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The Inconvenient Messiah

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The Inconvenient Messiah

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

Henry Adams once said that any succession of American presidents that could start with George Washington and lead to Ulysses S. Grant disproved forever the theory of evolution. I may well be striking it another fatal blow by inserting myself into an otherwise outstanding devotional calendar. But one of the advantages of being president of the university is that when you ask to be the speaker, they have to let you. Let me tell you why I'm intruding.

I have been a little frustrated that the only real chance I get to address you is in our opening President's Assembly the first week of the school year. As you well know, the atmosphere that day is a cross somewhere between Disneyworld and a Jamaican pep rally. I love that first hour with you, but neither the time restraints we face there nor the frame of mind you are in is very conducive to much of a presidential message. So after thinking about it for awhile, Sister Holland and I have determined to continue being chief animal tamers at the fall welcoming assembly and then sometime early in the winter semester—like now—we will have a slightly more serious moment with you about things we feel deeply and hope you will enjoy. So in that spirit I wish to ask Sister Holland to greet you and take a few moments to share her thoughts and testimony with you.

Patricia Holland

As my husband said, this is a little different setting than the opening assembly. There you are bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to set the world on fire, or at least one of the kitchens in Heritage Halls. Now as I watch you on campus, I think I detect a terminal case of the mid-winter blahs. Your roommate probably has mono, your grades have switched from Fahrenheit to centigrade as they approach absolute zero, your holiday menu consisted of no real date and lots of very real turkey, and you're broke. Other than that it's probably been a great winter.

I've come to you today in kind of a motherly way, if you'll indulge me, to speak to those of you who feel a little bit disappointed at this point, and thus, a little bit discouraged. May I just share with you a personal disappointment we've had in our home recently. A few months ago our daughter, Mary, decided to run for president of her seventh-grade class. She was encouraged by a teacher who felt she could win, and so she began to campaign with lots of enthusiasm and a great deal of confidence.

Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 27 February 1982.

Both her parents and her brothers rallied behind and gave her all the support and help we could.

Well, she lost. Now I was told this earlier in the day before Mary got home from school, and you know mothers. I was totally devastated for her, and I just churned with emotions all day and most of the day hoped for something that I could say that might comfort her. When I heard her footsteps at the door, my heart and my feet leaped to the rescue, and all the words of comfort I could think of came tumbling out.

And you know, she just looked at me for a few minutes and then with sad little brown eyes she said, “Mother, will you just pray with me?”

As we knelt in prayer, she said, “Heavenly Father, I promised you I’d do anything if I could win, and now I know I must show how to be a good loser.” And then she said, “I don’t want you to be my servant anymore. I just want to be yours.”

You see, it was because of her pain and disappointment that she was given to say in a twelve-year-old way, “Maybe what I wanted would not be the best thing to serve you at all.”

I guess what I’ve come to you today to say is that God uses broken things—and I quote:

It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. . . . it is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever. [“Broken Things,” an excerpt from Vance Havner, *The Still Water* (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell, 1934). Quoted in *Guideposts*, October 1981, p. 5]

Our Father in Heaven sometimes uses our pain as a megaphone for very significant instruction as he did with Joseph Smith, with Spencer W. Kimball, with Mary Holland. And as he did with Peter who, weeping bitterly, returned to greater power and service than ever.

I want you, all of you, to know of my testimony of the divinity of the Savior and of his church to which this university is ancillary. It too is a servant. I also have a firm conviction that, if you trust in him, the growth and development and challenges you experience here at this university will be part of his design and ministry. And of this I bear testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Holland

Many of you are aware, and all of you ought to be, that Elder Bruce R. McConkie has been writing and publishing a series of books on the Savior, tracing his role in the eternal plan from the councils in heaven through his earthly life to his exaltation in eternity. That series of books, entitled in several volumes as *The Promised Messiah*, *The Mortal Messiah*, and the soon-to-be-published *Millennial Messiah*, has been a part of my personal study material over these past several months of their publication.

For my purposes today, and with reasonable assurance that I won’t infringe on Elder McConkie’s series, I have labeled my remarks “The Inconvenient Messiah.” I wish to speak this morning of the demands of discipline and discipleship, of the responsibilities we have to face when we choose to follow Jesus Christ. In the Savior’s life and in ours, Satan counters such discipline with temptations of an easier way, with an offer of “convenient Christianity.” It is a temptation Jesus resisted, and so must we. Life was very inconvenient for him, and, unless I miss my guess, it will often be so for you and for me when we take upon us his name.

