

## *Chapter 1*

# **A “Burning in the Bosom”**

*This is your captain speaking. We have reached our cruising altitude of 31,000 feet, and I've turned off the seat belt sign. You are free to move about the cabin, but I recommend that you keep your seat belt fastened while seated, in case we encounter any unexpected turbulence. Our flying time will be approximately four hours and twenty-three minutes, and we should arrive on time, so relax and enjoy the flight. If there's anything we can do to make your trip more enjoyable, please let us know.*

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***Excuse me, but I noticed that you didn't accept coffee with your breakfast. You wouldn't by any chance be LDS, would you?***

No, I just happen not to care for coffee. Just a personal preference, that's all.

***I see. I didn't mean to pry, but it's unusual not to have coffee with breakfast, and I was just curious. Quite often it's an indication that the person might be a Mormon. As you may know, we Mormons have a practice of avoiding coffee, so it's sometimes a way of spotting a kindred spirit.***

I'm aware of your Word of Wisdom, and I agree with most of it. I don't know that tea or coffee are likely to be a problem for the average person, but when it comes to tobacco, the LDS Church was far ahead of the curve, banning it long before science proved how dangerous it is. So I'm with you on that. But no, I'm not what you call a “kindred spirit.”

***But you seem to be familiar with Mormonism.***

I am. I considered joining the Church, so I've been making an exhaustive study of it — in fact, I have some books and notes relating to Mormonism here in my briefcase to study on the plane. But I've decided against joining. There are just too many questions I haven't been able to resolve, so despite my admiration for the LDS culture and my friendship with some wonderful Mormons, I'm about to cast my lot permanently with the “Gentiles.”

***Well, I think our meeting may be fortuitous. I'm just returning from a mission, and I would like to suggest a little experiment. You and I are destined to spend the next several hours together. I propose that we spend that time examining the problems you have with***

***Mormonism, and perhaps we can clear some of them up. At least it's worth a try. What do you say?***

I'd rather not. I don't think it would be a good idea.

***Why not? Are you afraid I might convert you?***

Not at all. Quite the opposite. I'm afraid I might convert *you*, and I'm not sure I want to. You obviously have a firm belief in Mormonism, which gives you comfort and satisfaction, and I hesitate to get involved in a discussion that might undermine that belief — even though I happen to believe you're in error.

***Look, I'm not afraid of having my beliefs subjected to analysis. I'm happy to share them with anyone who's willing to listen. The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi said that there must be opposition in all things. I interpret that as meaning that only by examining all sides of a question can the truth be established. If I'm wrong — and I don't think I am — I want to know it, and I'm sure you feel the same way. So let's give it a try.***

Fair enough.

***To begin, let me ask what caused you to decide to end your journey into Mormonism?***

It was when I learned that there was far more to Mormonism than what the missionaries had told me. I didn't feel they had lied to me — they were sincere and honest and well-meaning — but I realized they were not forthcoming about many aspects of the Church. They discussed all the positive things — the emphasis on family, the courage of the pioneers, the youth programs, the healthy life style, the absence of a paid ministry, and so forth, and I was impressed. But when I began to study the Church on my own, I discovered many things I was unaware of, and some of them raised serious questions in my mind.

***I know what you mean. We call it the “milk before meat” principle. You may recall that Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that he couldn't talk to them as he would to mature Christians, because they were “babes in Christ...” He said “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto you were not able to bear it...”<sup>1</sup> As missionaries, we follow that principle. Some of the teachings of Mormonism are pretty unusual, so we just explain the basics and leave the more complex matters – the “meat” of the gospel – until later.***

Well, I'd like to discuss some of that “meat” with you. But before we start, let's consider that firm belief you mentioned. You seem quite confident that nothing I might say will affect it. How can you be so sure?

***Because my belief is based on something more important than theological arguments. It is based on faith, on what we Latter-day Saints call a testimony, or a “burning in the bosom.”***

And exactly what do you mean by that term?

***It's a phrase from the Doctrine & Covenants,<sup>2</sup> which, as you know, is a book we consider scripture. The idea is that if a person prays and asks God if something is true, God will cause their bosom to burn within them if it is true.***

So such a conviction wouldn't be based on an analysis of facts?

