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A Christ-Like Attitude

Marion G. Romney

On April 3, 1836, the Savior appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his companion, Oliver Cowdery, in the Kirtland Temple. The record of this vision is found in section 110 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In verse 4, the Savior declares:

I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.

Jesus is our advocate with the Father. You young people who have completed three years of legal training are about to embark on a life as advocates. Be the best earthly advocates you can be. Do not overlook the fact, however, that there is a spiritual, an eternal dimension to advocacy. As we honor you tonight at your commencement, I challenge you to become Christ-like advocates.

When the Board of Trustees announced ten years ago this month there would be a Law School at the Brigham Young University, many wondered about the purposes behind our action. I understand that question is still asked from time to time, and that many of you would be interested in hearing my views concerning the purposes of this Law School. I am not sure it would be worthwhile or even possible for me to give you a complete catalogue of those purposes. Nor is it necessary. Much more important than a list of the Law School's purposes is this fact: whatever they are (and I assure you they exist) the best way to achieve them is for you and those who have graduated before you and those who will graduate after you to respond to the challenge I have laid before you to become Christ-like advocates.

What are the characteristics of the Christ-like advocate? I would like to describe three of these characteristics and illustrate them by using examples from the life of the Savior and from the life of the man for whom this Law

School is named, J. Reuben Clark. I knew President Clark personally. I was his disciple. I learned from him as a lawyer, as a child of God, and as one who is convinced of the reality of the Restoration. I would urge each of you to become familiar with his life, his ideals, and his principles. You can gain such a familiarity by reading his writings—principally *Stand Fast By Our Constitution*—and also by reading his biography.

The first characteristic of a Christ-like advocate is integrity. I speak of integrity in its broadest sense. No characteristic is more highly prized by members of the legal profession.

Integrity certainly means honesty, but I believe it includes more than honesty. It includes that cornerstone principle of the Savior's life and teachings, a concern for other people. The reason I give such a broad meaning to integrity is that the word means "completeness" or "wholeness." I can think of no better formula for the complete person than the one the Savior gave: to love our Heavenly Father and to love other people as ourselves.

But how, you may ask, can concern, respect, and even love for other people be reconciled with a lawyer's duty to vigorously represent his client? I recognize that there is a potential tension between a lawyer's duty to represent his client and his obligations to other lawyers and to society as a whole. There are times when this tension will present some difficult problems. (Those kinds of problems are outside the scope of this evening's discussion, though I would urge, parenthetically, that when those problems arise, you not hesitate to discuss them with more experienced members of the bar. You will find your professional colleagues more willing to be helpful in that respect than you might have anticipated.)

For present purposes, I would like to make only three observations. First, neither your obligation to your client nor any other professional obligation should ever require you to be dishonest or in any other respect to compromise your integrity. Your professional responsibilities neither require nor permit you to deal in overt falsehood or misrepresentation, and if your client insists that you do, get another client.

I doubt that any of you will ever have a harder choice to make in this respect than President Clark had on one occasion. I hope that you will make it the same way he did. After many years of struggling, it finally appeared that his chances for success might be realized when he became legal counsel to the first of this country's multi-national corporations. The corporation changed presidents, however, and the new president insisted on taking some steps that were beyond the bounds of what integrity would permit. President Clark had to choose between his conscience and financial success. In the words of the biographer of his law school and professional years, Brother Frank Fox, Reuben let "the dream [of financial success] go glimmering."¹

Second, even beyond the requirements of truth-telling, service to the client and his interests seldom requires the lawyer to sacrifice the kind of

civility that is consistent with the Savior's instruction that we should love all people, including our enemies. All too often, practicing lawyers confuse the pursuit of their clients' interests with lack of courtesy and thoughtfulness toward the opposing lawyer. Most of the time, the two are unrelated. Rarely, if ever, will a client's interests be advanced by rudeness or discourtesy. Do not discard, as a lawyer, those basic attitudes of concern for other people that you have come to regard as the foundation stone of virtue in general.

Third, integrity means being prepared to say or do what must be said or done, regardless of the consequences. After the Savior fed the 5,000, many of those who had been fed followed Him to Capernaum. The Savior knew that they followed Him because He had fed them and would be offended if He declared Himself to be the promised Messiah. Nevertheless, He declared:

I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:35).

Not only those who had followed Him after having been fed but also His own disciples found this declaration troubling. In the Gospel of John, we read that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66).

A second characteristic of the Christ-like advocate is compassion. In response to the question of "a certain lawyer, . . . who is my neighbour?" the Savior reminded us of the importance of compassion by relating the Parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:30–37). The Savior was compassionate to all. He reached out to touch the lives of those who were despised because of their race, their social condition, or their physical or mental imperfection. We ought to be aware of the needs of individuals beyond our inner circle of family and friends. As advocates, you should be prepared to assist a client who is downtrodden, destitute, or unpopular.

