AN ESSAY ON CHRIST, REVELATION, AND SACRED ORDER

WHEN PLAIN THINGS NO LONGER SEEM ENOUGH

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One of the more refined dangers in religious life is that sign-seeking rarely announces itself as rebellion. It usually arrives clothed in reverence, sincerity, and spiritual enthusiasm. It does not always ask for fire from heaven. More often, it appears when the plain things of Christ begin to feel too plain, and believers start reaching for something extra to make sacred things seem more weighty, more memorable, more persuasive, or more spiritually compelling than the Lord's appointed means appear on their own.

That is where the problem begins.

In scriptural terms, sign-seeking is not merely a desire to understand or to be reassured. It is a disordered appetite. It is the impulse to have faith carried by what is dramatic, visible, emotionally forceful, or externally validating rather than by the word of Christ itself. The issue, then, is not simply whether signs exist. They do. Nor is it wrong to receive them when God gives them. The issue is whether the heart begins to depend on them. Once that happens, faith is no longer resting securely on revelation already given, but on some further manifestation that seems more vivid, more compelling, or more personally satisfying.

In a modern Latter-day Saint setting, this tendency often does not take the form of open demands for miracles. It appears more subtly. Scripture, ordinance, covenant, reverence, and obedience begin to feel too bare, too repetitive, or too ordinary. Then comes the temptation to reinforce them through creative additions, personalized emphasis, emotional amplification, or spiritually charged flourishes meant to make the experience land with greater force. The intent may be good. The people involved may be entirely sincere. But sincerity is not the final test. The real question is whether such efforts train the Saints to trust Christ more fully in the simplicity He established, or whether they gradually train them to need more than He established in order to feel that something sacred is happening.

That distinction matters greatly.

The sacrament stands as one of the clearest rebukes to sign-seeking in all of Christian worship. It is strikingly plain by design. Bread. Water. Prescribed prayers. Remembrance. Covenant renewal. No spectacle. No need for human enhancement. Its authority does not arise from novelty, atmosphere, or personal style. Its power lies precisely in the fact that Christ has already given it its meaning. The ordinance does not need to be rescued from plainness. Its plainness is part of its divine character. To adorn it unnecessarily, or to make it more spiritually impressive through creative expression, may seem harmless or even helpful. Yet it can quietly reveal a mistrust of simplicity. It can imply, even if unintentionally, that the form Christ gave is not quite enough unless man adds something to intensify the moment.

That is a modern sign-seeking instinct in polished religious form.

The same tendency can emerge through what might be called impression culture. Personal revelation is real. Divine guidance is real. The language of spiritual impression has a rightful place among believing

people. Yet there is a difference between being guided by the Spirit within one's stewardship and using spiritual language to lend sacred weight to acts that move beyond what has been plainly revealed or properly assigned. "I felt impressed" can be a humble acknowledgment of dependence on heaven. But it can also become a sanctified means of placing private force behind public innovation. When that happens, the plain order established by revelation is gradually displaced by the felt authority, tone, or confidence of the one administering it.

That shift is more serious than it may first appear.

Once a congregation becomes accustomed to this pattern, people can slowly be conditioned to respond less to truth itself and more to presentation, atmosphere, and personality. The issue is no longer whether Christ has spoken, but whether the moment feels sufficiently charged. The result is that spiritual appetite begins to change. Plain doctrine starts to feel thin. Simple ordinance starts to feel inadequate. Revealed order starts to feel lifeless unless accompanied by something more vivid. This is one of sign-seeking's deepest dangers: it does not merely ask for more evidence; it retrains the soul to distrust the ordinary forms in which God has chosen to work.

And the tragedy is that this can happen on both sides of the pulpit.

Leaders may seek signs by trying to make sacred things more compelling through creativity, personalization, or dramatic emphasis. Members may seek signs by becoming increasingly dependent on intensity, novelty, or emotional overwhelm in order to feel nourished. In both cases, faith begins to rest on reinforcement rather than on reality. Christ's word remains true, but people begin to want it delivered with enough force to make it feel true. That is perilously close to the condition the Lord repeatedly exposed in those who would welcome Him for what they had seen, but not truly honor Him for who He was.

This is why the issue cannot be dismissed as merely a matter of style or preference. At stake is not only order, but appetite. The real danger is that believers may gradually lose confidence in the power of the simple things God Himself chose, and begin looking instead for assurance in the very things men are most capable of manufacturing. Religious creativity, even when warm and sincere, can become spiritually corrosive if it teaches people to expect from man what they should be learning to receive from Christ.

The remedy is not coldness, nor suspicion of all feeling, nor contempt for beauty. The remedy is recovery of confidence in divine simplicity. God has not left His people without means. He has given His word, His ordinances, His covenants, His priesthood order, and His Spirit. These are not weak because they are plain. They are powerful precisely because they come from Him. The mature disciple learns to receive them without demanding that they be dramatized, personalized, or emotionally heightened in order to seem real.

That is the dividing line.

Faithful discipleship receives signs when God gives them, but it does not demand them as the condition of belief. It trusts that Christ is sufficient in the forms He established. Sign-seeking, by contrast, begins when the heart quietly decides that Christ's appointed means are too plain to bear the full weight of faith without human enhancement.

Once that assumption takes root, style begins to do the work that only truth should do.

And that is why the matter is not small. When plain things no longer seem enough, the soul is already in danger of preferring the impressiveness of man to the sufficiency of Christ.