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Making Visible the Beauty and Goodness of the Gospel

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MAKING VISIBLE THE BEAUTY AND GOODNESS OF THE GOSPEL

Daniel C. Peterson

Abstract: Apologetics is typically seen as a purely cerebral activity designed to convince others of the truth or, at least, of the plausibility of certain propositions, typically but not always religious. In the case of the Gospel, however, mere intellectual assent isn't enough—not in the eyes of God and, probably, not for the typical mortal human being. To please God, we must live our lives according to the Gospel, not merely concede its truth. But living such lives to the end requires that we love God and the Gospel and find them desirable, in addition to checking off a list of required faith-statements. Can apologetics play a role in encouraging and cultivating such attitudes as well as in convincing our heads? This article maintains that apologetics can and should play such a role, and invites those with the appropriate gifts and abilities to make the effort to do so.

Martin Luther (d. 1546) taught that there are two ways of believing. In the first place I may have faith *concerning* God. This is the case when I hold to be true what is said concerning God. Such faith is on the same level with the assent I give to statements concerning the Turk, the devil, and hell. A faith of this kind should be called knowledge or information rather than faith. In the second place, there is faith *in*. Such faith is mine when I not only hold to be true what is said concerning God but also when I put my trust in him in such a way as to enter into personal relations with him, believing firmly that I shall find him to be and to do as I have been taught. ... The word *in* is well chosen and deserving of due attention. We do not say, “I believe God the Father” or “concerning God the Father,” but rather *in* God the Father, *in* Jesus Christ, and *in* the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ J. N. Lenker, trans., *Luther's Catechetical Writings*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 1907), 1:203, as cited in Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian*

It isn't enough simply to accept the Gospel as true. Mere intellectual assent isn't sufficient from God's point of view: "Thou believest that there is one God," says the Epistle of James. "Thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."² We must believe and obey. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord," said Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."³

The "belief in" of which Luther speaks cannot, of course, exist in the total absence of propositional knowledge. One would need to have first heard of God the Father in order to know him or even to have belief in him. And one would need to know something of his will and his commandments in order to obey him.

Nor is mere acceptance of the Gospel as true likely to be sufficient from a human standpoint either, since, in order to be motivated to a lifetime of committed and sometimes even difficult discipleship, most if not all of us must regard the Gospel of Jesus Christ as true, yes, but also as good and beautiful — that is, as desirable.

And here too, of course, at least some basic propositional awareness is indispensable. "Holy affections," wrote the American Calvinist preacher, theologian, and philosopher Jonathan Edwards (d. 1758), "are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge."⁴ Still, that knowledge need not be academically extensive, and, very often, it can be distinctly slight. Christ's apostles, newly called along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, followed him "immediately."⁵ They didn't spend months as catechumens, attended no graduate seminars, earned no degrees in theology. "Those to whom God has imparted religion through the feeling of the heart," commented the great mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (d. 1662), "are

Belief (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015), 72–73. (My debt in this essay to the sixth chapter of Plantinga's excellent book will be obvious to anybody who reads it.) I believe, though, for reasons very like those given by Luther, that there's value in the expression (and the attitude) of "believing God." On this point, see (for example) Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

2 James 2:19.

3 Matthew 7:21.

4 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, edited by John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 266.

5 See, for instance, Matthew 4:22 and Mark 1:18.

very fortunate and justly convinced.”⁶ “All true religion,” said even the cerebral Jonathan Edwards, “summarily consists in the love of divine things.”⁷

It’s not a matter, in other words, of bare cognition, but also one of affection. The devils, we can safely assume, love neither the Gospel nor, indeed, God himself. By contrast, as Edwards observed, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.”⁸ “There is a distinction to be made,” he wrote,

between a mere notional understanding, wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind doesn’t only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels. That sort of knowledge, by which a man has a sensible perception of amiableness and loathsomeness, or of sweetness and nauseousness, is not just the same sort of knowledge with that, by which he knows what a triangle is, and what a square is. The one is mere speculative knowledge; the other sensible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned; the heart is the proper subject of it, or the soul as a being that not only beholds, but has inclination, and is pleased or displeased.⁹

In order to have a solid place in human souls, the central claims of Christianity in general and of Mormonism in particular must be attractive, indeed delightful, emotionally moving and gratifying objects of awe and wonder, reasons for humble gratitude. They should have us standing “all amazed.”¹⁰

It seems reasonable to assume that a person who fears or hates faith, or who holds religious belief in contempt, will be more difficult to bring to belief by means of logic and evidence than will a person who would dearly love to believe but who has encountered historical or other intellectual obstacles that render belief difficult for her. If, though,

6 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated by M. Turnell (London: Harvill Press, 1962), 282, as cited by Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 73 note 3. Compare Daniel Peterson, “Perhaps the world’s most important living Christian philosopher,” *Deseret News* (8 October 2015): <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865638546/Perhaps-the-worlds-most-important-living-Christian-philosopher.html>.

