

Why Would Anyone Join This Particular “Community of Christ”?

This morning’s class is about scripture, and I want begin with scripture – a quotation from the twelfth chapter of 2 Nephi:

[2 Ne 12:53] Thou fool, that shall say, A bible, we have got a bible, and we need no more bible.

[2 Ne 12:54] Have ye obtained a bible save it were by the Jews?

[2 Ne 12:55] Know ye not that there are more nations than one?

[2 Ne 12:56] Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath;

[2 Ne 12:57] And I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?

[2 Ne 12:58] Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word?

[2 Ne 12:59] Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another?

[2 Ne 12:60] Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another.

[2 Ne 12:61] And when the two nations shall run together, the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.

[2 Ne 12:62] And I do this that I may prove unto many, that I am the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure.

[2 Ne 12:63] And because that I have spoken one word, ye need not suppose that I can not speak another; for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be, until the end of man; neither from that time hence forth and for ever.

[2 Ne 12:64] Wherefore, because that ye have a bible, ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written:

[2 Ne 12:65] For I command all men, both in the east, and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them:

[2 Ne 12:66] For out of the books which shall be written, I will judge the world, every man according to his works, according to that which is written.

[2 Ne 12:67] For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews, and they shall write it:

[2 Ne 12:68] And I shall also speak unto the Nephites, and they shall write it;

[2 Ne 12:69] And I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it;

[2 Ne 12:70] And I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth,

and they shall write it.

[It reminds me of the verse that Bob Mesle had written in the front of his Bible, Amos 9:7. Is anyone able to quote that one from memory? "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"]

Some people think that the Bible contains the literal word of God, even to the extent of saying, "If Medieval English was good enough for Jesus and His disciples, it is good enough for me." Others think that it is historically accurate. Some people regard it a collection of teaching stories. And still others think it may be a combination of all of the above.

In previous classes at the Mississauga congregation, I have talked about the Hindu scriptures (some of which were written even before the Lord God made his covenant with Abram): the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. I talked about the monkey-headed general, Hanuman, and Ganesh, the elephant-headed god (or God representation); and about the myriad of "dieties" who are acknowledged to be representations of different aspects of One Supreme Power, which they called "Truth."

Which brings me to that well known hymn, "Give Me That Old Time Religion." (Words & Music: Anonymous; first published by G. D. Pike in 1873.)

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It was good for our mothers.
It was good for our mothers.
It was good for our mothers.
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

Makes me love everybody.
Makes me love everybody.
Makes me love everybody.
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,

Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It has saved our fathers.
It has saved our fathers.
It has saved our fathers.
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It will save all our children,
It will save all our children,
It will save all our children,
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It was good for Paul and Silas,
It was good for Paul and Silas,
It was good for Paul and Silas,
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It was good for the Prophet Daniel,
It was good for the Prophet Daniel,
It was good for the Prophet Daniel,
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It was good for the Hebrew children,

It was good for the Hebrew children,
It was good for the Hebrew children,
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It will bring you out of bondage
It will bring you out of bondage
It will bring you out of bondage
And it's good enough for me

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It will do when I am dying.
It will do when I am dying.
It will do when I am dying.
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It will be good when the world is on fire,
It will be good when the world is on fire,
It will be good when the world is on fire,
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

It will take us all to heaven.
It will take us all to heaven.
It will take us all to heaven.
And it's good enough for me.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,

Give me that old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.

There is an interesting variation on that old time religion theme that I would like to share with you. It goes this way:

THAT (REAL) OLD TIME RELIGION (with apologies to Pete Seeger)

Give me that Old Time Religion,
Give me that Old Time Religion,
Give me that Old Time Religion,
It's good enough for me!

We will worship Aphrodite,
'Though she's kind of wild and flighty -
We will see her in her 'nighty
And that's good enough for me!

We'll sing praises to Apollo;
Where the Sun God leads we'll follow
(Though his head's a little hollow) -
He's good enough for me!

Let us raise a toast to Bacchus,
We will raise a royal ruckus,
Then we'll lay us down and ... well
That's good enough for me.

We all worshipped Dionysus
'Till we ran into a crisis -
The bar had raised its prices;
That's not good enough for me.

It was good enough for Isis,
'Cause she comes through in a crisis
And she's never raised her prices
So she's good enough for me.

