



# THE RESTORED GOSPEL AND GOOD GOVERNMENT

Scholarship informed by  
the restored gospel of  
Jesus Christ



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## In Memoriam, Harry Mason Reid (1939–2021)

It is fitting that, in the “good government” issue of *BYU Studies Quarterly*, we recognize the passing on December 28, 2021, of former Nevada senator and Senate majority leader Harry Mason Reid. Of his thirty-four years in office, Senator Reid served four years as Senate minority leader and eight years as majority leader, achieving the highest rank in the U.S. Congress of any Latter-day Saint. Two presidents of the United States, the Senate majority leader, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives spoke at his funeral. The first speaker, however, was President M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who called Harry Reid a dear friend, “a man of faith in word and deed,” and a devoted member of the Church whose bishop recommended him as the best minister in the ward.

Although Reid was known as a tenacious and steely fighter in Congress, he demonstrated many of the qualities we discuss in this issue as necessary in citizens and politicians in order for good government to flourish. One of his primary motivations for entering politics was to help the less fortunate improve their lives. He deeply believed that “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). Current Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell said, upon his passing, “I never doubted that Harry was always doing what he earnestly, deeply felt was right for Nevada and our country.”

President Joe Biden said, “Harry Reid led by hearing all points of view and finding common ground.” Former President Barack Obama described him as having these qualities: “Pragmatism, adaptability, a premium on getting things done, a lack of pretension, and abiding loyalty,” explaining that while these qualities are “in short supply, . . . they are precisely the qualities our democracy requires.” President Obama also said, “Harry understood that we don’t have to see eye to eye on everything in order to live together, to be decent toward each other.”

Reid’s greatest quality was his love, especially for his wife, Landra, and his children, who always felt that, despite his immense responsibilities, they were his highest priority. We join in celebrating the life of this gifted, committed leader from whom we can learn much about applying the principles of the gospel in serving one’s country.

# Editors' Introduction

*Sharlee Mullins Glenn, Kristine Haglund, Linda Hoffman Kimball, and Susan Elizabeth Howe*

*"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isa. 2:3)*

*"And Enoch continued his preaching in righteousness unto the people of God. And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even Zion." (Moses 7:19)*

It would be nice if Isaiah had enumerated the law into a statutory code, or if Enoch had left some city council minutes behind. While Restoration scriptures give tantalizing hints of societies that have achieved the kind of harmony God intends, the descriptions are thin and short on practical details. Even the Doctrine and Covenants, which mentions Zion even more often than the Old Testament and has precise directions about many aspects of organizing the Saints in the earliest days of the Church, doesn't easily translate into a roadmap for governance or citizenship in the many countries where Latter-day Saints—in much larger numbers and more diverse circumstances—find themselves in the twenty-first century.

We can, however, be quite sure that the meetings of the city council in the city of Enoch were nothing like the partisan, rancorous, even violent municipal government meetings happening throughout the United States right now. Our congregations, even sometimes our families, are frayed and torn by seemingly intractable disagreements. And though the scriptures do not offer us precise directions for forming governments, they do make clear that the forms of government people choose and the ways they uphold those governments have great import for the religious and spiritual health of God's covenant peoples. The Book of Mormon warns that corrupt governments are both symptom and cause of spiritual destruction: "For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than they who chose good, therefore they were ripening for destruction, for the laws had become corrupted" (Hel. 5:2).



On the other hand, as Rob Schwartz shows in examining the effect of King Benjamin's address to the Nephites, righteous government can—through education and commitment to a strong social contract—realign culture, adjust habits of thought, and change attitudes toward wealth and inequality. The Book of Mormon peoples who applied King Benjamin's teachings were able to create just institutions and islands of peace and relative equality, despite the chaos of their circumstances. The doctrine that enlivens this history insists that good and bad government are not fated or externally imposed; human beings build governments and societies by their choices. "The Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself" (2 Ne. 2:16).

How then shall Latter-day Saints act in a moment of governmental crisis? What resources does our faith offer us? What responsibilities do our covenants impose? What wisdom can the Latter-day Saint tradition offer a fractured world? The essays that follow present a variety of responses to these questions and to the context—our fractious planet—in which they are asked. The deep scholarship, ardent scripture study, hands-on experience, creative energies, and personal examples of the contributors to this volume are attempts at the hard work of distilling scriptural truth into actionable civic principles. If we cannot yet effect a global Zion where all people are unified and "pure in heart" (D&C 97:21), the challenge to work from where we are toward that goal remains before us.



We begin with the artist's statement about the quilt and quilt scraps that enliven the covers of our issue. Artist and author Linda Hoffman Kimball's textile artwork is a nonverbal exploration of the question "What makes for a good government?" Her short description of the process—and mishap—that came with the work's creation provides a glimpse into the work in progress we aspire to: Zion.



The first few articles in the issue all address in one way or another the underlying principles that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must look to as we consider the question of what good government is and how we can best achieve and maintain it. The central thesis of Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye's excellent lead essay is that good government requires individual goodness. Citizens must first look inward and govern themselves and then look outward and honor the fundamental truth that we are all children of God.

In "Fellow Travelers, Brothers and Sisters, Children of God," Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf recounts the soul-wrenching experience he and his

wife Harriett had as they visited Auschwitz a number of years ago and identifies three basic principles that we must honor if we hope to prevent anything akin to the horrors of the Holocaust from ever happening again.

With impressive thoroughness, Robert F. Schwartz examines patterns of inequality in the Book of Mormon and argues that in the history it recounts, privilege and disadvantage become “defining lenses” through which various individuals and groups view each other and construct their narratives. One of the great lessons of the Book of Mormon is that societies are able to prosper only as they prioritize equality.

Melissa Dalton-Bradford details the complex, protracted, but largely successful process Germany has undertaken toward reconciliation for its crimes related to the Holocaust and asserts that if the United States hopes to heal as a nation, we must follow Germany’s lead by openly acknowledging, confronting, and repenting of the racism that blights not only our own history but also our present.

Susan R. Madsen begins her piece by clearly establishing the quantifiable benefits that come when women are involved in government and politics. She then examines scriptural injunctions and other Church teachings that speak to the need for members to be engaged participants in civic life and concludes by asserting that as women in the Church take an active role in politics, they can “work hand in hand with the Lord to further his work in ways that this world has never seen before.”



The articles in the next section offer models explaining how Latter-day Saint groups and individuals are making a difference in the practice of government, as well as identifying the principles from which their actions are derived. President Dallin H. Oaks’s November 2021 Joseph Smith Lecture at the University of Virginia, “Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination,” demonstrates how finding common ground in the midst of fundamental disagreements has sparked creative solutions and sturdy legal frameworks that bypass opposing ideologies. His experience shows that “the goals of both sides are best served by resolving differences through mutual respect, shared understanding, and good faith negotiations.”

Keith Allred, executive director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse, shares his insights into a core principle identified by Mosiah and James Madison: initiatives that achieve broad support across many constituent divisions are likely to produce good policy. Promoting such initiatives, as Keith does through his organization CommonSense American, is a way of leading political parties, which are too often opposed to good policy merely because it was suggested by the other party, to make more effective laws.

Sharlee Mullins Glenn describes how Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) came to be and outlines the core principles upon which the organization was founded. She also addresses some of the challenges the group has faced in its quest to enliven political engagement, quell rancor and political divisions, and teach a nonpartisan, nonviolent, faith-fueled better way to live up to the responsibilities of citizenship.

The article that follows is by the current executive directors of MWEG, Jennifer Walker Thomas and Emma Petty Addams, who share how this organization is “providing the scaffolding to help women build a new identity as peaceful, competent, and principled citizens who have the ability to change the political landscape in lasting and ethical ways.”



The next two articles show the many ways the use of truthful, appropriate language affects the conduct of good government. Grounding her arguments in President Oaks’s call for Latter-day Saints “to moderate and to unify” as they participate in political discourse and activity around contested issues, Kristine Hansen describes how we can become faithful “citizen rhetors” who persuade others by developing an ethos of warmth, civility, and gratitude, by welcoming diversity, and by being truthful.

Ed Carter’s contribution is catalyzed by Elder D. Todd Christofferson’s address to executives of the Inter-American Press Association in 2017. Christofferson reminded these journalists that their “privilege and calling as Journalist[s] is to facilitate discussion and debate between people who have different beliefs, races, nationalities, and political opinions. An informed citizenry, it is often said, is the bulwark of democracy.” In extending and amplifying that charge, Carter reminds us that by seeking out and supporting good journalism, we will help the press perform its proper functions of being a check on government, giving voice to the voiceless, building communities that “build trust and support civic participation,” and affirming the human dignity that requires freedom of expression as the foundation for all other human rights.



The next set of articles offers examples of Church members serving in various branches of government. Thomas B. Griffith, retired judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, discusses the role of federal judges in good government, arguing that this role is important but limited. A judge’s loyalty must be to the Constitution and to the law, not to the president who appointed him or her or to his or her own faith, family, personal beliefs, or political party.

Patrick Moran provides us with an overview of the involvement of Latter-day Saints in foreign policy and foreign service, beginning in the

nineteenth century and continuing to today, when considerable numbers of Church members are making careers in foreign service. He explains both the challenges Church members face and especially the opportunities their beliefs create for them in postings throughout the world.

And Tinesha Zandamela, whose work has been at the local and state level, describes her own experiences volunteering, running for office, and initiating programs to serve those who are often overlooked. It is worth noting that Tinesha has done all this in her teens and twenties; at twenty-eight, she is a first-year law student.



We have made Jessica Preece's piece the final essay of this collection because we hope that what it teaches will be the final principle readers take away from this study of what leads to good government. Despite the extreme partisanship, incivility, and dishonesty that have taken root in our political system, Preece encourages us not to become cynical but to choose hope, which activist and writer Mariame Kaba calls "a discipline,"<sup>1</sup> that will lead us to act "in the direction of the good things we hope for."

We encourage you to sit with the analysis and criticism offered by these writers. Historian and cultural critic Jacques Barzun wrote that "criticism . . . aims at action. True, not all objects can be acted on at once, . . . but thought is plastic and within our control, and thought is a form of action. To come to see, in the light of criticism, a situation as different from what it seemed to be, is to have accomplished an important act."<sup>2</sup> We hope that you will come to see some things differently through reading this issue of *BYU Studies Quarterly*. We hope that new visions will invigorate you with God's grace to stand up and get engaged in the arduous, practical, imperative quest for "good government."

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*BYU Studies would like to thank Mormon Women for Ethical Government for their support of this special issue. We especially thank Sharlee Mullins Glenn and Linda Hoffman Kimball (founding members) and Kristine Haglund (a current senior director) for serving as guest editors of this issue. Their networks of colleagues, voluminous knowledge, and endless hours of work have led to the breadth and depth of the content you are about to read.*

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1. Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Naomi Murakawa (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 26–27.

2. Jacques Barzun, *Science: The Glorious Entertainment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 6.

# Creating “Good Government”

*Linda Hoffman Kimball*

Creating an image that represents the quest for good government was a meaty challenge. There are so many opinions, so many priorities, so many personalities. How do power, choice, cooperation, force, fear, aspirations, and even geography impact how a society will structure itself and relate to others whose priorities vary?

Compiling a journal of essays on “what makes for a good government” is an analytic, orderly business of clarity, reason, and articulate supporting arguments. It was a great workout for my left brain. Putting that vast concept into something visual, intuitive, suggestive, and subjective is the muscular territory of the right brain. I unleashed mine and had a lively romp.

As a visual artist, I work in many media—painting, drawing, print-making, photography, collage, and more. Much of my time during the pandemic involved fabric—making hundreds of face masks and dozens of quilts. It was soul-soothing for me. During the long quarantine, I became familiar with the wonderful resource for textile artists called [Spoonflower.com](https://www.spoonflower.com). It is a company that provides designs by gifted artists that can be printed on demand onto a variety of fabrics.

I made searches on Spoonflower.com using headers that visually depicted some aspect of government (like maps, declarations, flags, justice, peace, war, conflict, leaders, power, boundaries, and more). My plan then was to cut them into squares, arrange them, and sew them into a quilt.

Then I fell off an e-bike and broke my right wrist. (My dominant hand still can’t quite maneuver the complex device called scissors.) This is where my “ministering sisters” came to my rescue. Before long they

had all the fabric cut into tidy squares for me. Temporarily unable to use a sewing machine, I would have to glue the squares down rather than sew them together. My husband bought me a large piece of foam core and drew a pencil grid on it for me to place the fabrics just so. I went to work because they had gone to work on my behalf. It was a group effort.

I spent several days arranging and rearranging the fabrics. Primarily I wanted a dark/light/dark/light pattern in diagonals, regardless of what the images on those fabrics were. When I had a pattern that pleased me visually, I was delighted with jarring juxtapositions. The peace dove right next to military insignia and bombs? Crowns and armor of the ancient realms near the flags of modern nations? Maps abutting hearts to represent all the skin tones of the world? How does this assemblage not just burst into flames from all the contrasts and conflicts?

It does not catch fire because it—symbolically at least—is “bound” by all human hearts dedicated to the hard work and necessary wrestles of what John Lewis referred to as “Good Trouble. Necessary Trouble.”

And lest we imagine that the “trouble” we go through to make government good will end up being tidy and orderly, there is the image on the back cover. It is a reminder. This is a work in progress. It is “All hands on deck!” It is constant and ongoing. All the scraps, disarray, and chaos can only succeed if there is an undercurrent of love, cooperation, commitment, and hard work woven into the ongoing process.

Below is a list of the Spoonflower designers I included in making this art:

**aftermyart:** “Soft Blue and Cream Map,” “Teeny Tiny Flags,” “World Flags, Navy,” “World Map Fabric Repeat”; **cooper+craft:** “Turkish Horsemen Yellow Turmeric”; **darla\_**

**duckie:** “Preamble We the People”; **kirstenkatz:** “17250-300-PEACE-DOVES-KKATZ-SF”; **krolja:** “military”; **landpen-**

**guin:** “Declaration of Independence,” “Declaration of Independence Signatures,” “Small Scale Lewis Chessmen,” “Watercolor Knights on Charcoal,” “Women’s Right around the World on Yellow”; **littlerhodydesign:** “civil rights”; **melaniemorey:**

“Good Trouble,” “Love All”; **retroagogo:** “God Bless Our King and Queen”; **southern\_cheyenne\_art:** “Kitfox Warriors”; **studiotendesign:** “Royal Crowns—Yellow on Black”; **sunni\_designs:** “king red”; **weavingmajor:** “declaration of independence.”



# Good Government Begins with Self-Government

*Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye*

## Good Government Requires Goodness

For nearly a thousand years (from around 960 to 1905 CE), becoming a government official in imperial China required passing a battery of multiday, multisubject, anonymously graded written exams requiring decades of intensive preparation.<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth-century European political thinkers, including Voltaire, admired China's system for using meritocratic criteria, as opposed to aristocratic birth, to select government officials.<sup>2</sup> The exams tested not only scholars' abilities in history, philosophy, government, and literature, but also—in theory at least—their personal cultivation of moral virtues such as benevolence and integrity. Good government required goodness.

Chinese children as young as six or seven began their education by committing a body of Confucian classical texts to memory, a mental feat akin to American first graders learning to recite, in Latin, the entire text of the Book of Psalms and the New Testament. One of the very first

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1. Benjamin A. Elman, "Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (February, 1991): 7–28; Jacques Gernet, *Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion 1250–1276*, trans. H. M. Wright (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 65. In this patriarchal system, only men could be appointed to government posts.

2. Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, "Prussian Emulations of a Chinese Meritocratic Ideal? Early Modern Europe Debating How China Selected Civil Servants," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2014): 425–41; Ssu-yü T'eng, "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 7, no. 4 (September 1943): 267–312, esp. 281.



Confucian classics that maturing scholars studied in depth was a relatively short text called *The Great Learning* (daxue 大學), dating to about the third century BCE. Robert Eno, a contemporary scholar of Confucianism, describes *The Great Learning* as “a beginner’s handbook in how to perfect oneself ethically and become capable of transforming the world into a universal utopia.”<sup>3</sup>

The optimistic view of the potential and power of human self-cultivation in *The Great Learning* stands alongside Joseph Smith’s inspired teachings of the ability of God’s children to learn and grow eternally into the stature of their Father and Mother in Heaven.<sup>4</sup> The influential opening passages of *The Great Learning* state that those who wish to transform the world for good cannot accomplish this without paying attention to smaller tasks: “In ancient times those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their countries; those who wished to order their countries first aligned their families; those who wished to align their families first cultivated themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

*The Great Learning* teaches that only as the self is cultivated can individuals gain the capacity and influence to transform the wider social circles around them: the family, the country, and eventually, the world. “When one’s self is cultivated, one’s family may be aligned; when one’s family is aligned, one’s country may be ordered; when one’s country is ordered, the world may be set at peace.”<sup>6</sup>

### Self-Government Disciplines the Natural Self

*The Great Learning*’s ancient insight that good government begins with self-government stands alongside the Savior’s teachings in the Gospels. Acknowledging the human tendency to focus on others’ flaws instead of confronting our own, Jesus asked: “Why do you look at the splinter in the eye of your brother or sister and do not consider the log in your own eye? Or how do you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there is a log in your own eye? Hypocrite, first take the

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3. Robert Eno, “The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean: An Online Teaching Translation,” June 2016, version 1.0, p. 7, <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23422/Daxue-Zhongyong.pdf>.

4. See “Mother in Heaven,” Gospel Topics Essay, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng>.

5. My translation is based on Robert Eno’s translation; see note 3.

6. My translation is based on Robert Eno’s translation; see note 3.

log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly the splinter in the eye of your brother or sister.”<sup>7</sup>

Here, Jesus’s use of the word *hypocrite* stings. We do not want to be in this position, and the way to avoid it is to do things in the proper order. To see others clearly, we must first address our own flaws and biases. Even after we have cleared our vision, taking things out of other people’s eyes is an intimate, sensitive undertaking. Without proper communication, well-meaning efforts to remove splinters become painful jabs in the eye.

Jesus gave us the Golden Rule, based on the teachings of ancient Judaism. The Golden Rule can be found within nearly every other religion. When a disciple of Confucius asked, “Is there any one word that can serve as a principle for the conduct of life?” Confucius replied, “Perhaps the word ‘reciprocity’: Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.”<sup>8</sup> We Latter-day Saints have repeated these basic Christian teachings in countless Sunday lessons, sung them in hymns, located them within seconds in annual youth scripture-chase competitions. And yet so often, we Latter-day Saints, myself included, succumb to the temptation to participate in the eye-jabbing political partisanship, cultural contentions, and sneering incivility of our time.

In “the real world” of political competition, some might argue that achieving concrete political wins is necessary and more important than adhering to philosophical ideals or following scriptural injunctions, even if they came from Jesus. “Politics is a dirty business, and one has to fight dirty,” friends have said. The prophet Nephi, observing the temptations of the last days, captured this attitude precisely when describing how people might justify unethical actions: “[God] will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this. . . . Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts” (2 Ne. 28:8–9). Of course, quoting scripture to support why “they” are wrong and “I” am righteous is the oldest trick in the book. It is *also* the oldest *mistake* in the book too, because, as *The Great Learning* and the teachings of Christ

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7. Matthew 7:3–5. I am using Thomas Wayment’s translation of the New Testament for Latter-day Saints. Thomas A. Wayment, *The New Testament: A Translation for Latter-day Saints, a Study Bible* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019).

8. “Selections from the Analects,” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. William Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 27 [15:23].

have pointed out, the way to bring about righteousness in the world is to look inward.

Priorities in good government all come down to a question of whether what we Latter-day Saints teach our children in Primary, or what missionaries teach investigators, is really an eternal truth, or just a platitude: *Are we really children of God? Is every human being really a beloved spirit child of heavenly parents, created in their image, possessing their divine nature and potential?*

### The Truth of Our Relationships

If we are all children of God, then no matter where we live, no matter under which form of government we live (democratic, authoritarian, theocratic, oligarchic, and so forth) or with whom we live (among our political rivals or among our political “tribe”), all national or political affiliations must be subordinated to the truth of this relationship. Christ taught us to love “enemies” who cursed us and persecuted us, because, in fact, we and they are all children of God. Within God’s universe, the true things that will not pass away, even after suns collapse and cease to shine, are not political platforms or government policies, which change with time and place, but relationships between eternal intelligences. If we are all children of God, then it is political platforms that have to be theoretical and relationships that have to be concrete.

A principle of Confucianism is “the rectification of names” (zheng-ming 正名), which means seeking to embody the roles and responsibilities inherent in our names, titles, and relationships. A mother and father should love, guide, and nurture. A teacher should transmit wisdom and cultivate potential. A student should respectfully receive teachings and be diligent in her study.

What do healthy relationships between sisters and brothers look like? The divine relationship with our siblings, the fellow children of God, supersedes all other earthly roles (in the eternal scheme of things, even parents and children are siblings). This fundamental peerdorm, radically egalitarian against the backdrop of the world’s hierarchies and classes, underpins Christ’s basic teachings on how human beings should relate to each other:

“In all things, do the same to others as you desire them to do to you” (Matt. 7:12; see also 3 Ne. 14:12).

“Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39; see also Deut. 5:14).

These teachings were given not only to people in ancient Israel but also to the peoples of the Book of Mormon. Alma, the priest who quit

the government of the corrupt King Noah and refused to accept a kingship himself because of the unrighteous hierarchy it might create, taught “that every man should love his neighbor as himself” (Mosiah 23:15). When the resurrected Christ visited the Nephites, Lamanites, Anti-Nephi-Lehis, and other peoples of that land, he repeated these basic teachings (see 3 Ne. 14:2–12).

