good samaritan
I am honored by this invitation. I value my association with the J. Reuben Clark Law Society and its mission. I am mindful that the reach of the Law Society is global, and I welcome those who are joining us from around the world. Although some of the examples I will draw upon in my remarks come from the American experience, the points I will try to make know no national boundaries.
The Work of Community Building

Many years ago I happily accepted an invitation to speak at BYU–Hawaii. The title of my remarks was “Lawyers and the Atonement.” Announcing that title drew some laughter, but it wasn’t intended to. It was my thesis that the Atonement of Christ should be the animating force in all we do, and although it may be easy to see how that works for a carpenter (especially one from Nazareth), a counselor, a teacher, an artist, someone in the healing professions, or almost any other profession or trade than ours, it is vital for those of us called to the bar to discover how acting well our part can encourage reconciliation.

This idea comes from the story of Enoch and his city, which was among the first lessons that the Lord impressed upon the heart and mind of Joseph Smith following the founding of the Church. We are told that Enoch and his city “were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.” Recreating that type of community was the chief goal of the first Latter-day Saints. The story of Enoch is not just about Enoch, his family, or even his clan. It is a story about a city that set the mark for the type of spirituality to which the Lord calls us in the Restoration.

The Book of Mormon teaches this as well. As Mormon began his own account on the large plates, he started with the story of King Benjamin and his city. I thank Professor Jack Welch of BYU’s law school for the following insight: King Benjamin’s city was divided by class, language, and ethnicity. Benjamin had spent a lifetime trying to overcome those divisions through legal and educational reforms, to no avail. Finally, near the end of his life, he delivered a powerful sermon on the Atonement of Christ, and for a season his people, moved with awe and humility, were united in Christ. I think it highly significant that Mormon, who had special insight into the unique challenges of our day, began his writings on the plates with the story of a person who worked hard at uniting a people divided by class, language, and ethnic identity.

From Enoch’s city and King Benjamin’s city, we learn that we are engaged in the highest form of spirituality when we work to make the effects of Christ’s Atonement radiate beyond ourselves and our families to build communities. The work of community building is the most important work to which we are called. All other work is preparatory. And here’s where lawyers come into the picture: to build a community involves law. Properly understood, the noblest role a lawyer can fill is to help build communities founded on the rule of law. The rule of law is the idea—of staggering importance in the progress of humankind—that a community should be organized in a way that reflects the reality that each person is created in the image of God and, by virtue of that fact alone, is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. Communities so organized create conditions of liberty and security that unleash human creativity and goodness.
Our Call to Change the World

This is all pretty high-minded stuff, I know. And it is in sharp contrast to the popular view of lawyers reflected in a joke I heard Rex Lee tell on a number of occasions. (I believe he learned the joke from BYU Law professor Jim Gordon.)

It’s true that some lawyers are dishonest, arrogant, venal, amoral, ruthless buckets of toxic slime. On the other hand, it’s unfair to judge the entire profession by five or six thousand bad apples.

More seriously, at a time in which some are urging Christians to retreat from a society that is growing increasingly secular at an alarming pace—I’m thinking of the interpretation many have given to the important and provocative book by Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*6—the Lord has called Latter-day Saints to do just the opposite. Jesus’s imagery of disciples as the salt of the earth,7 combined with scriptural injunctions and the imperatives of modern prophets regarding our distinctive role at this time in the world’s history, all urge Latter-day Saints to become part of the fabric of the societies in which we live.

Several years ago I had an interesting conversation with Judge Monroe G. McKay, a distinguished member of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Judge McKay is a raconteur without peer, and on this occasion he was musing over the remarkable and good changes in the Church that he had seen during his life. “When I was growing up in Huntsville, Utah,” he said, “we talked about only three things at sacrament meeting: tithing, the Word of Wisdom, and ‘They’re coming to get us!’” Now, it’s all about the Atonement of Christ and loving our neighbors.

Judge McKay’s humorous recounting of our trajectory as a people is spot on. We have spent our time of preparation in the wilderness. Now is the time for us to fully engage.

For years the general authorities have been urging us to lean in to the larger society and join forces with others to do good. We live, work, and play alongside wonderful people of different faiths or no faith who can teach us much about the things that matter most: kindness, courage, beauty, justice, mercy, love, and, perhaps most importantly, how to serve those on the margins of society. Jesus called these “the least,” but He also proclaimed that they were His brothers and sisters.8 True, there are forces of hatred and division loose in the world. But fortunately there are also countless men and women of goodwill. G. K. Chesterton called them “splendid strangers.”9 What I offer today is encouragement to join forces with these good people to look for ways to build unity and understanding.