7 Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, 271.

8 *Ibid.*, 95.

9 *Ibid.*, 272.

10 See *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), #193.

someone loves God — or at least the idea of God — and desires to know him and to have a personal relationship with him, and is moved by ideas of holiness and divine beauty, that person already has one foot in the Kingdom, and perhaps, with a little help, can come to believe that the Gospel is not only good and beautiful, but true.

Are there really people who hate the idea of God, who don't want any religious claims to be true? Yes, indeed, there are. Friedrich Nietzsche seems to have been such a person, for instance. Consider, too, the case of Joseph Stalin, who had devoted decades to destroying churches and killing priests, rabbis, and lay believers, and who may have railed against God even on his deathbed in March of 1953. Having suffered a severe stroke, the tyrant's right side was paralyzed, and he spent his last hours in virtually unbearable pain. "God grants an easy death only to the just," his daughter Svetlana, who was present, later reflected. Slowly, he choked to death. As she wrote years later, her father was effectively strangled while those in the room looked on. Although he had seemed at most merely semiconscious for the last few hours, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked about the room, plainly terrified. Then, Svetlana recalled, "something incomprehensible and awesome happened that to this day I can't forget and don't understand." Stalin suddenly opened his eyes and "cast a glance over everyone in the room. It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry and full of the fear of death."

He suddenly lifted his left hand as though he were pointing to something above and bringing down a curse on us all. The gesture was incomprehensible and full of menace, and no one could say to whom or at what it might be directed. The next moment, after a final effort, the spirit wrenched itself free of the flesh.¹¹

But there are less dramatic, more explicit, first-person declarations of intense dislike for religious claims and the very idea of God. Here, for example, is a statement from Thomas Nagel, who is currently the University Professor of Philosophy and Law Emeritus at New York University and who says that he actually has a "fear" of religion:

11 See Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 5–11. See also the account given by Ravi Zacharias in his Harvard Veritas Forum. (<http://www.christianbook.com/the-harvard-veritas-forum/ravi-zacharias/9781612560960/pd/1225BD>.) Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, was an eyewitness to the scene. Zacharias heard the story from Malcolm Muggeridge who, in his turn, based his report on three weeks of interviews with Alliluyeva, conducted for a three-part BBC series.

I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.¹²

Before such a person is fully open to the possibility that God exists or that religious claims are true, it would be helpful for her to see the truth of such claims as desirable, and God as lovable. I say "helpful" and not "absolutely necessary" because there seem to be clear exceptions: Saul of Tarsus showed no signs of any secret longing for Christianity to be true, and yet he was converted by the spectacular self-revelation of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus that is recorded in Acts 9:1–19. (Of course, it must be acknowledged that Saul's zeal for Judaism and his misdirected antipathy toward Christianity manifest a zeal for God, not religious indifference. And, plainly, the Lord built upon that in his case.) Moreover, there is also the well-known instance of C. S. Lewis, who had entered the University of Oxford as a convinced atheist:

You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen [College, Oxford], night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.¹³

People can, of course, be reluctantly convinced of truths that they would rather reject. It happens. But, on the whole, as the old adage says, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."¹⁴

12 Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 130.

13 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), 228–229. Francis Thompson's frequently-anthologized poem "The Hound of Heaven" describes another such case. It can be found online here, among many other places: <http://www.bartleby.com/236/239.html>. On page 211 of his *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis uses a metaphor analogous to Thompson's pursuing hound (which obviously represents God): "And so the great Angler played His fish and I never dreamed that the hook was in my tongue."

14 See <http://www.cliffsnotes.com/cliffsnotes/subjects/writing/who-wrote-a-man-convinced-against-his-will-is-of-the-same-opinion-still> for a brief discussion of the authorship of the saying.

And there seems little question that a person already persuaded that a proposition is good and beautiful will be more readily convinced of its truth.

