

The background is a dark, muted brown. On the left side, several 3D cubes of varying sizes are scattered, some appearing to float or be in motion. On the right side, there is a faint, light-colored network diagram consisting of interconnected dots and lines, resembling a molecular structure or a complex web. The overall aesthetic is modern and abstract.

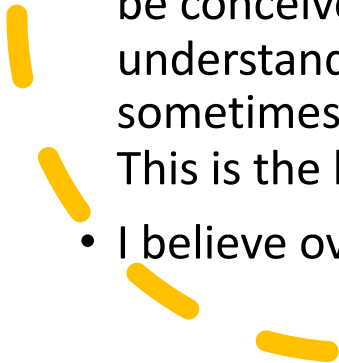
Embracing the Divine Purpose

Finding Unity of Purpose In the age of Fragmentation

Fragmentation – Entropy in the Modern Age



- Political Fragmentation – Enough Said
- Moral Fragmentation – e.g. The “Post Christian Age” and moral truths
- Intellectual Fragmentation – Specialization
- Social Fragmentation – Sections and intersectionalities, alienation
- Personal Fragmentation – Persons as foci of systems and forces within and from without
- This cannot be addressed at the superficial levels of our engagement with world and each other. Nor can we expect our disciplines to provide unification. It can be conceived only on the most profound and fundamental levels of understanding and meaning – the level where truth is anchored, the level we sometimes would rather not engage and even our disciplines are often silent. This is the level where academia, intellect and the restored gospel meet.
- I believe overcoming them is essential to the “moral renovation” of the world



Principal Issues

- 1. The BYU Mission Statement
 - “Assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life”
 - Directly, not just *de facto*
 - Actively, not just passively
 - Find the gospel “traction point” in a student’s life, or refute the secular orthodoxy
 - Example President Hinckley’s observation as an example:
 - “Why are we still doing/teaching XXXX at BYU?”
 - His implication was that there ought to be something unique about doing it and how it is done here that gives added value, related to our mission and identity, that students wouldn’t/couldn’t get at another place.
 - **The spiritual mission of BYU is not an “extracurricular activity”**

Principal Issues

- 2. There is an “LDS/Christian Perspective,” or Christian “take” on virtually every topic or issue resident in a good substantive higher education
 - AND . . . Most often it will make a difference i.e., it will non-trivial
 - AND . . . The “Christian Take” will be intellectually defensible, illuminating, and superior to any “Secular Take” on the same issue.
 - Because it reflects Truth
 - (Note: If it doesn’t seem to be so, then we have some intellectual and/or faith work to do.)
 - (Note: Where and How to find and articulate the Christian Take will vary across disciplines



Principal Issues

- 3. Keeping our “**subject matter** bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel.” (Pres Spencer W. Kimball/Aims document)
 - Note: Directionality
 - Note: Bathing is not the same thing as sprinkling
 - Note: This not a procedural nor a process issue, it is a CONTENT issue
 - Note: This will need to be done differently in the various disciplines
 - Example: The professional vs. the liberal arts disciplines
 - Note: This does NOT turn the university into a “Sunday School.”
 - Rather: It blesses the lives of students who are here to learn truth, and are struggling to find it, and in some cases, it *redeems* disciplines that have lost their way and are in need of renovation or redemption

Principal Issues

- 4. Employ “gospel methodology” in the quest for achieving the educational ends and purposes of a BYU education, and for achieving the fulfillment of the mission of BYU in the world in the latter days.
 - What is meant by “gospel methodology?”
- At the time of Pres Kimball’s talk, Feminist analyses were being formulated and deployed in various disciplines. Such approaches were “Standpoint” theories.
- According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/#H2>:
 - a standpoint is an achieved collective identity or consciousness.
- Scholarship is carried out from such a standpoint and this allows for defining constructs and terms, asking and evaluating questions, framing studies, and reaching conclusions compatible with the theoretical standpoint adopted as a beginning truth from which to operate.
- It should be fairly clear what “Gospel Methodology” is – and it’s not a reference to how we relate to students.

