

12-15-2009

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Recommended Citation

Durham, W. Cole Jr., "The Doctrine of Religious Freedom" (2009). *Vol. 2: Service & Integrity*. Paper 11.
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The Doctrine of Religious Freedom

W. Cole Durham Jr.

I would be remiss on this occasion if I did not express gratitude for the opportunities I have had during one of the great transformative epochs in human history—the decade after the collapse of communism—to visit almost every post-communist country and to work with leaders in their homelands on implementing the ideals of religious freedom. I am grateful beyond measure for blessings that have been given and keys that have been exercised to allow me to participate in the high adventure of opening the doors of nations.

Several years ago a close friend and Church leader gave me a blessing promising that I would be able to invoke the witness of the Holy Ghost when I spoke with others about religious freedom. In fulfillment of that blessing, I have seen the influence of the Spirit change the hearts and minds and, indeed, the entire outlook of many of the governmental leaders with whom I have met, the “gatekeepers” who stand at the doors of nations. I pray that the Spirit will be with me again today as I have the chance to bear witness of this great principle among my own people.

The Doctrine of Religious Freedom

The title of my address—“The Doctrine of Religious Freedom”—is intended to remind us that religious freedom is not merely an important constitutional and human right.¹ There can be no doubt that it is a “first” freedom.² But for us it is even more: it is a matter of doctrine. Our 11th article of faith reads:

We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.

Moreover, this is not merely doctrinal for us—it is a core doctrine. Yet, as I will explain, it is a paradoxical doctrine. And it is a doctrine of prophecy.

Religious Freedom Is a Core Doctrine

That religious freedom is a core doctrine has been reemphasized to my mind by the following remarkable statement from Elder Bruce R. McConkie:

Freedom of worship is one of the basic doctrines of the gospel. Indeed, in one manner of speaking *it is the most basic of all doctrines*, even taking precedence over the nature and kind of being that God is, or the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, or the vesting of priesthood and keys and saving power in the one true church. By this we mean that if there were no freedom of worship, there would be no God, no redemption, and no salvation in the kingdom of God.³

Note two things about this statement. First, Elder McConkie does not say this is the most *important* doctrine. He said that “it is the most basic of all doctrines.” It is the most basic because none of the other doctrines could become operative or have any meaning or authenticity if we did not have the option to choose them freely. The exercise of this right is in fact an attribute of divinity.⁴ The atoning sacrifice of Christ would be meaningless if we could not avail ourselves of its power to save and exalt through freely chosen acts of faith, repentance, and covenanting. Part of the reason the Messiah is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”⁵ is that at the key moment in the premortal existence, He recommended the Father’s plan of freedom, knowing its cost. He knew the price that He personally would pay to atone for all our abuses of freedom. He also knew that despite His payment of that price, countless numbers of His beloved brothers and sisters—individuals He loves with a depth and intensity that passes our understanding—would be lost forever because of their own decision “to choose captivity and death.”⁶

This brings me to the second point about Elder McConkie’s statement. Note that he did not say that it made no difference *how* we exercise this freedom; to the contrary, everything depends on learning to follow the divine pattern set by the Master of worship in every thought and deed and with all our “heart, . . . might, mind, and strength.”⁷

The Paradox of Religious Freedom

Paradoxically, following the pattern set by the Master includes learning to respect the beliefs and choices made by others, even while standing firm in witnessing and teaching doctrinal truths. Indeed,

following the pattern means standing for the rights and freedoms of others, even at the cost of our own lives—and surely also even at the lesser cost of inconvenience or discomfort.

This paradoxical nature of the doctrine of religious freedom needs to be emphasized and understood more deeply. Most of our doctrines are teachings that we affirm and agree to follow. In contrast, although religious freedom is basic and foundational for the system of gospel truth, it demands that we respect the views of those who adhere to other systems of belief. What is paradoxical is that our belief in religious freedom obligates us to tolerate and respect beliefs with which we disagree—though it does not require us to accept, endorse, or support them.

Part of the paradox is explained by the fact, attested by all the modern prophets, that the gospel embraces all truth.⁸ But more is involved in the doctrine of religious freedom than an admonition to accept truth wherever we find it.⁹ It is a recognition of the realities of human dignity and conscience and of the obligation to respect agency at the precious core of the human spirit. This doctrine has had great practical meaning for our leaders.¹⁰ Just a year before his martyrdom, Joseph Smith declared:

The Saints can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for my brethren. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a “Mormon[.]” I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.

