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"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely
players:
They have their exits and their
entrances;
And one man in his time plays many
parts,
His acts being seven ages."
(William Shakespeare, *As You Like
It*, Act I, scene 7.)

Yes, the world is truly a huge stage, and upon it the greatest drama ever conceived and produced is still coursing 6,000 years after the curtains were opened to unveil a beautiful scene in Act I called the Garden of Eden.

Purposes of Divine Providence

In a single sentence the author of this great drama set forth concisely a purpose, a motive, and an objective for his marvelous work. He said:

"For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

In that simple sentence, I find a fitting title: "The Eternal Life of Man." You who like brevity may shorten it to "Eternal Life." I like it either way. I hope the author will approve.

Later in my remarks I shall comment on the author's purpose.

Members of the drama's cast respectfully address the author as God. Frequently we dispense with formality and affectionately call him "Our Father which art in heaven." (Matt. 6:9.) His real name is Elohim. (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, pp. 465-473.) May he pardon me for calling him the author. This I do reverently to avoid too frequent use of the sacred title, God.

Free agency—the drama theme

The theme of the great drama is *free agency*, meaning man's agency or freedom to choose. The script is divided into seven acts, each 1,000 years in length. The play has advanced

far into the sixth act. Soon the curtain will rise for the seventh or millennial act.

Contest for leadership

To stage and direct the drama, the author needed a director. Bidding for it, a talented and ambitious character known as Lucifer, frequently called Satan, offended and insulted the author. His bid offended because he proposed to alter the author's script in a way that nullified the author's theme concept—free agency; it insulted because the bidder sought as his price the author's honor and power: "... wherefore give me thine honor," and give unto me thine "own power." (Moses 4:1-4.) His bid rejected, he rebelled and cried out in anger, "... I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the most High." (Isa. 14:13-14.)

The author awarded the directing job to his son Jehovah, who agreed to "go down" and prepare the world stage and to direct the play according to the author's script.

Rebellion

Lucifer's rebellion escalated into a war in heaven. It spread to earth, a fierce struggle between Lucifer and Jehovah. Battles are still raging on the stage here in the sixth act. Approximately one third of the cast selected for the great drama defected and sided with Lucifer. For so doing, they were dropped from the cast and thus denied physical appearances on the stage. This infuriated them. They vowed to make the play flop, and to that end they have used freedom—the very agency they at first protested—to destroy "free agency."

Lucifer's strategy is to induce the cast to use their individual agency in a way that will produce chaos on the stage. By exposing the cast to as much evil as possible, he hopes to gain numerical strength so that he might

shout when the curtain rolls down at the end of the play, "I have the majority of the heavenly host on my side; numerical strength is my power. Now I can claim 'thine honor'; now 'I will ascend into heaven'; now 'I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.'" (See Isa. 14:12-20.)

One thing we are forced to admit: Despite the fact that Lucifer's spirit followers were eliminated from the cast and thus deprived of physical appearances on the stage, their power to tempt and adversely influence the cast has been tremendous.

God in his infinite wisdom undoubtedly appointed his son Jehovah to be the drama director because of the Son's vast experience in building stages or worlds. ". . . worlds without number have I created . . . and by the Son I created them," he said. (Moses 1:33.)

By the time the stage was readied, the cast was ready, the leading roles filled by a process or doctrine called *foreordination*. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 365 and 158. See also Abr. 3:23.)

The First Act

". . . the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7), and the heavens resounded with praise when "a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice" announced curtain time for the first act. (Rev 5:2.)

John the Revelator likens the curtains throughout the play to seals. (Rev. 5:1-2.) "We are to understand that the first seal contains [reveals] the things of the first thousand years [Act 1], and the second also of the second thousand years [Act 2], and so on until the seventh [Act 7]." (D&C 77:7.)

The first seal or curtain revealed a beautiful scene called the Garden of Eden. The first man to appear on the stage was one Michael, an assistant to Jehovah in the stage-building project. (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, p. 51.) His stage name is Adam. He was given a wife in a marriage that will last forever. Her name is Eve.

Free agency, with some help from Lucifer, got this couple into trouble just as Lucifer had predicted, and they were "cast out from the Garden of Eden . . . because of his transgression." (D&C 29:41.)

Cain, a son of the couple, exercising his free agency unrighteously, slew his brother Abel. For this he was cursed with "a mark upon [him] lest any finding him should kill him." (Gen. 4:15.) Thousands upon thousands in the huge drama cast have had problems by exercising their agency unrighteously; other thousands have soared to great heights by exercising their agency righteously.