It was good enough for Buddha,
As a god he's kinda cute-a,
And he comes in brass or pewta'
So he's good enough for me!

There are some that call it folly

When we worship Mother Kali.
She may not be so jolly,
But she's good enough for me.

We will worship like the Druids
And drink strange, fermented fluids
And run naked through the woods
'Cause that's good enough for me!

It was good enough for Odin ,
Though the tremblin' got forbodin',
And the giants finally strode in,
But it's good enough for me.

Shall we sing in praise of Loki,
Though he left poor Midgard smokey?
His sense of humor's pretty hokey,
But he's good enough for me.

Montezuma liked to start out
Rites by carrying a part out
That would really tear your heart out,
But it's good enough for me!

There's that lusty old Priapus -
He's just itching to unwrap us.
(He'd do more to us than tap us
And that's good enough for me!)

It was good enough for Venus,
Of the gods she is the meanest
And she bit me on my ... elbow
But she's good enough for me!

There are those who practice Voodoo,
There are those who practice Voodoo,
I do and I hope you do -
It's good enough for me.

Uncle Crowley was a dreamer
At the Abbey of Thelema
But his magic is a screamer,
So it's good enough for me.

Meeting at the Witching Hour
By the Bud and Branch and Flower

Folks are raising up the power
And that's where I want to be.

Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
It's good enough for me.

But enough of dead religions, let's consider some of the live ones:

According to the editors of the "World Christian Encyclopedia..." there are 19 major world religions, subdivided into 270 large religious groups, and many smaller ones.

Here are the world's major religions ranked by the number of believers adherent to them:

1. Christianity: 2.1 billion
2. Islam: 1.3 billion
3. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 1.1 billion
4. Hinduism: 900 million
5. Chinese traditional religion: 394 million
6. Buddhism: 376 million
7. primal-indigenous: 300 million
8. African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million
9. Sikhism: 23 million
10. Juche: 19 million
11. Spiritism: 15 million
12. Judaism: 14 million
13. Baha'i: 7 million
14. Jainism: 4.2 million
15. Shinto: 4 million
16. Cao Dai: 4 million
17. Zoroastrianism: 2.6 million
18. Tenrikyo: 2 million
19. Neo-Paganism: 1 million
20. Unitarian-Universalism: 800 thousand
21. Rastafarianism: 600 thousand
22. Scientology: 500 thousand

For comparison sake, there are about 250 thousand people who are members of our own church, the Community of Christ.

[Now, these data are based on census or public opinion data. Thus, a person is considered to be of a particular religion if they say that they are of that faith. Thus, about 75% of the adults in both the U.S. and Canada are Christians. On the other hand, some of the approximately 1,000 Christian faith groups in the U.S. and Canada believe themselves to be the only true Christian denomination. So,

depending on the definition used, the percentage of Christians in the U.S. is somewhere between 0.1% and 75% of the total population.]

Although there are more than 2 billion Christians in the world, they are divided into some 34,000 or so separate Christian groups, "with over half of them being independent churches that are not interested in linking with the big denominations." Interestingly, there are even close to 200 church groups which have developed within the Latter Day Saint tradition.

During Glen McWilliams' recent baptism, I started to wonder, "Why would anyone join this particular church?" Actually, there are several good answers to that question, and I hope that we can explore some of them this morning. First, consider, if you will, this absolutely beautiful passage from the Book of Mormon (which no one but me seems to know):

[Mos 9:38] And it came to pass that he said unto them, Behold, here are the waters of Mormon; for thus were they called.

[Mos 9:39] And now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

[Mos 9:40] Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life:

[Mos 9:41] Now I say unto you, If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

[Mos 9:42] And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy, and exclaimed, This is the desire of our hearts.

Well, I expect that many if not most people join a particular church group either because they were brought up in it or because of relationships with people already in the church. One of the main reason that I continue to belong to this church, for example, is because of the relationships that I have within it.

Why else would someone join this particular religious denomination? Personally, I am a convert to this church, and I joined it because of its mix of mysticism and reason – like you, I am old enough to have been present for ministers who claimed to have the gift of revelation and who "spoke in tongues;" I have heard testimonies of miracles; and, while a member of this church, I have had a few rather profound religious experiences myself. (I have also seen this church become, I believe, more rational; and I do have mixed feelings about that – but that is a topic for another day.)

