



**Foundation for
Ancient Research &
Mormon Studies**

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Is there a gospel culture? We begin with the idea. Is there a gospel community or society? There clearly is. Zion has always been described as a city, an organized society, set apart from the world. If the community preserves its integrity for any length of time, it is bound to emerge as a separate culture. The earliest reference to the culture I have in mind is Israel as the "peculiar people." Moses and Aaron disengaged the children of Israel from the culture of Egypt, the most distinctive culture of its time. The Lord tells them: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exodus 19:4-5). The King James Version uses "peculiar treasure" for *segūlah*, a word meaning 'set apart,' 'sealed,' 'removed from the rest of the world.' Exodus continues: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (v.6). A distinctive culture begins there. The cultural franchise is set down in Deuteronomy. In the light of recent documentary discoveries the true nature of that culture is beginning to appear, presenting ever closer resemblances to the picture Joseph Smith has given us of ancient Israel and early Christianity.

The Mormon basic concept is that we are God's spirit children; that idea separates us from the world: "Ye are the children [of Jehovah Elohim] of the Lord your God." Hence, "Ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes. . . ." etc. (Deuteronomy 14:1-2). Awareness of their heavenly parentage sets Israel apart *culturally* as well as doctrinally.

Their ordinances set them apart too. Every ancient civilization is hierocentric; it is the temple that sets it apart from the rest of the world. And so we read in the 135th Psalm of praises to the Lord, to the name of the Lord and to the servants of the Lord standing "in the house of the Lord [the temple], in the courts of the house of our God" (Psalm 135:2). "Praise the Lord; for the Lord is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant. For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure [for his *segūlah* again]" (Psalm 135:2-4).

In his letter to Titus (2:12-14), Paul translates *segūlah* by a very interesting word that Aristotle uses also: *periousios*. It means a peculiar treasure.

The Saints are to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts" to become "a peculiar people." The word here rendered "peculiar," *periousios*, designates that part of any wealth that is set aside or reserved in a separate account, not part of the common deposit, a peculiar treasure, something special and set apart to be of value in times of dire need. When the going is bad, this is where we will go for our salvation. Paul continues:

"zealous of good works." It is specifically their good works that set the saints apart.

[What is the gospel culture composed of? Everything good. Like patriotism, it is more inclusive than exclusive. Its peculiarity, its *segūlah*, is a seal set upon whatever it finds desirable, rendering that thing also peculiar. It is the combination, the structure, that is peculiar, not the separate elements. Our thirteenth Article of Faith sums it up beautifully; we accept everything we put our stamp on. Can anything be more universally appealing, more desirable for the whole human race, than being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous (that's inner culture acceptable to any society), and in doing good to all men? Moreover, we seek after every good thing; we are in the market for everything good. Articles six (dealing with organization, the same organization as the primitive Church), seven (dealing with the spiritual gifts that set the Mormons apart from the rest of the world at this time), and ten, especially (looking forward to another kind of secular environment), all have very strong cultural implications. "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel [the same thing we have already been referring to] and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this [the American] continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory" (Article of Faith 10). We shall see all these things. These are very special things.]

So we believe there is a culture here, a single culture peculiar to Mormons. Brigham Young expressed it well when he said, "We have commenced to organize, I will say partially, in the Holy Order that God has established for his people in all ages of the world when he has had a kingdom on the earth. We may call it the Order of Enoch, the Order of Joseph, or the Order of Peter, or Abraham, or Moses, and then back to Noah, always the same order." It is essentially the same culture, we shall see.

Brigham continues: "We will organize, as far as we have the privilege . . . under the laws of the land . . ." that is, under its restraining influence, its alien culture. We have to defer to it because we are dependent on it and without those laws we would not even be allowed to exist at all. The gospel would never have emerged. "Many branches of industry have been organized here to help sustain each other, to labor for the good of all and to establish cooperation in the midst of the Church in this place." The concept is of an ongoing culture that had in each dispensation been restored—not the teachings alone, but celestial manners, morals, and environment.