Wickedness reigned upon the stage as Act 1 came to a close, save in the little city of Zion, where under the leadership of one Enoch the people prospered in righteousness. Adam lived 930 years. Shortly before his death he called his righteous posterity together at a place now known as Adam-ondi-Ahman and previewed for them the six remaining acts of the drama, predicting "whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the last generation," the end of the play. (See D&C 107:53-56.)

The Second Act

In Act 2 the greatest catastrophe of the drama up to this present time was enacted. Flooding waters swept over the stage, engulfing and destroying "every living thing" save eight people and certain "beasts" and "fowls" and "creeping things" which these people had stored with them in an ark. Noah was the hero personality in this act. Before the waters poured onto the stage, the drama director rewarded the righteous people of Enoch, lifting them "up into heaven, into his own bosom," by a process or doctrine called *translation*, to save them from the flood. (Moses 7:23, 69.)

Third Act

In Act 3, Abraham, "Father of the Faithful," played a leading role. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses made appearances. Moses delivered the children of Israel from their captivity in Egypt.

Great physical changes in the earth's appearances were made in the days of Peleg; and, when the director confused the tongues of the people, a small group under the leadership of one Jared made an epochal voyage across great waters to found a colony on this western hemisphere. In this act, Israel possessed its promised land and divided it among 11 tribes, leaving Levi without a portion. In one of the final scenes, the great prophet Samuel anointed Saul first king of Israel; and later, behind Saul's back, he secretly anointed the lad David to be Saul's successor.

Fourth Act

Act 4 opened with King David on the throne. Solomon succeeded him and built a great temple. Enemies overrunning Israel destroyed it, and friendly enemies subsequently helped restore it. Ten of the twelve tribes went into the north countries and were lost. A prophet Lehi built ships that came, under the power of God, to this western hemisphere, where his people became a great nation.

Fifth Act

When the curtain or veil was drawn for the fifth act, it revealed the drama director in person on the stage. His name was Jesus. Because he said he was the Son of God, certain members of the cast nailed him to a cross. In brief appearances in Palestine and on the western hemisphere, he reestablished his gospel, organized a kingdom, and ordained 24 apostles to direct it—12 in Palestine and 12 on the western hemisphere. For associating with Jesus, the apostles in Palestine were martyred, save one John who was exiled to Patmos, where in vision he saw the script of the author's great drama—"Eternal Life."

Sixth Act—Resurrection Scene

No scene in the entire drama can match the resurrection scene in the sixth act, unless it be a scene programmed in the seventh act when Jesus will come in glory to rule and

reign in person for a thousand years. Then "every knee should bow . . . and . . . every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Phil. 2:10-11.) Then Satan will be bound, "that he should deceive the nations no more . . ." (Rev. 20:1-3); then "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; . . . and the cow and the bear shall feed" together (Isa. 11:6-7); then "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isa. 2:4.) Temples then will dot the land, so kin may do work for kindred dead. (*JD*, Vol. 25, p. 185.) "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9.)

Seventh—Millennial Act

Before these blissful scenes are enacted in the seventh or millennial act, Act 6, running its full course, will crowd the intervening time space with spectacular events, some too tragic and distressing to give comfort to our souls. Already in this act:

- the author, accompanied by his director son, has made a brief behind-the-scenes appearance;

- the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored;

- the kingdom of God has been established to stand forever and forever;

- the great latter-day Prophet Joseph Smith has come and gone, forfeiting his life in the restoration cause.

The apostle John forecast a great earthquake in this sixth act. He wrote:

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

"And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth. . . ." (Rev. 6:12-13.)

Employing earthquakes and fire, war and lightning, famine and plague, and a desolating, overflowing scourge, the author will yet cleanse and prepare the

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stage for the peaceful millennial act. "Behold," he said, "the day has come, when the cup of the wrath of mine indignation is full." (D&C 43:26.)

The stage was cleared and cleansed in Noah's day (Act 2) with a flood of water. "... as it was in the days of No'e, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26), but the cleansing coming up soon will involve a flood of the other destructive agents I've just listed, atomic bombing not ruled out.

At this very moment Lucifer may be gloating at the confusion on the stage. To his confederates he might right now be repeating, "I told you so. Free agency doomed the play before it started." Well, he may think so, but not seriously. Certain lines in the author's script must worry him. On the other hand, those lines give hope and comfort to a distressed and confused cast. I delight in quoting them:

"Hearken, O ye people of my church, . . . Hearken ye people from afar; . . . listen together.

"... I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.