It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul—civil and religious liberty to the whole of the human race.¹¹

Forgetting the paradox of religious freedom has been a cause of incalculable suffering during human history. Too often, groups who have pleaded for tolerance while they were a persecuted minority have turned into persecutors as soon as they acquired political power. Joseph Smith was very conscious of this tragic tendency toward unrighteous dominion and repudiated it.¹² We as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should not be guilty of insensitivity in this area. Having so often suffered from religious intolerance in the past, we should go the extra mile in assuring that others are not exposed to similar pain.¹³ What those who forget this paradox do not understand is that the mere possession of truth does not carry with it a right to impose that truth on others. God possesses all truth, yet He has left us our freedom.

In the end, the paradox of religious freedom is linked to many of the deepest truths of the gospel, which share a similar paradoxical structure. “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”¹⁴ “I, the Lord, will

forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”¹⁵ What ultimately lies behind this paradox is the second great commandment: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”¹⁶ Love lies at the heart of the paradox and at the core of religious freedom.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.¹⁷

Stated differently, what makes the doctrine of religious freedom paradoxical is that the right to enjoy religious freedom for ourselves carries with it a reciprocal obligation to respect the religious freedom of others. In the words of the Golden Rule, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.¹⁸ Or as the Lord said at the Last Supper, “As I have loved you, . . . love one another.”¹⁹

Religious Freedom and Prophecy

Religious freedom is not only a matter of doctrine; it is a focus of prophecy. You are all familiar with the great description of the last days found in Isaiah 2:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.* . . .

O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.²⁰

For me, Isaiah’s great vision of the last days has taken on greater meaning ever since I read a commentary on this passage by President Harold B. Lee,²¹ in which he pointed to an interpretation of the phrase “out of Zion shall go forth the law” that is found in the dedicatory prayer of the Idaho Falls Temple. The relevant portion of that prayer reads as follows:

We pray that kings and rulers and the peoples of all nations under heaven may be persuaded of the blessings enjoyed by the people of this land [the United States] by reason of their freedom under thy guidance and be constrained to adopt *similar* governmental systems, *thus to fulfil the ancient prophecy of Isaiah that “out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”*²²

The Idaho Falls Temple was dedicated on September 23, 1945, immediately following the end of World War II. With that in mind, it is worth reflecting on developments that have occurred since 1945 that bear on the fulfillment of this prophecy.

First, virtually all currently enforceable international human rights treaties have been adopted since 1945. Moreover, the entire approach to international human rights law has changed. It is now taken for granted that it is legitimate for one sovereign nation to be concerned about the human rights practices of other nations.²³

At the national level, with only a handful of exceptions, all the countries on earth have adopted their current constitutions since 1945.²⁴ In short, we are witnessing a remarkable historical process in the field of international law and comparative constitutional law that is the subject of prophecy. This to my mind is one of the many ways that we see the tracings of the Spirit of Christ in history.

The Significance of Religious Freedom for Church Growth

Let me now give you a graphic sense for the implications that global religious freedom has for the growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Look first at a map of the globe that attempts to plot the status of religious freedom around the world [Map 1]. The information in this map is based primarily on the latest annual report on religious freedom provided by the U.S. State Department.²⁵ The countries shown in gray are countries that have either no constitutional protection of religious freedom or that do not respect this ideal in practice. Some states protect religious freedom to some extent but have significant qualifications that make it difficult to found a new religious community in the country. Restrictions on proselyting are particularly problematic. As the map shows, most of the world now has normal-to-strong protection of religious freedom. No country has a perfect record, but the situation is markedly better than it was even 10 years ago.

Now look at the map showing the presence of the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide [Map 2]. Darker gray shows the countries where the Church has not yet achieved formal recognition. As you can see, this band of the world includes China and most Islamic nations. Not surprisingly, since the Church always follows the policy of going “in the front door” and entering a country only when it is legal for it to do so,²⁶ there is a high correlation between low religious freedom and lack of formal presence of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The third map shows that religious freedom also has considerable significance for general patterns of Church growth [Map 3]. One of the things that is striking from the map is that concentrations are higher in what the scriptures refer to as the “promised land” of the Americas and

certain “islands of the sea.” Second, one is beginning to see the impact of growth in parts of Africa and the former socialist bloc, where we lacked significant presence until recently. Finally, what the map shows is that Church population remains very thin virtually everywhere. Aside from the United Kingdom, Portugal, and South Korea, there are no countries in these three vast continents of Europe, Africa, or Asia that have as much as one Latter-day Saint per 1,000 in its population. Even in the Americas population exceeds 3 percent only in Chile. Utah remains the only place where the Church is in the majority. The point is that we remain a tiny minority virtually everywhere—so religious freedom protections continue to be of tremendous significance to the Church and its members.