[Now, not only is there a single, central celestial culture reserved for the saints, but such a culture has also served as the model for the greatest peaks of human civilization as a whole. Those "Golden Ages,"

all too few and far between, that have illuminated the long night of history have, I believe, all drawn their nourishment from the memories of lost Zions. Whenever Homer speaks of anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, he invariably compares it with a heavenly model; whether it is an individual, some godlike hero, a society like the Phaeacians. A dream, or a landscape, it is always compared with some heavenly ideal. Hundreds of graffiti made by the Egyptian pilgrims to holy shrines describe the temples on which they scratch their names as places that make them think they are in heaven. How often the art of the Chinese (flowing robes amid the clouds) refers to its celestial counterparts; the people see themselves as a culture blessed and set apart, frankly styling themselves "the celestials." The brief splendor of Arabic Spain left behind the haunting image of a paradise on earth, just as the Gothic glories of the Middle Ages coming through Byzantium from the court of Persia transmit the heavenly visions of the Asiatics. The Egyptian court was also another heaven on earth, though its real glory was confined to an early dynasty. There have been but few such golden moments in history; their flourishing has been all too brief. But they do seem to follow a common pattern.] "We are trying to be the image of those who live in heaven. We are trying to pattern after them, to look like them, to walk and talk like them, to be like them, and build up the kingdom of heaven as they have done," said Brigham Young. Another celestial culture. God has already supplied us with the necessary materials and plans; indeed, the stage has been set for Zion from the beginning. "Heaven," said President Joseph F. Smith, "was the prototype of this beautiful creation when it came from the hand of the creator and was pronounced good." We have a good start.

The clearest evidence that the great cultures of the world were inspired by a common model is their common dependence on one special institution—the temple. Ancient civilizations were what Eric Burrows called "hierocentric" in nature, that is, all their activities and thoughts were centered around the single sacred point, which was marked in every case by the temple and its ordinances.² But even apart from that, if we compare the moment of fulfillment of these great cultures such as those of Greece, Persia, China, Arabic Spain, or Egypt, we find the external manifestations are strangely alike. They all sought the heavenly. So it is with us. Brigham Young was the first person to speak in tongues in this dispensation (1832).³ When he did so in the presence of Joseph Smith, the Prophet declared it to be the pure Adamic Tongue.⁴ It was the language of our father Adam, walking in Eden, and the time will come again when the Lord brings again Zion, the likeness of Zion and Enoch; this people will then all speak the language that Brigham Young Spoke. A single language, someday, and a single culture, all based on a heavenly model.

I am going to read from an old book of Adam, a Syriac text discovered in 1819, translated in 1856, and long forgotten, describing an ancient writer's idea of what the civilization of Enoch was like. For him it is a common culture scattered among countless worlds. He tells us what life is like on these worlds. His description is noteworthy because while writers of every age have found the description of hell only too easy, they become lost and unconvincing as soon as they attempt to depict what heaven is really like; that is a task that daunts Dante himself. But this old Christian writer, who has Mandaeen connections, tells us that Zion is a place "without discord or dissent," where angels wise and gentle, without malice or deceit, come and go on cheerful assignments.] There is a perfect agreement among the worlds, each having its particular glory, and all the inhabitants share their knowledge freely with each other. The worlds averaged one million *parasangs* (a *parasang* is about four miles) apart, and through the people's common knowledge and their common God, the Lord, they share a common glory. They are all incorruptible, without death. They do not grow old or wear out. Their nature is unfailing. They cannot be numbered, and their number is unchanging. Each of the worlds is a Zion, though each is different, for, most delightful of all, there is not monotony; there is a single universal culture which, as described in our own scriptures, "shall come forth out of all the creations which I have made" (Moses 7:64)—the culture of Zion. Yet variety (as Brigham Young often noted) was the very keynote to that culture.] But the text describes Zion in negative terms, which are indeed the only terms in which it can be described to people living in another world. Thus in 4 Nephi the only way to tell us benighted people what was going on is to say what was not going on: "there was no contention among all the people, in all the land . . . and there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people. . . ." (4 Nephi 13, 16). Not surprisingly, therefore, so we are told in this old Adam text, "each of these worlds is a Zion, having no law courts, no hungry or thirsty, no cold nor heat, no aged or fear, no war, no slavery, no harmful creatures or plants. . . ." How boring it all seems to primitives like us! We already possess the technical know how to achieve something very near to this, but who wants it? ["Magnificent buildings beside tranquil seas, flowing springs of life-giving water, every thing vibrates with joy; the wants of the people are few, they move about through the air by the power of flight." They are not overly concerned with technology because their technological knowledge has taken them far beyond our clumsy contraptions. "They are at home with the firmaments, with the 'Jordans' [a special term referring to ordinances], with groves, with kings, with spirits; their beauty is within them and shines out as if they were pure crystal. Force flows through them from

