

Arthur A. Oakman

# Language and Prophecy

We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

*Prophecy means not a forecast of the future but the unveiling of mysteries beyond the intellect's reach. The literal meaning of prophecy is the utterance of truth from a hidden source from which truth cannot be extracted by intellectual processes.—*  
Arnold Toynbee.

WE BEGIN by affirming the existence of an absolute reality. Absolute because there can be no other. Real because our experience itself is felt reality. This absolute reality—or God—must remain for us humans a mystery. Ernst Haeckel, a scientific astronomer of the last century, wrote a book called *The Riddle of the Universe*. Absolute reality is not a riddle. Riddles are amenable to intellectual processes and can eventually be answered. Sir James Jeans wrote a book with a much better title, *The Mysterious Universe*.

Who can fathom eternity? What does the word mean? Does it mean a very long time? Does it mean *endless* time? Immediately one asks the question he knows it is not a question at all but an attempt to fathom a mystery. All the terminology relating to God is itself a negation of all we know relating to our temporal existence. Almighty—this word means something incomprehensible to us, for all-mightiness would make what we know of power and might as though it did not exist.

Infinite! What can that mean to finiteness? In a realm where they were no bounds—no finity—there would be no existence such as we know. I say “such as we know” because of what will be said later.

*Unchangeable*. What does that mean? It can mean only the (to us) shadowy stability behind the change and decay which is all around and within us. So it is with any language applied to the mystery we call God. “Canst thou by searching find out God?” Yes, and *no*. To the intellect which seek always and only a “scientific” answer—no. Behind the foreground of intellectual inquiry there is a vast hinterland which for its exploration requires other means of conquest than the tools of human thought. Words strain and crack and sometimes break<sup>1</sup> when we apply them to try to discover and explore this hinterland of human consciousness and experience.

The other answer to the question, “Canst thou by searching find out God?” is yes—if. *If* he reveals himself to you. “If, with *all your hearts* ye truly seek me—ye shall ever surely find me!” “He that seeketh me early shall find me and not be forsaken.” Those who “with all their hearts” seek God have already found him. This means that knowledge of God—“the Absolute Reality”—is an affair engaging the *whole* man, not only his conscious thought but his subconscious affections, too. This kind of searching, we have found, is God’s gift to us, and while we seek him thus, we are assured that already we have been found of him.

## Not in Word only

We have said that all the language we use to indicate God is a negation of our temporal experience. But this needs further explanation. We could not know our language was temporal and imperfect unless we were already convinced there was an eternal and perfect form of expression. The terms we habitually use to apply to God are themselves thus inadequate and “found wanting” when examined at the bar of our basic being and deepest convictions. And so these words can never adequately express the divine. They “strain and crack” and finally break when required to bear such a burden. That is why Paul said, “Our gospel came not in word only.” It could never come “in word only,” for it needs the “power and the Holy Ghost and much assurance” put to it to make it a gospel.

While all this is said, let us hasten to add that this mystery we call “God” is not unintelligible. In fact we have organs or means by which it can be known. In the inner man, in the depths of the unconscious part of our minds we are all connected to a vast unfathomable mystery. This “inner man” is to us as mysterious as the God who made us. That is why when we know Him we come to know ourselves. But only through the knowledge of God can we know ourselves truly. Philosophy cannot help us, because it begins with the slogan, “Man know thyself.” One said that the proper study of mankind is man—which is true *if* the One Man who is truly man is first apprehended as a basis from which to judge all others. But that One Man can be apprehended only by the revelation of the Eternal God. Without that revelation, he is just another man “in like fashion” as all others. “Man know thyself” is therefore impossible of complete achievement. There are areas of the human psyche other than the intellect through which we may view reality “as through a glass darkly,” and these means or organs of knowledge and communion are as valid for the apprehension of the truth as the intellect.

## Personalities and Semantics

The conscious volitional area of the mind has been likened to a flat surface, and the subconscious to an “emotional abyss.” Each area has its own way of looking at reality and interpreting what it sees in terms of a single vocabulary. A sunrise may be described laconically in terms of time thus, “7:42, sunrise.” That is a utilitarian declaration. Or in

the language of poetry it may be described thus: "Jocund day stood at tiptoe on the misty mountaintops." This statement tells us that the sun rose in the imagination of a poet and more of his personality was engaged in observing it than was employed by the weather forecaster. But look at this statement from the Nineteenth Psalm.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.—Psalm 19: 1-6.