Global Challenges to Implementing Religious Freedom

With this background, let me turn now to some of the global challenges to implementing religious freedom. We live in a world that is peopled with an odd mixture of Sherems²⁷ and Korihors.²⁸ Sherem, as you remember, is the Book of Mormon figure who criticized prophets and revelations concerning Christ on the basis of fundamentalist or supposedly “orthodox” interpretations of religious texts. At the other pole stands Korihor, the secular anti-Christ who prefigured in his thought the great masters of suspicion of the 19th and 20th centuries—Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

Both secularism and fundamentalism or orthodoxy in other traditions can pose profound problems for religious freedom. Further problems emanate from nationalism, ethnicity, and efforts to exploit these for the retention of political power. The recent arrest of Slobodan Milosevic reminds us of the terrible ways a power-hungry leader can use these forces, often manipulating religion in the process to cause terrible devastation.²⁹ Finally, fears associated with stereotypical images of “dangerous sects”—often fanned by virulent anticult forces³⁰—are leading to infringements of religious freedom both in areas of Western Europe and in many other parts of the world.

The Church has outgrown the “dangerous sect” label, but just barely, and we are constantly at risk that overbroad reactions to supposedly “dangerous” religions will create problems for us as well. Even if this were not the case, however, our own experience with religious persecution should encourage us to stand firm for the rights of the currently less fortunate groups.

Time is limited, but let me give a few concrete examples of how religious freedom is protected in practice.

Technical Legal Assistance

A year ago in January I stopped for three days in Romania because I had a few extra days between two other conferences in Europe. I was aware that very problematic legislation was pending that, among other things, would have made it virtually impossible for the Church of Jesus Christ and many other religious groups to find places of worship in that country. On the first day of my visit I stopped in to see the head of religious affairs, who I had met at a conference a few months earlier. By coincidence, or something more, I was in his office when he received a call indicating that the ruling coalition in Romania would consider whether to withdraw the proposed law from Parliament three days later. Armed with that alert, it was possible to help mobilize response from many groups and government leaders both within and outside of Romania, with the result that the legislation was withdrawn. With a kind of clarity that is seldom so clear-cut, I knew that my three days in Romania had been blessed, and blessed with success.

More typical of efforts working on legislation has been the experience of the past few weeks working in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Through this international organization I have been privileged to help provide technical advice to these central Asian republics as they grapple with the difficult problem of dealing with Muslim extremists coming into their countries from other parts of the Islamic world. Their initial reaction has been to clamp down on any transborder activity, restrict missionary work, and make it more difficult for religious groups to be registered so that they can operate legally in the country. OSCE efforts will help contribute to better laws for these countries and may help set patterns that can be utilized elsewhere in the Muslim world.

The Influence of Academic Conferences and Consultations

Academic conferences provide an important setting for contributing to religious freedom. Let me describe a few incidents that have grown out of this type of activity. Each fall for the past several years we have held an international conference at BYU dealing with religious freedom. The minister of justice from Peru attended one of these two or three years ago. At the time the Church had just learned that it had exhausted missionary quotas for the year in Peru. A Church official working with visas mentioned this to the minister of justice during a break at the conference. He was quite surprised that such a quota existed at all and indicated he would check into the matter when he returned home. Within a few weeks there were no more missionary quotas in Peru.

The people who come to BYU for our annual conference are often deeply moved by what they experience here. One of my favorite statements comes from another friend who is currently the head of religious affairs in Albania. He had the opportunity last fall, the day before our academic conference started, to attend the Sunday morning session of general conference in the new Conference Center. Some of you who stood in lines to get into conference this past weekend can appreciate what he saw. This is what he said about the experience:

I have been in [my position as head of religious affairs] for a year, and I have seen a lot. But now I am totally convinced that religion should be an essential part of people's lives. In my country, people line up for bread; today I saw thousands of your people standing in line . . . to worship.

This kind of impression changes perspectives on the importance of religious freedom. I returned a month ago from a conference that same man had organized in Albania, aimed at pointing the way toward a good law on religious associations that can bless the lives of people in that poor and struggling country for years to come. These stories indicate only a few of the many approaches that can help promote religious freedom.