the King as they persevere in prayer and song." (It was a demanding thing; the celestial spirits had to work at it—"Force flows through them from the King as they persevere in prayer and song.") "They study and meditate constantly. They exhale a fragrance of divine happiness; each is more remarkable than the other, each more illustrious."]

Such a world, we are told, is only congenial "to the spirits of good men; it is a life for the wise and prudent, for the families of Abel, Seth, and Enoch." This state of things is scattered throughout the universe, according to our old Adam text; and the various colonies, in spite of the vast differences between them, are quite aware of each other. In some-thing the same way the fabulous dreamlike cultures of which we have spoken, in spite of their wide spacing in time, were quite aware of each other's existence. Thus Professor Werner Jaeger pointed out that both Plato and Aristotle were devoted followers of Zoroaster.⁶ Buddhism, as we know, moved from India to become the religion of distant China. The world of Lehi was one of widely shared cultures. Buddha, Con-fucius, Lao-Tzu, Mahavira, Zarathustra, Pythagoras, Antihales were all contemporaries of Lehi at that magic moment in history which Karl Jaspers calls the "axial [pivotal] period," that is, the moment when the civ-ilization of the whole world turned on its axis as a new order of the spir-it succeeded the old sacral kingship.⁷ That was the time when the seven wise men would come together from time to time from the ends of the earth to share their knowledge and wisdom at the Feast of the Seven Sages, knitting all the world together in a common cultural heritage.

Let me conclude with some quotations from the prophets of the Res-toration: "The Lord spake unto Enoch [Joseph Smith, Jun.], saying: Hearken unto me, saith the Lord your God, . . . who have assembled yourselves together; . . . it must needs be that there be an organization of my people . . . in the land of Zion—Or in other words, the city of Enoch [Joseph], for a permanent and everlasting establishment and or-der unto my church, . . . that you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things" (D&C 78:1-5). Such passages plainly look to the distinctive culture being "of one heart and one mind" (Moses 7:18), setting them apart from all the others. "We are following," said Brigham Young, "the cus-toms of Enoch and the holy fathers, and for this we are looked upon as not being fit for society. We are not adapted to the society of the wick-ed. . . ."⁸ The strong word that Brother Reynolds has used here today is that we are subversive to certain cultures. Brigham says much the same thing: ". . . we are looked upon as not being fit for society. We are not adapted to the society of the wicked and do not wish to mingle with them."⁹

What I wish to indicate, very briefly then, is that behind all this there is a culture of Zion, a culture that has the virtue of being an eternal one, yet never boring, never monotonous. It is something toward which

we should be striving. There are cultural images here, and there is a cul-tural reality, and we move into it by faith and prayer. It is not a pure fig-ment of the imagination, because every time human cultures have reached a real peak they have been infatuated with this idea, and have been convinced that they were imitating the heavenly model and doing the best they could. There is a gospel culture.

Footnotes

- ✓1. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 volumes (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1855-86), 17:113f.
- ✓2. Article by Eric Burrows in S. H. Hokke (ed.), *The Labyrinth* (London: SPCK, 1935). See also Hugh Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," *Western Political Quarterly* 4 (June 1951):226-53.
- ✓3. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 1: 279.
- ✓4. *Ibid.*
5. The text is in J. P. Migne, *Dictionnaire des Apocryphes* (Paris: 1856), 1:26-27. All sub-sequent references to the Syriac text are referenced to this volume.
6. Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 132-36.
7. Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 1-21.
- ✓8. *Journal of Discourses*, 10:306.
- ✓9. *Ibid.*