"And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world." (D&C 1:1, 35-36.)

If man's reckoning of time is accurate, the curtain at the end of Act 6 may fall in less than two score years from now. My children—surely some of my grandchildren—will be involved in this act's closing scenes. I call upon them and all of you to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Eph. 6:11.)

Some of my grandchildren may witness the return of the lost ten tribes; some of them may be around when ancient Enoch and his people return; one might even be bidden to Adam-ondi-Ahman to sit with Adam in another great council. Do I hope for

more than I deserve, to hope that I myself might be caught up with the righteous dead to meet the great director when he comes in glory to rule and reign upon the stage? One other hope I'd like to tuck in—I hope I haven't offended by calling this world a stage.

God never intended his great work to be accepted as a play. Life is not simulated. It is real; the scenes are real; the characters are real; the acting is "for keeps." The drama analogy is mine. I like it. I like the title, "Eternal Life." I like the worthy purpose it serves.

It is our Father's way of providing his billions of spirit children with mortal, flesh and bone bodies.

It is a course designed to give his children a fullness of joy, like unto our Heavenly Father.

It provides his children with powers of procreation for the first time.

It provides a period of probationary testing.

It is designed to condition his children forever against rebellion and sedition.

It prepares his children for citizenship in a theocratic kingdom, the kingdom of God.

I like the author's objective: "... this is my work, and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

When the drama runs its 7,000-year course, what, at its close, happens to the cast? Will the players be unemployed? How were they employed before the play began?

This world drama

My answer must be brief. This world drama is but a small part, a very brief act, in a great, grandiose drama that has been coursing through time and will continue to course through time for millions of years, without end. It is a drama within a drama, both by the same author. May he pardon me for the liberty I take in calling it Act 2—the *mortal act*—involving the cast in their mortal, flesh and bone, state. Act 1 I would call the *pre-mortal act*, involving the cast

in their spirit state. The future, Act 3, will later involve the cast in their immortal state. I must call it the *post-immortal* or *immortal act*.

In these several acts God's grandiose drama courses on and on and on, everlastingly, eternally.

Life is eternal. Faithful members of the cast, after their resurrection, may attain a state of exaltation in God's kingdom in a glory called *celestial*. That glory holds a promise of *eternal life*, the power of eternal increase, a continuation of the seeds.

"Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."

(Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life.")

God, the great Author, lives. He is in his heaven dispatching his spirit children to this mortal stage. Jesus Christ is the director, the very Son of God. Joseph Smith was a prophet. He played an important role in the great drama, "Eternal Life." David O. McKay is another prophet, our prophet, in another important role in that great drama. To this I bear my humble witness, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Elder Gordon B. Hinckley

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

Our Eternal Father, we ask thy blessing "upon the priesthood, all in authority in thy Church and kingdom, that they might enjoy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to qualify them in the discharge of every duty."

This prayer was voiced by President Brigham Young a century ago as he stood at the pulpit of this great tabernacle and offered the invocation on the first conference of the Church ever convened here. The day was October 6, 1867. A hundred years later his plea to the Lord is as timely as it was on the day it was offered.

We need the Holy Spirit in our many administrative responsibilities. We need it as we teach the gospel in our classes and to the world. We need it in the governing of our families.

As we direct and teach under the influence of that spirit, we shall bring spirituality into the lives of those for whom we are responsible.

World-wide scope of the Church:

With the tremendous growth of the Church we become increasingly aware of the great magnitude of the affairs of this the Lord's kingdom. We have a comprehensive program for the instruction of the family. We have organizations for youth, for children, for mothers and fathers. We have a vast missionary system, a tremendous wel-

fare operation, probably the most extensive genealogical program in the world. We must build houses of worship, hundreds and thousands of them. We must operate hospitals, schools, seminaries, institutes. The ramifications of our activities now reach around the world. All of this is the business of the Church. Sometimes the tendency is to handle it as we would ordinary business. But it is more than an organization of enterprises. It is more than a social body. These are but means to the accomplishment of its one true purpose.

That purpose is to assist our Father in heaven in bringing to pass his work and his glory, the immortality and eternal life of man. (See Moses 1:39.)

The forces against which we labor are tremendous. We need more than our own strength to cope with them.

To all who hold positions of leadership, to the vast corps of teachers and missionaries, to heads of families, I should like to make a plea: In all you do, feed the spirit—nourish the soul. ". . . the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." (2 Cor. 3:6.)

To cope with "famine in the land"

I am satisfied that the world is starved for spiritual food. Amos prophesied of old: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will