***No. Facts are important, but we believe they aren't sufficient in themselves to establish a firm testimony. The "burning in the bosom" is based not just on scientific evidence or reason, but on promptings of the Holy Spirit (or the Holy Ghost, to use the term found in the King James Bible, which we prefer). When God tells you something is true, there really isn't a lot of need for evidence.***

Okay. Let's just suppose for a moment that you are a devout Muslim. Would you then have a "burning in the bosom" telling you that Mohammed was God's prophet?

***No, because that isn't true, and the Holy Ghost would not give me a false message.***

But as a Muslim you would have a firm belief in Mohammed and in the Koran, wouldn't you?

***Yes, but it wouldn't be the same. As a Muslim I might BELIEVE Mohammed is a prophet, but as a Mormon I KNOW that Joseph Smith is a prophet.***

But if you were a devout Muslim wouldn't you say, "I KNOW that Mohammed is a prophet, and that Allah is the true god"?

***I can't imagine myself saying that, but I suppose that if I were a believing Muslim I would.***

So even though the follower of Mohammed doesn't receive his testimony through the Holy Ghost, it is just as firm, just as unquestioning, just as rock-solid as yours. Isn't that true?

***I suppose it is. But that doesn't prove he's right.***

Correct. And I submit that your "burning in the bosom" doesn't prove you are right. It merely proves you are *convinced*. Quite a difference.

But let's return to our hypothetical Muslim. *Why* does he have this "burning in the bosom" that tells him Islam is true? We both agree he didn't get it from the Holy Ghost, so where did it come from?

***Well, from four sources. First, it has been drilled into his head since infancy that "There is but one God, and his name is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Having been taught that all his life he finds the concept natural and familiar — it has the "ring of truth." Secondly, he is surrounded by people who hold the same belief, people he loves and trusts,***

*including his family and friends, who pray on their knees five times a day as evidence of their devotion. Thirdly, he associates Islam with the qualities most humans revere: decency, honesty, loyalty, love, chastity, unselfishness, courage, self-control, integrity, etc. He is sure that such noble teachings must come from God — in other words, from Allah. Finally, he has evidence to reinforce his beliefs: he has heard about sick people who recovered miraculously after praying to Allah, he has seen faithful Muslims achieve success, and he has seen some unfaithful Muslims meet with failures and illness. He considers all this to be sufficient proof that the Koran is true, and that Mohammed was a prophet of God.*

Exactly. Now don't you think it's possible that those same considerations might cause a Mormon to develop an ironclad belief in Mormonism? Doesn't the typical Mormon — or Catholic or Methodist or Seventh-Day Adventist, for that matter — feel that his church promotes decency, honesty, loyalty, love, chastity, unselfishness, self-control, and other desirable qualities? And doesn't he therefore feel that his own church, whatever it may be, is true?

***Well, you may have a point. But even if a person's convictions don't in themselves prove anything, you have to admit that they could be correct.***

They could, but convictions are never sufficient by themselves. Many people trust a “gut feeling” – in other words a “burning in their bosom” – when they should be analyzing evidence.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. In his book *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, Grant Palmer gives two examples of how reliance on the “Spirit of Truth” can be misleading. He writes:

“As one example, many people, including myself, felt this confirming spirit when we heard the World War II stories of Utah Congressman Douglas R. Stringfellow. Stringfellow's experiences were later revealed to be a complete hoax. I was about fourteen years old when I heard him speak, and it was a truly inspiring experience. After Stringfellow concluded, I remember that the leader conducting the meeting said, ‘If you have never felt the Spirit before, it was here today in abundance.’ He was right. I felt it strongly, as did many others. More recently, I felt the same spirit, along with many others, when hearing Paul H. Dunn, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, relate his religious experiences during World War II and as a professional baseball player. Today his stories are known to be contrived.”<sup>3</sup>

So you can see that “feeling the Spirit” is not an infallible test of whether something is true or false. Whether you are a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Mormon, it is folly to believe that faith trumps facts.

***Well, a belief in Mormonism doesn't rest on faith alone. Reason and logic provide ample evidence for the claims of the Church. In the words of J. Reuben Clark, who was a member of our First Presidency, “If we have the truth, it cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed.”<sup>4</sup> In that spirit, let's look at the facts.***