Getting the Question of the Gospel and the Discipling Right – We’ve Had It Backward

- A long history at BYU of asking the wrong questions:
 - How can we find a place for the Gospel in our disciplines?
 - How can we slip a little “gospel” or “spirituality” into our teaching of the content and skills of our secular disciplines?
 - Prayers in class?
 - Discussing devotionals? Bearing an occasional testimony?
 - Slipping in an insight or two about how a feature of our disciplines correlates or parallels a gospel principle.
- There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these things, and it likely does some good for students. BUT . . . It’s backward
- The issue is **not** “How to slip a little gospel into my discipline”



Getting the Question of the Gospel and the Discipline Right

- Thus, the issue is How to find a place and a role for our discipline in the whole of the Gospel and its mission of shaping, preparing, and even redeeming a secular world in need of renovation. By doing this we will know the secular world better than it knows itself.
- ➔ This **may** very well require fundamental critique, refutation, alternative analyses, and attention to philosophical and moral foundations, assumptions, and conclusions that our disciplines offer or advocate
- ➔ It will **certainly** require a breadth of intellectual preparation and involvement, intellectual sophistication, and an enhanced seriousness about the longer and broader mission of the church, the mission of the university to bless the world while helping students prepare for perfection and eternal life in order to fulfill the role we have been asked to play.
- ➔ This will all vary greatly from discipline to discipline but it is all one project.

A Short Aside

Orson Hyde's Introduction To The Restored Gospel — Written from London June 15, 1841

“When in the course of Divine Providence, it becomes our duty to record one of those remarkable events which *gives birth to a new era*.⁸ and lays the *foundation for the renovation of the moral world*; it fills the mind with wonder, astonishment, and admiration: How welcome are the rays of the morning light, after the shades of darkness have clothed the earth in gloom! So after a long and tedious night of moral darkness under which the earth has rolled, and her inhabitants groaned for the last fourteen hundred years; an angel! an angel!! commissioned from the Almighty, descended, and rolled back the curtains of night from the minds of some, and caused the sun-beams of truth to enlighten, cheer, and warm the hearts of many. *Welcome! welcome to our earth, thou messenger of the Most High! and thrice welcome, the tidings which thou hast borne!!*” -- Times And Seasons, Vol 2, No. 23, p. 551



The Breadth and Depth of the Restoration

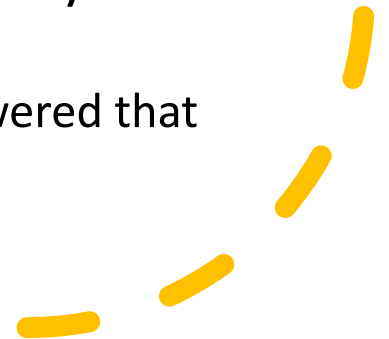
- We sometimes talk of the Restoration of the gospel as if it happened all at once. Two hundred years ago, the First Vision began the process, but the Restoration did not, of course, end there.
- “We’re witnesses to a process of restoration,” President Russell M. Nelson has said. “If you think the Church has been fully restored, you’re just seeing the beginning. There is much more to come. ... Wait till next year. And then the next year. Eat your vitamin pills. Get your rest. It’s going to be exciting.”
- <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2020/04/the-ongoing-restoration?lang=eng>
- Can we entertain the possibility that restored truth – the whole big bundle of it – provides and will continue to provide the intellectual and moral means to remake and renew more than just the religious landscape of the world? How about the whole moral (i.e., human) world? Including its intellectual commitments?