### Christ’s Most Basic Commandments Are the Hardest to Follow

Jesus’s basic teachings on loving our fellow beings, even those who seem extremely unlovable, put us in a difficult situation with regard to government and self-government. How can we love our political “enemies,” especially when the real-world consequences of losing seem so high? How can we pray for the welfare of those who seem bent on destroying ours? How can the Savior ask us to look at the people we most despise and see him in their place?

One example of the strength of the temptation to contentious incivility from my own neighborhood was when unruly protesters—many of whom were undoubtedly Latter-day Saints because of our majority presence in the local population—disrupted a school board meeting to express their opposition to mask wearing. Protestors ignored the rules of order, shouted and chanted to drown out board members trying to conduct the meeting, and rushed up to the front of the room to seize equipment and accost board members. One example of political partisanship from my own mind was the election-season afternoon I drove past a group of adults and children waving campaign posters on a busy corner. *Idiots*, I snarled in my head. *Losers*. Without even knowing them, I fantasized about pulling over and shouting, “You’re pathetic! You’re turning our country into garbage!” In the most unfortunate examples in recent memory, Latter-day Saints have even participated in violent insurrection, intimidated medical and health-care workers, or made threats against others’ lives.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Larry D. Curtis, “Man Photographed Hanging from Senate Balcony Identified as Religious Idaho Man,” *KJZZ*, January 8, 2021, <https://kjzz.com/news/local/man-photographed-hanging-from-senate-balcony-identified-as-religious-idaho-man>; Amy Donaldson, “Anti-mask Protestors Target State Epidemiologist Dr. Angela Dunn,” *Deseret News*, <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/10/29/21540624/anti-mask-protesters-target-state-epidemiologist-dr-angela-dunn>; Maggie Baska, “Gay Mormon Student Sent Death Threats after Being Labelled ‘Anti-Christ’ by Professor,” *Yahoo News*, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/gay-mormon-student-sent-death-16463369.html>.

Alas, these are not the finest moments of people who have made sacred covenants to follow Jesus Christ and join him in bearing the burdens of God's children. Does this mean that Jesus's teachings lack power? That the restored gospel is weak sauce? That we Latter-day Saints are all talk and no walk?

What I think it means is that we must renew our commitment to the Savior's most basic, elementary teachings on how to treat our fellow beings. What is the point of extolling the "fullness" of an ongoing Restoration—such as the beautiful temples dotting the earth, additional testaments of Christ in latter-day scripture, and so on—if we ignore Christ's most fundamental, oft-repeated, easy-to-understand commandments? We definitely don't want to be deserving of the Savior's criticism of the established religious leaders in his community who honored the letter but not the spirit of the law. "You tithe a tenth of the mint and the dill and the cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law, the judgment and the mercy and the faith," he said. "Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but drink down the camel" (Matt. 23:23–24).<sup>10</sup>

### Basic Tests

It's not that we don't want to follow Jesus. But it's so easy to get carried away. This is why Jesus repeatedly warned that there would be those who called him "Lord, Lord" and would think they were wonderful but were actually disregarding his teachings and jabbing his people in the eye (see Matt. 7:21–23; 25:34–45). Luckily, the scriptures supply us with some basic tests we can use to measure our actions and make course corrections.<sup>11</sup> *This is the crucial point:* These are not tests to share in Sunday School, when we are all sitting together in rows, wearing nice clothes. They are tests to apply in one's heart for every action, including every post on social media, every link we share, every interaction with random strangers, every vote, and every tense conversation:

**Basic Test #1, Substitution** (Matt. 7:12; 3 Ne. 14:12): How would I like to be treated if I were in \_\_\_\_\_'s place and \_\_\_\_\_ were in mine?

**Basic Test #2, My Standard of Respect** (Matt. 22:39; Mosiah 23:15): What would show \_\_\_\_\_ the same love and respect I expect for myself?

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10. Translation from David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017), 47.

11. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Daily Restoration," *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 77–79.

**Basic Test #3, When Do I Say “No” to God?** (Mosiah 2:17): Serving others = serving God. Declining to serve others = declining to serve God. Are there any particular groups of people I find myself especially disliking and therefore reluctant to serve? What can I do in order to make myself more useful to them and therefore more useful in God’s service?

**Basic Test #4, The Lowest of the Low** (Matt. 25:34–45): When you read the following sentence, putting yourself in the position of “I,” who comes to mind?

*I would be delighted if this most horrible person lost their job, suffered public humiliation, and developed painful, oozing sores for two weeks:*

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Who popped up in your mind? A despised politician? A workplace nemesis? A loud-mouthed presence on social media? An ex-family member? The perpetrator of an awful crime? Now instead fill in the blank as Jesus has instructed us to do: with his name. “As you did this to one of the least of my brothers or sisters,” he explained, “you have done it to me” (Matt. 25:40). In helping us understand “the least of these,” he gave some examples—the malnourished strangers needing hospitality, those struggling with illness, and prisoners. The last example, convicted criminals, is telling. Jesus didn’t say, “I was wrongfully accused in prison, waiting to be exonerated, and you visited me,” although it is certainly likely that people in such situations could be found in Roman prisons. He said he was also there among people who had made huge moral mistakes and harmed others and who were possibly completely unrepentant (Matt. 25:34–45). “The least of these” can mean “the lowest of the low.”

This sort of arduous human-to-human engagement is a fundamental task that Jesus gave his disciples. Here are some more “test questions,” beyond the scriptural diagnostics, that might help us do a better job at being sisters and brothers dedicated to supporting and influencing each other, instead of enemies and fools dedicated to destroying and undermining each other:

- What kinds of experiences have others had that shape their different choices?
- Do I know of their experiences and the cultural context of their lives?
- What could I do to acquire understanding of these others’ cultures on their own terms and in their own contexts (not as presented by people who dislike them)?
- Could I summarize their specific concerns regarding a political issue in a way they would recognize as fair and accurate?

- Am I aware of the good they do in their world, the people who depend on them, and the time they spend in service?
- Do I compare my strengths with their weakness, my awareness with their ignorance, my competence with their struggles, my most-emphasized value with their least-emphasized value?

When I apply these tests and questions, I discover my “righteous indignation” is half-baked. When I take some time to think about it, I realize people with such “opposite” views in my family and circle of friends are some of the best people I know. I also discover that I’m not the greatest example—more like the example of “what not to do.”

In one dialogue from a Confucian text on good government dating to around the fourth century BCE, the king of Liang consulted with the philosopher Mencius. “I don’t understand why more people aren’t coming to live in my kingdom,” the king complained. “I do indeed exert the utmost effort in their care. If it’s a bad year on this side of the river, I evacuate as many as I can to the east side and also send relief grain. If it’s a bad year on the east side of the river, I do the same thing. None of the other kings in the neighboring kingdoms does what I do.”<sup>12</sup>

“Since your majesty is fond of war, let me use an example from war,” replied Mencius. “The soldiers move forward to the beat of drums, but as soon as the weapons clash together, they throw down their armor and flee, trailing their weapons behind them. Some run a hundred steps and then stop; others run fifty steps and then stop. The fifty-steppers mock the hundred-steppers. What do you think of this?”

“They can’t mock,” said the king. “They didn’t go a hundred steps, but they still ran.”

“You, your Majesty, are a fifty-stepper,” said Mencius. He then enumerated the many tasks of good government, such as doing agricultural work in season, protecting fisheries from depletion, protecting forests from overharvesting, planting mulberry trees for silkworms, opening granaries to the hungry. Although the king prided himself on accomplishing the single task of transporting people and grain during famines, there were many other ways in which he had failed to do work his people needed. Worst of all, the king blamed hunger in his kingdom on a “bad year” instead of on his own lack of action.<sup>13</sup>

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12. My translation and paraphrase is based on the translation in the online Chinese Text Project: James Legge, trans., “Liang Hui Wang I,” Chinese Text Project, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://ctext.org/mengzi/liang-hui-wang-i>.

13. Legge, “Liang Hui Wang I.”



All of us are, in some sense, fifty-steppers. We may be great at attending to certain problems in public education, or family structures, or racial and social justice, or climate change, or fiscal reform, or environmental degradation, or any of the many urgent moral and existential issues of our time. But we all have limitations. On at least a few counts, every one of us makes some big problems worse, not better.

Instead of undermining or discrediting each other, we can acknowledge that the world is full of problems and everyone has distinctive perspectives, talents, and energies to apply to them. Everyone should be allowed to be multidimensional. Even in the realm of political competition, we can seek to persuade our sisters and brothers in a way that demonstrates respect for their motivations and effort. We will never be able to influence people if they perceive that we don't understand or respect them.

### Meanings of “Self”

Here I want to be clear about three things with regard to cultivating the “self”:

1. We don't have to feel responsible for singlehandedly transforming the world all at once. King Benjamin said, “And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that [people] should run faster than [they] have strength” (Mosiah 4:27). This caution is especially important for those for whom engaging in some public spaces means risking threats and actual physical harm, particularly members of marginalized groups. The responsibility for reform in *good* governance should fall most heavily on those at the apex of systems of power, such as systems of authority, money, cultural influence, and so on.
2. There is nothing wrong with engaging enthusiastically in political processes such as debates or elections. There is something magical about how individual people come together to form larger communities that work to bring about change in the world around them. There's also something magical when people from both sides of an issue come together to compromise and secure the common good. The Lord encourages people to be “anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27). However, the Epistle of James also warns that we should be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For human wrath does not accomplish God's righteousness” (James 1:19–20). In victory, we can be generous; in defeat, gracious.

3. “Self-government” takes on an additional meaning where democratic systems are concerned, because leaders are chosen from among the people themselves. “We the people,” the governors and the governed, are one body—not just Labour, Greens, Republicans, or Christian Democrats, nor any sort of identity category. Within a given democratic country and system, all people make up the national self. Supporting harm to or suppression of any group within a national system is self-harm and self-suppression. When the hand gets a wound, we don’t ignore it because the feet are fine. In this spirit, President Dallin H. Oaks recently taught, “Of course Black lives matter! That is an eternal truth all reasonable people should support.”<sup>14</sup>

We Latter-day Saints are among the world’s most enthusiastic when it comes to expanding our personal liabilities by expanding the size of the “body” to which we belong. We energetically undertake the distance-and-death-defying project of sealing families together, uniting not only parents and children but also spouses, great-uncles, and cousins from Canada to Colombia. We send out tens of thousands of missionaries speaking languages including Ilocano, Indonesian, and Italian to invite people to join us in covenants that not only reach upward to heaven but also outward as we shoulder the burdens of our fellow beings. The global burdens we are hastening to bear include poverty, violence, corruption, materialism, and popular falsehoods. The Latter-day Saint “self” extends beyond national boundaries, beyond types of physical bodies, and includes sisters and brothers through all generations and throughout all the earth.

This is why, though we may have differing views about immigration policy, Latter-day Saints do not scoff at refugees or engage in racist denigrations of immigrants from other countries any more than we would scoff at Mary and Joseph in Egypt or denigrate the Savior when he comes to us as a stranger. If we really despised association with our fellow sisters and brothers from certain other countries, what would be the point of doing missionary and temple work, which ties us into covenant relationships much longer lasting than political ones? This is why, though we may have differing views of social policy or tax policy, we do not dismiss whole groups of people as inherently villainous or evil. Are God’s children really endowed with dignity and holiness, or not?

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14. Dallin H. Oaks, Brigham Young University devotional, October 27, 2020, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/racism-other-challenges/>.

## Good Government Begins with Self-Government

*The Great Learning's* insight into how a person may change the world helps clarify both the quality and the scale of the Savior's teachings. Our discipleship, or *discipline*, begins with the self-restraint required to avoid the nearly irresistible tendency to blame and judge others. It begins when we do the uncomfortable work of cultivating humility, patience, and greater awareness of our own biases and blind spots.

As my uncle Professor Charles Inouye recently pointed out in a lecture at the Church History Department in Salt Lake City, the spirit of Elijah is the spirit of knitting generations and peoples together across human-made divisions, separations, and factions. It is the spirit of anti-racism and inclusion, gathering in all of the family of God (see Mal. 4; see also Moses 7:32–33).

Latter-day Saints have earned a popular reputation for self-discipline when it comes to food, drink, sleep, and sex. We must extend this reputation for self-discipline to civic conduct and interpersonal interaction. Sometimes in Sunday School, people mistakenly repeat King Benjamin's warning about "the natural self" as if it were a warning against the desires of the flesh.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, Benjamin presents the natural self as the opposite of five qualities that have nothing to do with carnal desires and everything to do with how we behave in *relationships* with God and our fellow beings. Fighting the natural self means learning to be "submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love" (Mosiah 3:19). The natural self threatens to have its way in the knee-jerk reaction, the impulse to dominate a discussion, or the exhilarating momentum of the online or in-person mob.

The tools for our project of self-governance are already at hand. In their recent book, *Proclaim Peace*, Latter-day Saint scholars Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher declare that Latter-day Saints "are part of a potentially powerful but often overlooked resource for community-based peacebuilding."<sup>16</sup> The authors playfully propose a "Just Ward Theory" of peacemaking (building on "just war theory" in academia). They point out the many Church structures, such as geographically defined

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15. My thanks to Elder Gerrit W. Gong for recently using the phrase "the natural self" as a gender-inclusive way to discuss "the natural man" in the twenty-first century. Gerrit W. Gong, "Trust Again," *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 98.

16. Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2021), 217.

congregations, ministering assignments, and missionary work, that persistently connect us to others outside our comfort zones.

Let's consider the 7.7 billion people on the earth today, all of whom are God's children, and value each person's "weight" on the eternal scales just as much as that of our own self. What does it mean to be  $\frac{1}{7,700,000,000}$  (to say nothing of the dead)? This demographic view helps us understand how little one person can actually know about "the human condition" and the right way to be in the world. For example, even if I were to master learning about the cultures and perspectives of everyone in my home country, the United States, I would end up knowing only about 6 percent of my sisters and brothers globally.

The odds are extremely low that our individual platform of assumptions, opinions, and values is 100 percent correct and that everyone else should align their worldviews and choices with ours. It is much more likely that our personal platforms have an idiosyncratic shape due to the particular economic, cultural, religious, and political situations into which we were born. People born in Senegal tend to be Muslims. People born in Alabama tend to be Republicans. In human history, because of China's large premodern and present-day population and influence on other populous civilizations, people having conversations about good government have tended to be East Asian Confucians, though other philosophers from places like India, Greece, and so on have also contributed much to humanity's moral understanding.

Here are some more "test questions" that might help us start seeing more of the 99.99999999 percent of the beloved children God currently sees:

1. What percentage of my trusting relationships and thoughtful conversations are with members of my same "kind of people"? How can I expand the circle of people with whom I have a two-way relationship?
2. Can I speak someone else's language? Can I cook someone else's favorite meal?
3. What do I know of the experiences of fellow Latter-day Saints outside my own country? (Check out the Global Histories in the Church History section of Gospel Library.)<sup>17</sup>

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17. "Global Histories," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories?lang=eng>.

4. Since statistically some of the planks in my “personal political platform” are bound to be wrong, or at least able to be drastically improved, where’s an area of policy where I can practice openness to others’ ideas and expertise?
5. Can I name five Latter-day Saint general leaders with a different gender, ethnicity, or nationality from mine? What have they taught recently?

A wide-angle view of our sisters and brothers in the present and in the past connects us with the wisdom of many inspired thinkers who have wrestled with the question of morality and good governance. Over and over, we see that those who wish to transform the world for good must begin with themselves.

Speaking to the Church amid the ravages of the Second World War in 1943, Latter-day Saint Apostle John A. Widtsoe put it this way: “Each individual . . . holds in his own hands the peace of the world. That makes me responsible for the peace of the world, and makes you individually responsible for the peace of the world. The responsibility cannot be shifted to someone else.”<sup>18</sup>

### What Lack I Yet?

Asking “What lack I yet?” like the rich young man in scripture (Matt. 19:20), yet being willing to obey the Savior’s answer, we must govern our natural selves, disciplining our tendency to uncharitable or untrustworthy interaction with the same strict boundaries we set regarding drunkenness or pornography. With the same systematic approach missionaries use to find people to teach, we must seek out fellow beings who are, to us, “the least” in our consciousness and understanding. President Bonnie H. Cordon recently called on us to “look *round about again*,” as Christ did, to discern how others feel and what they need.<sup>19</sup>

If we apply ourselves to cultivating the self, we will, in accordance with *The Great Learning* and through the Savior’s gift of repentance, develop new hearts and minds. We will be able to internalize the priorities of our Heavenly Father and Mother, who created all with the

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18. John A. Widtsoe, in *One Hundred Fourteenth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1943), 113.

19. Bonnie H. Cordon, “Come to Christ and Don’t Come Alone,” *Liahona* 45, no. 11 (November 2021): 12, emphasis in original.

potential to become like them in sight and in power.<sup>20</sup> We will develop the capacity to shed forth the love of Christ in our families, neighborhoods, countries, and beyond, in joyful preparation for the day when the Lord will come again and all the world will be at peace.

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20. David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "A Mother There: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 71–97, discusses the longstanding Latter-day Saint theological tradition of belief in Mother in Heaven as a full deity and co-creator with the Father.

# Fellow Travelers, Brothers and Sisters, Children of God

*Dieter F. Uchtdorf*

*Adapted from an address Elder Uchtdorf presented at the John A. Widtsoe Symposium at the University of Southern California, April 24, 2015.*

For a long time, my wife, Harriet, and I felt a need to visit Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp and site of the brutal murders of millions during World War II. So when we were in Eastern Europe a few years ago, we made a point of making a pilgrimage to the site. One cannot visit such a place without coming away from it changed. We walked along the same paths that so many others had walked. One could almost see weary mothers holding the hands of terrified children; the hobbling steps of the elderly and the infirm; the despair in the eyes of those caught in a cold and terrible nightmare; the immeasurable sadness of those who understood what was about to happen. I could imagine them looking at one another—families, parents, children, loved ones, friends, and strangers—their eyes filled with fear, grief, and resignation. To this day my wife and I have a difficult time talking about our feelings in that place of unimaginable horror. In many ways, it is too painful to talk about.

As I stood there, I wondered yet again, “Who could have done something like this?” I had learned about the Holocaust and Auschwitz all my life. In Germany, this is not something that is talked about once every few years. It is addressed regularly. Harriet and I, our children, and our grandchildren all attended German schools that ensured we understood the cruelty and inhumanity that happened during this time. So although I was not surprised by what I saw, at the same time it all seemed so



incomprehensible. How could anyone be so heartless and past feeling to do this? Who but a demon could do such evil?

The commandant of Auschwitz for much of the time of its operation was Rudolf Höss, a man who grew up in a strict religious family. His father wanted him to enter the priesthood, but Rudolf abandoned the thought as he became immersed in politics. What kind of a person was he? Rudolf Höss described himself as “gentle, good-natured, and very helpful.”<sup>1</sup> His daughter remembers him as “the nicest man in the world.”<sup>2</sup> Later, at Nuremberg, his defense rested on the fact that he was only following orders; that he was doing his duty. Rudolf Höss supervised the murders of perhaps millions of people.<sup>3</sup>

The first Jews to be executed at Auschwitz were from Upper Silesia. I was born in Ostrava, not far from Upper Silesia. I am troubled to know that at the very time and at the very place when I was taking my first steps, soldiers from the Gestapo were rounding up terrified families and transporting them in railroad cars to that horrible place where they were destined to take their final steps.<sup>4</sup>

Although I was only a small child during the war, I still recognize that the actions of my people affected me and the entire world. They left an inexpressible sorrow and an inextinguishable agony that is still felt to this day throughout the world. As Harriet and I walked away from that place that has been hallowed by the blood of so many innocents, we felt changed. We were different. We had learned and relearned important lessons that we must never forget. Three insights forcibly entered my heart and mind on that day.

### **The First Insight: We Hate Those We Do Not Really Know**

As I reflect on what happened in Germany years ago, it breaks my heart to think of the hatred of my people towards those of the Jewish faith, the Roma, the political opposition, and many other groups. That this hatred led to such horrific atrocities is something I still cannot completely understand. Historians, politicians, and sociologists have all attempted

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1. Rudolph Höss, *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, ed. Steven Paskuly, trans. Andrew Pollinger (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992), 189.

2. Thomas Harding, “Hiding in N. Virginia, a Daughter of Auschwitz,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/hiding-in-n-virginia-a-daughter-of-auschwitz/2013/09/06/1314d648-04fd-11e3-a07f-49ddc7417125\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/hiding-in-n-virginia-a-daughter-of-auschwitz/2013/09/06/1314d648-04fd-11e3-a07f-49ddc7417125_story.html).

3. The museum at Auschwitz states that four million people died at Auschwitz. Others estimate a number between 2.5 and 2.8 million. See Höss, *Death Dealer*, 38 n. 30.

4. Höss, *Death Dealer*, 28–29.

to explain what happened and why. And yet how can one truly understand such evil?

I am convinced that one of the major reasons these atrocities happened is because it is human nature to be suspicious, envious, distrustful, and even hateful of those we do not really know. I suppose we are all guilty of this to one extent or another. Do we really know even our neighbors and colleagues—people we greet daily? The great tragedy is, if only we could take the time to truly know the other person, we would discover that perhaps we are not so different after all. He who once was our enemy can become our friend.