But how can those of us who believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be altogether desirable as well as truthful bring others to see it as we do? Apologetics, a significant function of The Interpreter Foundation though certainly not its only purpose, is generally seen as a method of merely intellectual persuasion. And truly, to a large extent, it is left to the lives and examples of disciples to make visible the beauty and goodness of Christ's teachings. "Let your light so shine before men," he taught, "that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."¹⁵ "Preach the Gospel at all times," St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) is supposed to have said, "and when necessary use words." "The deeds you do may be the only sermon some persons will hear today."

Certainly, too, the Holy Ghost also plays an important role here. Latter-day Saints can agree with St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) in his insistence that "the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God."¹⁶

There's a vast gulf between a purely cerebral acknowledgement of truths about Deity and the ardent love for those truths of a committed disciple who seeks to "serve him with all [her] heart, might, mind and strength."¹⁷ The ecstatically joyous words of Isaac Watt (1674–1748), which were wonderfully set to music by the Latter-day Saint organist and composer John J. McLellan (1874–1925), beautifully capture this love:

Sweet is the work, my God, my King,
 To praise thy name, give thanks and sing,
 To show thy love by morning light,
 And talk of all thy truths at night.

My heart shall triumph in my Lord
 And bless his works and bless his word.
 Thy works of grace, how bright they shine!
 How deep thy counsels, how divine!

But, oh, what triumph shall I raise
 To thy dear name through endless days,

15 Matthew 5:16.

16 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Charles O'Neil, trans. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1957), 121–127.

17 Doctrine and Covenants 4:2.

When in the realms of joy I see
Thy face in full felicity!

Then shall I see and hear and know
All I desired and wished below,
And every pow'r find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.¹⁸

Conversion, therefore, isn't merely a changing of the mind — although it is most definitely that. It's also a changing of the will, a redirection of our affections. In his famous *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James wrote rather condescendingly of St. Teresa of Ávila (d. 1582) that, “In the main her idea of religion seems to have been that of an endless amatory flirtation ... between the devotee and the deity.”¹⁹

But, however much Professor James — a “Boston Brahmin” if ever there was one — may have disapproved, such love is entirely scriptural:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

18. *Hymns*, #147, verses 1, 3, 4, and 6.

19 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 380. “That cultured, sophisticated New England Victorian gentleman,” the distinguished modern American philosopher Alvin Plantinga summarizes, commenting on James’s remark, “looks down his cultivated nose, and finds all that a bit, well, *tasteless*, a bit *déclassé*.” See Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 74.

And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.²⁰

The Bible commonly compares God's love for his people, and Christ's love for his church, to a bridegroom's love for his bride (e.g., "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" [Isaiah 62:5]). And the Psalms provide numerous expressions of this passionately loving relationship:

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.²¹

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.²²

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.²³

My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.²⁴

I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.²⁵

So passionate was David in his praise of God, says the Qur'an, that the very mountains and the birds joined with him.²⁶ But this longing, perhaps a kind of nostalgia or homesickness, appears far beyond the Psalms: "For You have made us for Yourself," wrote St. Augustine, addressing God in the first chapter of his *Confessions*, "and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee."²⁷ "The source of my suffering and loneliness is deep in my heart," the great early Sufi mystic Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya is said to have remarked of her yearning for God. "This is a disease no doctor can cure. Only Union with the Friend can cure it."²⁸ Jalāl al-Dīn

20 Mark 12:28–34.

21 Psalm 27:4.

22 Psalm 42:1–2.

23 Psalm 63:1.

24 Psalm 84:2.

25 Psalm 119:131.

26 See, for example, Qur'an 34:10, 38:17–19.

27 Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1 (my translation): *quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te.*

28 See <http://rabia-al-adawiya.over-blog.com/2014/02/rabia-s-quotes.html>.

Rūmī (d. 1273), the illustrious Persian mystical poet, opens his *Mathnavi* with the image of a reed:

Hearken to the reed-flute, how it complains,
Lamenting its banishment from its home.²⁹

The plaintive sound of the reed flute reflects its sorrow at its exile from its home in the reed bed by the river, and it induces melancholy in its hearers because we too are in exile, far from our home in and with God.

In a similar vein, the great nineteenth-century English Romantic poet William Wordsworth (d. 1850) lamented in his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” what he described as “something that is gone”:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth. ...
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Wordsworth plainly thought that we come to earth from another place, with dim memories of a more exalted state that, unfortunately, fade all too swiftly as we mature. As he put it in another poem,

29 The translation is from E. H. Whinfield, *Teachings of Rumi: The Masnavi* (London: The Octagon Press, 1994), 1.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

But the process of disenchantment — or what Latter-day Saints might call, simply, the “veil” — cuts us off from what we once knew, or, at least, once dimly sensed (in nature and elsewhere) and vaguely remembered. Returning, again, to his famous “Intimations of Immortality”:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.
Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Then comes a passage that many members of my generation, at least, once had virtually by heart, as one of the clearest declarations in all of non-Mormon writing of a belief in the antemortal existence of the human spirit:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home.