Frankly I would prefer to speak with you individually about such temptations. I would be thrilled if at this very large university there were a way to have that kind of personal moment with you. Because that doesn’t seem possible, let me generalize as best I can and let you make some application in your life the best *you* can.

Open Rebellion

Probably the most easily recognizable kind of evil is that which simply rebels openly against heaven, as Satan rebelled before the world was—willful, wanton opposition to God and his angels. From Cain through Caligula down to today's domestic and international hostilities, Satan has attempted to lure children of promise into violent, destructive rejection of the gospel and its teachings. These are harsh sins which the world has known only too well but from which, in large measure, we are protected at this university nestled safely near the everlasting hills. We are, for the most part, untouched by wars and tyranny and terror. Indeed when measured against this world's history where, to quote Nephi, Satan does "rage in the hearts of . . . men" (2 Nephi 28:20), this truly is Happy Valley. We have very few ragers between Payson and Lehi.

More Subtle Temptations

But there is another, more subtle tactic used by the primeval turncoat which is not so violent, not so vengeful, and at first glance not so vicious. But, ah, there's the rub. Because Christ and his disciples—Satan's most important and necessary targets—would never seem to be attracted by flagrant, raging wrongdoing, this second approach becomes all the more sinister. It comes in the siren's song of convenience. It is, in the parlance of your day, "laid back." It says to every would-be Messiah—"Enjoy!" Its anthem might well be from Diana Ross—"Ease on Down the Road." Surely fluttering somewhere over the highway to hell is the local chamber of horrors banner reading, "Welcome to the ethics of ease."

Then Jesus was led up of the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be with God.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, and had communed with God, he was afterwards an hungered, and was left to be tempted of the devil,

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then Jesus was taken up into the holy city, and the Spirit setteth him on the pinnacle of the temple.

Then the devil came unto him and said, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

And Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

And again Jesus was in the Spirit, and it taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.

And the devil came unto him again, and said, All these things will I give unto thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. [JST Matthew 4:1–10, KJV Matthew 4:11]

One new convert to Christianity wrote of this moment:

Christ withdrew alone to the desert to fast and pray in preparation for a dialogue with the Devil. Such a dialogue was inescapable; every virtue has to be cleared with the Devil, as every vice is torn with anguish out of God's heart. [Malcom Muggeridge, Jesus Rediscovered (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), p. 26]

Because I believe such dialogues are entertained day after day, hour after hour, right here on the Brigham Young University campus—Happy Valley, USA—and because for us, like Christ, these temptations are far more

tantalizing in their nature than the more hostile versions pursued by barbarians, let me comment briefly on the three. Each of them deserves a sermon on its own, and we will be limited by the clock to only a sentence or two.

Appeals to the Appetites

“If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”

Whatever else Satan may do, he will certainly appeal to our appetites. Far better to play on natural, acknowledged needs than struggle to plant in us artificial ones. Here Jesus experiences the real and very understandable hunger for food by which he must sustain his mortal life. We would not deny anyone this relief; certainly we would not deny the Son of Man. Israel had its manna in the wilderness. This is Israel’s God. He has fasted for forty days and forty nights. Why not eat? He seems ready to break his fast, or surely must soon. Why not simply turn the stones to bread and eat?

The temptation is *not* in the eating. He has eaten before, he will soon eat again, and he must eat for the rest of his mortal life. The temptation, at least the part I wish to focus on, is to do it *this way*, to get his bread—his physical satisfaction, relief for his human appetite—the easy way, by abuse of power and without a willingness to wait for the right time and the right way. It is the temptation to be the convenient Messiah. Why do things the hard way? Why walk to the shop—or bakery? Why travel all the way home? Why deny yourself satisfaction when with ever such a slight compromise you might enjoy this much-needed nourishment? But Christ will not ask selfishly for unearned bread. He will postpone gratification, indefinitely if necessary, rather than appease appetite—even ravenous appetite—with what is not his.