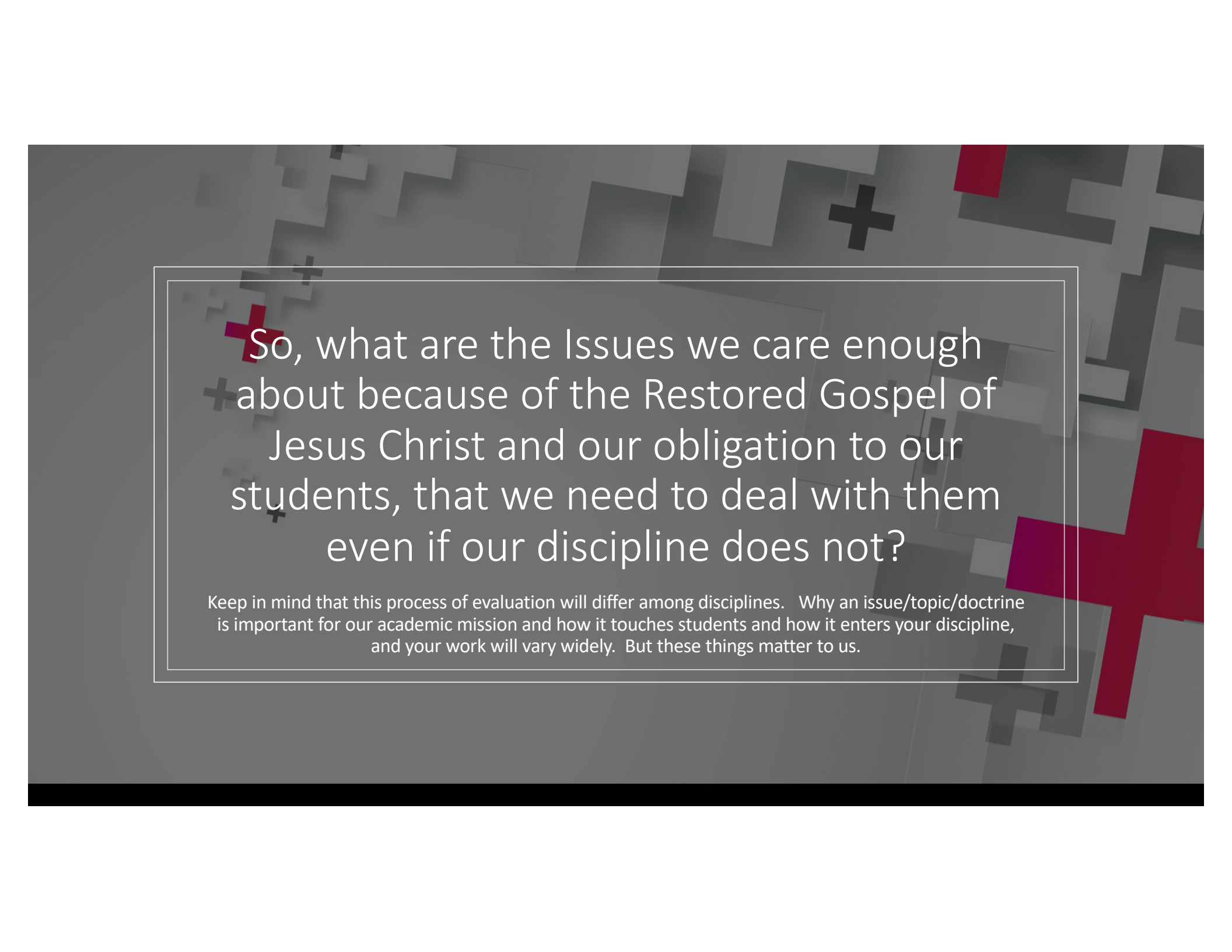
The Breadth and Depth of the Restoration

- My own commitment to the intellectual and moral importance of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ –
 - The Visit from the Father Himself did more than answer a religious question from a small boy and its import spreads beyond even the restoration of the true and living Church of Jesus Christ
 - The 19th Century was a key time in Western intellectual history and the seedbed of much of the problematic ideas, structures, and intellectual systems of our day.
 - In my judgment we have, in the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, the wherewithal to respond to these great challenges that have come to us through our social and intellectual history

Responding to the Principal Issues: i.e., employing Gospel Methodology

- A personal Example: My quest to understand, teach, clarify, and advocate for genuine human agency
- Does Human Agency Matter?
 - Elder Boyd K. Packer: Stack all the doctrines of the gospel one on top of another, starting with the most important and essential on the bottom. The one on the bottom is AGENCY.
- Why would Elder Packer put Agency on the bottom?
 - (I was in a meeting where he answered that question.)



The background of the slide is a dark gray field filled with various geometric shapes, including squares and rectangles in shades of gray and maroon. Scattered throughout are plus signs (+) in both black and maroon. A white rectangular border frames the central text area.

So, what are the Issues we care enough about because of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and our obligation to our students, that we need to deal with them even if our discipline does not?