But one of the main reasons I continue to belong to this church is because of its teaching that God is willing to reveal Himself to us in the present and in the future, as He has revealed Himself to humankind in the past. This faith in God's continuing revelation is reflected in our unique scriptures – the Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants – and I feel that, within these books, there is a wisdom for our times that is not to be found in the Bible.

I expect that you can think of your own examples; here are a few that speak to me:

from the third chapter of Genesis, IV:

[Gen 3:1] And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying, That Satan whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning;

[Gen 3:2] And he came before me, saying, Behold I, send me, I will be thy Son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore, give me thine honor.

[Gen 3:3] But behold, my beloved Son, which was my beloved and chosen from the beginning, said unto me: Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

[Gen 3:4] Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him; and also that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten I caused that he should be cast down; and he became Satan.

[Gen 3:5] Yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive, and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice.

from the first chapter of 2 Nephi:

[2 Ne 1:111] And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have remained in the garden of Eden.

[2 Ne 1:112] And all things which were created, must have remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained for ever, and had no end.

[2 Ne 1:113] And they would have had no children; wherefore, they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.

[2 Ne 1:114] But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things.

[2 Ne 1:115] Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.

[[2 Ne 1:116] And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall.

from the second chapter of 2 Nephi:

[2 Ne 1:117] And because that they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free for ever, knowing good from evil;

[2 Ne 1:118] To act for themselves, and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the Lord, at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

[2 Ne 1:119] Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man.

[2 Ne 1:120] And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil:

[2 Ne 1:121] For he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.

from the first chapter of 2 Mosiah:

[Mos 1:117] For behold, he judgeth, and his judgment is just, and the infant perisheth not, that dieth in his infancy;

[Mos 1:118] But men drink damnation to their own souls, except they humble themselves, and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

from the eighth chapter of Moroni:

[Moroni 8:4] and now, my son, I speak unto you concerning that which grieveth me exceedingly; for it grieveth me that there should be disputations rise among you.

[Moroni 8:5] For, if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children.

[Moroni 8:6] And now, my son, I desire that you should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you; for, for this intent I have written this gospel.

[Moroni 8:7] For immediately after I had learned these things of you I inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the holy Ghost, saying:

[Moroni 8:8] "Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin. ...

[Moroni 8:15] For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.

[Moroni 8:19] Little children cannot repent; wherefore it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of god unto them;

from the first chapter of Mosiah:

[Mos 1:121] And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall

come, when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

[Mos 1:122] And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent;

[Mos 1:123] And even at this time, when thou shalt have taught thy people the things which the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, even then are they found no more blameless in the sight of God, only according to the words which I have spoken unto thee.

[Mos 1:124] And now, I have spoken the words which the Lord God hath commanded me.

[Mos 1:125] And thus saith the Lord: They shall stand as a bright testimony against this people, at the judgment day;

[Mos 1:126] Whereof, they shall be judged, every man, according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil;

[Mos 1:127] And if they be evil, they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord, into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return: therefore, they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

[Mos 1:128] Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall, because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more for ever.

[Mos 1:129] And their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up for ever and ever.

from the seventh chapter of 3 Nephi:

[3 Ne 7:1] And now it came to pass that when Jesus had ended these sayings, he cast his eyes round about on the multitude, and said unto them, Behold, ye have heard the things which I have taught before I ascended to my Father;

[3 Ne 7:2] Therefore whoso remembereth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, him will I raise up at the last day.

[3 Ne 7:3] And it came to pass that when Jesus had said these words, he perceived that there were some among them who marveled, and wondered what he would concerning the Law of Moses; for they understood not the saying, that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

[3 Ne 7:4] And he said unto them, Marvel not that I said unto you, that old things had passed away, and that all things had become new.

[3 Ne 7:5] Behold, I say unto you, that the law is fulfilled that was given

unto Moses.

[3 Ne 7:6] Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore, it hath an end.

from D & C 150

[Sec 150:10a] Monogamy is the basic principle on which Christian married life is built. Yet, as I have said before, there are also those who are not of this fold to whom the saving grace of the gospel must go.