Here the sunrise is related to divine law both within and around the perceptor, and the social institutions are not entirely excluded from the consideration either. For the supreme example, remember the words of our Lord: "For as the light of the morning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, . . . so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." He who said this claimed that he was the "bright and the morning star."<sup>2</sup> The same fact of nature viewed first by the intellect, in the case of the newscaster, by the emotions of the poet who said that the sun meant "jocund day," then by one who was an enlightened moralist, who saw the relation between the inner and the outer world and related the sunrise to the inward "law of the Lord," or as we might say, "conscience," last of all by the supreme revealer of all, Jesus, who saw in the same fact a prophecy of that which was to come and related it to millenniums of time, and the judgment of Jesus as to the full meaning of this temporal fact is gradually being wrought out.

So when a complete man measures, we have a complete measure. Intellect, emotion, will, and history are combined in the view of Jesus. So prophecy is that utterance of the truth which is beyond the reach of the intellect. To the ordinary use of words must be added the language of the Spirit, which means the language of experience as interpreted by Jesus Christ our Lord if words are to be made at all adequate to be used in prophecy.

### Science, History, and Prophecy

A scientist asks, "why?" And when he has the answer, he asks of that answer, "Why?" again. When the second answer constitutes the ground of the third question, something else has happened. The first answer has been modified by the second, and the second by the third. So then, with all its vast knowledge of the universe, science is always provisional, and the only consistency about it is the never ending drive for knowledge which scientists have in themselves and which is not explicable in terms of their provisional formulas. This same thing is true of all intellectual and metaphysical pursuits. Truth apprehended intellectually is expressed in scientific formulas, in philosophical maxims, and in canons of art. The intellect runs on the surface of life. This is not to decry reason nor despise the intellect. There is no progress possible unless experience itself is analyzed by thought, and principles are apprehended and used to enrich life. We need the trained scientist and philosopher. We need the theologian, too—the theologian who will justify to the reason the Christian experience and relate harmoniously to the rest of human knowledge that justification. We are trying simply to say that life itself is more than thought. Christianity is more than theology, just as a man is more than his thought of himself.

### The Timeless Element

Because intellectual pursuits such as science are provisional they can be "dated." Ptolemy, Newton, Einstein—these names stand for provisional cosmogonies. One depends on the other. Science goes forward cumulatively. But this is not true of those apprehensions of reality given by other means. The Twenty-third Psalm, for instance, will never be out of date because it represents a unique apprehension of the nature of God. It has no "date," such as Newtonian physics has. It is timeless. When one compares two poems he simply asks which represents the greatest insight—not "which one came first." So that, unlike science, a later poem does not set aside the value of an earlier one. Each poem, worthy of the name, springs from a "swift intuition of the heart" in which the poet reaches into the timeless storehouse of eternal truth and writes as his mind is illumined. This is true also of music, which is older than words and engages the feelings which are prior to harsh words and to music. It is said by some that the Twenty-third Psalm is losing its value as a vehicle of peace, since so many of our contemporaries grow up in urban surroundings and never see a sheep. Perhaps there is some virtue in this observation, but surely the criticism is superficial, since all read, and the pastoral scene has not vanished from our screens and picture books.

### The Intellectual vs. the Intuitional

The difference between the intellectual and the intuitional approach to truth is fundamental. Because both use the same vocabulary, misunderstanding and mutilation often occur. This is illustrated by Wagner in "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg." The opera tells of a contest sponsored in the city with the prize going to him who pens the loveliest song. Walther, the hero, writes his prize songs which many consider the loveliest melody ever penned. Beckmesser, the villain, steals this song, and tries to rewrite it in the florid intellectual style which Wagner despised. The result is ludicrous, and Beckmesser is laughed to scorn because he attempted to put the language of the heart in the intellectual medium of strict classicism. The whole opera is an indictment of the attempt to translate into intellectual terms that which was expressive of the whole man—Walther's love for the beautiful Eva.

So it was with the Christian religion. As soon as the Church came to terms with the Empire (circa A.D. 314), being passionately missionary, she sought to win the minds of the philosophers and professors of the universities. These men were self-reliant and very independent. Even though the Emperor finally condemned paganism they remained aloof. They were sympathetic, it is true, but they would not accept Christianity until it could be presented in the philosophical language of the intellect.

Theodosius I (379-95) penalized paganism, but this philosophical class had a code of its own. If its members were to be won, the Church had to try to translate her gospel into their terms. In doing this—a process lasting over two hundred years—Christianity gradually and imperceptibly came to be a system to be believed rather than a life to be lived. The ancient symbols of that life took on a sickly hue, "the pale cast of thought," and the driving thrust of a pure moral life directed by the Spirit, which demanded the whole man to be effective, lost its force. So it is always.