Before the pandemic, when we assembled for general conference, street preachers of opposing religious views would assemble outside our Conference Center. Some of them were polite and desired to engage in rational conversation. However, some were provocative. They shouted insults and engaged in in-your-face confrontations, all the while attempting to escalate conflict. Some of them carried signs accusing Church members of everything from being possessed of Satan to using the wrong dinner fork for salads.

One Church member decided to do something that actually terrified him. He went up to one of the most vocal protestors and nervously asked him if he'd like to go to lunch later in the week. This simple act of offering to spend time with an adversary changed both of their lives. They ended up becoming friends. After that, when this street preacher came to Salt Lake twice a year to protest at general conference, he stayed at the LDS friend's house. He prayed with him and his family. The two of them had "lengthy, honest, and sincere conversations about the realities of [their] doctrinal differences, but [they] always show[ed] each other friendship and respect."<sup>5</sup>

These two men exemplify an important lesson: the more we get to know those who are different from us, the more we learn that perhaps they are not so different from us after all. And the more we understand this, the more likely we are to set aside our distrust and dislike of others.

## The Second Insight: We Must Speak Up

We all have a responsibility to speak the truth; to stand for what is right; to lift up our voices in support of that which is good. Too often evil rises in the world because good men and women do not find the courage to

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5. Bryan Hall, "How I Became Friends with a Conference Protester," *LDS Living*, October 1, 2013, <http://ldsliving.com/story/73834-how-i-became-friends-with-a-conference-protester>.

speak against it. And sometimes terrible, preventable events happen because we fail to open our mouths.

### *Avianca Flight 52*

In January 1990, Avianca Flight 52 approached New York City. One hundred and fifty-eight people were on board the Boeing 707, including several children under the age of two who were coming to the United States to be adopted. In a terrible tragedy, the plane crashed, and seventy-three of the people on board lost their lives. Why did it crash? What caused this terrible tragedy?

The short answer is that the plane ran out of fuel. Fog and wind conditions had caused inbound delays and airspace congestion. And so the plane circled in the holding pattern, waiting for its turn to land. The crew reported to air traffic control that they were low on fuel but failed to communicate the seriousness of their situation. In addition, the cockpit crew was reluctant to question the judgment of the fifty-one-year-old captain, who had logged nearly 17,000 hours flying the Boeing 707. The captain and first officer, perhaps out of respect for the air traffic controllers, failed to demand a short approach for landing. When one air traffic controller passed responsibility for the flight to another, he neglected to state the nature of the emergency.

One person after another did not speak up clearly—perhaps out of respect for others, or because of timidity, or because of neglect. And so the engines of the Boeing 707 flamed out and the airplane crashed into a Long Island hillside. Perhaps the most tragic thing about this event is that it could have been prevented if only someone would have had the courage to speak up for the truth forcefully and courageously.

### *We Must Raise Our Voices*

In a world where intolerance, meanness, and hatred are so easily accessible, we have a responsibility to speak up and defend what is good and right. We have all heard the profound statement, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”<sup>6</sup> This applies

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6. This quotation, of unknown origin, has been attributed to Edmund Burke, who expressed the same idea in much more complicated prose: “When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.” Edmund Burke, “Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents 82–83,” (1770), in *Select Works of Edmund Burke* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 1:146. A similar thought was expressed by John Stuart Mill: “Bad men need nothing more to

to us today. We have a responsibility to speak up for goodness, for virtue, for kindness, and understanding. We have an obligation to defend the weak and stand up for the downtrodden.

In this age, perhaps more than any other since the beginning of time, we are exposed to bullies and braggarts—people who belittle others and preen themselves in prideful arrogance. We can and must stand and let our voices be heard. We don't need to be provocative or belittling, but we must not allow our fears to prevent us from lifting our voices in defense of what is right and good and true.

I wonder how history might have been changed had the people of Germany spoken with one voice against the evil that rose around them. Perhaps future generations will ask the same of us today. It is not easy to stand in defense of what is right. We will likely face insult and ridicule. We will likely risk opposition and discomfort. Nevertheless, we must have the courage to do so.

### **The Third Insight: Divine Love Is the Answer**

As I walked along the paths of Auschwitz, I wondered if there was any hope. Was mankind destined to reenact the same tragedy over and over, each generation writing its own verse and adding to the song of grief and sorrow of the ages? I so desperately wanted to hope it wasn't true that we learn from history that we cannot learn from history. The question that struck deep into my heart was, "Is there hope?" I believe there is. I know there is. And what is that hope?

Must we all believe the same creed? Espouse the same political opinions? Root for the same football team? No. That will never happen. Nevertheless, there is one virtue—one quality—that could solve all the world's ills, cure all the hatred, and mend every wound. If we only learned to *love God as our Father in Heaven*, this would give us *purpose* in life. If we only learned to *love our fellow man as our brothers and sisters*, this would give us *compassion*.

After all, these are God's great commandments—to love God and to love our fellow man. If we distill religion down to its essence, we nearly always recognize that love is not merely the goal of religion; it is the path of true discipleship. It is also the destination. If we love as Christ loved, if we truly follow the path he practiced and preached, there is a chance for

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compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing." "Inaugural Address at the University of St. Andrews, February 1, 1867," in *Littell's Living Age*, no. 1189, fourth series, no. 50 (Boston: Littell and Gay, March 16, 1867), 664.

us to avoid the echoing tragedies of history and the seemingly unavoidable fatal flaws of man.

Will compassion for others bring light into the darkness? Will it allow us to part the clouds and see clearly? Yes. For though we are all born blind, through the Light of Christ we can see past darkness and illusion and understand things as they really are. I am convinced that had my countrymen felt and applied the power of divine love and compassion, the Holocaust never would have happened. The evil that befell the world would have been prevented. Such heartache would not have descended upon the planet.

It is easy to love those who wear the same color of jerseys that we do. It is easy to forgive those who are like us. But what about those who are not on our team? What about those who hate us? Who curse us?

We are to love our enemies. “Bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them which despitefully use . . . and persecute [us].” For as we do this, as we love our enemies, we truly begin to be worthy of our heritage as “children of [our] Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45). We must love all of God’s children because they are our brothers and sisters. Even—and perhaps especially—we must love those who are different from us or just appear strange.

This conviction and resolve to overcome our lower instincts and truly love all mankind regardless of race, religion, political ideology, and socioeconomic circumstances is one of the grand objectives of our human existence. It is the essence of pure religion. It may not be an easy thing to do, but it is worth doing, and we can do it.

### **We Are All of One Family**

Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints connects cultures, nationalities, languages, and people of every socioeconomic status. It encourages people to be good citizens, to care for those who are in distress, to be kind to others, and to nurture and build loving, respectful families. Today, Church members seek to create goodwill among people of all religious beliefs and political persuasions, and of every race. Our eleventh Article of Faith states, “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” (A of F 1:11).

We members of the Church know what it means to be a minority. Throughout our history, we have been discriminated against and persecuted as a result of our religious beliefs. More recently, we are experiencing

the growing pains of becoming a majority in some areas—which creates its own challenges. In both cases, we understand that the rights of all men—whether they are in the minority or the majority—must be preserved and safeguarded. Although we do not know what the coming years and decades will bring, we trust that because of our sincere beliefs and strong faith, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be numbered among those who are a force for good and are advocates for peace and brotherly love among all nations.

What we have in common as the people of the world is of far greater significance than what divides us. We must try to really understand and to really know one another. We must raise our voices in defense of what is just and good. We must increase our genuine love for God and our fellow man. This is our greatest hope of preventing the ever-repeating catastrophes that have plagued this planet since its earliest days. It is my hope that we will look past our differences and, instead, see each other with eyes that recognize who we truly are—fellow travelers, brothers and sisters, pilgrims walking the same path that leads to becoming more enlightened and more refined, as our Father in Heaven intends us to become.

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# The Happiest Day of Your Life

You wake up and hear rain. You wake up  
and think there's not enough rain, not enough  
songs about rain or memories of rain.  
Of being numbed or warmed by rain.

You wake up. Your eyes are open.  
Lilies in a moss-green bowl. Elms through  
the window moving their hands like cellists.  
Books exist. And paintings. And pillows.

Blue Mountain and Saddle Mountain.  
Abundance Creek. Alpha Centauri. Delft.  
The woman in your dream was putting down  
a crate of oranges, but then you woke up

remembering there is custard. There is  
Verdi, there is smoke-filled late-fall air.  
And even joy in what it feels like to grieve.  
Wanting to sleep instead of bear what

you must. Like finishing the best book  
in the world: "... And so they buried Hector,  
tamer of horses." You wake up, wanting to try.  
You try. Here in the swirling eddies,

in the dark river of time and decay.  
There is rain. There is this day. There is  
this day and no other. Praise it with trumpets  
and zithers. Praise it however you can.

—Michael Lavers

# Inequality and Narrative in the Book of Mormon

Robert F. Schwartz

*In every country the history of inequality is political—and chaotic.*

—Thomas Piketty<sup>1</sup>

*So a dispute arose as to whether dearth and not death had not been the word in the verse; but at the present juncture, it was of course decided in favour of the latter; for the people made their recollection fit in with their sufferings.*

—Thucydides<sup>2</sup>

*That's the problem with history, we like to think it's a book. . . . But history isn't the paper it's printed on. It's memory, and memory is time, emotions, and song. History is the things that stay with you.*

—Paul Beatty<sup>3</sup>

I speak unto you as if ye were present,” writes Moroni, “and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Morm. 8:35). Eyewitnesses to the end of their civilization, Moroni and his father, Mormon, address us, their modern readers, from the perspective of exiled visionaries. Like twentieth-century exiles Hannah Arendt or Czesław Miłosz, these editors and part-authors of the Book of Mormon write as refugees from a society in utter, violent

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1. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap, 2014), 359.

2. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7142/7142-h/7142-h.htm>.

3. Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (New York: Farrar, 2015), 115.



collapse, left to piece together a narrative of how things came to such a bitter end and what the future will hold.

Tracing their own history back to the events that gave rise to ruin, Mormon pinpoints inequality as a corrosive catalyst. He records that after almost two hundred years of unmatched peace following an appearance by Jesus Christ, his then-prosperous society ceases to “have their goods and their substance” in common and “began to be divided into classes” (4 Ne. 1:24–26). As the “fine things of the world” and avarice supplant common endeavor and a shared “love of God” in the hearts of the people, the swift results are persecution, imprisonment, war, and despotic forms of rule and misrule that seek to entrench the privileges of a few over those of the many (4 Ne. 1:15–18, 24–34, 39–46).

And what does Moroni see of today? His description of our circumstances and ills is so similar to his father’s assessment of their own past that it could be the same: “Ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted” (Morm. 8:37). And the consequences, Moroni warns in a prophetic voice, will be the same, like a “sword of vengeance” (Morm. 8:41).

But these writings and prophecies present an enigmatic paradox. In the Book of Mormon a reader today has an ancient text by ancient authors whose stated desire is to speak to a modern audience on issues that span from antiquity to modernity. In about AD 400, when the Book of Mormon comes to a close, Mormon and Moroni understand inequality primarily in terms of impact on faith and worship. But they are writing to a people centuries later whose “social imaginary” has changed, including a grasp of the roots and effects of inequality.<sup>4</sup>

There can be no doubt that Mormon and Moroni are convinced their record will be relevant for its recipients. In part, this is a matter of faith for the authors and readers alike. But as demonstrated, for example, in the thought experiments of the Apostle Paul (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23), faith may require an astute reader to reconcile Book of Mormon messages with the prevailing background practices and understandings of modernity.<sup>5</sup>

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4. See, for example, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap, 2007), 171–76. Taylor says that in using the term “social imaginary,” he is trying to describe the deep background understanding of a people or society, “the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (171).

5. See, for example, Taylor, *Secular Age*, 13–14. The notion of “background” is one that has currency with many thinkers from Martin Heidegger onward. It is related to

While stubborn antagonisms between religion and an age of science and scientism can make this appear difficult, it is not impossible, and Mormon and Moroni's focus on inequality may be a good place to start.

In fairness, the unequal conditions that Mormon and Moroni describe could similarly apply to many (or even most) human eras. Economist and historian Thomas Piketty estimates that in antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages and in modern rural societies, the top 10 percent of society owns 80 percent to 90 percent of all wealth, with the top 1 percent usually holding 50 to 60 percent.<sup>6</sup> Like any other condition experienced by humans over time, inequality feeds mentalities and narratives, which can in turn reinforce disparities. Racial tension, barriers to collective action, institutions that protect the privileged, extractive political and economic systems with their conflicts of interest, and simple inertia also do their work. Given their human ubiquity, these patterns should manifest themselves not only in the Book of Mormon apocalypse, but across the entire record, and they do.

This study is an attempt to understand these patterns of inequality while reconciling the Book of Mormon with our modern background. The work presented here can be seen as an extension of the author's prior study on conflict in the Book of Mormon.<sup>7</sup> That study applies tools of the modern social imaginary (in particular the methods of mathematical game theory) to make visible patterns of conflict and resolution, inequality and struggle, and hope and long-term cooperation that might not be clear without those tools. Provocatively, that analysis also suggests that inequality is in fact one of the key drivers of conflict in the histories that the Book of Mormon presents.<sup>8</sup>

For this study, two main areas of recent insight in the social and economic sciences stand out as potentially fruitful in seeking to interpret the Book of Mormon with new eyes.

First, recent research suggests that individuals with privilege might systematically share less than their less-privileged counterparts. This

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the idea of "social imaginary" and is most usefully employed in this context again by Charles Taylor.

6. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*, 436. Piketty specifically writes that we find "extremely high concentration of wealth—with 80 to 90 percent of capital owned by the top decile and 50–60 percent by the top centile—in most societies prior to the nineteenth century, and in particular in traditional agrarian societies in the modern era, as well as in the Middle Ages and antiquity" (436).

7. Robert F. Schwartz, "Game Theory, the Prisoner's Dilemma, and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2013): 67–112.

8. See Schwartz, "Game Theory," 99, 103, 105.

could revise or even upend certain readings about the privileged and less-privileged people that the Book of Mormon portrays.

Second, the Book of Mormon convincingly illustrates and reinforces some of the best current understanding on the relationship and correlation between inequality on the one hand and the prevailing socio-political order on the other, specifically whether the prevailing order is extractive or inclusive. While contemporary understanding focuses on the democratic or undemocratic nature of an extractive or inclusive regime, the Book of Mormon may have something to say about how faith within a society affects the type of regime and, by extension, how it affects inequality.

As much as evaluation of the Book of Mormon may be enriched by a reconciliation with today's scientific background, so too the world at large may benefit from the resulting amalgam in ways that vindicate ambitions expressed by Mormon and Moroni. The Book of Mormon, as will be seen, gives unique views into how human bias feeds into personal and group perception in ways that can perpetuate inequality. It gives prescriptions on how to create inclusive institutions and move past patterns of inequality as well as perspectives on whether and how these prescriptions work, why they encounter challenges, and whether equality is a realistic aim.

### **Early Days, Seminal Events: Privilege, Payoffs, and Distributional Preferences**

As a reader wades into the Book of Mormon narrative, she may find herself murmuring, "How did it come to this?" The narrative begins with common family origins. The authors and their people enjoy education and frequent prosperity. They are led by faith in God handed down in tradition, scripture, and direct experience. They profess to desire peace. And yet despite these advantages, neighboring peoples always seem ready to fight, their hatred inscrutable. For the authors, the explanation often seems clear: their neighbors are hateful and spiteful by nature. Inquiry into how they fail to convert their advantages into lasting peace does not arise, because the endless struggle is simply the way things are and seem destined to be, unless their neighbors are willing to change.

The Book of Mormon's first third chronicles the travails of a single family and the conflicts and disputes that eventually fracture it into two groups. The two groups develop distinct narratives about how and why they ruptured, and as they drift apart, the respective narratives reveal differences in how the groups live and what means they have. Once

they are separated, not much appears to change in either the means or the narratives of the two groups over a period of almost three hundred years.<sup>9</sup> A critical juncture occurs for one of the groups when an aging king institutes a new social order that makes inclusive political reforms possible, establishing a different set of conditions for how that society will develop and, in time, how the two groups interact with one another.

The opening family narrative describes a father, Lehi; a mother, Sariah; and four sons (in age order): Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. In time, Sariah and Lehi have two more sons who are mentioned by name, Jacob and Joseph, and the group expands further through marriage and—for lack of a better term—recruitment. The family history is recorded by two of the youngest sons, Nephi and Jacob.

Between them, Nephi, Jacob, and Jacob's son, Enos, fill 138 English typeset pages, or approximately 25 percent of the Book of Mormon, and a span of 179 years.<sup>10</sup> Though the Old Testament presents many family vignettes (for example, Jacob and Esau's birthright-wrangling or Joseph's envy-inducing colored coat), and the New Testament also gives glimpses into family life, nothing else in Judeo-Christian scripture resembles the intimate portrait that emerges from the books of 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, and Enos. It is the intimacy of this view that allows readers to track patterns of praise and privilege from the family's earliest days.

The arc of Lehi-and-family's early history can be précised as follows: a Jerusalem-based prophet in the time of Jeremiah (around 600 BC), Lehi receives a command from God in a dream that he and his family must depart into the wilderness before Jerusalem is destroyed (1 Ne. 1–2). They comply immediately but then exist in desert limbo for a time while the sons undertake two divinely appointed excursions back to Jerusalem to obtain sacred records (described as “plates of brass,” 1 Ne. 3:2–4) and enlist more people to accompany them (1 Ne. 3–7). From there, the group proceeds through years of trial and hardship toward a “land of promise” (1 Ne. 12:4; see 1 Ne. 8–18), which they ultimately reach by sailing across a “sea” of “many waters” (1 Ne. 17:5; 18).

As he weaves these events into a family saga, Nephi presents himself as eager to do the things that his father-prophet asks him to do. Over time, Nephi receives Lehi's praise and parental blessing while Laman and Lemuel become targets of grievance and regret (see, for example,

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9. See Enos 1 and Mosiah 1.

10. See the time footnotes in 1 Nephi 1 to Enos 1. Many thanks to Roger Terry for his astute observations on some of the relevant timings in this context.

1 Ne. 2:9–14, 8:2–12). Although early on Nephi admits a natural instinct to “rebel against” Lehi, prayer softens his heart, and he then obeys practically without exception (1 Ne. 2:16). Sam often joins Nephi in carrying out family tasks while Laman and Lemuel consistently push back (for example, 1 Ne. 3:28).<sup>11</sup>

The text shows Nephi taking decisive action to bring sacred records from Jerusalem back to the wilderness (1 Ne. 4:6–24), cracking the spiritual code of a dream that Lehi shares with his family (1 Ne. 15:6–36), feeding the family during a food crisis (1 Ne. 16:15–32), and leading in building a ship that takes them to the land of promise (1 Ne. 17:7–55). In each of these seminal tasks, Laman and Lemuel fail to lead or receive much credit despite being the eldest and despite often taking part. In their frustration, they often resort to violence against Nephi (see, for example, 1 Ne. 3:28–29; 18:11).

In their back-and-forth struggles, the brothers are vying for what is arguably the most fundamental of all goods: the right to rule, to “become the political elite, enforce property rights, maintain order, and also benefit from their status.”<sup>12</sup> Nephi understands this struggle and his right to rule primarily in faith terms, equating (as does Lehi) the right to rule with righteous living (see, for example, 2 Ne. 5:19–20). He writes that Laman and Lemuel “knew not the dealings of that God who had created them” and prays that they might come to know better (1 Ne. 2:12, 18). In the wilderness, younger Nephi scolds the two eldest for being “swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God” (1 Ne. 17:45).

For their part, Laman and Lemuel are calculating and decisive in response: “Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people” (2 Ne. 5:3).

Shortly before his death, Lehi formalizes Nephi’s privileged status, doing so in a way that humiliates Laman and Lemuel and their families. Lehi gives Laman, the eldest, “a blessing, yea, even my first blessing,” but solely on the condition that Laman, Lemuel, and the other brothers and brothers-in-law must “hearken unto the voice of Nephi” (2 Ne. 1:28).

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11. For even casual readers, the received wisdom says that Nephi is “obedient” while Laman and Lemuel are “rebellious.” Although broadly accurate, these labels fail to reflect the fact that Laman and Lemuel oblige most of the time. Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 91–96.

12. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Random House, 2012), 139.

If Laman and Lemuel fail to observe the condition, the “first blessing” reverts to Nephi and stays with him (2 Ne. 1:29). Lehi teaches the children of Laman and Lemuel that they will eventually find redemption, but not before enduring curses and destruction (2 Ne. 4:3–9). Shortly afterward, Lehi passes away (2 Ne. 4:12).

Nephi’s victory in the family struggle over who will rule is pyrrhic from the outset. Although he tries to fulfil his appointed role as family leader, Nephi quickly finds himself in a lethal struggle with Laman and Lemuel and decides to flee into the wilderness with his family and others (2 Ne. 4:13–35; 5:5–9). Although they depart in haste, Nephi and his followers take “the plates of brass; and also the ball, or compass, which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord, . . . [and] the sword of Laban” (2 Ne. 5:12, 14). These items are the key assets of the family’s years of travel and adversity, and as the eldest, Laman and Lemuel would have also had strong claim to them. When Nephi disappears into the wilderness with his father’s final blessing and all of the family’s treasures, the family and its descendants cease to have a shared narrative or history for many hundreds of years.