After all, our theology moves us toward others. As Terryl L. Givens has written:

Mormonism’s conception of heaven is radically social. . . . Salvation is a communal enterprise. . . . It is a social heaven [Mormons] envision—and so the church must do more than cultivate individual models of sanctity. The church must function as the model, the catalyst, and the schoolmaster for the City of God. . . . Zion-building is not preparation for heaven. It is heaven, in embryo. . . .

. . . The process of sanctifying disciples of Christ, and constituting them into a community of love and harmony, does not qualify individuals for heaven; sanctification and celestial relationality are the essence of heaven.10

In his recent book, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*, noted New Testament scholar and Anglican cleric N. T. Wright makes a striking claim that upends how many view Christ’s mission. According to Wright, a close reading of the New Testament shows that, for the Christians of the first century, Jesus’s death and Resurrection were about much more than getting us to heaven. They were also, and more urgently, about followers of Christ changing the world here and now.11 That is a message familiar to Latter-day Saints. According to the newspaper account of remarks he recently gave at Westminster College, Elder D. Todd Christofferson emphasized that “spirituality is manifest and nurtured in service.”12

Or, as President Henry B. Eyring has said:

*Instead of thinking of yourself primarily as someone who is seeking purification, think of yourself as someone who is trying to find out who around you needs your help. Pray that way and then reach out. When you act under such inspiration, it will have a sanctifying effect on you.*13

Certainly that was the profound message of the life of President Thomas S. Monson.

In short, the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is that we are called to change the world for the better—here and now—and we do that best through relationships.

The Binding Power of Christ’s Atonement

Last spring Yale Law School asked me to join a panel discussion titled “Mormonism in American Law and Politics” along with Professor Amy Chua of Yale and Professor Noah Feldman of Harvard.14 Both have written with insight and even admiration about the Mormon experience, and their comments were interesting, provocative, and generous. As the lone Mormon on the panel, I tried to offer an insider’s view. But rather than speak about the past, I made a claim about the future that was intended to surprise the audience: Despite the way we are viewed by many, Mormons are uniquely positioned to help negotiate the tension between our nation’s twin goals of liberty and equality—a tension that sometimes seems irreconcilable.

Here’s how. The late Catholic scholar Stephen H. Webb got it right when he wrote, “Mormonism is obsessed with Christ, and everything that it teaches is meant to awaken, encourage, and expand faith in him.”15 But Webb’s description is incomplete. To Mormons, the Atonement of Christ does not only forge a bond between an individual, his or her family, and God; the Atonement of Christ is at the center of our efforts to create community. Latter-day Saints don’t use much iconography, but if any symbol expresses who we are and what we are about, it’s the beehive, because the
paramount form of religious expression in Mormonism is building community.

It’s within the Latter-day Saint ward that much of that hard work takes place. As Eugene England pointed out in his essay “Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel” (which is near-canonical to me), two features of the ward work in tandem to create a laboratory for Christian living. First, with no paid help, all are called upon to pitch in. Second, because we are members of a ward by virtue of where we live and not because of a hankering to be among those who share our views, we end up working in close quarters with and eventually coming to love people we might not have wanted to take to lunch when we first met them. 16

Each Sunday we gather with our ward to partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The symbolism of that ritual binds us one to another. When we partake of the sacrament, we share the emblems of Christ’s suffering with one another. That sharing is an outward manifestation of an inner commitment that we “are willing to bear one another’s burdens, . . . mourn with those that mourn . . . , and comfort those that stand in need of comfort”; 17 to go to Young Women camp, Scout camp, and youth conference; to minister to one another; and to help people move their household on a Saturday morning in the cold rain. We receive the bread and water not from our leaders but from whoever happens to be next to us on the pew—a beautiful expression of the powerful idea that C. S. Lewis used to close his most important sermon: “Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.” 18

I served a full-time mission in South Africa and Zimbabwe from 1973 to 1975. I loved my mission, but those years were an unhappy time for the region. Apartheid was still the law in South Africa, Nelson Mandela was still imprisoned on Robben Island, and Zimbabwe was caught up in a civil war. But in the last few weeks of my time there, I caught a glimpse of how the doctrines of the restored gospel, coupled with the experience gained from life in a ward, could provide a way forward for nations divided by race.

One of the paid staff at the mission home was a wonderful woman of mixed race. Ella Baatjies had only recently come to work at the mission home after a lifetime spent in virtual slavery as a maid at a boarding house. Missionaries who lived at the boarding house befriended Ella and arranged for her escape. I was among the happy group that welcomed Ella to her new life in the mission home hundreds of miles away.

Upon arriving at the mission home, the first thing Ella asked for was the missionary discussions. She wanted to learn about the restored gospel. Our mission president, Robert P. Thorn, granted Ella’s plea, and my companion, Steve Oliver, and I had the honor of teaching her. In truth, Ella taught us. She was a woman of profound and exuberant faith. There was, however, one problem: the owner of the boarding house had kept Ella from learning to read. That posed a problem because there is a fair amount of reading required of those considering whether to join the Church.