People who cry for exact meanings of words as the sole tool to reshape life miss the mark. The meaning of words is derived from their context, just as notes in a symphony combine with each other to convey the heart of the Master's message. The Spirit uses the letter and makes of the letter the vehicle of *life*. It is the life in its turn which inspires the thought. Theology must ever be baptized in worship and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost as the theologians set their



Apostle  
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hands to do the will of God. Otherwise, theology becomes a vain Babel, and men think thereby they can get to heaven simply by building towers of words and castles in the breath of their lips. The beauty of Walther's song cannot be pinned down in Beckmesser's babblings. The beauty of the divine message cannot be held in creeds and formulas. Creeds and formulas, written scripture, church organization, *et al*, are means to the end that men might have life. But they become means of denying life to men when they are mistakenly supposed to be ends in themselves.

#### Lost Dimension

So, then, poetry and art use a language in common with the intellect, but they use it in a quite different sense. Further, the subconscious uses other means than speech as well as using speech. Parable, myth, metaphor, ordinance, drama in sacrament, all these it uses to convey to man the treasures of that hinterland which is beyond the reach of the intellect. Recently Paul Tillich diagnosed the ailment of our age as western man's "loss of dimension in depth." By this he means the loss of being concerned about one's own being and being universally. We are not gripped by any concerns about the infinite, and we lust after having, rather than seeking to be. In the process of losing this dimension in depth, we have lost also the symbols which expressed it. For instance, when the protagonists of religion sought to "square" the account of the Fall in Genesis with "scientific" truth, the Fall became not a symbol of this dimension in depth but a piece of clumsy fiction invented, it was thought, by the childish minds of primitive people. The same spurt of ridicule which Wagner utters in Beckmesser was used against the story of the Fall and for precisely the same reason. Symbols, which are the language of the whole man, cannot be expressed in terms of the intellect. This does not mean that these symbols are unintelligent or unintelligible. It means that they alone can "say" what needs to be said to the whole man.

#### The "Language" of Symbols

Of course, some men have been metaphysicians and poets both. Santayana is one; Plato another. Plato knew that logic was not enough and used myth to say what logic was powerless to express. Strangely enough it is Plato's prophetic vision that has power over men today. His metaphysics is dated and his science hopelessly lost. For poetry and music are akin to the prophetic vision; these are timeless and are somehow related to the eternal mystery. And God uses many means to minister his life to us. By word, yes; by ordinance, certainly; by history, and by his own Son—who was an *essential symbol* of his own life. The word "symbol" used in this connection might be misunderstood. But I can find no other

word for what is meant. Symbols are representative of that which they stand for. If a man spits on a piece of calico colored red, white, and blue, I think him disgusting; but if he comes into my home and does the same thing to red, white, and blue cloth sewn together so as to form the Stars and Stripes, I shall not do any thinking at all. I shall proceed to throw him out. The flag represents to me a deep devotion to my adopted country. It is a symbol—a conventional symbol, but it is not that country. It is a symbol, but not an *essential* symbol in the manner to which we referred to the life of Christ. An essential symbol is "one with what it tells of." When such a symbol occurs or is used, then that for which it stands occurs also. It is this kind of symbol which the prophetic vision uses to convey the knowledge of God. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are so constituted as to be capable of becoming such essential symbols. That is the meaning of the passage which affirms that without the ordinances thereof, "the priesthood and the authority of the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh."<sup>3</sup>

#### Believing Is Seeing

In the being of God all have being. God is not "in the world" in the same sense that we are. The world, and we in it, are in God—in that divine Being where certain timeless truths are. Any institution, such as our church, has value only as it apprehends these eternal verities and exists to make them luminous. The preaching of the gospel of God, the administering of priestly ordinances, the inevitable gathering together of those who believe, the establishment of Zion, all these are apprehensions of truth and are based *alone* on the prophetic vision which rightfully belongs to all who believe.

Some have said that seeing is believing. It is not so. The reverse is true, believing is seeing. What is belief itself but the call of God to a man out of his loneliness and solitude into the fraternity and fellowship of Christ? How *can* there be believers without a church? And how can there be a church unless these called-out ones have the companionship of Him who called them? No man can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unless Christ is with him to aid him to believe, and when he so does believe, there is the end of his solitude and his strange loneliness.

#### Science and the Prophetic Vision

What is the upshot of all this? First of all, the prophetic vision encompasses *all*, intellect, feeling, will, and history. This vision has essential symbols peculiar and necessary to it, through which it is actualized. These essential symbols *cannot be translated into intellectual terms*. When the attempt to do so is undertaken, and scientific language is introduced to convey these timeless apprehensions, always their essential counsels and truths are mutilated. There is no scientific explanation capable of describing what happens when a sinner repents and finds peace to his soul in God. There is no adequate psychological "explanation" for the vision of Isaiah, who "saw the Lord high and lifted up," because it is not possible to psychoanalyze the Lord. To understand what happens in the Communion means to partake of the flesh and blood, i.e., the life of Jesus. No theological treatise can be substituted for the act of Communion itself. When the dimension in depth with its own symbols of life are yanked out and pressed flat on the horizontal plane of the intellect they are destroyed, and the life they convey is destroyed also. You cannot force the prophetic vision into intellectual and scientific terminology.