There is too much sexual transgression on this campus. *Any* is too much, and we have *much* too much. This highest of all physical gratifications you were designed and created

to enjoy. It is as natural as it is appealing. It is given of God to make us like God. And Satan has certainly capitalized on a divinely ordained appeal. But it is not yours without price. Not instantly. Not conveniently. Not with cozy corruption of eternal powers. It is to be earned, over time and with discipline. It, like every good thing, is God’s right to bestow, not Satan’s. When faced with that inherent appetite, a disciple of Christ *must* be willing to say, “Yes, but *not this way*.” In time, with love, after marriage. The right and proper and sanctified physical relationship of a man and a woman is as much a part—indeed more a part—of God’s plan for us as is the eating of our daily bread. But there is no convenient Messiah. Salvation comes only through discipline and sacrifice. Listen to the historians who wrote this after a lifetime of studying the story of civilization:

*No one man, however brilliant or well-informed, can come in one lifetime to such fullness of understanding as to safely judge and dismiss the customs or institutions of his society, for these are the wisdom of generations after centuries of experiment in the laboratory of history. A youth boiling with hormones will wonder why he should not give full freedom to his sexual desires; and if he is unchecked by custom, morals, or laws, he may ruin his life before he matures sufficiently to understand that sex is a river of fire that must be banked and cooled by a hundred restraints if it is not to consume in chaos both the individual and the group. [Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 35–36]*

And we have purposes the Durants never dreamed of, “promises to keep, and miles to go before we sleep” (Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”). I plead with you not to yield to what one has called the “glandular stench” of our times. In your hours of temptation and vulnerability I ask you not, in your case, to turn bread into stone with that fire that has gone unbanked and uncooled.

Those loaves will be millstones—bogus bread—weighted with heartache and despair and pain. Care more. It is too easy today with movies you can see and the magazines you can read. It is all tragically, painfully, cunningly convenient. In our time the only restraint left is self-restraint. I ask you to say of this highest, most intimate, most sacred physical expression, “Yes, but *not this way*.” I ask you to be inconvenienced until you’ve earned the right and paid the divine price to know the body and the soul of the one you love. Excuse me for speaking boldly, but this must be said. Perhaps another time we can say even more.

Temptations of the Spirit

“If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from the pinnacle of this temple.”

Satan knows this holy scripture is the center of religious life for Israel’s people. It is the edifice to which the promised Messiah must come. Many are even now coming and going from their worship, many of who through their traditions and disbelief will never accept Jesus as their Redeemer. Why not cast yourself down in a dramatic way and then, when the angels bear you up, as the scriptures say they must, legions will follow you and believe? They need you. You need them—to save their souls. These are covenant people. How better to help them see than to cast yourself off this holy temple unharmed and unafraid? The Messiah has indeed come.

The temptation here is even more subtle than the first. It is a temptation of the spirit, of a private hunger more real than the need for bread. Would God save him? Would he? Is Jesus to have divine companionship in this awesome ministry he now begins? He knows that among the children of men only suffering, denunciation, betrayal, and rejection lie ahead. But what about heaven? How alone does a Messiah have to be? Perhaps before venturing forth he ought to get final reassurance. And shouldn’t Satan be silenced with his insidious

“If, if, if”? Why not get spiritual confirmation, a loyal congregation, and an answer to this imp who heckles—all with one appeal to God’s power? Right now. The easy way. Off the temple spire.

But Jesus refuses the temptation of the spirit. Denial and restraint there are also part of divine preparation. He will gain followers, and he will receive reassurance. But *not this way*. Neither the converts nor the comforts he will so richly deserve have been earned yet. His ministry has hardly begun. The rewards will come by and by. But even the Son of God must wait. The Redeemer who would never bestow cheap grace on others was not likely to ask for any himself.

And so I ask you to be patient in things of the spirit. Perhaps your life has been different from mine, but I doubt it. I have had to struggle to know my standing before God. As a teenager I found it hard to pray and harder to fast. My mission was not easy. I struggled as a student only to find that I had to struggle afterwards, too. In this present assignment I have wept and ached for guidance. It seems no worthy accomplishment has ever come easily for me, and maybe it won’t for you—but I’m living long enough to be grateful for that.

