

And Now, Why Tarest Thou?

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.—Rev. 3:20-22.

WE HAVE presented in this study the history and claims of the Restoration movement, as represented by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We have described the prophetic mission and ministry of Joseph Smith, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the history of the rise of the church. We have tried to bring you the fullness of Christ's gospel, to explain its doctrines, sacraments, and ordinances, to give you some understanding of what we believe as a church, and why. We have tried to bring you an explanation of the purposes, goals, and ideals toward which we are striving as individuals and as a church.

Perhaps you have wondered why we have as yet issued no invitation to join the church. Perhaps you have even visited some of our services, and wondered why we do not have an altar call, or why someone did not invite or urge you to unite with the church. Perhaps we should invite and urge people more than we do. The fact that we don't is some-

times misconstrued to mean that we are cold, or indifferent, or clannish. We are perhaps more eager than most Christian people to share what we have, because we sincerely believe that we have more to share than any other church. But it has never been our policy to use an excessive emotional appeal, or high-pressure evangelistic methods. We want converts who accept Christ with the head, as well as with heart, with intellect as well as with emotion. We will go to any lengths to inform men and women of our message, to answer their inquiries, to resolve their honest doubts if possible. We give them all the time they want to make up their minds, and let them make their own decisions without harassment and endless importunity. The door is always open, but it is you who must step through the door. You should never be pushed into this church against your will.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A NEW MEMBER?

We want to devote some of this chapter to explain what is expected of those who join our fellowship, or what are some of the requirements for membership in the church. In suggesting some of these standards we do not mean to imply that all of our members live up to them fully. We have some backsliders among our membership and perhaps an occasional hypocrite, too. The church is not composed of perfect people, but of people who are mutually and cooperatively striving to *become* perfect with the help of God and of each other, and who are striving to the best of their human abilities to witness for Christ with a godly walk and conversation among their neighbors.

Would we require you to subscribe to a formal creed? No. We have no formal or written creed to imprison the intellects or the spiritual understanding of men, or to bind the men of tomorrow to the frozen concepts of today. A creed is sometimes a very good thing when it can be used to catch up and make concrete and objective a man's beliefs; but no

creed ever written has ever been satisfactory to *all* men. No creed ever written was altogether an exploration for further truth, but rather an attempt to solidify and congeal known truth in such a form that men are forced to accept it now and for all time. Each generation demands the right to revise the old creeds, and to write its own new ones. In keeping with our belief that the process of God's revelation is not a completed, finished process, but a continuing one, we say that our creed is "All truth," wherever and whenever found, or by whomsoever it is revealed.

Though we do not have a formal creed, we would expect the candidate for church membership to have some basic, fundamental beliefs which he could phrase in his own way, or leave unphrased if that better suited his needs. We would expect him to have faith in God, the Infinite, the Eternal, the Creator of heaven and earth. We would expect him to believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the world, who "suffered temptations but gave no heed unto them; he was crucified, died, and rose again the third day; and ascended into heaven to sit down on the right hand of the Father, to reign with almighty power according to the will of the Father, that as many as would believe and be baptized, in his holy name, and endure in faith to the end, should be saved" (Doctrine and Covenants 17:5 b-d). We would expect him to have some belief in the Holy Spirit, which "beareth record of the Father, and of the Son" and through whose ministry spiritual gifts and direction are given to the church, and whose abiding presence constitutes the Comforter which Jesus promised to his disciples.

We would require of the candidate for church membership a manifestation of repentance from his former sins. Repentance would involve a forsaking of those sins, and a doing of them no more. If the sin involved a personal wrong or injury, repentance might involve confession of that sin to the person who had been wronged, and an effort to effect reconciliation and make restitution insofar as that was possible.

Jesus does not save unrepentant people in their sins, but only repentant people from their sins. You cannot bring your sin with you into the church of Christ and be acceptable to him, no matter how well you succeed in fooling church officials or your fellow members.

We would require of the candidate for church membership baptism by immersion by one of our ministers whom we recognize as having authority to officiate in the ordinances of the church. This requirement grows out of our peculiar beliefs about priesthood authority, which we explained early in the study. This baptism, according to scriptural teaching, would be for the remission of repented sins. It would symbolize the death of the old man, and the birth of the new. It would be the public avowal of a covenant entered into with Christ—a covenant in which the candidates agree "that they have truly repented of all their sins, and are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end, and truly manifest by their works that they have received of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of their sins" (Doctrine and Covenants 17:7 b-d). We do not baptize any under eight years of age, which we believe is the age of accountability. Following baptism the elders of the church would lay hands on the head of the person and pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost, God's seal of adoption and acceptance of the covenant made with him.

Would you be expected to believe in Joseph Smith as a prophet of God? People oftentimes ask that question, and seem to be strangely troubled by it. Let us answer it this way. Salvation is through belief in and acceptance of Jesus Christ as your Savior, not through a belief in Joseph Smith or any other man. But we would point out that if Christ spoke through Joseph Smith as a true prophet, rejection of that prophetic ministry and message would constitute at least a partial rejection of Christ. We would be willing to offer you baptism solely on the basis of your belief in Christ, but your acceptance of our authority to baptize would be tanta-

mount to accepting Joseph Smith as a prophet and spokesman for Christ.

Would you be expected to believe in the Book of Mormon? We would sincerely hope that you did, but we would not necessarily make it a test of membership or of fellowship. Belief in Christ is essential to salvation. Belief in the Book of Mormon is not. But we would hope that in the fellowship of our people, and under their ministry of teaching, you would become increasingly aware of the truth and value of the Book of Mormon in explaining and clarifying and enlarging upon some of the obscure doctrines of the Bible, in hearing added witness to the divinity of Christ. The Book of Mormon is an indispensable book to those who want the fullness of the gospel, but perhaps it is not necessary for you to have the fullness until you have grown more nearly into spiritual maturity.

As a prerequisite to membership, we would expect you to have some knowledge and understanding of the beliefs of the church, the duties of members, and the obligations of citizenship in God's kingdom. The pastor of the congregation with which you would be associated would probably inquire about this understanding, and might suggest that you wait for baptism until you knew more of the church, not because you were in any sense unwelcome, but because it wants fully informed, fully converted, permanent members, not those who will drift away after a few weeks or months or years.

Would you be expected to pay your tithing? Like all the laws of the church, God's laws regarding finances are obligatory, but not compulsory. Many of our present members are still unconverted to the law of tithing, which teaches that one tenth of your net worth is due at the time of baptism, and after that one tenth of the increase each year, after necessary living expenses have been met. No one comes around on payday to collect the tithe under threat of expulsion from the church. On the other hand, it is our ideal so to instruct

not only the candidates for membership but our present membership, that they will wish to comply voluntarily with the law of tithing.

There are certain other obligations of church membership which we should certainly hope and expect new members to maintain. There is the obligation of attendance at regular church meetings, and especially at the monthly Communion service where the covenant made in baptism is renewed and remembered at the Lord's table. There is the obligation of prayer, both public and private, at home, and abroad in the meetings of the church. There is the obligation to cultivate all the Christian graces; to be clean in body and mind, to be honest, generous, industrious, thrifty, kind, forgiving, loving, friendly, and sincere. There is the obligation to shun evil companions who would bring reproach upon the church; to abstain from bad habits which enslave the will, destroy the spiritual perception, and debilitate the body. There is the obligation to be true to the marriage covenant and to maintain a Christian home life. There is the responsibility to bear one's full share in the work of the church; to bear witness to your friends and neighbors of the good news you have found, and of what it has done for you.

And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized. This is our invitation for you to join with us in bringing to pass the kingdom way of life for all men.