[Sec 150:10b] When this is done the church must be willing to bear the burden of their sin, nurturing them in the faith, accepting that degree of repentance which it is possible for them to achieve, looking forward to the day when through patience and love they can be free as a people from the sins of the years of their ignorance.

[Sec 150:11a] To this end and for this purpose, continue your ministry to those nations of people yet unaware of the joy freedom from sin can bring into their lives. In this way they will be brought to a knowledge of the teachings of my gospel and be made ready and willing to help spread the message of reconciliation and restoration to other worthy souls.

[Sec 150:11b] In this ministry the apostolic council, as the chief witnesses of the gospel, are directed to interpret and administer the doctrines and ordinances of the gospel in a manner appropriate to the circumstances in which they find such persons.

from D & C 151

[Sec 151:8a] Do not let pride of personal accomplishment turn you away from my purposes in you as brothers and sisters in Christ and objects of my creation. You are called apart to do the will of your heavenly Father in whose name you serve.

[Sec 151:8b] Seek to be reconciled one with another. Let not your differences over procedures and program materials separate you and thus vitiate my influence for good in the world which is torn asunder by the devastating powers of evil.

[Sec 151:9] You who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives.

from D & C 156

[Sec 156:9a] I have heard the prayers of many, including my servant the prophet, as they have sought to know my will in regard to the question of who shall be called to share the burdens and responsibilities of priesthood in my church.

[Sec 156:9b] I say to you now, as I have said in the past, that all are called according to the gifts which have been given them. This applies to priesthood as well as to any other aspects of the work.

[Sec 156:9c] Therefore, do not wonder that some women of the church are being called to priesthood responsibilities. This is in harmony with my will and where these calls are made known to my servants, they may be processed according to administrative procedures and provisions of the law.

[Sec 156:9d] Nevertheless, in the ordaining of women to priesthood, let this be done with all deliberateness. Before the actual laying on of hands takes place, let specific guidelines and instructions be provided by the spiritual authorities, that all may be done in order.

[Sec 156:10] Remember, in many places there is still much uncertainty and misunderstanding regarding the principles of calling and giftedness. There are persons whose burden in this regard will require that considerable labor and ministerial support be provided. This should be extended with prayer and tenderness of feeling, that all may be blessed with the full power of my reconciling Spirit.

from D & C 162

1a. Listen, O people of the Restoration—you who would become a prophetic people, embodying in your life together the ministries of the Temple. Listen to the Voice that speaks from beyond the farthest hills, from the infinite heavens above, and the vast seas below.

b. Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

2a. Listen carefully to your own journey as a people, for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.

b. Listen to its teachings and discover anew its principles. Do not yearn for times that are past, but recognize that you have been given a foundation of faithful service, even as you build a foundation for what is yet to be.

c. As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry. The priesthood must especially respond to that challenge, and the church is admonished to prayerfully consider how calling and giftedness in the Community of Christ can best be expressed in a new time.

d. You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.

e. Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every

generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.

3a. Do not be discouraged. You have not been promised an easy path, but you have been assured that the Spirit that calls you will also accompany you.

b. That Spirit is even now touching alive the souls of those who feel the passion of discipleship burning deeply within. Many others will respond if you are persistent in your witness and diligent in your mission to the world.

4a. Listen carefully to the many testimonies of those around the world who have been led into the fellowship of the Community of Christ. The richness of cultures, the poetry of language, and the breadth of human experience permit the gospel to be seen with new eyes and grasped with freshness of spirit. That gift has been given to you. Do not fail to understand its power.

b. It is for divine purpose that you have been given the struggles as well as the joys of diversity. So must it always be in the peaceable kingdom.

5a. Do not be defined by the things that separate you but by the things that unite you in Jesus Christ.

b. Over and over again you have been counseled to be reconciled, to seek the unity that is imperative to the building of the kingdom. Again the Spirit counsels the church to not allow the forces of division to divert you from your witness.

c. Listen together to one another, without judgment or predisposition. Do not assume that the answers to matters of conflict have yet been perceived. There is much labor to be done. Reason together in love, and the Spirit of truth will prevail.

6a. From the earliest days you have been given a sacred principle that declares the inestimable worth of all persons. Do not forget.

b. The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. A prophetic people must work tirelessly to tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding.

c. You hold precious lives in your hands. Be gentle and gracious with one another. A community is no stronger than the weakest within it. Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name.