It is ordained that we come to know our worth as children of God *without* something as dramatic as a leap from the pinnacle of the temple. All but a prophetic few must go about God’s work in very quiet, very unspectacular ways. And as you labor to know him, and to know that he knows you; as you invest your time—and your convenience—in quiet, unassuming service, you will indeed find that “he shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up” (Matthew 4:6). It may not come quickly. It probably won’t come quickly, but there is purpose in the time it takes. Cherish your spiritual burdens because God will converse with you through them and will use you to do his work

if you carry them well. Do you recognize this struggle? The date is 14 July 1943.

No peace had yet come, though I had prayed for it almost unceasingly. . . . I turned toward the hills. I had no objective. I wanted only to be alone. I had begun a fast. . . .

My weakness overcame me again. Hot tears came flooding down my cheeks as I made no effort to mop them up. I was accusing myself, and condemning myself and upbraiding myself. I was praying aloud for special blessings from the Lord. I was telling him that I had not asked for this position, that I was incapable of doing the work, that I was imperfect and weak and human, that I was unworthy of so noble a calling, though I had tried hard and my heart had been right. I knew that I must have been at least partly responsible for offenses and misunderstandings which a few people fancied they had suffered at my hands. I realized that I had been petty and small many times. I did not spare myself. A thousand things passed through my mind. Was I called by revelation? . . .

If I could only have the assurance that my call had been inspired most of my other worries would be dissipated. . . . I knew that I must have His acceptance before I could go on. I stumbled up the hill and onto the mountain, as the way became rough. I faltered some as the way became steep. No paths were there to follow; I climbed on and on. Never had I prayed before as I now prayed. What I wanted and felt I must have was an assurance that I was acceptable to the Lord. I told Him that I neither wanted nor was worthy of a vision or appearance of angels or any special manifestation. I wanted only the calm peaceful assurance that my offering was accepted. Never before had I been tortured as I was now being tortured. And the assurance did not come. . . .

I mentally beat myself and chastised myself and accused myself. As the sun came up and moved in the sky I moved with it, lying in the sun, and still I received no relief. I sat up on the cliff and strange thoughts came to me: all this anguish and suffering could be ended so easily from this high cliff and then came to my mind the temptations of the Master

when he was tempted to cast Himself down—then I was ashamed for having placed myself in a comparable position and trying to be dramatic. . . . I was filled with remorse because I had permitted myself to place myself. . . . in a position comparable, in a small degree, to the position the Saviour found Himself in when He was tempted, and . . . I felt I had cheapened the experiences of the Lord, having compared mine with His. Again I challenged myself and told myself that I was only trying to be dramatic and sorry for myself.

. . . I lay on the cool earth. The thought came that I might take cold, but what did it matter now. There was one great desire, to get a testimony of my calling, to know that it was not human and inspired by ulterior motives, kindly as they might be. How I prayed! How I suffered! How I wept! How I struggled! [Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, Jr., Spencer W. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), p. 192–95]

Now at this very hour 38 years and a mountain of tumors and troubles later, this sweet and godly man clings to life *not* because that life has been convenient but because he feels there might be one more mountain to climb, one more obstacle of body or spirit that needs to be overcome. The spiritual odyssey of Andrew Kimball's son has been anything but easy. And maybe that of your father's son or your mother's daughter will require patience and perseverance too.

So if your prayers don't always seem answered, take heart. One greater than you or President Kimball cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). If for a while the harder you try, the harder it gets, take heart. So it has been with the best people who ever lived.

"Name Your Price."

Now in some frustration Satan moves right to the point. If he cannot tempt physically and cannot tempt spiritually, he will simply make

an outright proposition. From a high mountain where they might overlook the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, Satan says, *"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."*

Satan makes up for lack of subtlety here with the grandeur of his offer. Never mind that these kingdoms are not ultimately his to give. He simply asks of the great Jehovah, God of heaven and earth, "What is your price? Cheap bread you resist. Tawdry messianic drama you resist, but no man can resist this world's wealth. *Name your price.*" Satan is proceeding under his first article of faithlessness—the unequivocal belief that you can buy anything in this world for money.

Not This Way

Jesus will one day rule the world. He will govern every principality and power in it. He will be King of kings and Lord of lords. *But not this way.* Indeed to arrive at the point at all, he has to follow a most inconvenient course. Nothing so simple as worshipping Satan or for that matter nothing so simple as worshipping God. At least not in the way some of us think worshipping is simple. His arrival at the throne of grace is to lead through travail and sorrow and sacrifice. Some seven centuries earlier Isaiah had prophesied of him,

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. . . .