Serving as the chef in the mission home was a remarkable woman who came to our aid. Dorothea Storey was white and had doing it right, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ works to bring “at-one” those who are divided by race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, and other fault lines that too often keep us from fully embracing each other as brothers and sisters.
Civic Charity and the Constitution

This may be where we can be of help to our divided nation. Mormons have a sense that we have a role to play in defending and preserving the Constitution of the United States, and we teach one another to study its text and history. That is all good. But I wonder, is there something even more basic that we can offer?

Matthew Holland, former president of Utah Valley University, is a scholar of the American founding. President Holland has written that the idea of civic charity was central to the creation of the United States and is indispensable to the success of the Constitution’s structural protections of federalism and separated and enumerated powers, as well as its guarantees of fundamental rights.20 It was pilgrim John Winthrop who, in the spring of 1630, first expressed the need for civic charity. In a sermon that has been called the “Ur-text of American literature,”20 Winthrop implored those about to launch the Massachusetts Bay Colony, “We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own . . . , always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work.”21

Some 230 years later, Abraham Lincoln gave the fullest expression to the idea of civic charity and its critical role in defending and preserving the Constitution. Lincoln understood that without civic charity, the Constitution could not succeed. And so at the most perilous moment in our nation’s history, and in an effort to avoid the cataclysm of a civil war that posed the greatest threat the Constitution has ever faced, Lincoln pled with his fellow citizens:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.22

As we know, it turned out that those bonds of affection were not strong enough to hold the nation together. War came, and its consequences are with us still. Near the end of the armed hostilities, Lincoln again invoked those bonds of affection, this time in an effort to reconstruct constitutional government for the nation:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.23

In the challenges we face today, strengthening those bonds of affection may be as important as any other task we face in defending and preserving the Constitution.

Compromise, Equality, and Religious Liberty

Our nation is rightly committed to banishing discrimination that holds back women and racial, sexual, and other minorities from full participation in our national life. Can we pursue that goal while allowing religious minorities to live in ways consistent with conscience? Here is the challenge: equality and religious liberty are in tension.

Martha Minow, recent dean of Harvard Law School, is a political progressive fully committed to equality. She recognizes that our current controversy over equality and religious liberty is high stakes because important rights and values are involved. Dean Minow has wisely called on all sides involved in the negotiations, small-group dynamics were a factor that led to this breakthrough. The compromise was worked out not only around the conference room tables of lawyers but around the dining room tables of people who had become friends despite their differing views. As these friendships formed, ideas emerged about how each side could accommodate the needs of others while maintaining their own core values.28

Significantly, many of the players were Mormons or former Mormons who had experience in the life of a ward. There is a debate over whether the Utah compromise can be accomplished elsewhere. I am not a political scientist, nor am I good at predictions, but I can hope. Is it too much to think that the skills gained from life in a ward can help address the divides that separate our nation? Can it be that our work as ministering brothers and sisters, our weekly passing of the sacrament to one another, and our learning to love those in our ward who see things differently can play a role in helping our nation bridge its divisions?

I believe they can, but only if we get involved in the world beyond the chapel doors.

“Radiant Mormonism”

I know we are all busy with work, family, and church. But the time has come for us to set
Our sights on building community beyond the ward.

One way we can do this is to look for ways to make existing Church programs more oriented to serving those in need who are not members of the Church. Over a decade ago I presided over a young single adult stake that was composed largely of students attending BYU. It was a remarkable group of young people, and as a stake presidency we realized there were important things they could do if given the opportunity. And so with the approval of Elder John H. Groberg, the general authority seventy to whom I reported, we created in each ward a Pure Religion Committee, whose charge was to form a partnership with a local service provider so that our members could help those on the margins of society. Our inspiration was Mother Teresa, and we began the new school year with a fireside that showed a documentary about her life and service to the poorest of the poor.

When the stake presidency visited each ward, we shared this message:

I bear you my witness that if the Lord Jesus Christ were to be physically present in Provo today, He wouldn’t attend a single meeting of our stake. Why? He has you covered by your bishop, the elders quorum president, and the Relief Society president. My witness is that if the Lord were to come to Provo today, He wouldn’t attend a single meeting of our stake. Instead, He would spend time at the state mental hospital and the battered women’s shelter and visit with a recently arrived immigrant family from Central America. If that’s where He would be, then what are we doing here in a comfortable setting at church? Actually, something very important.

We can also be involved in the life of our neighborhoods, towns, counties, and cities—not as a Church calling but simply as citizens who want to help the common good. As we serve in various capacities, we can bring to others what we have learned and experienced in our laboratory for Christian living.

