

**Enduring Principles Series**  
**Continuing Revelation**

by **Stephen M. Veazey**

*See, the former things have come to pass, and the new things I now declare.* —Isaiah 42:5–9 NRSV

When we explore the church’s Enduring Principles—the focus of this series—we define what makes us who we are as a faith community. It takes a community of belief, worship, witness, and practice to mold us into disciples of Jesus Christ, release our best natures, and fulfill God’s intent.

The statement of Enduring Principles in the recently released *We Share* document clearly expresses such community at work.

Several years ago the Presidency called a group together from throughout the world to meet with World Church leaders. We now refer to that group as the Expanded World Church Leadership Council. As the council discussed various issues, we struggled with linguistic, cultural, and theological differences. Finally, we realized we needed a common “faith language” to describe what makes us Community of Christ.

Over many months, we prayed, listened, and shared from the deepest and most-passionate understandings of our faith. The power and ministry of the Holy Spirit guided us to express essential elements of our identity, mission, and message in ways that could be understood in multiple cultural settings.

One Enduring Principle that rose up quickly was continuing revelation. The principle is so ingrained in who we are that we cannot describe our faith without giving ample attention to it. Revelatory experience is a key part of our church’s beginning. It has functioned in transforming ways through-out our history. It will play a vital role in the future.

What do we mean by “continuing revelation?” In theological terms, revelation means unveiling or uncovering. It refers to God’s disclosure of God’s self as an expression of God’s love and desire to be more fully known in relationship with us.

Some theologians speak of two interrelated types of revelation: original or originating revelation and dependent or—to use Community of Christ language—continuing revelation.

Originating revelation is the pivotal encounter with God that starts a people toward truly becoming a people of God. Moses kneeling before the burning bush and learning God’s name, “I Am that I Am” or “I Will Be What I Will Be,” is an example.

For the Christian faith, built on the Hebrew prophetic tradition, the originating revelation was the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe God clearly and reliably was revealed in Jesus Christ.

However, the decisive revelation’s full meaning of God in Christ remained hidden to many because God chose the form of a humble “suffering servant.” That servant eventually was killed on a cross to reveal the most-essential aspects of divine nature and will.

That revelation of God in Christ birthed the Christian church. Over the years it experienced continuing revelation, which broadened understanding beyond the perceptions of those who walked and talked with Jesus.

Consider the experience of Peter recorded in chapter ten of the Book of Acts. Through a disorienting revelatory experience, Peter came to understand the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as Jews—quite a leap for one so steeped in the Jewish religion. This encounter culminated in his confession that I truly understand that

*God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.* —Acts 10:34–35 NRSV

Without that experience of continuing revelation there would not be a worldwide Christian faith today.

I believe one calling of Community of Christ is to keep the tradition, principle, and practice of continuing revelation alive. Expressed succinctly in one of our beloved songs (Hymns of the Saints #309) we affirm that:

**About this Series**

The Enduring Principles are at the heart of how we express ourselves. When they become the descriptors of our behaviors—rather than mere ideals—we truly will become the Community of Christ that God is calling us to be. Follow the Commentary Series, August 2009 to April 2010, in the Herald and e-Herald, [online](#) and by [e-mail](#).



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**For Further Reflection,  
Discussion, and  
Discernment**

We limit not the truth of God,  
To our poor reach of mind,  
...The Lord hath yet more light and truth,  
To break forth from his word.

Because of my current role, I often am asked about the nature and process of revelation. Before responding, I would like to share two comments:

First, many books address this topic. We do not have the space here—much to the relief of all of us—to provide comprehensive treatment.

Second, I still am growing in my understanding, even as I have been drawn increasingly into the experience. I expect to continue to grow. I also hope and expect the church to continue to grow in its understanding of continuing revelation.

With that said, I would like to make three affirmations:

**First, revelation is a gift from God.**

Revelation occurs how, when, and where God chooses. It is an expression of God's love and freedom to act in creation. God is the giver of revelation. What God gives is experience with and knowledge of God's self or being.

Revelation is not simply information about God; it is encounter with God. Humans record, express, and interpret such encounters through language, stories, art, songs, poems, etc.

It is important to remember, however, that God is never fully contained in or limited by our words and symbols, inspired as they may be.

So, God is the giver of revelation, God is the gift, and God works to open our hearts and minds while giving revelation. Clark Williamson, puts it this way in *Way of Blessing, Way of Life*:

God is the giver, the gift, and the giving... God is the revealer, the revealed, and the revealing.