. . . He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities. . . .

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and . . . openeth not his mouth. [Isaiah 53:3, 5, 7]

Should earning our place in the kingdom of God be so difficult as that? Surely there is an easier way? Can't we buy our way in? Every

man or woman does have a price, don't they? Can't you buy anything in this world for money? Sometimes we wonder. I offer one sobering fact about our lives together. *BYU is not here to help you make money.* Any university in this land can do that. We hope your education brings income sufficient for your needs, but we have no mission at all if we are simply turning you out into the best current job market, whatever and wherever that may be. BYU has been established to extend to you the very glory of God, his intelligence, his light, and his truth. And that light and truth, by scriptural promise, is to forsake the evil one, your tempter. No, not everyone *does* have a price. Some things *can't* be purchased. Money and fame and earthly glory are not our eternal standard. Indeed these can, if we are not careful, lead to eternal torment.

Emerson said once,

*Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.*

[*"Ode Inscribed to W. H. Channing," Poems*]

Well, at BYU we refuse to be ridden. As much as this university and this Church and you and I as individuals need the wherewithal to feed and clothe ourselves and further the work of the kingdom, we do not need to sell our souls to get them. And here again, we are tempted to think there is an easy way, a fast buck, that in the world's goods and the glories of men's kingdoms, we may ride through reaping, as the very convenient Messiah. But why do we think it when it was never so for Him? What do we do with a stable for birthplace and a borrowed tomb at his death? And in his lifetime? Not one single mention of earthly possessions.

*The foxes have holes and the birds . . . have nests;
but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

[Matthew 8:20]

Forgive me if I go on. Just three weeks ago I was working with President Elliot Cameron on the BYU-Hawaii Campus only to open the Sunday edition of the *Honolulu Advertiser* to read this headline: “Mormon Utah Called a Test Market for Scams.” May I quote a few lines:

Utah’s large Mormon population has become a prime target for con artists and swindlers who annually gyp the state’s residents out of hundreds of millions of dollars. . . . Federal prosecutors say the state has gained a national reputation as “test market for scams. If it works here, they take it on the road. . . .”

“It has happened time and time again. . . . —It’s very easy for people to bridge the gap from unbelievability to believability if church affiliation is used.” . . .

*The investor lists were drawn up on genealogy sheets used by church members to trace their ancestry. . . . Mormon leaders denounced the scheme in a stinging editorial which asked, “Why do people take chances like this? Why do people gamble?” One answer: “Their greed gland gets stuck. . . . [I]n this culture, financial success is often equated with righteousness.” [Peter Gillins, *Sunday Star Bulletin and Advertiser*, Honolulu, January 10, 1982]*

Note this from Elder Marvin J. Ashton in our last general conference:

In today’s marketplace—yes, in your own neighborhood, town, and cities—scheming, deceiving promoters are making available to gullible purchasers all kinds of enticing offers. We are sorry to report thousands within our ranks are being duped by the glib tongues of those who offer and solicit in whispers: “Once in a lifetime opportunities” and “Just for you” approaches. [Ensign, November 1981, p. 90]

We can get our share of the earth’s bounties but *not this way*.

Speaking to this issue several years ago Professor Hugh Nibley wrote:

*Why should we labor this unpleasant point? Because the Book of Mormon labors it, for our special benefit. Wealth is a jealous master who will not be served halfheartedly and will suffer no rival—not even God: “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.” (Matthew 6:24) In return for unquestioning obedience wealth promises security, power, position, and honors, in fact anything in this world. Above all, the Nephites like the Romans saw in it a mark of superiority and would do anything to get hold of it, for to them “money answereth all things.” (Ecclesiastes 10:19) “Ye do always remember your riches,” cried Samuel the Lamanite, “. . . unto great swelling, envyings, strifes, malice, persecutions, and murders, and all manner of iniquities.” (Helaman 13:22) Along with this, of course, everyone dresses in the height of fashion, the main point being always that the proper clothes are expensive—the expression “costly apparel” occurs 14 times in the Book of Mormon. The more important wealth is, the less important it is how one gets it. [Since *Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), pp. 393–94]*

Cost Sometimes Very High

As with appropriate, necessary income, so too with studies at school or any other honest endeavor. To the king who wondered if there weren’t an easier way to learn, Euclid said, “Your Highness, there is no royal road to geometry”—nor any other aspect of godly knowledge. Plan right now to work hard and earn your achievements. Postpone your gratification so you don’t have to postpone your graduation. You may feel school will never end and that your bills will never get paid. It will and they will. To work hard and to try earnestly and to deserve good things to happen is worth the effort and worth the wait. And they will happen, often sooner than you think. But it won’t be easy, and it won’t be convenient. An easy education is a contradiction in terms.