In the exercise of tracking conflicts and imbalances that begin in Lehi’s family and then continue for many generations, a reader should not lose sight of both Lehi’s and Nephi’s tenacity and visionary leadership. To buck the prevailing culture at Jerusalem, strike out into the desert, survive the better part of a decade in the wilderness, express distinct prophetic vision(s), undertake a pioneering cross-ocean voyage, and then put down roots on a new continent requires a singularity of effort and drive that might necessarily cut across the intentions and desires of others. The intention is not to criticize Lehi or Nephi or put in question their status as prophets; quite the opposite: the present exercise effectively requires a reader to take the narrators at their word regarding faith and the prophetic mantle and then ask what the record suggests about the trade-offs, sacrifices, and conflicts that result from such faith and guidance.

This article’s companion study on conflict in the Book of Mormon—and in Lehi’s family in particular—argues that the patterns of conflict between Nephi and his two oldest brothers fit classic models of conflict developed in modern economic theory.<sup>13</sup> Considering scriptural history in terms of economics or mathematical models of conflict and its resolution can feel strange or even profane. But to the extent it feels reductive, one does well to remember that scripture can be read as a

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13. Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 91–99.

string of human conflicts with more and less successful resolutions. Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 37), Moses and Pharaoh (Ex. 5), Jonah and the Ninevites (Jonah 3), Jesus's disciples bickering over who is the greatest (Luke 22:24–30)—the list is long. When two or more individuals or groups seek common access to finite goods (such as birthright, praise, food, land, wealth, or freedom), the result is conflict that can be resolved either cooperatively or destructively. Faith has power to inform the outcome, but conflict is the inescapable stuff of daily humanity.

In conflicts akin to those in Lehi's family, experience and economic models suggest that those who consistently receive less from a bargain will often take advantage of others, or strike out at them, to create a deal that feels more equal.<sup>14</sup> Studies in neuroscience support the notion that unequal outcomes often trigger visceral, emotional negative reactions from those receiving the raw deal.<sup>15</sup> In economics, the benefit of a bargain or daily struggle is often referred to as a “payoff.” The payoffs do not end up equal for Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel. Where Nephi receives praise, effective birthright, and the family treasures, Laman and Lemuel receive almost nothing, and their response is casual violence that crescendos into murderous rage. The deeper structure and trajectories of these conflicts can be studied in more detail in this article's sister piece on conflict.<sup>16</sup>

But just as drawing the short straw provokes anger, recent studies in economics and social science suggest that privilege itself guides how people divide goods among themselves and creates its own forms of blindness. Oxford historian Norman Davies once observed that “human nature always tempts people to imagine that they inhabit the cultural upland whilst their neighbours inhabit the Styx.”<sup>17</sup> It turns out that this observation is reliably true not only anecdotally but also in practice.

Let us recall how Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel articulate their struggle (all in Nephi's telling): Nephi describes his path as virtuous in distinction to the unrighteousness of his older brothers, while Laman and Lemuel describe Nephi as entitled and out of place (the brother who “thinks to rule over us,” 2 Ne. 5:3). Whether as a product of his narrative or by chance, Nephi takes the primary family capital with him when

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14. See Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 83–84; compare Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

15. See, for example, Sarah F. Brosnan and Frans B. M. de Waal, “Monkeys Reject Unequal Pay,” *Nature* 425 (September 18, 2003): 297–99, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature01963>.

16. See Schwartz, “Game Theory.”

17. Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 54.



he retreats into the desert. Rather than distribute the goods equally (for example, take the plates but leave the sword), Nephi deals these goods to himself. This behavior and its supporting narrative can be observed as a predictable pattern in human conduct where privilege is concerned.

Around the turn of the present century, the RAND Corporation (a storied research institute that also conducted some of the first studies in game theory) assembled a panel of 800 Americans that ultimately expanded to include 6,000 people, which remains its present size.<sup>18</sup> The panel—named the “American Life Panel,” or ALP—is designed to represent American society at large, reflecting a similar mix of age, gender, race, income, and other relevant traits, so that researchers can conduct field surveys and experiments to achieve better understanding of preferences within society.<sup>19</sup>

In 2014, a trio of economists used the ALP to, in their words, understand “the individual distributional preferences of the general population.”<sup>20</sup> A “distributional preference” is a view on how income or assets should be distributed or redistributed. Economists look at two main signs: first, the weight that a person places on “own income versus the incomes of others,” and second, the weight “on reducing differences in incomes versus increasing total income.”<sup>21</sup>

Based on these two factors, an economist can assess what an individual prizes more: “efficiency” (increase total income with a focus on own income) or “equality” (reduce overall differences in income with a focus on the incomes of others).<sup>22</sup> Although rough as analogues, one might express the efficiency mindset as “taking-oriented” and the equality mindset as “sharing-oriented.” These attitudes represent two extremes with many gradations between them, and the authors of the study explain that “the fair-minded should place equal weight on themselves and others. . . . [But] fair-minded people may disagree about the extent to which efficiency should be sacrificed to combat inequality.”<sup>23</sup>

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18. “About the Panel,” RAND Corporation, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://www.rand.org/research/data/alp/panel.html>.

19. “Demographics,” RAND Corporation, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://www.rand.org/research/data/alp/panel/demographics.html>.

20. Raymond Fisman, Pamela Jakiela, and Shachar Kariv, “The Distributional Preferences of Americans,” Working Paper 20145 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2014), 2, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20145>.

21. Fisman, Jakiela, and Kariv, “Distributional Preferences of Americans,” 2.

22. Fisman, Jakiela, and Kariv, “Distributional Preferences of Americans,” 2.

23. Fisman, Jakiela, and Kariv, “Distributional Preferences of Americans,” 2.



The study on distributional preferences within the ALP found that American society at large tends to be quite fair-minded.<sup>24</sup> In other words, despite the fact that society includes people of all preferences—those who favor efficiency and those who favor equality—the general distribution of preferences does not skew either way. On average, in society at large (at least to the extent American society is representative), people balance their inclination to take with their inclination to share. Looking at the overall distribution, about a quarter have a hard preference for efficiency, about a quarter have a firm preference for equality, and roughly half are spread somewhere between the two.<sup>25</sup>

The researchers then repeated the same experiment with a narrower cohort: students at Yale Law School (YLS).<sup>26</sup> Noting why they chose to examine YLS students, the economists remark, “Overall, the YLS subjects are one of the most academically elite groups in the United States and can, in expectation, expect to join the ranks of the economic and political elite as well.”<sup>27</sup> Looking at this small group, then, allows the economists to ask whether distributional preferences of people with high privilege are different from those in society at large.

The YLS study finds a very marked difference, specifically that YLS students favor efficiency over equality vastly more than society at large. “We found that the YLS subjects are 29.2 percentage points more likely to be efficiency-focused than are the ALP subjects. . . . After controlling for demographics, the YLS subjects are still 14.1 percentage points more likely to be efficiency-focused than are the ALP subjects.”<sup>28</sup> Where the general distribution in society of equality-moderation-efficiency preferences is roughly 25-50-25, for YLS students the spread is closer to 25-25-50.<sup>29</sup> Though about 50 percent of ALP subjects are more efficiency-focused, in the YLS group this increases to a remarkable 80 percent.<sup>30</sup>

To check that their YLS results are not anomalous, the economists also survey undergraduate students at University of California, Berkeley (UCB), and zero in to analyze the more educated, wealthier ALP subjects.<sup>31</sup> These groups also skew toward efficiency, though not as radi-

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24. Fisman, Jakiela, and Kariv, “Distributional Preferences of Americans,” 6.

25. Fisman, Jakiela, and Kariv, “Distributional Preferences of Americans,” 26.

26. Raymond Fisman and others, “The Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” *Science* 349, no. 6254 (September 18, 2015).

27. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” aabo096-2.

28. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” aabo096-5.

29. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” aabo096-4–aabo096-5.

30. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” 1300.

31. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” aabo096-5–aabo096-6.

cally as the YLS group, with the additional wrinkle that the UCB cohort is more efficiency-focused than the privileged ALP group, leading the researchers to conclude, “Our findings indicate sharp differences in distributional preferences between subjects of varying degrees of eliteness.”<sup>32</sup>

In short, the more privilege a person has, the more likely that person is to prefer efficiency over equality, or to take rather than to share as a matter of perceived natural right.

But the researchers also reveal an element of blindness in the efficiency preference of the elite, or at least internal incongruity. In a comment that they present almost as an aside, the economists assert that the “YLS subjects displayed this distinctive preference for efficiency over equality in spite of overwhelmingly (by more than 10 to 1) self-identifying” with more liberal political philosophies.<sup>33</sup> “In addition,” note the authors, “YLS subjects were less likely to be classified as fair-minded and more likely to be classified as selfish than were the ALP subjects.”<sup>34</sup>

Although the economists do not delve any deeper into their comment on political leanings, the observations imply that privileged individuals could have preferences for efficiency at odds with their professed beliefs. One social commentator and former student says of his time at Yale Law School, “You’re sitting in a seminar room, you’ve got a professor who’s written a million books, surrounded by 20 students from San Francisco, New York, mostly, all pontificating about how to help poor people in America.”<sup>35</sup>

This mismatch of preference and belief could represent an uncoupling of beliefs as much as it represents true blindness. One possible interpretation is that while it feels good to embrace causes and communities that assist others and seek to achieve equality, the integrity of this belief breaks down when faced with tangible choices to divide or allocate capital in ways that could erode settled privilege. It is possible publicly to support the cause of economic equality while privately—through, for example, spending or voting—seeking efficiency. The disparity could be conscious, or it could be unconscious, and in any case the observation is an aside to the social scientists’ main conclusion: the more elite the person, the more likely that person is to seek efficient outcomes.

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32. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” 1300, aabo096-5-aabo096-6.

33. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” 1300.

34. Fisman and others, “Distributional Preferences of an Elite,” 1300.

35. Jamil Jivani, quoted in Simon van Zuylen-Wood, “The Radicalization of J. D. Vance,” *Washington Post*, January 4, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2022/01/04/jd-vance-hillbilly-elegy-radicalization/>.

And so back to Nephi, Laman, and Lemuel. It is fair to question what, if anything, studies of twenty-first-century Americans, Yale Law School students, and other contemporary privileged groups can tell us about ancient preferences or behaviors of the privileged. Culture, technology, forms of wealth, and many other elements are entirely different. But it should be feasible, at the very least, to assess whether the narrative set out by Nephi and Jacob evidences similar patterns of behavior.

The patterns do not fit perfectly. Nephi would likely not label himself as “privileged” or “elite.” He describes himself being beaten by his brothers with a stick (1 Ne. 3:27–31), opposed in returning to the wilderness from Jerusalem with new recruits (1 Ne. 7:6–16), mocked when he proposes to build a ship (1 Ne. 17:17–22), tied up and beaten at sea (1 Ne. 18:9–11), and ultimately forced to run for his life (2 Ne. 5:3, 5–9). Sneering Laman and Lemuel often appear to have an unbeatable upper hand.

And yet. Nephi’s ability to record his narrative is premised on the fact that he has the wherewithal to do so. Throughout his narrative, he presents himself as fit (or at least able) to urge family members to loyalty and faith (1 Ne. 2:16–18; 3:7, 21; 4:1–3; 7:8–12; 16:22; 17:23–47). He describes himself as a “ruler” and establishes a nation and a people, both of which bear his name (2 Ne. 5:8, 19; see Enos 1:19), having first obtained the right to rule by virtue of his father’s dying blessing (2 Ne. 1:28–29). He has the plates, which enable ongoing education, as well as the potent symbols of a sword that came with the plates and a compass that led his people through the wilderness (2 Ne. 5:12, 14).

However one chooses to describe the result, there is a positive correlation between Nephi’s privilege and his efficient distributional preference in taking the family treasures. Nephi ascribes these results to faith and divine gift, and perhaps that is the point. With privilege in hand, the fact that the means get distributed to him is simply the way things are supposed to be.

Thousands of years later, it is easy to ask what might have happened if things had been spread more evenly, but the personalities at play suggest that another allocation might not have been achievable. Lehi does nominally bestow his “first blessing” on Laman as firstborn, and one could take his difference-splitting bid to give Nephi spiritual leadership as an attempt to achieve fairness in the circumstances (2 Ne. 1:28). The nuances of the text arguably whisper, “I tried,” as Lehi’s *mea culpa*, especially given that Laman quickly misuses his gift, such as it is.

Taking the historical characters as they are (were) and not as we wish they would be, the reader finds it hard to fault Nephi for preserving such

important relics in the face of brothers who, in his telling, behave in brutal and myopic ways. Perhaps in the ancient Americas, as in the America founded later in the eighteenth century, as Tocqueville describes, there is simply an unresolvable tension between freedom and equality, and the struggle for freedom will sometimes squelch equality by necessity.<sup>36</sup> In any case, both inequality and the privilege-and-efficiency-of-distribution nexus become clearer and more pronounced in the ensuing generations, where the analysis now turns.

### Centuries of Inequality and Separation

While there is a credible argument that ruling Nephi shows an efficient distributional preference when he settles his late father's estate, does this preference extend to the ensuing groups, and more fundamentally, does the text show evidence of inequality between the two groups? The short answers to these questions are yes and yes. As the groups that follow Nephi and Laman separate and then grow, the text shows evidence of inequality both within and between the two groups.

When Lehi's family splits and the principal factions go separate ways, Nephi takes his people, who later come to be known as "the people of Nephi," or "Nephites" (Jacob 1:13–14), and flees "into the wilderness, . . . journey[ing] in the wilderness for the space of many days" (2 Ne. 5:5, 7). Now in two different places, the Nephites and the people of Laman and Lemuel (or "Lamanites") develop independently and at a distance from one another, having ruptured over their fierce differences of opinion (Jacob 1:14). Though geographical references are not well defined early in the Book of Mormon, the Nephites reside in a land that they refer to as the land of Nephi (see Omni 1:12), while the Lamanites dwell in close enough proximity that Nephites continue to make reference to them and have some visibility on how they live (see, for example, Jacob 7:24).

In *Why Nations Fail*, a seminal treatise on how groups develop social and political structures at historic crossroads and how those structures influence inequality, Daron Acemoglu of MIT and James A. Robinson of the University of Chicago observe:

Even societies that are far less complex than our modern society create political and economic institutions that have powerful effects on the lives of their members. . . . No two societies create the same institutions;

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36. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. James T. Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 879, compare cxix.

they will have distinct customs, different systems of property rights, and different ways of dividing a killed animal or loot stolen from another group. . . . Societies are constantly subject to economic and political conflict that is resolved in different ways because of specific historical differences, the role of individuals, or just random factors. These differences are often small to start with, but they cumulate, creating a process of institutional drift. Just as two isolated populations of organisms will drift apart slowly in a process of genetic drift, . . . two otherwise similar societies will also slowly drift apart institutionally.<sup>37</sup>

This is precisely what the Book of Mormon shows as the Nephites and Lamanites become nascent nations. Lehi's grant of ruling status to Nephi, Laman and Lemuel's murderous response, and Nephi's resulting departure into the wilderness together constitute what Acemoglu and Robinson would term a "critical juncture." A critical juncture can be understood as "a major event or confluence of factors disrupting the existing economic or political balance in society."<sup>38</sup>

The significance of a critical juncture is that it can materially influence both the political and economic institutions that develop after the event and whether those institutions are "extractive" or "inclusive."<sup>39</sup> Extractive economic institutions are "structured to extract resources from the many by the few and . . . fail to protect property rights or provide incentives for economic activity."<sup>40</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson explain that extractive political institutions (such as absolutist monarchies) tend to create extractive economic institutions, "transferring wealth and power toward the elite . . . who will then have incentives to maintain and develop extractive economic institutions for their benefit and use the resources they obtain to cement their hold on political power."<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, an inclusive political institution is one that shares "political power widely in a pluralistic manner" but is still able to maintain enough of a political core "to establish law and order, the foundations of secure property rights, and an inclusive market economy."<sup>42</sup> Just as extractive political and economic arrangements go hand in hand, so too inclusive economic institutions tend to have a symbiosis with inclusive political institutions. And so, as the Nephites and Lamanites establish themselves, what kind of institutions do they establish and with what effect?

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37. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 108–9.

38. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 101.

39. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 101, 113.

40. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 430.

41. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 401, 430; compare 113.

42. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 364–67, 372, 430.

Almost immediately upon striking out on their own, Nephites choose rule by king. Nephi explains that though he does not desire kingship, he accedes to the desire of his people and accepts the role (2 Ne. 5:18). According to Jacob, the Nephites look to Nephi “as a king or a protector” and “depend [on him] for safety” (2 Ne. 6:2). From the time that Nephi is established as king, the reigns of Nephite kings last for almost five hundred years (approximately half of Book of Mormon history).<sup>43</sup>

While monarchy has the benefit of central political power and decision-making, the clear downside is that it puts decision-making in the hands of a single individual and of those who can influence that individual, making extractive regimes more likely. For his part, as one would expect from his narrative, Nephi is an equitable leader, whom Jacob describes as being “loved . . . exceedingly” by his people for being their “protector,” “having wielded the sword of Laban in their defence, and having labored in all his days for their welfare” (Jacob 1:10).

At the end of his life, Nephi anoints an unnamed successor as the second king, cementing “reigns of the kings” (Jacob 1:9, 11), and matters appear to deteriorate quickly from there. Jacob relates that the people “under the reign of the second king” begin to be obsessed with “gold and silver” and what Jacob calls “wicked practices” in describing men who take additional wives and concubines (Jacob 1:15–16).

Dedicated to the ministry with his brother Joseph (Jacob 1:18–19), Jacob inveighs against rising inequality as certain classes within the society persecute others on the basis of “apparel” and acquired wealth (Jacob 2:12–13). To combat this trend, Jacob encourages the Nephites to be “familiar with all and free with [their] substance” (Jacob 2:17). Despite Jacob’s efforts, his teaching does not appear to have much effect, and his son, Enos, describes a Nephite people who are prosperous in their crops and herds but who appear to be destined for some kind of “destruction” (Enos 1:21–23).

Although the record is not focused on distribution of wealth in all of its different forms (income, provisions, opportunity, education), the Book of Mormon does give some clear evidence that the institutions established by Nephite kings were often politically and economically extractive. After over four hundred and sixty years of kings,<sup>44</sup> a transformational Nephite king named Benjamin (who will be studied in

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43. Nephi becomes king in approximately 588 BC (2 Ne. 5), and the constitutional change in which kings are replaced by judges occurs in approximately 92 BC (Mosiah 29).

44. From the start of Nephi’s reign in about 588 BC (2 Ne. 5), 464 years pass until King Benjamin speaks to his people in 124 BC (Mosiah 2).

detail later) introduces himself in a speech by stressing his credentials as a peaceful public servant who has not imposed harsh imprisonment, violence, oppression, slavery, heavy taxation, or collection of gold and silver (Mosiah 2:12–14). The very mention of these things suggests that they are a matter of record if not living memory for the hearers. In a contemporary view, all of these practices are textbook hallmarks of extractive regimes that increase societal inequality.<sup>45</sup>

Lest any reader wonder whether Nephites engage in the kinds of practices that this king says he has abandoned, the Book of Mormon describes a rough contemporary of this monarch who rules over a Nephite offshoot that develops away from the main body. The offshoot ruler, King Noah, runs classic extractive institutions, levying a “tax of one fifth” on all monetary wealth, crops, and herds in order to “support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines,” fuel nonstop wine consumption, build “many elegant and spacious buildings,” and erect a “spacious palace” complete with a gold-ornamented throne (Mosiah 11:3–15). Jacob’s account combined with the contrasting examples of Kings Noah and Benjamin together provide compelling evidence that, at least at times, the Nephites plainly experience extractive regimes and witness inequality within their own societies.

The Book of Mormon (authored as it is by Nephites) does not give a similarly detailed view of the formation and features of Lamanite institutions, but there is some evidence that they are similar in some ways and also broadly extractive. Although it is unclear when their institutions first take shape, the Lamanites are also ruled by kings (see, for example, Mosiah 20:22–25; 24:1; Alma 20:8). Jacob gives a description of Lamanite society that suggests it may have been less extractive than Nephite society in certain respects, with an absence of the concubine arrangements seen among affluent Nephites (and presumably the economic arrangements needed to support concubines à la King Noah, Jacob 3:5). Readers see Lamanite kings with flocks, pastures, and servants who could be executed for poor service (Alma 17:25–29, 39; 18:16), and the Lamanites have a hierarchy of kingdoms with greater and lesser kings where a principal king appoints lesser kings and the lesser kings have their autonomy limited by the principal (Mosiah 24:2–3; Alma 20:8, 24, 26).

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45. See, for example, Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 81, 116, 168–69, 343–44.



In addition to these elements, there is a passage in Lamanite history that lends further credence to the notion that the political and economic arrangements are extractive. At a certain point in Nephite history, a group of Nephites led by a man named Zeniff goes to reclaim old lands and enter into a treaty with a Lamanite king named Laman. The treaty sets up an uneasy *détente* with agreed landholdings and mutual economic affairs (Mosiah 9:5–10). Ultimately the treaty plays out like the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Lamanites playing Germany, rushing across an agreed-upon border to grab Nephite lands and property. The Nephites defend themselves for a period of some years, but the exchange yields the observation that King Laman fears the destabilizing effect of Nephite prosperity and desires “to bring [the Nephites] into bondage, that they might glut themselves with the labors of our hands; yea, that they might feast themselves upon the flocks of our fields” (Mosiah 9:12). The default space for a Lamanite king (as for a typical Nephite king or any king) appears to be extractive.