Implications

In the end, what ultimately carries the day is that religious freedom is a true principle. It is a principle of justice. The just and honorable people of this earth recognize its validity. A nation that fails to respect it cannot claim to be just. We must do all in our power to make it a common heritage of all mankind. As the maps suggest, the gospel flourishes best under conditions of liberty. God Himself respects this principle. Were it otherwise, He would not be just. His kingdom must be freely chosen. It will not be imposed on anyone anymore than worship in the temple is imposed on nonbelievers. The celestial kingdom is, among other things, a type of worship that will be imposed only on those who have chosen it. But choosing the Lord's kingdom has implications; you cannot arrive in Zion without having chosen to get there. You cannot ascend the mountain of the Lord's house without leaving other things behind. Part of the paradox of freedom is that the Lord allows people not to return to Him. Allowing freedom reflects the nature of a just God, but it cannot compromise divine truth. Just as mercy cannot rob justice, so justice cannot rob truth.

With this in mind, let me conclude by saying a few things about what the doctrine of religious freedom should mean for each of us. I am convinced that many in your generation will have opportunities to make important contributions to the cause of religious freedom. Hannah Smith, a law student, and Elizabeth Clark, the associate director of the BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies, each

played crucial roles in a recent visit to France to help oppose problematic anticult legislation there. Hannah's husband, John, also a law student, is helping to organize a conference on religious freedom in Ukraine. Others could be mentioned. In time there will be more and more such individuals with knowledge, experience, expertise, and contacts who will be able to help monitor religious freedom developments worldwide and provide assistance and positive contributions when called upon to do so.

Another young Latter-day Saint lawyer played a crucial role last year in helping to set up a conference on religious freedom with the constitutional court of Azerbaijan. His work had taken him to Azerbaijan at the time. He recognized the opportunity and checked with appropriate authorities. A way was found to organize the conference. I want to underscore the fact that this brother checked with appropriate authorities. Matters of religious freedom often raise a variety of sensitive issues, and it is important before working on these matters to follow the guidance of those holding the keys for the work. There are a number of unfortunate incidents in Church history where well-intended Church members exerted "zeal without knowledge," and set Church progress back by years.

The story of the founding of the Church in Kazakhstan suggests another role that some adventurous Church families will play. About three years ago a major law firm approached the Law School looking for a business lawyer willing to go to its office in Almaty, Kazakhstan. One of our graduates who had been in practice for several years responded. He and his family have now been in Kazakhstan about three years. Two other expatriate families have moved in. As recently reported in the *Church News*,³¹ the Church is now organized in Kazakhstan. These founding families are praying for someone to come with greater fluency in Russian, or with other gifts, so that they can teach and train new Church members more effectively.

During conference over the past weekend, you heard several talks about the need for couples. Let me tell you a secret. You don't have to wait until you are 65. I have been convinced as long as I have been teaching at the Law School that one of the great waves of missionary work we will see in our lifetime is that performed by families who, like Ammon, decide to go out to the frontiers of the kingdom, dedicated to serving those they find there and hoping to build the kingdom in these locations. This activity will not be for everyone, and there is much to be done on the home front.³² But some of you will feel this call and will see unparalleled growth in the Church as a result of your faithfulness and witness.

Consider one other example that suggests another kind of role we all can play. I have a nonmember friend who has played a very important role in a country sensitive enough that I will not name it. He tells me that over the past few years, through a chain of coincidences, he has found himself being befriended by Church members at almost every turn. When he first

came to the U.S., the librarian at his university was a Latter-day Saint who helped him immeasurably. Later he studied at another university, where he met additional Latter-day Saints. I heard of him through yet another organization and invited him to our BYU conference. He has subsequently met some Church members in his own country. He was ultimately retained to help secure legal recognition for the Church. In connection with rendering this service, he was asked what he would charge. The lawyer who asked him told me that at the time he was silent for several minutes. Then he said, "I really don't know what to do. I have been benefited so much by friends in your Church that I don't know whether I should charge at all." In the end he was persuaded to take some compensation, but I'm sure it was much less than his help was worth.

This leads me to a final set of comments about how we should implement the doctrine of religious freedom in our lives. Most of you will not in fact be engaged in legal defense of religious freedom in various parts of the world. For you, what will be most important is the paradoxical part of this doctrine—not the part that underlies all our doctrine and protects our rights to worship but the reciprocal part in which you show tolerance and respect and love for others.