May I close with a story of inconvenience, now well known to you. Two weeks ago Air Florida's Flight 90 to Tampa, a Boeing 737 with 74 passengers aboard, began rolling down the runway at Washington's National Airport. Nothing seemed very different about this; hundreds of planes leave that airport every day. But you all know what happened next. The plane slammed into the 14th Street Bridge, smashed five cars and a truck, and then skidded into the ice-clogged river. To quote one source:

For a moment, there was silence, and then pandemonium. Commuters watched helplessly as the plane quickly sank. . . A few passengers bobbed to the surface; some clung numbly to pieces of debris while others screamed desperately for help. Scattered across the ice were pieces of green upholstery, twisted chunks of metal, luggage, a tennis racquet, a child's shoe. . .

*Within minutes, sirens began to wail as fire trucks, ambulances and police cars rushed to the scene. A U.S. Park Police helicopter hovered overhead to pluck survivors out of the water. Six were clinging to the plane's tail. Dangling a life preserving ring to them, the chopper began ferrying them to shore. One woman had injured her right arm, so [the] pilot . . . lowered the copter until its skids touched the water; his partner [then leaned out and] scooped her up in his arms. Then [a young woman] grabbed the preserver, but as she was being helped out of the . . . river by [a] fellow passenger . . . she lost her grip . . . A clerk for the Congressional Budget Office who was watching from the shore, plunged into the water and dragged her to land. But the most notable act of heroism was performed by [another] of the passengers, a balding man in his early 50s. Each time the ring was lowered, he grabbed it and passed it along to a comrade; when the helicopter finally returned to pick him up, he had disappeared beneath the ice. [James Kelly, "We're Not Going to Make It," *Time*, 25 January 1982, pp. 16–17]*

I quote from an essay entitled simply "The Man in the Water":

His selflessness [is] one reason the story held national attention; his anonymity another. The fact that he [has gone] unidentified invests him with a universal character. For a while he was Every man, and thus proof (as if one needed it) that no man is ordinary.

Still, he could never have imagined such a capacity in himself. Only minutes before his character was tested, he was sitting in the ordinary plane among the ordinary passengers, dutifully listening to the stewardess telling him to fasten his seat belt and saying something about the "no smoking sign." So our man relaxed with the others, some of whom would owe their lives to him. Perhaps he started to read, or to doze, or to regret some harsh remark made in the office that morning. Then suddenly he knew that the trip would not be ordinary. Like every other person on that flight, he was desperate to live, which makes his final act so stunning.

For at some moment in the water he must have realized that he would not live if he continued to hand over the rope and ring to others. He had to know it, no matter how gradual the effect of the cold. In his judgment he had no choice. When the helicopter took off with what was to be the last survivor, he watched everything in [his] world move away from him, and he deliberately let it [go]. . .

*The odd thing is that we do not. . . really believe that the man in the water lost his fight. . . He could not, [like Nature], make ice storms, or freeze the water until it froze the blood. But he could hand life over to a stranger, and that is a power of nature too. The man in the water pitted himself against an implacable, impersonal enemy; he fought it with charity; and he [won]. [Roger Rosenblatt, *Time*, 25 January 1982, p. 86]*

In this world we are all, you and I, the man or the woman in the water. We often, like this man and Hamlet, must "take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them" (Act 3, scene 1, ll. 59–60). And sometimes the cost is very high. It was for Christ, it was for

Joseph Smith, and it was for this lone man who counted the cost there in the Potomac—and paid it. It is not easy to go without—without physical gratifications or spiritual assurances or material possessions—but sometimes we must since there is no guarantee of convenience written into our Christian covenant. We

must work hard and do right, as Abraham Lincoln said, and sometimes our chance will come. And when we've tried, really tried, and waited for what seemed never to be ours, *then* "the angels came and ministered unto him." For that ministration in your life I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.