Eliza R. Snow (d. 1887), Wordsworth's younger contemporary, formulated the doctrine in her own memorable lines:

For a wise and glorious purpose
 Thou hast placed me here on earth
 And withheld the recollection
 Of my former friends and birth;
 Yet oftentimes a secret something
 Whispered, "You're a stranger here,"
 And I felt that I had wandered
 From a more exalted sphere.³⁰

A central theme in C.S. Lewis's autobiographical book *Surprised by Joy* — and the obvious source of its title — is what he terms "Joy." Yet Lewis struggles to convey what he means. "Longing," he calls it, sometimes using the evocative German synonym *Sehnsucht*.³¹ He describes fleeting instants when, encountering a landscape or phrase or musical passage, he suddenly and unexpectedly "desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described." "It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what?" "Before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased." Of his earliest such experience, he writes, "It had taken only a moment of time, and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison."

30 *Hymns*, #292, verse 2.

31 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 7. Most of the quotations from the book that follow come from pages 16–18.

Lewis's first encounters with "Joy" often involved Norse mythology and, eventually, the music of Richard Wagner: "Pure 'Northernness' engulfed me: a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of northern summer, remoteness, severity."³² Yet he eventually realized that his yearning wasn't really for things Norse and Northern, but for something beyond them.

Joy, in Lewis's sense, is "an unsatisfied desire, which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." Though it resembles them in the sense that "anyone who has experienced it will want it again," it's distinct from happiness and pleasure. Indeed, he describes it as "inconsolable," a "stabbing," a "pang," and a sense of "loss," observing that "it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world." "All Joy reminds," he says. "It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still 'about to be.'" It always "implies the absence of its object."³³

When I first read Lewis on "Joy," I knew immediately what he meant. He wondered whether others shared his experience. I have. The eminent Austrian-American sociologist Peter Berger regards northern Italy's extraordinarily beautiful Lake Como as the most powerful argument for the existence of God. I would quibble about the specific location, but I understand. Certain alpine landscapes — in the Canadian Rockies, in Italy around Cortina d'Ampezzo and the Dolomites, and, pre-eminently, in Switzerland's Berner Oberland (where I served as a missionary) — have often awakened in me an aching and almost overwhelming sense of transcendence.

I know how it feels to want to possess them in a way that they simply cannot be possessed — though what I've just written doesn't really capture the feeling. What would it mean to "possess" the Bernese Alps? How, Lewis asks, can anybody "possess" the "Idea of Autumn" (as, in one such transient moment, he deeply desired to do)? I can no more define the experience than Lewis could. I'm confident, though, that some readers will recognize it.

The desire is, in a sense, entirely vain. "Stay a while!" says a famous line from Goethe's *Faust*, addressing one rapturous but passing moment.

32 Ibid., 73.

33 Ibid., 82.

“You are so beautiful!”³⁴ But the moment *doesn't* stay. Everything is transient.

Still, I believe that such experiences offer powerful religious meaning to those who've had them. They are, I think, “stabs” of “divine homesickness,” a yearning for something unspeakably and unchangingly beautiful, good, and holy. Reasoning that, since ordinary desires (e.g., for food, water, air, sex, or companionship) can always be fulfilled (at least potentially), Lewis argued that the yearning he called “Joy” also promises the possibility of satisfaction — if only in another life than this one:

A man's physical hunger does not prove that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indicator that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.³⁵

The inescapable but deeply significant problem, contended Lewis, is that:

we do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words — to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.³⁶

The eminent American Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has also written on this experience of deep yearning, longing, or *Sehnsucht*:

It isn't easy to say with any precision what the longing is a longing for, but it can seem to be for a sort of union: it's as if you want to be absorbed into the music, to become part of the ocean, to be at one with the landscape. You would love to

34 *Verweile doch, du bist so schön*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* I.7.2.699. In context, of course, Faust intends the line ironically or with disdain.

35 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Touchstone, 1980), 30.