While both Nephite and Lamanite societies display traits that an economist might consider extractive, and there is evidence of inequality within each, each of the societies likewise recognizes a degree of personal autonomy and property rights. Nephites ruled by kings acquire wealth, engage in farming and industry, and enjoy liberties such as freedom of movement (see, for example, Jacob 2–3, Enos 1). The text likewise describes king-ruled Lamanite trade and Lamanite flocks that do not belong to the crown and appear to be private property (Mosiah 24:7; Alma 17:26–27). While each group evidences inequalities, the reader does not see endemic slavery as in ancient Rome, a slave trade as in sub-Saharan Africa from the fifteenth century, or widespread serfdom as in feudal medieval Europe. Which is to say that there could be enough fluidity within each society to make change possible if there were impetus for change.

Understanding that there is inequality within both Nephite and Lamanite societies and some evidence of extractive political and economic institutions, is there also a wealth gap *between* the two groups? Are Nephites richer than Lamanites or vice versa? As has already been documented, Nephi first receives the original and fundamental currency within any society, the right to rule, obliterating Laman’s expectation of primogeniture. The sword and compass that Nephi takes as ruler may have had more symbolic than economic value, but the brass plates contain a key technology (the written word) that gives Nephites an advantage that Lamanites lack for many centuries and desire to gain.



From Nephi's time to the end of Book of Mormon history a millennium later, Nephites benefit from written language, and this bestows on them the literacy, education, and economic benefits that usually accompany writing as a technology.<sup>46</sup> Deanna Draper Buck convincingly argues that literacy is widespread among Nephites, but this driver of wellbeing is absent in Lamanite society for hundreds of years until introduced by Nephites after the time of King Noah (Mosiah 24:1–6).<sup>47</sup> Tellingly, as soon as the Lamanites are taught “the language of Nephi . . . [and] that they should keep their record, and that they might write to one another” (Mosiah 24:4, 6), the immediate effect is that they begin “to increase in riches, and . . . to trade one with another and wax great” (Mosiah 24:7). The Book of Mormon seems to establish that literacy has economic value, and the fact that Nephi takes the plates means that Nephites have this wealth driver for generations while the Lamanites do not.

The Lamanites know that they have drawn the short straw in their relations with the Nephites. Some four hundred years after the split of nations,<sup>48</sup> Mormon summarizes the Lamanite narrative worldview in aggrieved, bleak terms. In Lamanite memory, they were “driven out” of Jerusalem and then repeatedly “wronged” in the wilderness, on the sea, and after arrival in the promised land. In this telling, Nephi usurps the right to rule from his elder brothers and robs them of “the records which were engraven on the plates of brass.” In return, the Lamanites “have taught their children that they should hate [the Nephites], and that they should murder them, and that they should rob and plunder them, and do all they could to destroy them” (Mosiah 10:12–17).

In short, given the heavy costs that they have paid over time, the Lamanites view themselves as having free license to deal with Nephites as they please. As noted, this Lamanite narrative embodies textbook economic and emotional reaction to inequality. Another hundred years later when (Nephite) Ammon and (Lamanite) Lamoni happen upon Lamoni's father, a Lamanite king, the father's immediate response is “Whither art thou going with this Nephite, who is one of the children

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46. Deanna Draper Buck, “Internal Evidence of Widespread Literacy in the Book of Mormon,” *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 10, no. 3 (2009): 64; see also Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 213–15.

47. Buck, “Internal Evidence of Widespread Literacy,” 68–69.

48. The Book of Mormon chapter headings estimate that 2 Nephi 5 was written between 588 BC and 559 BC and that the events recorded in Mosiah 10 occurred between 187 BC and 160 BC, giving an overall span of between 372 years and 428 years.

of a liar? . . . These Nephites . . . are sons of a liar. Behold, he robbed our fathers; and now his children are also come amongst us that they may, by their cunning and their lyings, deceive us, that they again may rob us of our property” (Alma 20:10, 13). Both this narrative and Mormon’s summary suggest that the Lamanites recognize the value of the plates (with their attending literacy and educational benefits) and that they have been deprived of this and other wealth.

The Nephite self-perception and assimilation of history is hand-in-glove with the Lamanite narrative. In their own view, the Nephites are “industrious” (2 Ne. 5:17), “fair and delightsome” (2 Ne. 5:21), wealthy (Jacob 1:16), and hopeful that the Lamanites will return to “the knowledge of the truth” about God (Jacob 7:24; see Enos 1:13–19). In that same view, the Lamanites are “an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety” (2 Ne. 5:24), possessed of “an eternal hatred against [the Nephites]” (Jacob 7:24), and a “wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness” (Enos 1:20; see also Jacob 3:5, Jarom 1:6, Mosiah 10:12). Nephites build temples like Solomon’s (thanks to the brass plates, 2 Ne. 5:16), enjoy shareable surplus means (Jacob 2:17–22), and learn to farm land and raise livestock effectively (Enos 1:21), while the Lamanites, according to one Nephite account, live in tents, wander “about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins,” and feed on “beasts of prey” (Enos 1:20).<sup>49</sup>

In their own eyes, the Nephites are privileged, and they know it, and the Lamanites are deprived, and they know it. Although early on, Jacob uses Lamanites as positive examples of how to conduct healthy family relationships between husbands, wives, and children (Jacob 3:7), he also claims that Lamanites are filthy, bloodthirsty, hateful, and descended from iniquitous fathers (Jacob 3:5, 7, 9; 7:24). While both Jacob (who has primary experience with Laman and Lemuel) and his son, Enos, express concern for Lamanites and hope that they will adopt “true faith” (Enos 1:14, 16–20), their perception of Lamanites as inherently inferior is unshakable.

Visible as a nascent trend in Nephi’s dealings with Laman and Lemuel, the blindness of Nephite privilege and the accompanying efficiency in distributional preference calcify in following generations. While

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49. The specific reference to Lamanites in tents and dwelling in the wilderness may have been more specific to the time of Enos and Jacob, since later interactions clearly evidence Lamanites living in permanent structures and raising flocks (Alma 17–18). Nonetheless, the reference remains useful as an artifact of Nephite narrative.

Nephites define themselves by their faith and industry, that same faith and industry mean that Nephites never question their economic superiority or wonder whether the conflicts they face might be a product of economic imbalance. No, the Lamanites fight because they are bad, and why should someone who has worked hard for what they have share with people who are so clearly undeserving? Nephites hope that Lamanites will change their minds, especially because they are so bad.

A rounded assessment of Nephites' and Lamanites' perception of themselves and each other would be incomplete without addressing the matter of race. The two groups effectively start out from one large family unit led by Lehi and Sariah together with Ishmael and his wife (whose name is not mentioned), suggesting ethnic unity and common origin. However, as the nations drift apart, Nephi records: "[God] had caused the cursing to come upon [the Lamanites], yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. . . . Wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them" (2 Ne. 5:21). What to make of this unusual evolution away from common ethnic origin over a single generation, and how does it fit into the broader narrative?

Nephi's statements of "cause" read as revelation (God "caused the cursing to come" and "the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness").<sup>50</sup> Without questioning Nephi's station as a prophet or truthful witness of events, it is possible to consider his observations in the context of his conflicts of interest. After all, he is commenting not on people observed for the first time but on his brothers and their posterity—brothers who at various times beat him, tied him up, opposed him, habitually mocked him, and tried to kill him. He takes flight away from them to create living space, and it is natural that he now wants to develop a new people and a fresh narrative away from one-time tormentors. It is possible to embrace Nephi the seer and prophet while observing Nephi the human, who is working to assimilate God's will while grappling with partially or wholly unresolved family trauma.

In processing Nephi's assimilation of divine will amid trauma, the Old Testament prophet Jonah stands out as a valuable antecedent. Jonah

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50. It should be observed that certain scholars have tried (not terribly convincingly) to interpret the reference to "skins" narrowly, hypothesising that perhaps Nephi was referring to garments rather than actual skin. See, for example, Ethan Sproat, "Skins as Garments in the Book of Mormon: A Textual Exegesis," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 138–65.

is historically interesting because he predates Lehi's departure from Jerusalem by some years and may well have been sufficiently famous to be known to Nephi (see, for example, 2 Kgs. 14:25), but the book of Jonah could not have been in the brass plates because it was composed after the Babylonian invasion of which Lehi prophesies before leaving Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> God calls Jonah to preach to his Assyrian oppressors at Nineveh, a call from which he runs (Jonah 1–2), not unlike Nephi's ultimate escape into the wilderness away from Laman and Lemuel.<sup>52</sup> When Jonah eventually heeds the call and God forgives the Ninevites, Jonah is "very angry," overcome by his antipathy for the inhabitants of the head city of his cultural enemies (Jonah 4:1).

Like Lehi's cursing his sons and their children and Nephi's mention of "sore cursing" for them (2 Ne. 5:21), the Jonah of scripture subscribes to a notion of God as propagator of *Midat Hadin*<sup>53</sup> as laid bare in Exodus: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7; see Jonah 4:1–3). Jonah is a rough cultural contemporary for Nephi, a prophet from the same general period who also seeks to fulfil God's will while struggling to contain anger toward an abuser and perceiving (or, as the book of Jonah would have it, misperceiving) God as a bringer of vengeance. Nephi's pronouncement of a divine curse fits a larger pattern of cursing that we see in Jonah and that can be traced in Israelite heritage back to its founding events. Had the brass plates contained the book of Jonah, Nephi might have seen more clearly the future of his people and the quick forgiveness that comes when prejudice melts. But all of that is to come.

Nephi's controversial perception becomes part of the Nephite narrative, and Jacob makes similar references to the "darkness" of Lamanite skin (Jacob 3:5, 8–9). These descriptions align with concurrent descriptions of Lamanite filthiness and indolence. The Nephites, who do not bear this "sore curse," have industry on their side as well as perception of themselves as "fair and delightful" (2 Ne. 5:17, 21).

But as with his distributional preference, privilege plays a key role in Nephi's narrative on the curse of dark skin that follows his father's original curse. Though generations of Book of Mormon readers have

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51. See Grazia Papola, "A Biblical Story of Conversion: The Book of Jonah," *The Person and the Challenges* 6, no. 2 (2016): 156–57.

52. See Papola, "Book of Jonah," 156–57.

53. Moshe Pelli, "The Literary Art of Jonah," *Hebrew Studies* 20–21 (1979–1980): 23.

interpreted these references as racist value judgments of the book itself, the broader critical context of Nephite narrative suggests that an aspect of Nephite privilege was an “othering” of the Lamanites on racial terms. Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas expresses othering as “totality” and violence, the process of reducing another person to a term or concept like darkness.<sup>54</sup> In modern terms, othering includes being “denied the fullness of one’s humanity,” “subordination,” and a process that “renders the subject as object.”<sup>55</sup>

History and experience suggest that privilege, inequality, and othering as a natural aspect of the narrative of the privileged go hand-in-hand. Studying the opposition of twentieth-century white Americans to welfare in the form of “means-tested transfer programs,” social and political scientist Martin Gilens explains that “attitudes towards blacks must be counted as the most central” of the factors creating the opposition.<sup>56</sup> “In particular,” notes Gilens, “the beliefs that blacks’ poverty reflects a lack of effort and that, economically, blacks have gotten what they deserve are strong predictors of whites’ opposition to welfare.”<sup>57</sup> On this view, the Nephite opinion of Lamanites as “an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety” (2 Ne. 5:24), who are “wild, . . . full of idolatry and filthiness” (Enos 1:20), can be seen in its divisive racial light. And if Gilens’s findings are any guide, a reader should expect that these Nephite views will impede the sharing of technology (like the brass plates and the written word that they make possible) and other wealth. In the round, Nephite race narrative becomes another reason—conscious or not, expressed or not—to stay separate and not share.

As a privileged, elite group, the Nephites do not, in centuries of separation from the Lamanites, take any identifiable action to share from their means to lift Lamanite living conditions. When interaction consists primarily of war (Jacob says that Lamanites “sought by the power of

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54. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Philadelphia: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 54–58.

55. Erin Kerrison, Wizdom Powell, and Abigail Sewell, “Object to Subject: Three Scholars on Race, Othering, and Bearing Witness,” *Othering and Belonging* 3 (August 2018): 17. [https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/otheringbelongingjournal\\_issue\\_3\\_publish\\_web\\_bwk\\_select-spreadsmq.pdf](https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/otheringbelongingjournal_issue_3_publish_web_bwk_select-spreadsmq.pdf).

56. Martin Gilens, “Racial Attitudes and Opposition to Welfare,” *Journal of Politics* 57, no. 4 (November 1995): 1009–10; compare Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). At the time that he published his research, Gilens was at Yale University; he later went to teach at both Princeton University and UCLA.

57. Gilens, “Racial Attitudes,” 1010.

their arms to destroy us continually,” Jacob 7:24), it is not surprising that equality does not rank high on the Nephite agenda. But the efficiency of the Nephite distributional preference is stark nonetheless.

This efficiency preference also stands out because of the Nephites’ professed desire to help Lamanites acquire faith (Enos 1:20). Like YLS students who nominally support equality but in fact have a hard preference for efficiency, Nephites say they want to help Lamanites, but practical efforts to make outcomes more equal do not appear forthcoming from this elite group. Centuries pass without any notable effort to share wealth or faith.

The observed fact that privilege can impede sharing is intensified by both Nephite and Lamanite narratives. As noted, studies in game theory show that unequal payoffs in repetitive conflicts produce a narrative pattern where deprived parties feel like they are being cheated and privileged parties see their counterparts as irrational and devious.<sup>58</sup> In a seminal study of conflict, the disadvantaged person protests that the privileged party will not share, and this fact entitles him to take at will.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the advantaged person describes the taker as “a shady character,” “shiftless,” “crazy,” and “unintelligent.”<sup>60</sup> This clash closely resembles the Nephite-Lamanite civil wars.

Inequality, by its very nature, creates separation between individuals and groups. As people exist at a distance, separated by space and means, misunderstandings arise. Misunderstanding leads to suspicion and contempt that then get reinforced by narratives encompassing both racial and value judgments. The Nephite-Lamanite civil wars sprawl and tumble over centuries of suspicion, contempt, racial animus, reprisals, and more separation. Narratives become immovable as generation follows generation again and again.

Where the connection between privilege and efficiency is merely plausible when initially studied between Nephi and Laman and Lemuel, the connection and its effects become staggering over years of struggle between Nephites and Lamanites. The distributional preferences of elite Nephites flow into lasting inequality of means between the two groups, which then calcify into narratives that feel unbreakable.

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58. Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 83–84.

59. Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 83; compare Merrill M. Flood, “Some Experimental Games,” U.S. Air Force Project RAND Research Memorandum RM-789-1 (June 20, 1952), [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_memoranda/2008/RM789-1.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2008/RM789-1.pdf).

60. Schwartz, “Game Theory,” 100.

The question becomes how these vicious circles can ever end or evolve. Acemoglu and Robinson show that extractive institutions “have been the norm in history,” and both Nephite and Lamanite institutions affirm this state of affairs.<sup>61</sup> The two societies wage wars fueled by history, mutual antipathies, and further inequalities. Can the groups experience critical junctures, whether exogenous shocks or internal reforms, that shrink their internal inequalities or change their incentives in a way that makes war less likely?

### **Breaking Down Inequality: Sermon as Critical Juncture**

In the midst of this radical separation and centuries of war and extractive inequalities, the record written by Nephi, Jacob, and their lineal descendants comes to a close. Following the initial trio of Book of Mormon prophets in Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob, Nephite introspection and public thought seem to endure a three-hundred-year dark age.<sup>62</sup> Once the reader passes Jacob and his son, Enos, a series of kings and chroniclers pass in sequence without much depth or description other than to note nonstop conflict with Lamanites (Jarom, Omni).

Near the end of this succession of record keepers, a lineal descendent of Jacob named Amaleki tells of a Nephite named Mosiah who receives a warning from God to leave the land of Nephi (Omni 1:12–13). Mosiah gathers the Nephites, presumably including Amaleki, and departs into the wilderness (by now a Book of Mormon leitmotif), where they are led to a land called Zarahemla (Omni 1:12).

At Zarahemla, Mosiah and his group discover a new people, neither Nephite nor Lamanite. On discovery, the people at Zarahemla are unintelligible to Mosiah and his travelers, having no records and their language having been corrupted. Mosiah arranges for them to be taught in the Nephite language anchored by the brass plates, which Mosiah and his people bring with them out of the land of Nephi (Mosiah 1:3–6). Ultimately, Mosiah and his people join together with the natives at Zarahemla, and Mosiah is anointed king of the united nation, who continue together to be referred to as Nephites (Omni 1:19).

At this juncture, Mormon focuses his writings on the teachings of a king named Benjamin, the lead figure of the book of Mosiah. When

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61. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 431; compare 428–37.

62. Compare Enos 1 and Mosiah 1.



Mosiah passes away, his son Benjamin becomes king (Omni 1:23). This study took a quick look at Benjamin earlier when it mentioned the king who distinguishes himself as the ruler who chooses not to employ extractive practices like slavery and onerous taxation. Although not a lineal descendant of Nephi or Jacob as far as the text makes clear, Benjamin ends up as keeper of the record Jacob and his descendants have been keeping when Amaleki, who has no children and deems Benjamin to be “a just man before the Lord,” passes them to him (Omni 1:25). Benjamin also succeeds in “obtain[ing] much advantage over [the Lamanites] . . . and . . . [driving] them out of the land of Zarahemla” after “a serious war and much bloodshed” (Omni 1:24).

Aging and sensing that his own time is drawing near, Benjamin exercises the privilege of relative peace and makes plans to address his people at Zarahemla. He arranges for his son Mosiah to summon the public to the temple, and an innumerable crowd gathers (Mosiah 2:2). The gathering has a celebratory air of festival and thanksgiving as people offer sacrifice and burnt offerings, give thanks and praise for deliverance and just leaders, and pitch tents in family groups pointed toward a tower erected at the temple from which the king will speak (Mosiah 2:3–8).

With his people gathered and listening, Benjamin delivers an extended oration in three parts. His triptych in spoken word focuses first on preparation, setting a common context and background for his listeners. Part two sees the aged king relate a visionary revelation from an angel, foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ (a vision with precedents in Book of Mormon history) as he seeks to construct and consolidate shared faith. The final segment builds to a series of challenges intended to both reform the culture of Zarahemla and the Nephite nation and wed shared belief to collective action in a way that, as will be seen, ultimately clears the ground for more inclusive institutions.

Benjamin opens his address with an account of his years of unpretentious service for the betterment and defense of his people. Expressing hope that all listeners will have open hearts to hear his words and understand God’s mysteries, he affirms his own aging mortality and infirmity “in body and mind” while witnessing that he has been kept and preserved by God (Mosiah 2:9–11). As mentioned, unlike earlier kings, rent-seeking, unjust imprisonment, slavery, lawlessness, and godlessness have not been aspects of Benjamin’s rule (Mosiah 2:12–13). He has labored with his own hands to serve and defend his people, which he mentions merely to make the point that if he merits any praise from them, then God *a fortiori* deserves thanks (Mosiah 2:14–19).



In Benjamin's view, there is a cosmic inequality at play in the relationship between Deity and humankind: because God gives such profuse, fundamental blessings (creation, preservation, agency), even lifelong, nonstop, whole-souled service to him falls short of adequate thanks (Mosiah 2:20–21). “Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you” (Mosiah 2:25). The profound imbalance suggests that no human—not even a monarch—can merit special praise, and with all humans on a level, all humans should devote themselves to serving God and one another, which amounts to the same thing.

Knowing that the native people at Zarahemla were godless when his father, Mosiah, discovered them (Omni 1:17), Benjamin uses his early remarks to forge common understanding among his subjects and put them on a common footing of intellect and faith. From this perspective, the discourse is constitutional, seeking to form one body out of many listeners. Extending this constitutional spirit, Benjamin announces that the time has come for him to step down as king and that Mosiah, his son, will reign in his place (Mosiah 2:29–30). Once Benjamin passes away, yielding his “mortal frame to mother earth” in fulfilment of the cosmic inequality, Mosiah will protect the Nephites from their enemies and help them prosper (Mosiah 2:26, 31).

Having laid a basis for common understanding, Benjamin proceeds to the second, expository portion of his thoughts, specifically exposition on Christ. The aged king declares that in answer to his prayers, an angel appeared to him to deliver a message of joy and salvation for him and his people (Mosiah 3:1–4). Like Nephi and Jacob, Benjamin teaches that Christ and his fair judgment are the sole means of salvation for humankind. But Benjamin pushes further and affirms that, in the same way that Christ saves children and those without the law, people fail to achieve salvation unless they humble themselves as children and embrace the law in Christ (Mosiah 3:16–18).

Benjamin teaches more clearly than his forebears that human nature fundamentally pits each individual against God and his laws, and that the significance of a Christ figure is that Christ can make the debased human condition revocable when individuals are willing to try to exercise control over corrupted nature in reverence, meekness, humility, patience, and love before God and one another (Mosiah 3:19–20). The Christ narrative in Benjamin's telling presents another perspective on divine inequality and what it means for the human condition.

Benjamin presents himself as humbly accountable to the command of the angel, who told him that he must share these messages with his people to hold them accountable before God, leaving all except children to seek salvation through repentance and faith in God (Mosiah 3:21–22). In fulfilling the command to proclaim, the king has discharged his duty, and he explains that his words will stand as a testimony to either the salvation or damnation of the listeners (Mosiah 3:23–27).