We should not overlook, however, the needs of those who are closest to us. Compassion should begin in our own homes. In the course of your career as advocates, there will be a continuing temptation to spend long hours away from your spouse and children. President Clark struggled with this problem throughout the early years of his career. In October 1909, his wife, Luacine, suffered an allergic reaction to morphine and hovered for two hours between life and death. His biographer, Frank Fox, indicates that this episode had a profound effect on his life:

He seemed to see life through new eyes. His days at the office grew perceptibly shorter, while evenings at home lengthened. He learned, in fact, to do much of his work in a private study upstairs, his books and notes piled around him and his infant son propped on the desk beyond the lamplight. And when the children came down with chicken pox in December, he let his work go entirely and became a full-time nurse.²

I hope that you will be perceptive to the needs—temporal and spiritual—of your spouse and children and remember that the most important service we render in this life is in our own homes.

A third characteristic of the Christ-like advocate is teachability. I speak of teachability as a learning process that encompasses not only an awareness of our lack of knowledge, but also a desire to learn and improve.

The Savior was teachable. The Apostle Paul tells us about the Savior's learning process in Hebrews:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;
And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:8–9).

As a result of this learning process, the scriptures tell us that “all that heard him [when He was but twelve years of age] were astonished at his understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). This learning process continued throughout the Savior's life.

You must not regard your legal education as consisting of the three years that you have spent in this Law School. This is part of what I mean when I counsel that you should be “teachable.” These three years have only been the beginning. The label “commencement” is particularly appropriate for a lawyer's training. The great lawyers are the ones for whom the legal education process never ends. The longer they practice the more proficient they become.

With your graduation from law school, you will move from one phase of your legal education to another. The emphasis will also change. The principal emphasis of your law school years has been legal analysis, and to a lesser extent learning substantive rules of law. If you are the kind of lawyer you should be, you will continue to improve those legal analysis skills and to acquire additional learning about the rules of law. But those will no longer be the focal points of your continuing legal education. Probably the single time in your professional career when you will know the most about the largest number of rules of law will be the day before you take the bar exam. It should not be the point at which you are the best lawyer. The main focus will now shift to the development of practical application of the analytical abilities and the rules that you have learned in law school. You should always approach those tasks with the same enthusiasm and the same concern as you approached your first semester of law school. I can think of no higher compliment that could be paid to any lawyer than that at any given time in his life, he was a better lawyer than he had ever been before.

Some of you may have heard a talk given by Francis Kirkham at the Law School two years ago this spring on the occasion of the annual Board of Visitors meeting. During the time that Mr. Kirkham served as a law clerk to

Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes of the United States Supreme Court, he heard an oral argument delivered by John W. Davis, who was then in the late stages of his career. Mr. Kirkham commented to the Chief Justice how impressed he was that a man of aging years could perform so brilliantly. Hughes response was: “That’s because he’s a lawyer.”

I think that Chief Justice Hughes was partially right. Certainly he was right as to John W. Davis. Unfortunately, not all lawyers are like that. Some effectively stop their learning processes once they leave law school. They remain for long periods of time on the same plateau, or even begin a gradual, continuing slide downward. But the great ones are like John W. Davis and J. Reuben Clark. The longer they live, the longer they practice, the better lawyers they become. I know of no better example of this characteristic than J. Reuben Clark. His mind was never satisfied. He was always striving to gain new knowledge and to reach new and higher levels of understanding. In the foreword to the biography of President Clark’s law school and professional years, I described him as “a man who was, at times, unsure of himself, a man who altered his decisions, a man who made mistakes and repented of them . . . a soul who struggled harder than most and who faced numerous obstacles, trying temptations, and severe challenges.”³

You, too, will have decisions to make. In the process of decisions you, too, will make mistakes. Those mistakes, and the willingness to recognize them and learn from them, constitute an important part of the continual learning process that is characteristic of every good lawyer. They will contribute to making you the complete lawyer, the whole lawyer, the lawyer of integrity in the broadest sense of that word. In his continual striving to grow and improve, J. Reuben Clark became a Christ-like advocate in both the earthly and spiritual sense. He also became a Christ-like person. May God bless you to achieve what J. Reuben Clark achieved is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

This convocation address was given at the BYU Law School on April 24, 1981. Reprinted from Speeches at the Sixth Convocation of the J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University, April 24, 1981, 1–3.

Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) received his LL.B. from the University of Utah in 1932. He served as a General Authority 1941–88, member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles 1951–88, and counselor in the First Presidency 1972–85.

Notes

1. Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 360.

2. *Id.* at 375.

3. *Id.* at xi.