36 *Ibid.*, 39.

climb that mountain, certainly, but that isn't enough; you also somehow want to become one with it, to become part of it, or to have it, or its beauty, or this particular aspect of it, somehow become part of your very soul. . . . When confronted with beauty, it is never enough; we are never really satisfied; there is more beyond, a more that we yearn for, but can only dimly conceive. We are limited to mere fleeting glimpses of the real satisfaction — unfulfilled until filled with the love of God. These longings too are types of longing for God; and the brief but joyous partial fulfillments are a type and foretaste of the fulfillment enjoyed by those who “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”³⁷

The entire vast literature of mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and beyond can be read as an expression of the quest for an ultimately satisfying *unio mystica* with God. “And this is life eternal,” records the gospel of John, “that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”³⁸ Eternal life is not to know *about* the Father and the Son, but to know *them*. Moreover, it's probably not insignificant that a form of the same verb for “knowing” that's used by John is also used in the Septuagint Greek form of Genesis 4:1, which reports that “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived.” Plainly, this isn't mere book learning. It's experiential.

It's possible that there are some people who've never experienced the yearnings described by St. Augustine, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, William Wordsworth, Eliza Snow, C. S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, and many others. If so, I honestly don't know what to do for them. Still, while the frenetic pace of modern life, and its various ways (chemical and other) of dulling such feelings, may work against senses of disquiet and foreignness in this world, my supposition is that almost everybody has experienced or will experience these longings, at least briefly, once or twice in a lifetime.

What does this have to do with apologetics? How is it connected with Interpreter? My hope is that Latter-day Saint philosophers, scholars, writers, artists, composers, and others will find ways to exhibit the Restored Gospel such that at least some currently outside the Kingdom, or not thoroughly within it, will recognize that in its promises rests the ultimate fulfillment of our deepest human yearnings.

37 Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 75, 76. He alludes to the first question and answer of the Westminster Confession.

38 John 17:3.

Many of these methods of exposition won't fit this journal especially well. The beauties of the Gospel need to be expressed and celebrated in a wide variety of ways. Such expressions will commonly find their proper place in recordings, in concert halls, in choral performances and dramas, hanging on walls, featured in novels and poems, or in other sorts of writing. But I hope that some of them will also come to *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*. I firmly believe that The Interpreter Foundation itself, through its journal and elsewhere, can become a vehicle not just for arguments that fortify intellectual conviction — important as those can be and are — but also for examinations of scripture and revealed doctrine that will set forth, insightfully and eloquently, the profundity and spiritual wealth to be found in them.

A slogan has been circulating among Mormon intellectuals of late, to the effect that “Richness is the new proof.”³⁹ If this is taken to suggest that historical and other arguments no longer have a place in discussions of the claims of Mormonism, I strongly disagree. But if it's understood to mean simply that “richness” is a powerful apologetic, I strongly concur. It's not enough, as I've said, to show that the Gospel is true, or at least plausible. We ought also to be trying to show how very good and beautiful it is, how rich and deep. And *Interpreter* is an excellent place for doing that.

And here's just one of many themes on which such variations can be created: “The thought that God is triune,” writes Alvin Plantinga, “distinguishes Christianity from other theistic religions; here we see a way in which this doctrine makes a real difference, in that it recognizes eros and love for others at the most fundamental level of reality.”⁴⁰

“Does this suggest,” he asks, “that we should lean toward a *social* conception of the Trinity, the conception of Gregory and the Cappadocian fathers, rather than the Augustinian conception, which flirts with modalism?”⁴¹

I plan to publish an article in the *Interpreter* journal that answers that question with a resounding “Yes.” Professor Plantinga also notes that, in Christianity, “God's love for us is manifested in his generously inviting us into this charmed circle (though not, of course, to ontological equality), thus satisfying the deepest longings of our souls.”⁴²

39 Creation of the phrase has been ascribed James Faulconer, but, in conversation, he disclaims authorship.

40 Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, 78, note 13.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 78.

In Mormonism, I will argue, and specifically in its doctrine of exaltation or human deification, that invitation takes on a uniquely concrete and profound meaning. “One must admit,” an astute non-Mormon scholar recently wrote:

that the Mormon doctrine of deification presents something heartwarming. Deification among the Latter-day Saints is not a matter of the lonely individual buried in contemplation. To become a god, one must become a god in the midst of family — as a husband, wife, daughter, son, father, or mother progressing with the family into higher and higher levels of godhood. Mormonism does not so much teach the deification of the individual as the deification of the family and the larger family of the church. Godhood is eternal communion, and the increase of this communion with God and with each other. It is not just the rule and domination of other planets; it is the progression and infinite multiplication of love.⁴³

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43 M. David Litwa, *Becoming Divine: An Introduction to Deification in Western Culture* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 203–204.