But a peculiar thing is here to be noted. The terminology of science, its apprehension of truth, and the truth so appre-

hended can be the stuff out of which the prophetic vision can formulate new and even more meaningful symbols, myths, and parables. Take the case of the discovery of Neptune in the 1850's. The gravitational pull of Neptune on Uranus was observed and precisely measured before Neptune was seen. Indeed it was the observed vagaries in the orbit of Uranus that led to the scientific affirmation of the existence of the other planet. Who has observed the vagaries of the wild and irregular scene of this world's course and not affirmed the existence of another world which is exerting a "gravitational pull" on the souls of men? Joseph Smith asserted that Christ was in the sun and was the "power thereof" by which it is made. It remained for science to provide additional literal verification of that fact, for our sun shines by a power that causes it to be dying while giving light and life to all. So the prophetic vision restored in these last days is capable of assimilating all. It must be so, or our gospel is a shibboleth.

In olden days prophets wrote and spoke as they were "moved" upon by the Holy Ghost. They did not "move upon the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost moved upon them. He wrought in their souls apprehension of those timeless counsels and truths which are of the whole man—the man Christ Jesus. The principle of sacrifice they used to convey apprehension of the instrument of divine grace. They used action and drama to give meaning to their words. When the future came before them in apocalyptic vision there was always at the heart of it "one like the Son of Man," or the "Suffering Servant," or the "Messenger of the Covenant." Call him what they would, he is recognizable, whether this figure or that is chosen to symbolize him. For he is the author of prophecy—Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*
2. Revelation 22: 16
3. Doctrine and Covenants 83: 3

## Live As You Pray

I knelt to pray when day was done,  
 And prayed, "O Lord, bless everyone;  
 Lift from each saddened heart the pain,  
 And let the sick be well again."  
 And when I woke another day  
 And carelessly went on my way,  
 The whole day long I did not try  
 To wipe a tear from any eye.  
 I did not try to share the load  
 Of any brother on the road.  
 I did not even go to see  
 The sick man just next door to me.  
 Yet once again when day was done,  
 I prayed, "O Lord, bless everyone."  
 But as I prayed, into my ear  
 There came a voice that whispered clear,  
 "Pause, hypocrite, before you pray.  
 Whom have you tried to bless today?  
 God's sweetest blessings always go  
 By hands that serve him here below."  
 And then I hid my face and cried,  
 "Forgive me, God, for I have lied;  
 Let me but live another day  
 And I will live the way I pray."

—Unknown

From "Office Machine Mart News," September, 1958



Artist Alta Seal paints the "Sacred Grove"

## Drama Prepared for Conference

"THE LIVING CHRIST" is the title of the 1958 General Conference production by the White Masque Players.

Richard Maloney, president, said the production will be a compilation of poetry, prose, and drama selected from great literature, including the writings of several church authors.

Brother Maloney has spent over a year in research and study to make up the drama which moves in sequence from the Creation to Christ's birth, his ministry, the revelation of the Book of Mormon, the Passion, and finally the resurrection.

A rhythm choir will present a prelude to each act using the recorded music of César Franck as a background for "The Creation," the music of Prokofiev for the "Land Shadowing with Wings," and "Were You There?" by the Roger Wagner Choral for the prelude to the "Passion Drama."

Church authors include Elbert A. Smith, Helen Harrington, Roy Cheville, Geoffrey Gillard, Josephine Montgomery, and Elbert Dempsey, Jr. Excerpts from the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants will also be used.

Other authors represented are Carl Sandburg, T. S. Eliot, Longfellow, Dorothy Parker, Frank Harris, Padraic Colum, and Mary Austin.

The production staff has worked many months with Brother Maloney to execute the stage settings, costuming, lighting, and other technical problems for staging the drama.

Cast for the drama will be Elbert Dempsey, Jr., Mrs. Arline Cackler, Joseph Long, Mrs. Nina Maloney, Bruce Reynolds, Miss Ruth Morrison, Max Kaplan, Mrs. Ruth Hays, Stewart Carson, and Miss Jeanette Gard.

The Conference production will be given eight nights, October 3 to 11. Persons attending General Conference will be admitted with a ticket which will be included in all General Conference registrations.