A few years ago, precisely as much of my work in Eastern Europe was heating up, I became involved in an effort to revise provisions of the Utah Constitution dealing with religious freedom.³³ During the political process I had numerous opportunities to speak around the state. Two things concerned me. First was the number of Church members who felt it was part of their duty as Church members to impose their views on other members of our community. Too many of them, it seemed to me, had forgotten the vital lesson at the core of the paradox of the doctrine of religious freedom: the mere possession of truth does not carry with it a right to impose that truth on others. Second, I heard countless nonmember parents talking about pain their children had suffered because of either intentional or more often unintentional exclusion of their children in our communities.

I believe that President Hinckley has also sensed their concerns. I don't know if you have paid attention to this, but in virtually every conference for the past few years he has emphasized the importance of being tolerant, of being civil, and of being good neighbors. I cannot repeat his numerous statements on this theme.³⁴ I can only say that he has been an exemplary advocate of religious freedom. I was immeasurably proud when he greeted the arrival of the Southern Baptist Convention and its plans to "evangelize the Mormons" with counsel that we should be as courteous to them as we would hope others would be to our missionaries.³⁵ Again and again he has reminded us of our obligation to be true to the hard side of religious freedom: respecting the beliefs of others.

Let me conclude with a statement that some of you here may have heard President Hinckley give at his devotional on November 4, 1997. In that address he stated:

I hope that [Brigham Young University] will give to you a great sense of tolerance and respect for others not of your faith. The true gospel of Jesus Christ never led to bigotry. It never led to self-righteousness. It never led to arrogance. The true gospel of Jesus Christ leads to brotherhood, to friendship, to appreciation of others, to respect and kindness and love.³⁶

After teaching this principle he told a remarkable story. He had been visited the week before by Shimon Peres, a former prime minister of Israel and one of the elder statesmen of the world. Mr. Peres told him the following story about a Jewish rabbi, which appropriately enough had been told to the prime minister by a Muslim. President Hinckley recounted the story as follows:

A Jewish rabbi . . . was conversing with two of his friends. The rabbi asked one of the men, “How do you know when the night is over and the day has begun?”

His friend replied, “When you look into the distance and can distinguish a sheep from a goat, then you know the night is over and the day has begun.”

The second was asked the same question. He replied, “When you look into the distance and can distinguish an olive tree from a fig tree, that is how you know.”

They then asked the rabbi how he could tell when the night is over and the day has begun. He thought for a time and then said, “When you look into the distance and see the face of a woman and you can say, ‘She is my sister.’ And when you look into the distance and see the face of a man and can say, ‘He is my brother.’ Then you will know the light has come.”³⁷

I am reminded of the first line of a hymn by my great-grandfather, Thomas Durham: “Stars of morning, shout for joy; Sing redemption’s mystery.”³⁸

The morning is coming. You are the stars of morning. We are the stars of morning. We are witnessing the Church coming “forth out of obscurity and out of darkness.”³⁹ Part of “redemption’s mystery” is our paradoxical—and yet ultimately not paradoxical—obligation to respect and love and protect the rights of others not of our faith.

May we sing this mystery well. May we be true children of our Father in Heaven, never forgetting—and never forgetting to live—the song learned in Primary: “As I have loved you, Love one another.”⁴⁰ In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Religious liberty is protected by a vast array of constitutions, treaties, and other international human rights instruments. See, e.g., U.S. Constitution,

amendment 1; *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted and proclaimed by U.N. General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) (1948), art. 18; *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted and opened for signature by U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) (1966), art. 18.

2. See Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “The Four Freedoms,” address to 77th Congress, 6 January 1941; available online at <<http://www.libertynet.org/edcivic/fdr.html>>.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 655; emphasis added.

4. The members of the Godhead Themselves worship each other freely as a natural, yet free response to the glory of Their beings. For example, the Father can be seen as worshiping the Son—not a worship of subordination, but surely worship in the sense of love and respect—when He declared, “This is my beloved Son.” See 2 Peter 1:17: “For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The members of the Godhead bear witness of each other. See 3 Nephi 11:32: “I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me.”

If C. S. Lewis is correct in pointing out that praise is a natural and willing response to “the worthiest object of all,” then it is reasonable to assume that an attitude of worship and praise characterizes the reciprocal relations of members of the Godhead (*Reflections on the Psalms* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958], 96). As Lewis says, “All enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise. . . . I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation” (*Reflections*, 94, 95; see also entire chapter, “A Word About Praising,” 90–98).

5. Revelation 13:8.

6. 2 Nephi 2:27.