Last summer I was fly-fishing in southern Missouri. The upper portion of the river is a typical Midwestern stream in appearance, flow, and the life it supports.

Midway down the river, several springs dump millions of gallons of cold, oxygen-rich, sparkling water into the river. The river is the same river, yet it becomes transformed. The springs enliven it. The river's capacity for living and serving the larger creation increases dramatically.

Standing there, I was blessed with an understanding of how such springs are like God's enlivening, transforming, redemptive, revealing movements.

We are called to position and condition our lives, through prayer and spiritual formation, to be present and to receive the blessings of such revelation whenever it springs forth as blessing to creation.

**Second, a primary function of continuing revelation is to move us in the direction God wills.**

Revelation—if genuine—humbles, unsettles, stimulates, and even compels significant growth in our perception of and response to God's will.

I like the story of Jacob in Genesis 28. After gaining his older brother's inheritance blessing through deceit, Jacob flees to escape the wrath of both his brother and God.

Jacob believed that God was a tribal, territorial God. So, he went into the wilderness, where he thought he could escape from God's presence.

Sleeping that night, he dreamed of a ladder reaching from the earth to the heavens, on which angels descended and ascended. Upon awaking, he jumped up and exclaimed, "God is in this place, and I did not know it!"

The experience of continuing revelation teaches us that God is never limited to previous understandings. God is never a prisoner of our categories or definitions. And, when revelation challenges our categories and definitions, we must decide how we will respond, which brings us to our third affirmation:

**Faithful human response to continuing revelation requires us to expand our "worldview."**

Our worldview is how we understand, organize, and navigate the world and how we perceive reality. Our personalities, families, cultures, faith, experience, education, and spirituality all shape our worldview.

In that regard, consider this observation by Marilyn M. Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, and Tina Amorok in *Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life*:

It can be very difficult to shift a firmly entrenched mode (view) of reality. We can get firmly attached to what we think is true, important, and real...even when presented with evidence to the contrary. To a great extent, our worldview (what we believe is true) determines what we are capable of seeing....What our worldview doesn't expand to contain quite literally escapes our perception. We just don't see it.

Expanding our worldview is the greatest challenge in continuing revelation. Revelation pries open our settled views and expands our understanding of God. That process can be breathtaking, disorienting, even painful.

The book, *Space and Sight*, by Marius von Senden describes what happened when surgeons discovered how to perform safe cataract operations. Before the surgeries, doctors tested their patients' sense of space, size, shape, and light. Those who had been blind since birth were very limited in these perceptions.

Following surgery, the enhanced vision confused patients. Space and distance were difficult to grasp. Distinct light and vibrant colors overwhelmed them. Some preferred shutting their eyes to seeing.

Others, though, struggled to develop greater capacity to see and understand their world. One woman, at first over-whelmed, kept her eyes shut for two weeks. Then, when she opened her eyes

...the more she now directed her gaze upon everything about her, the more it could be seen how an expression of gratitude and astonishment overspread her features; she repeatedly exclaimed, "Oh God, How beautiful!"—Marius von Senden, *Space and Sight*, as quoted in Annie Dillard's, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

A great challenge of continuing revelation is that it may disturb, even shock. To embrace it usually requires an expanded understanding of God's nature. That is why some may resist or reject continuing revelation.

However, when embraced by church members it enlivens, enriches, and transforms the whole body for faithful mission. To fulfill its purpose, continuing revelation must find embodiment in our lives and relationships.

The Navajos have a wonderful term for a great realization or insight that is not sustained; they call it a floating cloud. It is beautiful in shape and we describe it and we talk about it—and then it dissipates because it hasn't been mobilized or grounded or sustained. —Angeles Arrien in *Living Deeply*


With that image in mind, I would like to make a recommendation. Over the next several months, prayerfully reflect on various passages in the Doctrine and Covenants. Focus on Sections 161, 162, and 163. The church has only begun to glimpse the meaning of these sections, which illuminate what it means to be disciples engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ today.

Quiet the stresses and concerns of your everyday life. Let go of your agendas! Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for continuing revelation. Then, ask God to help you see the truths that you have yet to apply fully to your life and the church's life.

As we do this, the promise in Doctrine and Covenants 159:8 will be fulfilled in our lives:

Then, as you gain ever more confidence in sensing the leadings of my Spirit, you will begin to see with new eyes, embrace the truths that are waiting for your understanding, and move joyfully toward the fulfillment of the tasks that are yours to accomplish.

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