Celebrated historian Richard Bushman has noted a trend that is startling to some: “Mormon influence is being felt in many segments of our society.” Bushman describes this growing influence for good as “radiant Mormonism”:

Think of all the individuals who have an impact simply because they live good lives. The psychiatrists, the teachers, the policemen, the bosses, the coaches, the construction workers, who are admired and appreciated by the people around them because they are decent, generous people—people of good will. . . . Everywhere you turn, you find Mormons in positions of power and influence. But the influence goes beyond the eminent and powerful. It is exercised by ordinary Latter-day Saints going about their everyday lives. They may not trumpet their religion to their associates, but they elevate their workplaces and neighborhoods by working for the good of the people around them.

According to Bushman, “radiant Mormonism” works only when two conditions are present. First, we must be trusted; people must know that we have their best interests at heart, that we are not maneuvering for our own gain. And second, we must be competent; we must know what we are doing. Brother Bushman is not a man given to hyperbole, but mark these words: “[R]adiant Mormonism must extend Mormon influence. . . . Every day we add to the sum of goodwill among humankind; some day that goodwill may save the world.”

Wait, what? Did he just say that we can help “save the world”? That’s a much taller order than what I’m calling for. I’m just asking us to save the Constitution! And I’m asking us to do that by taking what we know about the Atonement of Christ and the life experience we have gained in our wards—how to create and strengthen “bonds of affection”—and by using those skills in our neighborhoods, the workplace, our school boards and town councils, and the halls of Congress to reach across divides and create relationships that result in empathy. Such empathy can then facilitate compromise, an ever-present need in a democratic republic whose motto is E pluribus unum.

Get involved with groups and organizations that work to bridge divides. Then, as a member of that group, be yourself. Remember how we reacted to Stephen R. Covey’s success with the 7 Habits books? We realized that he had taken principles that are commonplace among us—the standard fare of many a priesthood and Relief Society lesson—and shared them with a larger audience. So join the PTA, the Rotary, the bar association, or any of a thousand different points of light that seek to do good—or start your own, but if you do, make sure the group includes people not of our faith as well. And show by your example what you have learned about creating unity from your experiences in your ward. Don’t hide your light under a bushel.

Agents of Reconciliation

Allow me a cautionary note about our necessary involvement in partisan politics. Too often those who practice politics play upon passions and biases and use personal attacks rather than treating opponents with respect. We can do better. As we embrace the best that American political culture has to offer—a commitment to liberty and equality of opportunity—I hope that we will reject the brand of politics that has far too often been part of that culture. When I was a student at BYU, we were taught to have “a style of our own” in dress and grooming standards. That seems like good advice for our involvement in politics. We should have a style of our own, a “Mormon approach to politics.”

Don’t get me wrong. I am not saying that you will have certain views about marginal tax rates or about the best way for a nation to conduct its foreign affairs by virtue of the fact that you are a Latter-day Saint. In fact, I am uncomfortable with any who maintain that principles of the restored gospel compel their partisan affiliations. But I am saying that a Mormon approach to politics will be animated by a passion for justice and fairness and a respectful way of treating opposing points of view and the people who espouse them. And it will look for ways to unify people.

Michael Gerson observed:

The heroes of America are heroes of unity. Our political system is designed for vigorous disagreement. It is not designed for irrec-
Times of change like our own are marked by turmoil and anxiety, making it tempting to lash out in anger and frustration and then seek shelter by retreat ing to our own tribe of like-minded folk. But I don't think that is what the Lord calls us to do in the Restoration. I believe, instead, that He wants us to join with others and become agents of reconciliation in a divided world. The concept expressed in the English word *atonement* has Hebrew roots. When it appears in the Hebrew Bible, it conveys the sense of bringing together into one things that have been separated. The King James translators used a new word for the concept: *at-one-ment*, or “at-one-ment.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminded us in the April 2017 general conference that our best tools for addressing the divisions that beset us are the simple and profound teachings of Jesus, summarized in the two great commandments:

>Someday I hope a great global chorus will harmonize across all racial and ethnic lines, declaring that guns, slurs, and vitriol are not the way to deal with human conflict. The declarations of heaven cry out to us that the only way complex societal issues can ever be satisfactorily resolved is by loving God and keeping His commandments, thus opening the door to the one lasting, salvific way to love each other as neighbors.

It is my hope that we will take from the doctrines of the Restoration and our experiences in our ward laboratory of Christian living the desire to become heroes of unity. If we are trusted and skilled in creating and strengthening the bonds of affection that are a necessary precondition for constitutional government, this may be our greatest gift to a divided nation in this present moment of peril. That we may do so is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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**NOTES**


4. See Mosiah 2–5.


7. See Matthew 5:13.


25. Id. at 844.


30. Id.

31. Id., emphasis added.


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