7. D&C 59:5.

8. There are countless statements supporting this proposition. Only a few of the more notable ones are listed here. Joseph Smith wrote:

The first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men. [Letter to Isaac Galland, written from Liberty Jail, 22 March 1839, in Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 420]

Brigham Young taught:

“Mormonism,” so-called, embraces every principle pertaining to life and salvation, for time and eternity. No matter who has it. If the infidel has got truth it belongs to “Mormonism.” The truth and sound doctrine possessed by the sectarian world, and they have a great deal, all belong to this church. . . . There is no truth but what belongs to the gospel. [*JD* 11:375]

I want to say to my friends that we believe in all good. If you can find a truth in heaven, earth or hell, it belongs to our doctrine. We believe it; it is ours; we claim it. [*JD* 13:335]

Further, he stated:

For me, the plan of salvation must . . . circumscribe the knowledge that is upon the face of the earth, or it is not from God. Such a plan incorporates every system of true doctrine on the earth, whether it be ecclesiastical, moral, philosophical, or civil: it incorporates all good laws that have been made from the days of Adam until now; it swallows up the laws of nations, for it exceeds them all in knowledge and purity; it circumscribes the doctrines of the day, and takes from the right and the left, and brings all truth together in one system, and leaves the chaff to be scattered hither and thither. [*JD* 7:148]

A wonderful passage from John Taylor is worth quoting at length:

We wish to comprehend and embrace all truth and seek for and obtain everything that is calculated to exalt, ennoble and dignify the human family; and wherever we find truth, no matter where, or from what source it may come, it becomes part and parcel of our religious creed, if you please, or our political creed, or our moral creed, or our philosophy, as the case may be, or whatever you may please to term it.

We are open for the reception of all truth, of whatever nature it may be, and are desirous to obtain and possess it, to search after it as we would for hidden treasures; and to use all the knowledge God gives to us to possess ourselves of all the intelligence that he has given to others; and to ask at his hands to reveal unto us his will, in regard to things that are the best calculated to promote the happiness and well-being of human society. If there are any good principles, any moral philosophy that we have not yet attained to we are desirous to learn them. If there is anything in the scientific world that we do not yet comprehend we desire to become acquainted with it. If there is any branch of philosophy calculated to promote the well-being of humanity, that we have not yet grasped, we wish to possess ourselves of it. If there is anything pertaining to the rule and government of nations, or politics . . . that we are not acquainted with, we desire to possess it. If there are any religious ideas, any theological truths, any principles pertaining to God, that we have not learned, we ask mankind, and we pray God, our heavenly Father, to enlighten our minds that we may comprehend, realize, embrace and live up to them as part of our religious faith. *Thus our ideas and thoughts would extend as far as the wide world spreads, embracing everything pertaining to light, life, or existence pertaining to this world or the world that is to come.* [John Taylor, *JD* 14:337; emphasis added]

Wilford Woodruff stated, “If any man has got a truth that we have not got, let us have it. Truth is what we are after. . . . If we have not the truth, that is what we are after, we want it” (*JD* 17:194).

Joseph F. Smith proclaimed:

We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. No sect or religious denomination in the world possesses a single principle of truth that we do not accept or that we will reject. We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure. [*GD*, 1]

Coming down to the present, President Howard W. Hunter stated:

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we seek to bring all truth together. We seek to enlarge the circle of love and understanding among all the people of the earth. Thus we strive to establish peace and happiness, not only within Christianity but among all mankind. [“The Gospel—A Global Faith,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 18]

Note the interesting linkage here between the notion of embracing all truth and enlarging the circle of love and understanding.

Finally, President Gordon B. Hinckley has restated the theme as follows:

I love to learn. I relish any opportunity to acquire knowledge. Indeed, I believe in and have vigorously supported, throughout my life, the pursuit of education—for myself and for others. . . .

The learning process is endless. We must read, we must observe, we must assimilate, and we must ponder that to which we expose our minds. I believe in the evolution of the mind, the heart, and the soul of humanity. I believe in improvement. I believe in growth. . . .

. . . It therefore behooves us, and is our charge, to grow constantly toward eternity in what must be a ceaseless quest for truth. And as we search for truth, let us look for the good, the beautiful, and the positive. [*Standing for Something* (New York: Times Books, 2000), 59, 62, 64]

9. Clearly that is part of our obligation, but it is not all. The light of Christ “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9; D&C 93:2), and we should be responsive to that light wherever it shines. In seeking wisdom “out of the best books” (D&C 88:118), my experience has been that although others may not have the fullness of the gospel with the authority and keys that have come with the Restoration, they often understand those portions that they have been given in greater depth. We can benefit immensely from their knowledge. For example, a modern physicist may not understand the fullness of the gospel, but as to the truths of the fundamental structure of matter, he no doubt knows more than most of us, and to the extent his knowledge corresponds to reality, he has knowledge of truths that are embraced by our religion. The same is true in other domains of knowledge. In this regard it is worth remembering Brigham Young’s statement:

Our religion measures, weighs, and circumscribes all the wisdom in the world—all that God has ever revealed to man. God has revealed all the truth that is now in the possession of the world, whether it be scientific or religious. [*JD* 8:162]

10. When Nauvoo was founded, the Prophet Joseph Smith stated that he designed its charter “for the salvation of the Church, and on principles so broad, that every honest man might dwell secure under its protective influence *without distinction of sect or party*” (*HC* 4:249; emphasis added). In this same spirit, the city council of Nauvoo passed one of the early “anti-hate crime” ordinances in American history. Section 1 of the ordinance reads as follows:

Be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Nauvoo, that the Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Latter-day Saints, Quakers, Episcopalians, Universalists, Unitarians, Mohammedans, and all other religious sects and denominations whatever, shall have free toleration, and equal privileges, in this city; and should any person be guilty of ridiculing, and abusing or otherwise depreciating another in consequence of his religion, or of disturbing or interrupting any religious meeting within the limits of this city, he shall, on conviction thereof before the Mayor or Municipal Court, be considered a disturber of the public peace, and fined in any sum not exceeding five hundred dollars, or imprisoned not exceeding six months, or both, at the discretion of said Mayor or Court. [*HC* 4:306]

Significantly, Brigham Young clearly taught that even during the Millennium there will be just and honorable people of other faiths who will be protected in their rights to freedom of religion (see *JD* 2:309).

11. *HC* 5:498.

12. See D&C 121:37. For an example of Joseph Smith's critical view of the tendency of the persecuted to assume the role of oppressors, see his comments on intolerance in Massachusetts (HC 2:464–65).

13. For an excellent discussion of this principle, see John K. Carmack, *Tolerance: Principles, Practices, Obstacles, Limits* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993).

14. Matthew 16:25; see also 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33.

15. D&C 64:10.

16. Matthew 22:39.

17. Matthew 5:44–45.

18. See Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” A version of this great teaching of the Master is found in virtually every major religious tradition. See, e.g., *The Analects of Confucius* 15:23 (“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others”—Confucianism); *Mahabharata* 5:1517 (“This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you”—Hinduism); Talmud, Shabbat 31a (“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man”—Judaism); *Udanavarga* 5:18 (“Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful”—Buddhism); *Dadistan-i Dinik* 94:5 (“That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another what-ever is not good for its own self”—Zoroastrianism); *Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi* 13 (“Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself”—Islamism); *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 71:26 (“Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself”—Baháism); *Sutrakritanga* 1.11.33 (“A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated”—Jainism); Guru Arjan Dev 259, *Guru Granth Sahib* (“Don't create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone”—Sikhism).

19. John 13:34.

20. Isaiah 2:2–5; emphasis added.

21. Harold B. Lee, “The Way to Eternal Life,” *Ensign*, November 1971, 15; quoted in Jay M. Todd, “A Standard of Freedom for This Dispensation,” *Ensign*, September 1987, 16.

22. George Albert Smith, “Dedicatory Prayer for the Idaho Falls Temple,” *Improvement Era*, October 1945, 564; quoted by Harold B. Lee in Todd, “A Standard,” 16; emphasis added.

23. See Henry J. Steiner and Philip Alston, *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 148–65. Moreover, a number of regional international treaties have been adopted. Most notable of these is the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The European Court of Human Rights, which monitors compliance with this convention, is now the most significant constitutional court in the world. It has approximately 800,000,000 people within its jurisdiction, including all the former socialist bloc countries with the exception of those in Central Asia, and its pronouncements on human rights issues are now given effect throughout this vast region. See P. van Dijk and G. J. H. van Hoof, *Theory and Practice of the European Convention on Human Rights*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Kluwer Law, 1998), 1–2, 31–36. For a brief overview of the current status of the court, see European Court of Human Rights, *FAQ*, <<http://www.echr.coe.int/50/en/#faq>>.

24. To the best of my knowledge, the only exceptions are the following 10 countries, which adopted their constitutions prior to World War II: the United

States in 1788, Norway in 1814, Liberia in 1847, Luxembourg in 1868, Switzerland in 1874, Tonga in 1875, Australia in 1901, Liechtenstein in 1921, Lebanon in 1926, and Ireland in 1937. The only other exceptions are the United Kingdom, Bhutan, Israel, and Libya, which do not have written constitutions.

