire his style and approve his zeal, but wisdom greater than man tells me that we are not playing the right game: “The world lieth in sin at this time and *none* doeth good *no not one*.”⁵² The game is not going to last much longer. “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, *which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall*” (D&C 1:16; compare 2 Nephi 9:30). According to Joseph Smith,

We . . . [and] our wives and children . . . have been made to bow down under . . . the most damning hand of murder, tyranny, and oppressions, supported and urged on and upheld by . . . that spirit which has so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies, upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with confusion, and has been growing stronger and stronger, and is now the very main-spring of all corruption, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity.⁵³

This is our heritage.

The news of the world today reminds me of nothing so much as those bulletins which a short while ago were being issued by the doctors attending the late King Gustave of Sweden and by those treating Pablo Casals. The king was in his nineties; Casals, ninety-six; and both were very ill—what really good news could come out of the sickroom? That the patient had rested well? That he had had some lucid moments? That he had taken nourishment? Could any of that be called good news, hopeful news—in view of the inevitable news the world was waiting for? What is your own idea of an encouraging and cheering item in the news today? That the next Middle Eastern war has been postponed? That a new oil field has been discovered? “This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.”⁵⁴ We shall achieve lasting peace when we achieve eternal life. Politics has the same goal as the gospel: complete happiness. But to achieve that requires eternal life. The most painful thing in the world, says Joseph Smith, is the thought of annihilation;⁵⁵ until that gnawing pain is relieved, all the rest is a forlorn

53. Smith, *Teachings*, 145.

54. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 3, line 96.

55. Smith, *Teachings*, 296.

52. Joseph Smith, as quoted in Jessee, “Early Accounts,” 280. See note 3 above.

and wistful game of make-believe. The solution of all our problems is the resurrection: only God knows the solution. Why not follow his advice? And only the gospel can remove that pain. The final relief of all our woes lies beyond all worldly politics. So when Joseph Smith says, “My feelings revolt at the idea of having anything to do with politics,” he is not being high and mighty but putting his priorities in order. “I wish to be let alone,” he says, “that I may attend strictly to the spiritual welfare of the church.”⁵⁶ Specifically, “The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do.”⁵⁷ “For one truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence.”⁵⁸ And so he pursues his way: “It matters not to me if all hell boils over; I regard it only as I would the crackling of the thorns under a pot. . . . I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world. . . . It will not be by sword or gun that this kingdom will roll on.”⁵⁹

How should the Saints behave? Brigham Young believed that “the elders cannot be too particular to enjoin on all the saints to yield obedience to the laws, and respect every man in his office, letting politics wholly, entirely and absolutely alone, and preach the principles of the gospel of salvation; for to this end were they ordained and sent forth. We are for peace, we want no contention with any person or government.”⁶⁰ “Amid all the revolutions that are taking place among the nations, the elders will ever pursue an undeviating course in being subject to the government wherever they may be, and sustain the same

by all their precepts to the Saints, having *nothing to do with political questions* which engender strife, remembering that the weapons of their warfare are not carnal but spiritual, and that the Gospel which they preach is not of man but from heaven.”⁶¹ “As for politics, we care nothing about them one way or the other, although we are a political people. . . . It is the Kingdom of God or nothing with us.”⁶² The kingdom is beyond politics—one way or the other—that is, it is beyond partisan party politics.

On the last night of a play the whole cast and stage crew stay in the theater until the small or not-so-small hours of the morning, striking the old set. If there is to be a new opening soon, as the economy of the theater requires, it is important that the new set should be in place and ready for the opening night; all the while the old set was finishing its usefulness and then being taken down, the new set was rising in splendor to be ready for the drama that would immediately follow. So it is with this world. It is not our business to tear down the old set—the agencies that do that are already hard at work and very efficient; the set is coming down all around us with spectacular effect. Our business is to see to it that the new set is well on the way for what is to come—and that means a different kind of politics, beyond the scope of the tragedy that is now playing its closing night. We are preparing for the establishment of Zion.🔒

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56. Smith, *Teachings*, 275.

57. Smith, *Teachings*, 332.

58. Smith, *Teachings*, 338.

59. Smith, *Teachings*, 339, 366.

60. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 7:407.

61. *Millennial Star* 13 (15 July 1851): 215.

62. *Millennial Star* 31 (4 September 1869): 573.