The response to Benjamin's proclamations is dramatic, with the entire assembled body politic falling to the ground, having "viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ" (Mosiah 4:1–2). By marrying social consciousness and civic mindedness with his own (and others') prophecies about the coming Christ, Benjamin has a visible impact on his people. The power of this new narrative to shift conviction in a crowd of listeners appears to be both immediate and extraordinary. Whether the narrative will have lasting influence has yet to be seen, and Benjamin is not done.

Repeating his calls to repentance, humility, and faith (Mosiah 4:4–12), Benjamin continues interweaving Christology, civic-mindedness, and cosmic imbalance as he drives to the final challenge for his people. Those who reach a state of conversion, as Benjamin's listeners say they have, will naturally live in peace and "render to every man according to that which is his due" (Mosiah 4:13). The converted will care for and teach their children and help those in want, not suffering "the beggar" to make requests in vain (Mosiah 4:14–16). In Benjamin's view, those who pass judgment on beggars, withholding substance on the basis that such suffering is self-inflicted, must think again. Those who persist in such a mindset have no interest in God's greatness (Mosiah 4:17–18).

Here, in the context of the beggar, Benjamin reaches the peak of his oration and his final challenge. Though human nature and the economic reality of having means tempt each person to see the beggar as "less" and "other," Benjamin responds, "Are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?" (Mosiah 4:19). Benjamin's move here is very deft, taking the faith that has served as a basis for the Nephite narrative of superiority and turning it inside out, making

it the prism through which personal dependence and lowliness must be viewed. Nephites have been blinded by their privilege, and Benjamin is redefining their faith with the aim of restoring their sight.

Everything that he has explained thus far—the commands of an angel, the coming of Christ, the practicability of repentance, and the attainability of salvation—is effectively forfeit unless a person is willing to recognize dependence on God and give to others in need: “for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26; see 19–26).

Benjamin’s formulation here closely mirrors Jacob’s earlier teaching during the rule of the second Nephite king: “Be familiar with all and free with your substance, . . . to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:17, 19). The mirroring suggests that Nephites (at least Nephites of a certain class) are familiar with teachings of their forebears. But whereas Jacob was a voice in the wilderness, preaching against what he saw as degenerative practices of the wealthy taking hold under a new king, Benjamin is king, and he is iterating the same message in a new context with new energy.

Benjamin levels his challenge not only at the wealthy. Just as those with means should give reasonably in proportion to their ability, so too those who have no particular means should be willing to give if means were to permit (Mosiah 4:24–27). Given all of life’s imbalances, Benjamin suggests that being a good citizen and a model believer requires taking steps to remedy inequality, even if the only realistic step is maintaining a heart and mind that are willing to say, “If I had I would give” (Mosiah 4:24). Where usually a king is the locus of extraction (taking from the many to give to the few), Benjamin reverses this and teaches that each individual has an obligation to give what is possible.

The logic that runs through Benjamin’s address has a forceful arc. Starting with recognition of an infinite gap between God and humans—despite which God remains willing to sustain life and bless without measure—the sermon ultimately stretches back to finish with an argument that people ought to reflect divine compassion in relation to others. Benjamin chooses to share the message in a very public act as sovereign, and his words have the effect of royal decree for a newly unified nation. He

evidently does not want giving to be merely a private matter; he wants it to serve as the foundation of Nephite society and public policy.

Having conveyed his message and challenge, Benjamin surveys his listeners: “He sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them” (Mosiah 5:1). The response is overwhelming acclaim combined with a public affirmation of oath and covenant to follow Benjamin’s teachings (Mosiah 5:2–6).

In his final constitutional acts, Benjamin confirms the rightness of the covenant accepted by his people, records the names of each person who has taken the oath, anoints his son Mosiah as king, appoints priests to “teach the people . . . [and] stir them up in remembrance of the oath which they had made,” and finally dismisses the people to return to their homes (Mosiah 5:6–15, 6:1–3). He dies three years later (Mosiah 6:5).

Without knowing the course of history following Benjamin’s address, an analyst of these Nephite affairs should bear in mind that the same economic and social studies which find skewed distributional preferences among the elite also find that thought leadership makes a difference. The YLS study authors explain that when people are exposed to teaching that emphasizes equality (“reducing differences in payoffs”) over efficiency, their preferences can shift accordingly.<sup>63</sup> Giving Benjamin’s thoughts normative weight, the economists state: “The overarching lesson from hundreds of experiments is that people often sacrifice their own payoffs in order to increase the payoffs of (unknown) others, and they do so even in circumstances that do not engage reciprocity motivations or strategic considerations.”<sup>64</sup> In different disciplines, observers concur that exposure to egalitarian values can lead people to regard themselves less and share more.<sup>65</sup>

Reviewed in sum against the backdrop of the foregoing analysis of extractive Nephite institutions and conflict-ridden Nephite-Lamanite relations, Benjamin’s teachings have the potential to do a few things. First, Nephites might work to reform their institutions to become more inclusive. Benjamin does not abolish rule by king, but he does teach the

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63. Raymond Fisman, Shachar Kariv, and Daniel Markovits, “Exposure to Ideology and Distributional Preferences” (working paper, July 19, 2009), 1, [http://eml.berkeley.edu/~kariv/FKM\\_II.pdf](http://eml.berkeley.edu/~kariv/FKM_II.pdf).

64. Raymond Fisman, Pamela Jakiela, and Shachar Kariv, “Distributional Preferences and Political Behavior” (working paper, August 23, 2017), 7, [https://eml.berkeley.edu/~kariv/FJK\\_II.pdf](https://eml.berkeley.edu/~kariv/FJK_II.pdf).

65. Paul K. Piff, “Wealth and the Inflated Self: Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2014): 39–40.

absolute necessity of sharing, bind the people by oath to live the teachings, and create a class of teacher-priests to reinforce the oath. Further, Nephites might possibly become more aware of their own privilege and advantage, skewing their distributional preferences away from efficiency and back toward equality. Finally, as these changes occur, the Nephite narrative surrounding their relations with Lamanites might change in a way that gives way to new understanding and healing of old wounds. But as Benjamin passes the torch to Mosiah, these remain theoretical possibilities, not practical realities, and whether the address constitutes a true critical juncture has yet to be proven.

### **New Social, Political, and Economic Order**

After Benjamin's death, emissaries travel from Zarahemla to discover the fate of a long-lost Nephite offshoot in another land (Mosiah 8). On locating this group, led now by King Noah's son Limhi, the Zarahemla envoys' first order of business is to convey the teachings of King Benjamin. They "rehearsed unto them the last words which king Benjamin had taught them, and explained them . . . *so that they might understand all the words which he spake*" (Mosiah 8:3, emphasis added). Benjamin's teachings are so valued and constitutional to the Zarahemla group that they ensure the principles are clear before undertaking any other business. Independently, a group that separated from Limhi's people, led by a prophet named Alma, arrive in Zarahemla after being led there by God.

As the Nephite offshoots join the main group in Zarahemla, Mosiah acquaints himself with the histories of his new people, causes those histories to be taught widely to enhance shared narrative, and installs newcomer Alma (a reformed priest of the aforementioned Noah) as leader to manage the launch of seven "churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla" with "power to ordain priests and teachers over every church" (Mosiah 25:5–6, 19, 23). As first established by Benjamin, priests have a constitutional role in Zarahemla, both ensuring the feeling of "one church, . . . even the church of God" and teaching the people to "stir them up in remembrance of the oath" that forms the basis of their particular social compact (Mosiah 25:22; 6:3).

The nascent order that King Benjamin puts in place as his last public act flourishes and grows as Mosiah leads a newly united and diversified nation. With the curious itch to explore and repossess the land of Nephi well and truly extinguished after years of Lamanite war and captivity, Zarahemla becomes the undisputed heart of Nephite territory, and the people there enjoy an extended measure of peace and plenty. "And they

were called the people of God. And the Lord did pour out his Spirit upon them, and they were blessed, and prospered in the land” (Mosiah 25:24).

Not long after this time of consolidation, Mormon describes a significant point of evolution in post-Benjamin history, marked specifically by the coming of age of those who do not have a personal memory of the speech itself and the social order that it instituted. Many of these “rising generation” reject the order and traditions, refusing to conform and in some instances seeking to tear down (Mosiah 26:1–4). In response to this disorder, Mosiah issues a royal “strict command” that unbelievers should not persecute believers, that there should not be persecution among churches, and “*that there should be an equality among all men; . . . that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself, laboring with their own hands for their support*” (Mosiah 27:3–4, emphasis added).

To further establish these proclamations of equality, Mosiah decrees that “all their priests and teachers should labor with their own hands for their support, in all cases save it were in sickness, or in much want; and doing these things, they did abound in the grace of God” (Mosiah 27:5). Mosiah’s proclamations both deepen and echo the calls of Benjamin’s social pact, and the effects are widespread peace and prosperity (Mosiah 27:7).

Amid this progress, the Nephite royal lineage encounters an unexpected constitutional crisis. Mosiah’s sons (Benjamin’s grandsons) desire only to go to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites (Mosiah 28:1–5). The post-Benjamin mindset shifts thinking and desire from a historical focus on having and reclaiming the land of Nephi as a matter of birthright to sharing and reclaiming a relationship with the Lamanites themselves. A tall order to be sure. Mosiah takes the pleas of his sons seriously and receives divine confirmation that a mission to the Lamanites will have deep impact, so he gives his consent (Mosiah 28:6–8). As the sons depart for the land of Nephi, “king Mosiah had no one to confer the kingdom upon, for there was not any of his sons who would accept of the kingdom” (Mosiah 28:10).

By the time Mosiah’s sons all forswear the throne, Nephites have enjoyed rule by a king for the better part of five hundred years, dating back to Nephi.<sup>66</sup> Mosiah inquires of his people, “desiring to know their will concerning who should be their king” (Mosiah 29:1). The people respond

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66. Mosiah 28 dates to approximately 92 BC while Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem around 600 BC; we should note that it is not clear precisely when Nephi was declared king following Lehi’s death.

that they want Mosiah's son Aaron. With Aaron gone on a mission to the Lamanites and unwilling to be king, Mosiah sends "a written word . . . among the people" with thoughts on the way forward (Mosiah 29:4).

Mosiah tells his people that, like Benjamin, he has upheld the rule of law and sought to govern justly (Mosiah 29:13–16). If, by historical contingency, "it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, . . . then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you" (Mosiah 29:13). But Mosiah explains that this is simply not how history works, with King Noah being exhibit A (Mosiah 29:18).

Describing the weight of extractive institutions and highlighting the role of historical contingency and vicious circles, Mosiah laments that a single "wicked king" can deploy his guards and armies to shred any laws, means, or human lives that stand in his way (Mosiah 29:17, 20–23). Modern economists and political scientists such as Acemoglu and Robinson would tend to agree with and echo Mosiah's lament.<sup>67</sup>

As the best alternative, Mosiah proposes judges chosen by "the voice of the people" (Mosiah 29:11, 25). Reflecting the modern view that inclusive political institutions are those that share "political power widely in a pluralistic manner" but remain able "to establish law and order, the foundations of secure property rights, and an inclusive market economy,"<sup>68</sup> Mosiah seeks to establish a "land of liberty" where each individual "may enjoy . . . rights and privileges" and exercise their voice to choose judges who will judge "according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers" (Mosiah 29:25–26, 31–32). The new system proposed by Mosiah reads, within its context and compared against the system of kings that it replaces, as a model inclusive institution that has potential to abolish "the inequality" that is associated with "the iniquities of [the] kings" (Mosiah 29:31–32).

As Benjamin's grandsons, the natural heirs to the throne, abandon the kingdom to preach, and Benjamin's son, the king, proposes to abolish the system of potentially extractive kings to institute an inclusive system of judges, the reality of King Benjamin's speech as a critical juncture in Nephite society comes into sharp focus. Mosiah can see both that rule by king introduces too much variability and that one effective way to stabilize political (and economic) volatility will be to give a broader base of people a voice in and ownership of the result. These radical changes are a

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67. See Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 335–67 (a chapter focusing on vicious circles and extractive institutions).

68. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 430.



natural consequence of Benjamin's teaching, a complete revolution in the political order that follows in the wake of a new social and religious order. The principles of equality and fair dealing with others move beyond the realm of ideas and begin to change the fabric of Nephite society itself.

While economic growth and peace can occur in extractive regimes, there is a "link between inclusive economic and political institutions and prosperity."<sup>69</sup> Following nineteen years of the more inclusive reign of judges, Mormon records that "there was continual peace among them, and exceedingly great prosperity" (Alma 49:30). In the following years, the Nephites build a string of new cities, "prosper exceedingly, . . . [and] became exceedingly rich; yea and they did multiply and wax strong in the land" (Alma 50:18). Mormon reflects that "there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi" (Alma 50:23).

Though the history, as will be seen, is more complicated and nuanced than this idyllic summary might suggest, the book of Mosiah in Mormon's editorial hands reads as an extended treatise on inclusive versus extractive systems and their impact on inequality. As the Nephites are brought together in one body and into alignment under the Benjaminite oath (Mosiah 8:3), Mormon focuses on the breakdown and abolishment of monarchy, the establishment of a new and more inclusive system, and the nature of political power.

### Ups and Downs of the "Equal" Life: Warring Narratives

The stretch of Book of Mormon history that begins with the abolition of kings in Mosiah 29 and ends with the appearance of the resurrected Jesus Christ among the Nephites and Lamanites in 3 Nephi 11 spans just over one hundred years (roughly one-tenth of the Book of Mormon's chronological history), but it occupies close to half of the Book of Mormon's overall content.<sup>70</sup> Mormon recounts this relatively short period in very close detail. To comprehensively summarize the conflicts and dealings covered in these accounts would require a separate work.

What follows is an attempt to consider, as succinctly as possible, how successfully the Nephites and Lamanites are able to live Benjamin's social order with its inclusive institutions and whether, in turn, these developments

69. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 429.

70. The page span of this period runs from page 203 to page 428, or 225 of the Book of Mormon's 531 pages (42 percent). The abolition of kings in Mosiah 29 is estimated to take place around 92 BC, and the appearance of Christ is, as one would expect, approximately 34 AD (roughly 122 of the Book of Mormon's approximately 1,020-year history).



impact historic Nephite-Lamanite inequality and the accompanying narratives. This effort will necessarily require some selective summary and synthesis, revealing episodes of stunning success and crushing failure.

Very shortly after being elected as the inaugural chief judge at Zarahemla, Alma finds himself challenged by a man named Amlici and his followers. Amlici strives to return the political order at Zarahemla to a rule of kings (Alma 2:2–4). Opposed by Alma and ultimately defeated by the majority voice of the people of Zarahemla, Amlici and his followers secede from the main body politic at Zarahemla. The dissenters make Amlici their king, and he incites them to war against the Zarahemla majority (Alma 2:5–15).

Alma and the people of Zarahemla defeat Amlici and his followers in battle, but the skirmish draws them into conflict against Lamanites with whom Amlici allies himself (Alma 2–3). Though Alma and his forces ultimately win, the victory proves fleeting as Amlici's people join with the Lamanite faction and sow his discontent further—political dissent “gone viral” in a way that increases conflict. Mormon terms these mixed Lamanites “Amalekites” (for example, Alma 21:3) and explains that they come to follow “the order of the Nehors” (Alma 21:4).<sup>71</sup>

A man named Nehor appears in Zarahemla not long after King Mosiah passes away and Alma assumes political leadership as the inaugural chief judge (Alma 1). Appealing to the people at Zarahemla, Nehor attacks the order established by Benjamin: “bearing down against the church; declaring unto the people that every priest and teacher ought to become popular; and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people” (Alma 1:3).

Where the inclusive order at Zarahemla is grounded in notions of equality and widespread labor (Mosiah 29:38; Alma 1:26), the teachings of Nehor invert this and imbed the extractive tendencies of systems that “concentrate the power in the hands of a few, who will then have incentives to maintain and develop . . . institutions for their benefit.”<sup>72</sup> Adding

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71. The name of this group in the book of Alma is rendered both as “Amlicites” (Alma 2:15–38) and “Amalekites” (Alma 21:2; 43:6). At least two recent studies have hypothesized that the two spellings refer to one group and that the variation is a matter of how the Book of Mormon was translated and transcribed rather than a difference in identity. See, for example, J. Christopher Conkling, “Alma’s Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–17, 130–32; see also Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Three, Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2006), 1605–9.

72. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 430.

crude eschatology to this degenerate order, Nehor teaches “the people that all mankind should be saved at the last day, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4).

The teachings of Nehor benefit from their clarity and simplicity: be popular, seek to be supported by others, and know that ultimate redemption requires no special sacrifice of self for others. Nehor’s appearance is remarkably brief (fourteen verses all told) and related entirely in the context of one of Alma’s earliest trials, which concludes with Nehor’s execution by law for murdering a local dignitary named Gideon (Alma 1:15). But this, Mormon relates, “did not put an end to the spreading of priestcraft through the land; for there were many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor” (Alma 1:16).

And so despite the radical reordering of Nephite society in line with Benjamin’s teachings, Nehor’s appearance suggests that political and theological opposition begin soon afterward. The opposing schools of thought represent the familiar dichotomy of immediate versus delayed gratification and inclusive versus extractive systems. In the context of distributional preferences, Benjamin’s order nudges its adherents toward equality while Nehor’s order pulls them back toward efficiency, though for different reasons than the historic Nephite blindness. Where Nephites historically held to a faith that yielded privileges which blinded them to their efficient, conflict-enabling, nonsharing preferences, Nehor embraces taking as a virtue. On the take, all the time.

Kingship-seeking Amlici appears almost immediately in the wake of Nehor’s demise, and his appeal to the people at Zarahemla is consciously modeled on Nehor’s teachings (Alma 2:1). In contemporary political thought, Amlici would rightly be classified as a populist. Though its manifestations vary over time, populism can broadly be described as “a political movement with anti-elite, authoritarian, and nativist tendencies. . . . At the most basic level, populists divide society into the elites and the people. . . . The people may lack the education of the elite, but they possess a basic common sense, passed down through collective traditions . . . and community, to which populist politicians can appeal.”<sup>73</sup>

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73. Barry Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–2.

Amlici's appeals—to abolish the newly established political order of elite judges and return to the age-old tradition of kings—certainly have a populist ring, and they embody the core irony of all populism, which tends to tear down authority only to erect tyranny and extractive systems in its place. Mormon describes Amlici as “a very cunning man, yea, a wise man as to the wisdom of the world, he being after the order of the man that slew Gideon by the sword, who was executed according to the law” (Alma 2:1). Dark, populist credentials.

Far from an incidental figure, Nehor and his teachings become the antithesis to the thesis laid down by Benjamin before his death. Most of the aforementioned hundred-year stretch chronicled in the Book of Mormon books of Alma, Helaman, and 3 Nephi is centered on the spiraling interchanges between these two opposing forces and the adherents of one and the other. Lamanites join Nephites to adhere to the inclusive social order of King Benjamin and the rule of judges, and Nephites join Lamanites, where, ruled by kings, they live out the extractive, populist doctrines first announced by Nehor and then perfected by Amlici.

In a break from this dismal spiral and writing of a lull after years of war, Mormon records a note on the effect of the pluralism and equal relations between Nephites and Lamanites that begins with the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites. In Helaman 6:7, Mormon describes a period of “peace in all the land.” Lamanites preaching to Nephites, Nephites preaching to Lamanites, Lamanites and Nephites traveling and trading together on equal footing, all parties sharing the gain of their common enterprise (Hel. 6:7–11). “And they did flourish exceedingly [and] . . . multiply and wax exceedingly strong in the land” (Hel. 6:12). As both nations share common levels of education, social constitution, trade, and belief (within reason), prior curses, distributional preferences, extractive tendencies, and inequalities fade and even disappear for a time.

But, of course, intrigue among the Nephites and Lamanites does not cease. Readers witness corrupt judges, more murder, prophets who testify that Christ's coming is nigh only to be rejected and chased away, mysterious bandits who occupy hilly regions and raid both Nephites and Lamanites, and Nephites and Lamanites who join forces to defeat their common foe, the bandit robbers (Hel. 7–16, 3 Ne. 15). As the coming of Christ to the Nephites and Lamanites draws closer, an ominous note gets logged on class distinctions as a driving factor in a general breakdown of civil society: “And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive

great learning because of their riches. . . . *And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up*" (3 Ne. 6:12, 14, emphasis added).

As a long chapter closes on Nephite-Lamanite history, it is a lonely band of "a few of the Lamanites" who refuse to depart from the social order, "firm, and steadfast, and immovable, willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord" (3 Ne. 6:14). And so the Nephite narrative comes full circle. Nephi, Jacob, and Enos would be very surprised to know that it is Lamanites, the "wild, and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness," who end up as the sole emissaries of the order and faith that they cherish (Enos 1:20; see also Jacob 3:5, Jarom 1:6, Mosiah 10:12). Narratives and reality change as education, contact, and pluralism increase over generations.

### The Long Equality and the End of History

The coming of Jesus Christ to the Nephites deserves book-length treatment (and it has, in fact, received such treatment).<sup>74</sup> Landed among the Nephites and Lamanites as an emissary from another realm, Christ is the absolute embodiment and fulfilment of everything that Benjamin prophesied, taught, hoped, and dreamed. He is everything that the Benjamin-adjacent Nephites and Lamanites have lived for and sought to achieve for generations. He calls leaders and reestablishes his church (3 Ne. 11, 18). He teaches compassion, the ceasing of disputation, and to prize eternal reward over earthly gain (3 Ne. 11–13). He heals their sick, greets them one by one, and ministers to their children (3 Ne. 17–19). If the teachings of Benjamin, Nephi, and Jacob were clear pencil sketches pointing to a brighter day, Christ brings to the Nephites and Lamanites rich tapestries, canvases full of unspeakably beautiful paintings, symphonies and arias, and sculptures to last for the ages.