25. U.S. State Department, *2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* (5 September 2000) (available online at <http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/irf/irf_rpt/irf_index.html>). The differentiation between “normal” and “strong” protection is subjective, based on personal perceptions and interactions with comparative constitutional law experts.

26. “Wherever we go, we go in the front door. Our representatives honor the laws of the nations to which they go and teach the people to be good citizens” (“President Hinckley Addresses World Affairs Council,” *Ensign*, August 1999, 75). Similar statements have been regularly made by other Church leaders as well. See, e.g., Spencer W. Kimball, quoted in Martin B. Hickman, *David Matthew Kennedy: Banker, Statesman, Churchman* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 342; also see Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, “The Missionary Work of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” in John Witte Jr., and Richard C. Martin, eds., *Sharing the Book: Religious Perspectives on the Rights and Wrongs of Proselytism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 270.

27. Jacob 7.

28. Alma 30.

29. See “Siege Ends as Milosevic Surrenders,” *Deseret News*, 1 April 2001, A1.

30. W. Cole Durham Jr., “The United States’ Experience with New Religious Movements,” *European Journal for Church and State Research* (1998), 5:215.

31. “Kazakhstan Recognizes Church,” *Church News*, 17 February 2001, 5.

32. See Bruce D. Porter, “Building the Kingdom” *Ensign*, May 2001, 80–81. Elder Porter provided a vital reminder that

sometimes, perhaps, we may be inclined to see the building of the kingdom as something that takes place beyond the horizon, far away from our own branch or ward. In truth, the Church advances both by outward expansion and by inward refinement. . . .

We do not have to be called to serve far from home, nor do we have to hold a prominent place in the Church or in the world to build up the Lord’s kingdom. [Porter, “Building the Kingdom,” 80]

33. Because of what I regard as one of the great decisions in the history of our state supreme court, *Society of Separationists v. Whitehead*, it ultimately became unnecessary to pursue the constitutional amendment in question (870 P.2d 916 [Utah 1993]).

34. See, e.g., Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Time of New Beginnings,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 87–88; “The Work Moves Forward,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 4–5; and “We Bear Witness of Him,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 4–6. One statement that seemed particularly impressive to me is the following:

In many communities where our people are in the majority, accusations are heard that we are intolerant, that we display an attitude of self-righteousness, and that we are uncooperative in advancing causes which are for the common good. . . . It has been reported that some parents, out of a desire to protect their children, have told them that they should not associate in school with those not of their faith.

It seems anomalous that some would keep their sons and daughters from so doing while they are in the elementary schools, and yet make great sacrifice when they grow older to send them into the mission field.

Let us not forget that we believe in being benevolent and in doing good to all men. I am convinced that we can teach our children effectively enough that we need not fear that they will lose their faith while being friendly and considerate with those who do not subscribe to the doctrine of this Church. Let us reach out to those in our community who are not of our faith. Let us be good neighbors, kind and generous and gracious. Let us be involved in good community causes. There may be situations, there will be situations, where, with serious moral issues involved, we cannot bend on matters of principle. But in such instances we can politely disagree without being disagreeable. We can acknowledge the sincerity of those whose positions we cannot accept. We can speak of principles rather than personalities. In those causes which enhance the environment of the community, and which are designed for the blessing of all of its citizens, let us step forward and be helpful. An attitude of self-righteousness is unbecoming a Latter-day Saint. [TGBH, 661–62]

35. See, e.g., “We Are a Biblical Church, Atlanta Members Told,” *Church News*, 23 May 1998, 5, quoting President Gordon B. Hinckley as saying:

I don’t know how many will be there [at the Southern Baptist Convention]. I have heard everything from 12,000 to 18,000. I hope there are 20,000 of them. I hope they have a wonderful time. I hope that our people are hospitable toward them and will reach out the hand of fellowship and show love for them.

36. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The BYU Experience,” *BYU 1997–98 Speeches* (Provo: BYU, 1998), 63.

37. Hinckley, “BYU Experience,” 64.

38. “Stars of Morning, Shout for Joy,” *Hymns*, 1948, no. 164.

39. D&C 1:30.

40. “Love One Another,” *Hymns*, 1985, no. 308. I am indebted to Elder Bruce D. Porter for highlighting this image to beautifully teach this concept in his recent general conference address. See Porter, “Building the Kingdom,” 80.

This devotional address was given to the BYU student body on April 3, 2001. Reprinted from Brigham Young University Speeches 2000–2001, 213–226 and the Clark Memorandum, fall 2001, 2–13.

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