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RELATIONSHIP OF MORMONISM TO CHRISTIANITY.

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[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

When requested by the brethren presiding in this meeting to address you, I expressed a dread of the task. It seems to me that I feel more at home in speaking to those who have no faith in the Gospel; because then I know that the principal thing to do is to incite faith in their minds. I happened to remember also that this congregation is privileged to hear the servants of God who are peculiarly blessed both with natural endowments and with the Spirit of the Lord, which enable them to instruct and encourage you in your duties. However, I am persuaded that anything which will increase the faith of the people is profitable to be considered; for not only is it the object of preaching, to create faith in the hearts of those who do not believe, but its purpose is also to strengthen the faith in the hearts of those who already believe.

I think it profitable for Latter-day Saints to consider the relationship which "Mormonism" sustains to the rest of the religious world, as well as to try and comprehend the separate principles of which it is composed; and by becoming acquainted with that relationship, learn its importance and its grandeur; and by becoming acquainted with its importance and grandeur, learn to love it; and by learning to love it, learn to live in harmony with its requirements. For it seems to me that the only incentive needful to create devotion and love for the work of God is simply to know it; and that love, if pure and undefiled, will lead one to obey its requirements.

The world, so far, has failed to read altogether the deep meaning of this religious phenomenon called "Mormonism;" but while it has not clearly understood its meaning, it has nevertheless struck at it. It has a wonderful message to bear to the world, this "Mormonism." It is a marvel and a wonder, just as one of the ancient prophets said it would be. It is a bold work, for it declares the whole modern Christian world in error and apostasy. To understand the relationship which this wonderful work sustains to modern Christianity it will be necessary to refer briefly to the views entertained of the Christian religion by the great divisions of Christendom.

It is believed by the Roman Catholics

that St. Peter, before the close of the first century, established the church at Rome; and from his seat of authority in that city governed the whole Church of Christ. They contend that to this Apostle (and in that they are right) there was a certain primacy accorded by his fellow Apostles; that unto him had been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with the power to bind on earth and have it bound in heaven, and to loose on earth and to have it loosed in heaven; and that the other Apostles were subject to his presidency. Hence, their theory is that the church which he founded, and over which he immediately presided, also had a certain primacy which should command the respect of all the other branches of the church and be recognized as the head of the Christian societies. Catholic tradition tells us that there succeeded to Peter one Linus, and after Linus, Anaclethus, and after him, Clement of Rome; and so they will read you a list of the bishops who have succeeded to the presidency of the Church of Rome from Peter to Leo XIII, who now occupies the chair of St. Peter, succeeding to that primacy allowed to Peter by the Apostles. Thus they insist that there has been a continuous and unbroken line of authority from the days of Peter until now. Running parallel with that line of divine authority has come also a continuation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its essentials to salvation. And if there have been additions of rites and ceremonies, they have sprung from seeds sown in apostolic days—additions which contribute to a more successful worship of Deity, and an increase of spiritual life and morality in the church. This I understand to be the contention of the Catholic Church, and the claims which it makes that the Catholic Church of today is identical with, in fact, a continuation of the church founded by the labors of the divinely appointed Apostles of Jesus Christ. And though the church may not always have been healthy, it has at least continued to live.

The position of Protestant Christendom is radically different to that of the Catholic Church. Protestants agree with Catholics that Jesus established His Church; that He brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel; that He divinely commissioned Apostles to preach the Gospel and evangelize the world. They believe these messengers of salvation visited many parts of the earth and carried the light of the Gospel with them wherever they went. But after a lapse of time abuses crept into the Church, corruption abounded, the simple form of Church government was transformed into a most splendid hierarchy, but one that was as corrupt as it was splendid.

Idolatry crept into the Church; and image worship usurped the services of the true God. The laws of the Gospel were disobeyed; its ordinances were changed; and the Gospel was so far corrupted that the Master, when He came to look upon the Church He had founded, could not recognize it. Protestants insist that all sects, all parties, all divisions of Christendom were sunk in abominable idolatry—and that for more than eight hundred years. Such is the statement of the first great body of the Protestant sects—the Church of England. (See Homily on Perils of Idolatry, p. 3.)

Another great reformer, explaining how it was that the Christians lost those spiritual gifts, so characteristic of the Saints of God in New Testament times, refuted the poor excuse that the reason why miraculous gifts ceased among Christians in the third and fourth centuries was because the whole world had become Christian and there was no further need of these extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Ghost. He calls attention, in his discourse upon this subject, to the fact that not one-tenth part of the world had become Christian when these gifts and graces departed from the Church, and that those who were converted, in the main, were only nominally Christian. Said he, the reason why the gifts were no longer to be found in the Church was because the Christians had turned heathens again and only had a dead form left. This was John Wesley, one of the first of Protestant reformers. (Wesley's Works, sermon 89.) I do not mean first as to the time in which he began his work, but first as to the results which followed his labors. Protestants teach, then, that there has been a universal apostasy from the Gospel of Christ, and a destruction of the Church He founded; but Protestants would have us also believe that in the Reformation that occurred in the sixteenth century, under the leadership of Martin Luther and his associates, the errors of Rome were pushed aside; and that the Christian religion in all its simplicity and its beauty was restored to men; that the Gospel was rescued from absolute destruction and again proclaimed in power to the world; and that from that time, the sixteenth century, until now, the Gospel light then burning dim and low has been growing brighter and spreading until the whole earth is likely to be filled with its glory. That is their contention.

What I wish now is to point out the relationship which Mormonism sustains to this great controversy. No one that is acquainted with the history of the Church of Christ, in the first centuries of its existence, can doubt for a moment