

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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The Last Enemy

In the beginning—or, at any rate, a very long time ago—were bacteria.

And there was war among the microbes—the viruses attacking with their variants, and the bacteria responding with all their wily defenses.

One of the wiliest of those defenses—an adaptive internal immune system—works like this: After being infected by a virus, a bacterium stores in its own genome a small segment of the virus’s DNA. These segments are known as CRISPRs: Clustered Regularly Interspersed Palindromic Repeats. (Other acronyms were considered, but this one was chosen because it sounded, well, crisper.) CRISPR sequences furnish the bacterium with a “memory” of past infections. If the same virus attacks again, the bacterium recognizes the intruder and deploys a protein called Cas (CRISPR-associated), which, guided by RNA, latches onto the targeted DNA of the invading virus and unceremoniously slices it to pieces.

It is an elegant process—beautiful in its remorseless efficiency. It has also proved revolutionary. The pioneering scientists who deciphered the CRISPR structure and process later unlocked its potential to target and “edit” human genes. Future possibilities—and the associated moral and ethical dilemmas—remain legion.¹

As I recently learned about the CRISPR process, the thought occurred: Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have a CRISPR-type mechanism to identify and vanquish, not only invading viruses, but anything else mortality might throw at us?

Now, at Easter time, I remind myself that there is in fact someone who has experienced the full gamut of mortal adversity—the sum of all human

sickness, suffering, and sin—and who not only overcame it Himself but also wields almighty power to help us overcome as well.

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities (Alma 7:11-12).

Wouldn’t it be wonderful? I asked. “O, it is wonderful, wonderful to me.”²

At Brigham Young University, we are concerned with “education for eternity”³—the education of the total person, the eternal soul. Our theology proclaims that such a soul and such an education necessarily require an embodied state: “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul” (D&C 88:15-16).

Not by accident, this evocative disclosure appears in Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants—the Olive Leaf, “the basic constitution of Church education.”⁴ Education for eternity presupposes life beyond the grave; it points to a resurrected state.

Three years ago, President Russell M. Nelson explained to the young adults of the Church that, in contrast to secular educators who strive “to educate and prepare you for your *mortal* experience—meaning, how to succeed in your life’s work,” his prophetic “responsibility is to educate and prepare you also for your *immortal* experience—meaning, how to gain eternal life.”

We too seek to prepare our students for an immortal experience. Our work thus bears witness of a universal resurrection.

I love the anthems of Easter that underscore and extol the Savior’s final triumph and glorious ascent.

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory thou o’er death hast won.*⁵

*Now death where is your sting?
Our resurrected King
Has rendered you defeated
Forever[.]*⁶

*The hardest thing that ever was done,
The greatest pain that ever was known,
The biggest battle that ever was won—*

This was done by Jesus!

*The fight was won by Jesus!*⁷

*Shame and pain can never defeat you,
Spirit is fire and flesh it is clay.
Back to the clay go the men who mock you,
Death is a great stone rolled away.*⁸

*Come with high and holy hymning;
Chant our Lord’s triumphant lay.
Not one darksome cloud is dimming
Yonder glorious morning ray[.]*⁹

And the final word to St. Paul:

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

...

*O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory? . . .*

[T]hanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:25-26, 55, 57).

Thanks be to God, for Christ is risen indeed.

¹ For an accessible introduction to the discovery of CRISPR from the perspective of some of its key participants, see Walter Isaacson, *The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing, and the Future of the Human Race* (2021).

² Charles H. Gabriel, “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193 (1985).

³ See Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University” and “Education for Eternity” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 1—Foundations and Dreams* (2022) 46, 159.

⁴ Dallin H. Oaks, “‘A House of Faith,’” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 2—Learning and Light* (2023) 6.

⁵ “Thine is the Glory” (1912), Richard Birch Hoyle’s translation of Edmond Budry’s French text, “À toi la gloire.”

⁶ Nathan Pacheco, “Forever” (2017).

⁷ Melanie Hoffman, “Gethsemane,” *Hymns for Home and Church*, no. 1009.

⁸ Stephen Hatfield, “When It Was Yet Dark.”

⁹ Cecil Frances Alexander, “He is Risen,” *Hymns*, no. 199 (1985).