Keep in mind that this process of evaluation will differ among disciplines. Why an issue/topic/doctrine is important for our academic mission and how it touches students and how it enters your discipline, and your work will vary widely. But these things matter to us.

- What is the Christian message, the “good news” in the context of every subject, i.e. where do we find Christ in our intellectual lives and our subjects of study in a “fallen world?” If He’s in there, is He the one you really know?
- The nature, including the divine nature, origins, and eternal potential of the human soul, and what difference our understanding of this makes.
- The nature of knowledge in your area of study, the varying kinds and varying sources of knowledge itself. What counts as knowledge in this discipline and elsewhere and how this knowledge might fold into Christian understandings of knowledge and truth.
- The origins of and the anchor for morality, moral principles, and moral sensibility. What a Christian understanding adds to, or requires of, our theories and approaches to morality.
- The nature and purpose of human life—the *telos* and the “wherefore” of life and of living souls.
- How to understand our fundamental human nature, and what light this might cast on the problem of evil, including the universal need for atonement?
- The nature and importance of families and family life.
- The nature, origins, and meaning of human sexuality and its inherently moral and inherently agentic character.
- A comprehensive, recognizably Christian “ethic of life,” or some similar guide to social and personal responsibility, and respect for all human life.
- Transcendence as it is essential to religion and to intellectual understandings of all meaningful human actions, social theories, and meanings.
- What, for Christians, constitutes the good and flourishing life over against what constitutes such a life in the context of our disciplines and the secular world.
- The nature and relationship of the *good* and the *beautiful*—virtue and art.
- The nature and content of a “Christian take” on each and all academic disciplines.

Turning attention to a (somewhat) distinctly LDS formulation of a similar set of questions and issues, I have found helpful a general conference address **by President Dallin H. Oaks (*Truth and the Plan*, October 2018)**. These are found in a list of what he referred to as “**restored gospel truths that are fundamental to the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.**” They were not presented by President Oaks in a form intended to make salient their scholarly implications; however, the implications should be clear

What difference do (or should) these “truths” make in our understanding of truth, knowledge, beauty, morality, the nature of the world, and what it means to be a human being (i.e., the core subject matter and the point of university-level Christian liberal arts education), and thus what difference do these truths make in our advanced studies and our intellectual lives across a spectrum of intellectual topics and disciplines?

Keep in mind that we may have to tackle some of these things at a deep philosophical level, others at a more conceptual, or theoretical level, and some, perhaps even at an empirical level. All are important.

- “There is a God, who is the loving Father of the spirits of all who have ever lived or will live.”
- “Gender is eternal. Before we were born on this earth, we all lived as male or female spirits in the presence of God.”
- As part of a divine plan, “. . . God created this earth as a place where His beloved . . . children could be born into mortality to receive a physical body and to have the opportunity for eternal progress by making righteous choices.”
- “To be meaningful, mortal choices had to be made between contesting forces of good and evil.”
- “The purpose of God’s plan [is] . . . the opportunity to choose eternal life . . . by experience in mortality and, after death, by post-mortal growth in the spirit world.”
- There will be “a universal resurrection to an embodied life after death.”
- The Savior “. . . [provided] an atonement to pay the price for all to be cleansed from sin on the conditions He prescribed.”
- “God’s plan . . . provides a perfect balance between justice and mercy . . .”
- “The family is ordained of God . . . gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose and . . . marriage between a man and a woman is essential to His eternal plan.”
- God “has provided a destiny of glory for all of His children.”
- “. . . we honor agency . . . and religious freedom . . .”
- “. . . mortal life is sacred to us. . . [which] requires us to oppose abortion and euthanasia.”
- “. . . the bearing and nurturing of children [is] part of God’s plan and a joyful and sacred duty of those given the power to participate in it. . . we must teach and contend for principles and practices that provide the best conditions for the development and happiness of children —all children.”

We are Happy
to Announce
this Year's
Spring
Conference

Embracing Divine Purpose in Education and Scholarship Spring Conference



April 14, 2023

SAVE
THE **DATE!**

9:00 AM

TO

4:00 PM

Theme:
Gospel
Methodology



For more information Contact
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Watch for details