The record of the first actions of the Nephites and Lamanites upon Christ's ascension relates that they "taught, and did minister one to another; and *they had all things common among them*, every man dealing justly, one with another. And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them. And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ" (3 Ne. 26:19–21,

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74. See, for example, John W. Welch, *Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990).

emphasis added). After all of Christ's teachings, one of the first-order effects of the instruction is an increase in equality, a people who have "all things common" among them. And a long equality ensues, bringing the reader full circle to where this work began, with Mormon and Moroni as exiles, puzzling over why and where the entire project went so wrong.

For the better part of two hundred years after Christ's appearance, the people have "all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. . . . There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God" (4 Ne. 1:3, 17). Where Benjamin's Christ-looking prophecies and social order succeeded in helping to maintain peace among different parties and tilt distributional preferences toward equality and away from efficiency, Christ and his teachings erase class and race distinctions altogether, creating one people out of factions that had continued for many hundreds of years and giving rise to equality that is organic and natural.

Had Robert Frost lived in the post-Christ period, he might have warned the people that "nothing gold can stay."<sup>75</sup> Mormon records, as noted at the outset of this work, that inequality creeps in and eats away at the unity like a cancer (4 Ne. 1:24–26). And so begins the death spiral of a people who again become divided into Nephites and Lamanites, resurrecting a distinction that had been erased for well over a hundred years, factions derived from some principle related to spite passed on from a long-distant memory (4 Ne. 1:36–39).

The Book of Mormon ends with the final accounts of Mormon and Moroni. They are military leaders, leading a nation of Nephites drunk on violence and hell-bent on destruction (Morm. 1–6). They each try to preach repentance and revive the spirit of the old Benjamin order and the teachings of Christ, but somehow things are worse than they have ever been. Bleak, hopeless. If there had ever been valor or "good guys," both evaporated a long time ago, and all that is left is a war of evil pitted against evil (see Morm. 4:5).

As Moroni brings the record to a close, the reader's head swims. Mormon and Moroni manage to unearth and share lost records of Christ among the Nephites. Beautiful rituals, social order, and edification at

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75. Robert Frost, "Nothing Gold Can Stay," Poetry Foundation, accessed January 26, 2022, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/148652/nothing-gold-can-stay-5c095cc5ab679>.

their most rarefied and refined. Moroni shares notes from an old sermon that Mormon once gave, exhorting to love as Christ loved, with charity. And then we are wrenched from these reveries to learn that their actual surroundings consist of Lamanite cannibal squads, Nephites committing atrocities and war crimes that include rape and torture, and widespread agony and suffering among anyone who cannot wield a sword. Moroni closes the record with his own witness of its truth and a prophecy that all will meet before the judgment bar of God.

## Conclusions

Viewing the patterns of inequality, inclusive and extractive institutions, shifting distributional preferences, and the accompanying narratives that play out in the millennial history of the Book of Mormon, students might derive two principal lessons:

First, Christians ignore the sharing imperative—expressed in the Book of Mormon most clearly by King Benjamin and Jesus Christ—at their peril. Because living Christian principles can lead to privilege, and privileged people (Christian or not) often express natural, unconscious preferences for extractive efficiency (greater focus on self) over inclusive equality (greater focus on others), part of Christian repentance should include assessment of whether a life filled with the material fruits of faith might be feeding narratives or preferences that leave others behind or even fuel conflict. Indeed, the need for repentance might arguably be greater among the faithful than among the faithless.

Second: the good work that can be done by Christians to achieve equitable, inclusive outcomes is and will be assailed by populism and other easy appeals to the basest human instincts. People may walk an inspired path, but anyone willing to play to predictable patterns in human nature can interrupt that path.

And so faith is destined to be a struggle. If all this were not arduous enough, narratives that arise to explain and justify actions of the productive faithful, the counterproductive faithful, and faith detractors can complicate efforts to achieve equitable ends. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz is noted to have often observed that “our world is the worst of all possible worlds, in which there is still hope.”<sup>76</sup> As a volume that begins with family

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76. Rabbi Adin Even Israel Steinsaltz, “The Paganization of Western Culture,” Oxford University Chabad Society Lecture in Memory of Sir Isaiah Berlin, May 2009, [https://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/908669/jewish/Rabbi-Adin-Even-Israel-Steinsaltz-Isaiah-Berlin-Lecture-2009.htm](https://www.oxfordchabad.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/908669/jewish/Rabbi-Adin-Even-Israel-Steinsaltz-Isaiah-Berlin-Lecture-2009.htm); see also Jonathan Sacks,

feuds and ends with a man penning missives from a cave while hiding from cannibals, the Book of Mormon embodies a similar ethos.

In his 2007 Reith Lecture, development economist Jeffrey Sachs observed, “There is no sense in theory if there is not something to do, starting today.”<sup>77</sup> In this spirit, a reader of this piece is left to wonder: What, if anything, should a study on inequality in the Book of Mormon mean for the world at large, especially for champions of the scientific method and those who do not regard the Book of Mormon as scripture or as even having any value? And what should it mean for the faithful, for those who do hold the Book of Mormon close to their hearts?

First, for society and scientists generally, as Thomas Piketty and scores of other economists have noted for some time, inequality is on the rise, reaching levels not seen for many decades if not a century. The effects of global pandemics and the like might only accelerate its advance. While it is possible to debate Gini coefficients and argue about root causes, the fact remains that capital seems to be concentrated in ever fewer hands while the balance of humanity makes do with ever less to distribute. In a world where increasing inequality is a problem, where old extractive institutions can arise in new guises, and where Christianity often gets thrown into the mix because it is too often paired incongruously with political movements that are seen to make things worse, the Book of Mormon matters because it presents a free society where faith is a key element in creating inclusive institutions and solving centuries-long endemic inequality.

But do those who believe in the Book of Mormon as scripture fulfill this hope? Sometimes. As per the first takeaway mentioned above, one of the takeaways from the Book of Mormon’s opening third is that sometimes the faithful can unconsciously foster efficient preferences and narratives in ways that yield conflict.

The early Nephites fervently and sincerely embraced beliefs with an internal tension: they believed that the Lamanites could find faith, peace, and truth (Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:13–19), but they also believed the Lamanites were “idle,” “full of mischief and subtlety,” and “wild” (2 Ne. 5:24; Enos 1:20). Nephite history and history generally suggest that it is hard for two parties to find common faith and truth when one party sincerely

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“The Persistence of Faith: A Community of Communities,” lecture 6, *BBC Reith Lectures*, 1990, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/poogxthb>.

77. Jeffrey Sachs, “Bursting at the Seams,” lecture 1, *BBC Reith Lectures*, 2007, 41:36, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/boo776j3>.

believes that the other is inferior. There exists the danger that a faithful person can fall into thinking that because faith yields privilege, that privilege need not be shared with those less faithful or less supposedly enlightened.

Reviewing Book of Mormon history through the long view of inequality, privilege, and the narratives surrounding each demands a relearning of the lessons that it has to teach. Readers see distinct periods that might not have been as clear before. There are the initial founding events in Lehi's family. Years of separation and inequality ensue owing to blindness, extractive institutions, and divergent narratives that are sometimes at odds with the stated intentions of the respective parties. King Benjamin shatters old mindsets, realigning Nephite culture and changing Nephite distributional preferences through education combined with a social pact. Actions by Mosiah, Alma, and others who apply his teachings begin to create inclusive institutions and pockets of equality and peace amid extremely chaotic circumstances over decades. Jesus Christ eventually appears to the Book of Mormon peoples, and a long period of equality and peace follows. After centuries, old evils reappear, and the ancient societies quickly descend into chaos and violence that prove to be their end. Redemption is possible. Prejudice, racism, discrimination, populist appeals, murder, revenge, and destruction are also possible. What will the reader choose?

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## Moo at the Moon

We lift our eyes from grazing. We  
people should not be in the alfalfa,  
which might bloat and kill us.  
We people have four stomachs—one  
to fill with fodder, one that turns,  
one wherein our bravery reposes,  
one to hold our souls. We people  
bawl for others to join us. We believe  
in our right to follow, even though  
we are eating alfalfa, tasty but dangerous,  
in this field on a high plateau above a killing  
drop. We have herded ourselves, stumbled  
up the path. We didn't need to climb,  
but no one turned off in a different direction.  
Up here we can moo at the moon, we can  
jump and kick, we can set our sights  
on the great leap over. There is no freedom  
like ours. Freedom for so many,  
more and more ascending.  
Now we rail about crowding, blame  
the weak for being underfoot, whimper  
that we are not getting enough  
practice. The moon is a high target.  
We have become a mass, a mess,  
packed tighter and tighter, pushing  
ourselves toward the edge, where at last  
we will again be one and one and one,  
individuals all along, a thin wisp of cirrus  
between each self and its purposes.

—Susan Elizabeth Howe

# From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones

## What America Can Learn from Germany about Reconciliation

*Melissa Dalton-Bradford*

On December 7, 1970, while in Poland to sign the Warsaw Treaty, German chancellor Willy Brandt visited the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The towering stone and bronze monument commemorates the bloody confrontation between Polish resistance groups and German military that took place on the eve of Passover in April 1943, when seven hundred Jewish insurgents wielding only pistols and homemade grenades fought against the well-equipped SS, who, in the end, leveled and incinerated the entire ghetto. More than seven thousand Jews died in that uprising, and an additional forty-two thousand were rounded up and deported to concentration camps. Under gray and steely skies, Brandt now stood face-to-face with a monument to that event. Surrounded by international dignitaries, journalists, and photographers, Brandt slowly carried a large memorial wreath to the steps of the monument, laid the wreath on the ground, and straightened the ribbon. Then, without ceremony, he dropped abruptly and heavily to his knees. Motionless, wordless, arms hanging down with one hand folded atop the other as if captured mid-sacrament, Brandt riveted his gaze to the ground for about half a minute while cameras clicked frenetically, and onlookers held their breath. In a speech delivered in March 1971 at the Christian-Jewish Week of Brotherhood, Brandt recalled that moment, saying, “As I stood in Warsaw at the beginning of December, the burden of recent German history, the burden of a criminal racial policy, lay upon me. I then did what people do when words fail, and I memorialized—for my compatriots—the millions who were murdered.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960–1975*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 399. For Brandt’s quote, see “Woche der Brüderlichkeit 1971:

A year later Brandt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for paving the way for a meaningful dialogue between East and West.”<sup>2</sup> His image, with the title “Man of the Year,” graced the cover of U.S. *TIME* magazine for “seeking to end World War II by bringing about a fresh relationship between East and West,”<sup>3</sup> and two years on, Brandt was reelected, his policy of Ostpolitik (healing and fortifying relations with Eastern Europe) having initiated a desperately needed rapprochement. Germany’s foreign minister Heiko Maas offered a fitting summation: “The genuflection by Willy Brandt contributed like almost no other event to the self-discovery of Germany after World War II and to the reconciliation in Europe.”<sup>4</sup>

Brandt’s silent thirty seconds spoke volumes. Yet they constituted only one of countless moments and markers along the route from the edge of a historical abyss to Germany’s current ranking as one of the world’s most trusted and admired leaders. A BBC World Service Poll taken in 2013 placed Germany as most popular among its EU neighbors, with 60 percent of the larger world saying the same thing.<sup>5</sup> A similar poll taken in 2017 has Canada with the highest positive ranking, followed closely by Germany.<sup>6</sup> Germany’s hard-won global reputation of decency and trustworthiness, unthinkable seventy years ago, is directly tied to its scrupulous self-criticism, its frequent declarations of accountability (and its repeated apologies) for its crimes against humanity, its insistence on unsparingly educating the public about even the most heinous acts committed in Germany’s name, and its efforts toward peacemaking throughout the modern world.

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Rede des Bundeskanzlers auf der Eröffnungsveranstaltung in Köln,” *Bulletin* 43 (March 23, 1971): 442, [https://www.willy-brandt-biografie.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1971\\_Brandt\\_Rede\\_Br%C3%BCderlichkeit\\_4982.pdf](https://www.willy-brandt-biografie.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1971_Brandt_Rede_Br%C3%BCderlichkeit_4982.pdf). The German original reads: “Als ich Anfang Dezember in Warschau stand, lag auf mir die last der jüngsten deutschen Geschichte, die Last einer verbrecherischen Rassenpolitik. Ich habe dann getan, was Menschen tun, wenn die Worte versagen, und ich habe so—für meine Landsleute mit—der Millionen Ermordeter gedacht.”

2. “Willy Brandt—Facts,” The Nobel Peace Prize 1971, The Nobel Prize, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1971/brandt/facts/>.

3. “On the Road to a New Reality,” *TIME* 97, no. 1 (January 4, 1971): 6.

4. Michael Fischer and Doris Heimann, “German Foreign Minister Praises Historic Brandt Warsaw Genuflection,” dpa International, December 6, 2020, <https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/german-foreign-minister-praises-historic-brandt-warsaw-urn:newsml:dpa.com:20090101:201206-99-593174>.

5. “BBC Poll: Germany Most Popular Country in the World,” *BBC News*, May 23, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22624104>.

6. “Sharp Drop in World Views of US, UK: Global Poll,” *Globe Scan*, July 4, 2017, <https://globescan.com/2017/07/04/sharp-drop-in-world-views-of-us-uk-global-poll/>.

To understand the journey Germany has made toward reconciliation for its racially driven crimes, this research will begin by exploring the origins of Nazi Germany's race laws. We will then track what worked and what did not in Germany's decades-long effort to move from pariah to globally respected leader in peace, noting that the story has been at times hostile and violent, at times more a lurching cautionary tale than a textbook trajectory toward absolution. We will observe how Germany's emergence from the moral and physical devastation of war can offer guideposts, if not a detailed road map, toward a nation's moral revitalization. In conclusion, this study will extend an urgent invitation to its readers to confront, root out, and seek reconciliation for racist ideology and its ancillary atrocities in their own histories and contemporary cultures. For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this explicit and pressing plea is to live true to our discipleship by raising our voices against the signs and sins of racism. Only by doing so can we claim to follow One who "inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black or white, bond or free, male or female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Ne. 26:33).

### **The Origin of Nazi Germany's Race Laws**

The insidious germ that feeds racial discrimination did not originate in modernity. Already in 400 BC, Plato, the father of Western philosophy, taught that selective breeding would elevate society. Ancient Rome practiced infanticide to weed out the weak, and countless variations of the same line of thinking persisted across many cultures throughout history. An obsession with racial purity resurfaced with a vengeance in nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* Western society, a period when, due to unprecedented swings in immigration, both Germany and America witnessed seismic shifts in population in terms of quantity and degree of diversity. What followed was a preoccupation with protecting national identity, which in turn generated research, publications, and formal statements related to racial purity, all emerging between the 1880s and 1920s.

The same years saw German soldiers colonizing South West Africa, enacting genocide on its native inhabitants, whom the Germans called "Untermenschen," or subhumans. While the term "Untermensch" was notoriously applied later by Nazi Germany to the Jews, the idea had gained traction earlier in America. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, researchers Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant popularized in the United States a pseudoscience called eugenics. By the 1920s, Stoddard, a Harvard historian, Boston University-trained lawyer, conspiracy

theorist, and member of the Ku Klux Klan, had become a recognized leader of the eugenics movement in the United States by writing *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*. The work became required reading among both Klan members and early Nazi leaders. And it was in Stoddard's second major work, *Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man*, that the term "Untermensch" entered the lexicon.<sup>7</sup>

Madison Grant was both as racist and as doctrinaire as Stoddard.<sup>8</sup> In 1916, he authored what James Q. Whitman, author of *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, claims was America's most influential work of scientific racism, *The Passing of the Great Race* (approximately seventeen thousand copies sold in the United States alone).<sup>9</sup> A Yale- and Columbia-educated New York lawyer, Grant argued that there were patently "worthless race types" in contrast to "desirable types."<sup>10</sup> The inferior races, he reasoned, should be quarantined or expelled from superior races, if not altogether eliminated. That book became one of Hitler's oft-referenced texts, moving him to exult to Grant that *Passing* was his "bible."<sup>11</sup> Grant served until his death as vice president of the U.S. Immigration Restriction League. At the Nuremberg trials where WWII war criminals were sentenced, Germans introduced *Passing* as evidence that the policies of the Third Reich were not native to Germany but were in fact inherited from American ideologies.<sup>12</sup>

Germans absorbed the contagion of American racist theories while American readers fell under the spell of self-appointed European spokespeople for racial hierarchy. Few were as influential as Eugen Fischer. A professor of anthropology and eugenics in Berlin, Fischer had conducted

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7. Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); see Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920); and Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

8. Adam Serwer, "White Nationalism's Deep American Roots," *The Atlantic*, April 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/adam-serwer-madison-grant-white-nationalism/583258/>.

9. James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 7, [https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload\\_documents/Hitler%27s%20American%20Model%20for%20NYU.pdf](https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/Hitler%27s%20American%20Model%20for%20NYU.pdf); Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

10. Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*, 47.

11. Serwer, "White Nationalism's Deep American Roots."

12. Paul Julian Weindling, *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials: From Medical War Crimes to Informed Consent* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 229.

medical field work among enslaved indigenous adults and children in Germany's African colonies. In *The Bastards of Rehoboth and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man*, published in 1913, Fischer argued unapologetically for a hierarchy of races.<sup>13</sup> Beyond giving his indigenous subjects experimental injections of smallpox, tuberculosis, and typhus, Fischer studied and ran a barrage of tests on 310 children, the mixed-race offspring of Herero women and German men. Like other members of the German governing body in the colonies, Fischer was categorically against mixed-race reproduction, believing it would lead to the deterioration of the superior Nordic-Aryan race. On these children, consequently, Fischer performed forced sterilizations. But he did not stop there. Justified by his conviction that such humans were "inferior" or of "lesser racial quality," Fischer advocated genocide, declaring that "whoever thinks through thoroughly the notion of race, can not arrive at a different conclusion."<sup>14</sup> Hitler studied *Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene* while writing *Mein Kampf*, adopting Fischer's notions of racial hierarchy with Nordic-Aryan "Hervolk," or the master race, at the apex, and the darkest-skinned peoples at the base. Hitler expressed his admiration for Fischer by appointing him president of Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now Humboldt University) in Berlin.

Stoddard, Grant, and Fischer provided the theoretical rationalization for the Nazis' industrialized annihilation of millions. American magnates, high profile personalities, politicians, and millionaires—Carnegie, Rockefeller, Kellogg, Alexander Graham Bell, President Calvin Coolidge, and Henry Ford, among others—provided endorsement and publicity to the eugenics crusade.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Eugen Fischer, *The Rehoboth Bastards and the Problem of Miscegenation among Humans* (Jena, Ger.: G. Fischer, 1913).

14. Quoted in Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 51, translated from Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Jena, Ger.: Gustav Fischer, 1913), 302.

Eugen Fischer, in a lecture dating from 1939, justified such undertakings as simple, pragmatic self-defense: "When a people wants . . . to preserve its own nature, it must reject alien racial elements, and when these have already insinuated themselves, it must suppress them and eliminate them. The Jew is such an alien and, therefore, when he wants to insinuate himself, he must be warded off. This is self-defence. In saying this, I do not characterize every Jew as inferior, as Negroes are, and I do not underestimate the greatest enemy with whom we have to fight." Quoted in Richard M. Lerner, *Final Solutions: Biology, Prejudice, and Genocide* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 38.

15. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation funded the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWI-A) in Berlin, which was established and headed by Eugen Fischer. C. Kurbegovic, Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology,

Only the “surface of American society is . . . covered with a layer of democracy, from beneath which the old aristocratic colors sometimes peep,” Alexis de Tocqueville had written a century earlier in *Democracy in America*.<sup>16</sup> The veneer was too thin to hide from de Tocqueville the underlying scourge of racial oppression inherent in the treatment of indigenous peoples and, above all, in slavery. That entrenched practice “pained and astonished” de Tocqueville as it did other friends of America. In contrast, the German lawyer Heinrich Krieger was fascinated by the American practice of enslaving African and Native peoples and became singularly influential in the Nazis’ assimilation of American race law. As an exchange student in law at the University of Arkansas in the 1930s, Krieger observed at close range the implications of race in the South and spent his year abroad scrutinizing the legal architecture of the infamous Jim Crow era. While residing in Fayetteville, he wrote numerous articles expounding on American racial jurisprudence and outlining the specifics of U.S. race legislation, including the over thirty states that prohibited miscegenation.<sup>17</sup> In 1934, he published “Race Law in the United States” in the *Verwaltungsarchiv* (the Administrative Archive),<sup>18</sup> followed by “Principles of the Indian Law and the Act of June 18, 1934,” published in *George Washington Law Review*.<sup>19</sup>

On June 5, 1934, when German bureaucrats and jurists gathered to draft the “Nürnbergergesetz” (Nuremberg Laws), they had already engaged in extensive study of American case law and legislative acts, including Krieger’s works. Nazis cited Krieger’s findings repeatedly and verbatim, and though many of them judged America’s race laws too radical for their purposes, they were “inspired by America’s ability to treat marginalized populations as less than full citizens while still maintaining a positive global reputation.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, Krieger’s description of

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Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWI-A), September 14, 2013, accessed February 8, 2022, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/5233cdc25c2ec500000000a8>.

16. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vols. I and II, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Bantam, 2000), 50.

17. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 61.

18. The *Verwaltungsarchiv* is a quarterly journal for administrative theory, law, and policy in government, academics, and law. It contains articles addressing and analyzing topics impacting everyone from civil servants to officials sitting in the highest judicial offices.

19. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 54; Heinrich Krieger, “Principles of the Indian Law and the Act of June 18, 1934,” *George Washington Law Review* 3, no. 3 (1935): 279–308.

20. Michael Adkison, “The University of Arkansas’s Hidden History of Helping Nazis,” *Facing South*, April 30, 2021, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2021/04/university-arkansas-hidden-history-helping-nazis>.



America's apparatus of legal discrimination shaped the institutional and legal underpinnings of the Third Reich and its quest for racial purity.

In September 1935, National Socialists unfurled the Nuremberg Laws under dazzling Swastika banners that both threatened and mesmerized the "Volk." German officials and a mostly compliant citizenry enacted a systematic masterplan that legalized purging racial impurities from their midst. A year later, when those laws went into effect, Germany became a well-developed racist regime, employing American laws as blueprint for the Third Reich's legislative framework. At the same time, Krieger published his magnum opus, *Das Rassenrecht in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Race Law in the United States), in whose pages he proclaimed approvingly that the global leader in codified racism was the United States.<sup>21</sup> An ocean away, American lawmakers were busy drafting policies, with support (or at least acquiescence) from otherwise ordinary and decent citizens, that would severely disadvantage minority (primarily Black) populations for generations to come.

Whitman writes that the men who authored the legal codes of the Nazi regime and laid the groundwork for an Aryan nation wondered "how to institutionalize racism in the new Third Reich" and did so "by asking how the Americans did it."<sup>22</sup> Isabel Wilkerson argues persuasively that in the infant stages of National Socialism, those German legal scholars and government officials who partnered with Hitler to draft the Nuremberg Laws looked to the United States not only as *an* example of racist ideology but as *the* classic template of the day for radically racist jurisprudence.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (German Society for Racial Hygiene), founded in 1905, pointed admiringly to the "dedication with which Americans sponsor research in the field of racial hygiene and with which they translate theoretical knowledge into practice."<sup>24</sup> Thirty years later, in 1939, the Grossdeutscher Pressedienst (Greater German Press Agency) wrote, "For us Germans, it is especially important to know and see how one of the biggest states in the world with Nordic stock already has race legislation which is quite

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21. Ira Katznelson, "What America Taught the Nazis," *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/what-america-taught-the-nazis/540630/>; Heinrich Krieger, *Das Rassenrecht in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1936).

22. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model*, 53; see also Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 79.

23. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 79.

24. Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15.



comparable to that of the German Reich.”<sup>25</sup> When Hitler and his cohorts began formulating their grand plan, U.S. race laws based on a culture of ethnic purity were already entrenched as a cultural and political fixture. Hitler praised America’s slaughter and compulsory expulsion to reservations of Indigenous Americans, stating that the United States had wisely “gunned down the millions of Redskins to a few hundred thousand.”<sup>26</sup> He praised the Immigration Act of 1924 (known also as the Asian Exclusion Act) and praised it as a model for his strategy for racial purification. And he commended the custom of torturing, mutilating, and lynching Blacks, extolling that singularly American “knack for maintaining an air of robust innocence in the wake of mass death.”<sup>27</sup>

There can be no question that there was considerable cross-pollination of racist ideology between America and Germany. But it is vital to note that by “borrowing heavily” from American purity laws governing citizenship, intermarriage, and immigration, Germany “managed its marginalized groups and guarded its ruling white citizenry,” fashioning law by law the scaffolding that would undergird the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup> Humbly taking responsibility for crimes America has committed against its own includes acknowledging that our racism fed the ugliest genocidal bureaucracy humankind has ever produced. Taking responsibility also includes recognizing that those ideologies continue to infest our society to this day and threaten to multiply, driving deeper the rifts in our nation and our world. Taking responsibility requires the commitment of all levels of governments as well as organizations and individuals to the demanding and unending work of reconciliation and healing. For that, we can now analyze Germany’s efforts as our guide.

### The German Path to Reconciliation

Jewish-American, Berlin-based scholar Susan Neiman, in *Learning from the Germans*, offers a place to begin our analysis by introducing her readers to “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung,” the German word whose closest English

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25. Quoted in Wilkerson, *Caste*, 79.

26. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 10, 89 n. 30, citing Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 386–87. Whitman added a fuller and slightly altered translation of the passage quoted by Kershaw, from Adolf Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen* (1928; repr., Munich: Saur, 1994), 3:1, p. 161. See also Waitman Wade Beorn, *The Holocaust in Eastern Europe: At the Epicenter of the Final Solution* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 61.

27. Quoted in Wilkerson, *Caste*, 81.

28. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 78–79.

equivalent is “reconciliation.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast to “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” sometimes used in similar contexts and which means overcoming or surmounting one’s past, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* emphasizes, broken into parts, continually-working-through-one’s-past. Neiman stresses that this laborious process begins with facing the truth. “What readmitted Germany to the family of civilized nations only decades after the Holocaust and allowed it to become the leading power in Europe,” she asserts, “was the recognition of its crimes. Having the will to face your shameful history can become a show of strength.”<sup>30</sup> There were many attendant factors that led to a tipping point when most Germans would not only concede their nation’s crimes but also support the process of reconciliation and all that that entails. We will examine seven.

### *1: Denazification*

The victors, the Allies, demanded penance from defeated Germany, and the first step was calling criminals to justice. The IMT (International Military Trials, otherwise known as the Nuremberg Trials) continued over a four-year period, convicting 1,426 criminals and handing down sentences ranging from imprisonment to death. The first hearings focused on twenty-three leading Nazi officers. Of those, only three were found not guilty, and twelve were executed. In the end, only a few war criminals were in fact brought to justice. But in the minds of some, sentencing individual criminals might not have been the ultimate objective of the process. As Robert M. Kemperer, German-American prosecutor pointed out, the “trials with their devastating collections of German documents were the greatest history seminar ever held in the history of the world.”<sup>31</sup> The point, as eminent historian Ian Buruma writes, was a “symbolic punishment of the German people,” a “morality play” that “claimed to deliver justice, truth, and the defeat of evil.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, beyond sentencing war criminals, the IMT hoped to discredit in the public’s eyes the regime that had stoked war and genocide and “stamp out the whole tradition on which the German nation [had] been built up.”<sup>33</sup>

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29. Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2019), 7–8, 17.

30. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 32.

31. Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 144–45.

32. Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, 145.

33. J. M. Troutbeck, quoted in Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds., *The Political Re-Education of Germany and Her Allies after World War II* (London: Routledge, 1985), 18.

The trials were but one publicized facet of a larger denazification program. The Allies further intended to locate and remove specific Nazi party sympathizers from any government responsibility. But that process was staggering, if not doomed from the start. It was virtually impossible to differentiate between major offenders, Nazi party members, opportunists, the duty-driven, the morally disengaged, the “Mitläufer” (those who blankly went along), and the supposedly oblivious bystanders. Furthermore, stabilizing postwar Germany required skilled civic leadership, and the overwhelming majority of prewar and wartime civic leaders had in fact been supporters of the regime, if not Nazi party members. Complicating matters, at the same time the denazification purge was underway, the Cold War was setting in, and attention was turning swiftly to the task of quelling Communism. Within a few years, most former Nazis were returned to their posts. In 1952, 60 percent of civil servants in Bavaria were former Nazis, and ten years after the war, 90 percent of judges in West Germany were former Nazi party members.<sup>34</sup>

A more successful element of denazification was the removal of all physical symbols and messaging of the Nazi regime. Allies called for a complete “Liquidation of German Military and Nazi Memorials and Museums”<sup>35</sup> and seized control of public communications to accelerate a comprehensive reeducation of the German people. By July 1946, the Information Control Division of the U.S. Army had taken over German media, commandeering 37 German newspapers, 6 radio stations, 314 theaters, 642 cinemas, 101 magazines, 237 book publishers, and 7,384 book dealers and printers.<sup>36</sup> Part of the reeducation effort also entailed disseminating a propaganda campaign aimed at shaming and blaming the German citizenry for war horrors. The Allies hung posters showing photos of piles of corpses in concentration camps with headlines screaming, “This is your fault!”<sup>37</sup> Even as they mourned the seven million German lives lost in the war (more than any war in history),

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34. Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 284.

35. See “Liquidation of German Military and Nazi Memorials and Museums,” Directive no. 30, in Matthew Dessem, “How Did We Treat Monuments to White Supremacists When They Weren’t *Our* White Supremacists?” *Slate*, August 13, 2017, <https://slate.com/culture/2017/08/read-the-allied-order-to-destroy-nazi-monuments-in-germany.html>.

36. Alfred H. Paddock Jr., “Major General Robert Alexis McClure, Forgotten Father of US Army Special Warfare,” accessed February 10, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061115053715/http://www.psywarrior.com/mcclure.html>.

37. Neiman *Learning from the Germans*, 47.

Germans wrestled with “Kollektivschuld,” or collective guilt,<sup>38</sup> as they slowly came to terms with multiple millions of victims of genocide—their former Jewish (and Roma, Sinti, homosexual, Black, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other victimized) neighbors.

## 2: Denial, Avoidance, and Obfuscation

By 1951, the IMT and denazification efforts had largely failed at calling the guilty to justice and extracting a mea culpa from a defeated people. Many Germans argued that, given all they had suffered at the hands of these victors, the Allies had no right to judge them. Germans believed that they were victims—of war, of occupation, and even of Nazism itself, which, some said, “was a good idea, badly applied.”<sup>39</sup> Germans took over the denazification process, enacting Amnesty Laws that reversed many Allied efforts to impose justice. Observing this, General Eisenhower estimated that a successful denazification process would take fifty years.<sup>40</sup> Nazis were excused, and German society’s demands for exculpation from guilt in the catastrophe were appeased. According to the surveys commissioned by the occupying government put in place by the United States soon after the war, a third of the population was still staunchly anti-Semitic, and two-thirds felt no responsibility whatsoever for countrywide anti-Semitic sentiments. Some Germans believed the reports of the Holocaust had been exaggerated, if it had happened at all. Others held that if it had in fact happened, it had been justified. And 83 percent held that Germany’s crimes were no worse than those of other nations.<sup>41</sup>

Neiman notes in an interview with Deutsche Welle that well into the 1960s, besides answering those surveys, few Germans openly talked about the realities they had witnessed during the war. Perhaps this was out of evasion and the sense that they were the greater victims of the war, Neiman explains, or it was due to the collective trauma of war and

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38. See Lars Rensmann, “Collective Guilt, National Identity, and Political Processes in Contemporary Germany,” in *Collective Guilt: International Perspectives*, ed. Nyla R. Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169–90.

39. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 58.

40. Noland Norgaard, “Eisenhower Claims 50 Years Needed to Re-Educate Nazis,” *Oregon Statesman*, October 13, 1945, 2, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.news-papers.com/clip/1206197/eisenhower-50-years-for-de-nazification/>.

41. Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 283–90.

of those particular postwar years.<sup>42</sup> Desperate and starving, Germans barely survived the winter of 1946/47, one of the coldest on record, when most rivers and 80 percent of the country's infrastructure were frozen. Surrounded by tons of rubble and occupation troops; suffering from cholera and diphtheria; and threatened by rampant looting, robbery, and murders, many committed suicide while others coped by burying the past. It was their zero hour, or as one says in German, their "Stunde Null," when the past was submersed in silence.

### 3: A Truly Postwar Generation

In the 1960s, in the final years of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's administration, a seismic shift tipped Germany's general opinion regarding World War II. The trial of Adolf Eichmann—a leading SS officer who had facilitated the deportation of Jews, and who, upon being found guilty of fifteen counts of crimes against humanity, was executed by hanging—seemed to begin to alter public opinion. In those proceedings, among the first in history to be completely and internationally televised, not only Eichmann, and "not the Nazi regime alone, but anti-Semitism throughout history," were cross-examined and exposed.<sup>43</sup>

The Eichmann trial was reported in the international press, drawing heated commentary. Throughout Germany in particular, the media coverage catapulted to the forefront of German public discourse and artistic expression themes pertaining to the war, war crimes, and national identity.<sup>44</sup> The public's conscience was not just pricked but stabbed. And the generation that was just coming of age, the children who had grown up in an atmosphere of muffled whispers about their parents' and country's past—"Hitler's children," as some called them—erupted in revolution. As German historian Norbert Frei writes, this was a time when "wrenching, sometimes violent, confrontation between the generations" began.<sup>45</sup> It took a singular intersection of events and the literal passing of a generation for the new one to demand answers. The year 1968 was marked

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42. Susan Neiman, in "May 8, 1945, Was 'Zero Hour' for Germany in Multiple Ways," *Deutsche Welle*, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/end-of-world-war-two-marks-zero-hour-in-germany/a-53352628>.

43. David Ben-Gurion, quoted in Valerie Hartouni, *Visualizing Atrocity: Arendt, Evil, and the Optics of Thoughtlessness* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 93.

44. See David Cesarini, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage, 2004), 324–56.

45. Belinda Cooper, "Truth and Reconciliation," *New York Times*, February 9, 2003, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/09/books/truth-and-reconciliation.html>.

by student revolts that erupted around the western world—in Paris, Prague, Berkeley—but nowhere were the revolts as fierce as in Berlin. It was an epicenter for students, who, freshly cognizant of their forebears' culpability in the Holocaust, protested that former Nazis (or Nazi sympathizers) now held some of Germany's highest political offices. Feeling betrayed both by their fatherland and their very fathers, they took to the streets, demanding answers, apologies, and change.

#### *4: The Historians' Dispute*

On the one hand, a new generation's clash with the traditions of its predecessors was hostile and violent. On the other, that energy plowed fresh ground in which the seeds of reconciliation could be planted. This schism between generations and factions—one guarding the gates of an idealized history, the other pickaxing at it—was evidenced in the "Historikersstreit" (the historians' dispute) of the 1980s. This battle of world-views and opinions regarding Germany's recent history, a fight that had begun already in 1945 and had flared in the late '60s, went another round in highly publicized exchanges between conservative and left-of-center scholars.

Instigated by Ernst Nolte and countered by Jürgen Habermas, the dispute's primary arguments were about how to explain Germany's recent history in a way that would make the future bearable: What motivated Nazism? Was the Holocaust unique and uniquely horrible? Who was culpable? Why should that matter if it is past? Should the present pay for the past? And who, when all these questions are answered, are we as a people? Nolte opined that "embedded in the context of twentieth century genocide, the Final Solution and the state and society responsible for it seem neither unique nor singularly evil." Hence, the Nazi past, which, he wrote, "hung like the sword of judgement over the present," ought to be minimized if not entirely removed. In response, Habermas argued that Nolte and his camp "wanted to utilize revisionist history to dress up national history with a conventional identity," criticizing his opponents for masking the evils of the Nazi era, thereby shutting off Germany from the rest of the West.<sup>46</sup>

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46. Hanging over such queries was the overarching notion of historiography: whether the future is controlled by those who determine the content of memory, as Michael Stürmer, far-right politician and one of the debates' principal participants famously wrote. If the future of Germany belonged to those who controlled (that is, muzzled, sanitized, deliberately distorted, or shot holes through) its past, then which

Vitriolic, intentionally controversial, and barbed with stinging personal attacks, the historians' dispute was a firestorm of ethical and moral questioning. The heart-searching elicited (and still elicits today) complex responses and required profound reflection on Germany's identity: past, present, and future. The international attention the dispute with its public debates drew added ballast and valuable contour to the exercise,<sup>47</sup> but one factor that made the public sparring especially impactful was that those calling for German accountability were Germans themselves. Unlike the IMT and denazification programs which, to Germans, smacked of Schadenfreude on the part of the war's victors, the debates were different. They were fellow-Germans pointing judgment's finger as much at themselves as at anyone else, an intrafamilial plea for collective penance and rebirth. For all these reasons, the historians' dispute induced public truth-seeking, which inched Germany closer to acknowledging the cruelties and criminality within its own history and, in turn, toward reconciliation.

Germany's conversion from denying its history to insisting on accurate historical self-knowledge was wrenchingly confrontational, which might encourage other nations whose own routes toward reconciliation for historical wrongs may also swerve, at times appear hopeless, or even implode. Many if not most Germans of the late 1980s—forty years after the war—knew their nation's future depended on an openly critical attitude about the Nazi past, writes Buruma, and they therefore called for a clean “break with the discretion, the silence, the evasions that were thought to have been necessary to turn millions of former Nazis into republican citizens.”<sup>48</sup> Primed for greater unity, the nation experienced just that when,

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German people were they going to become? Those who, after suspecting or even witnessing the rationalized butchery of fellow humans choose to respond with a shrug of collective amnesia, or those who choose to bow in collective guilt? Habermas's retort was absolute: “We in Germany . . . must, undisguisedly and not simply intellectually, keep awake the memory of the suffering of those murdered at German hands.” Michael Stürmer, “How Much History Weighs,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993), 197; Jürgen Habermas, “On the Public Use of History: The Official Self-Understanding of the Federal Republic is Breaking Up,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?*, 168.

47. In short order, the debates expanded, drawing global interest, when historians and philosophers from outside of Germany—Brits, Canadians, Americans, Israelis—joined the fray. One such intellectual was Auschwitz survivor, spiritual luminary, and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, who wasted no time in calling Nolte and his defenders “the four bandits” of German historiography, soundly denouncing them as apologists for the Third Reich. John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York: Random House, 1997), 238.

48. Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, 188.



in 1989, the Berlin Wall was demolished. At that time, the work toward reconciliation was only nascent and became far more complicated as East and West German memories and interpretations of the war met, quite literally, face-to-face. Major (and by many accounts, the most significant) work toward full reconciliation was yet to come.

### 5: Confessing and Apologizing

If a single thirty-second public act of penance like Willy Brandt's silent supplication in Warsaw could pivot history, then it is wise to study what makes an effective apology. "To apologize," writes Nicholas Tavuchis in his seminal work, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*, "is to declare voluntarily that one has *no* excuse, defense, justification, or explanation for an action (or inaction) that has 'insulted, failed, injured, or wronged another.'"<sup>49</sup> Brandt falling spontaneously to his knees was voluntary, authentic, and visually defenseless. It was a posture of pure and unstudied penitence where he, as a proxy for his people, rendered himself small, laid aside the shield of language, and begged for forgiveness. As Tavuchis notes, "One who apologizes seeks forgiveness and redemption for what is unreasonable, unjustified, undeserving, and inequitable."<sup>50</sup> Whether the offended or victimized (in this case, Poland) wholeheartedly embraces the offender's or perpetrator's (Germany's) apology is unpredictable. This is an important issue to which this essay will return when discussing Germany's initial attempt at reconciliation with Israel. What history has proven, nonetheless, is that Brandt's fall to his knees was a decisive step toward reconciliation, and reconciliation, in turn, was a definitive step toward Germany's reunification.

After Brandt's, a second ground-breaking German public apology was offered in words. The landmark speech given by German president Richard von Weizsäcker on May 8, 1985, commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. U.S. president Ronald Reagan was slated to attend the event, but days prior, on May 5, he made a controversial ceremonial visit to the Bitburg, Germany, cemetery where forty-nine S.S. officers (among many others) were interred.<sup>51</sup> Public out-

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49. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 17; emphasis in original.

50. Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 17.

51. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Joint German-American Military Ceremony at Bitburg Air Base in the Federal Republic of Germany," May 5, 1985, accessed February 4, 2022. <http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/texts/reagano51985.html>.



cry at what appeared to be Reagan's disregard of war crimes, or even his tacit sympathy for their perpetrators, was unleashed on both sides of the Atlantic. Weizsäcker's World War II commemorative address landed as a resonant counterpoint. In it, Weizsäcker lauded May 8, not as a day of defeat and humiliation, as it had always been known, but as a "day of liberation" from Nazism. Laying blame at the feet of the public's chiefly enthusiastic support of National Socialism, he pointed to the inseparable connection between the Nazi takeover in Germany and the tragedies of World War II. And, with extraordinary candor, he added that when the Holocaust had become a known fact, "all too many of us claimed they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything." He continued, saying, "All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it." He also spoke these piercing words: "We need to have the strength to look truth straight in the eye—without embellishment and without distortion. . . . We must understand that there can be no reconciliation without remembrance."<sup>52</sup>

A third apology of note came in 2008 from Angela Merkel, who became Germany's chancellor in 2005. On numerous occasions, she had already spoken with striking specificity about the Nazi crimes and the need to remember and take accountability for her nation's past.<sup>53</sup> On this occasion in particular, a commemoration for the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish state after the Holocaust, Merkel delivered an extraordinary address at the Knesset (Israeli Parliament).<sup>54</sup> Using the Hebrew word *Shoah* for the Holocaust, Merkel solemnly admitted to the Parliament that the "break with civilization that was the Shoah" was unprecedented and that "the mass murder of 6 million Jews, carried out in the name of Germany, has brought indescribable suffering

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52. Richard von Weizsäcker, "Speech in the Bundestag on 8 May 1985 during the Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of War in Europe and of National-Socialist Tyranny," accessed February 4, 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20140201195236/http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Medienbildung\\_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/weizsaecker\\_speech\\_may85/weizsaecker\\_speech\\_may85.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140201195236/http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Medienbildung_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/weizsaecker_speech_may85/weizsaecker_speech_may85.pdf).

53. Ruth Wittlinger, "The Merkel Government's Politics of the Past," *German Politics and Society* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 9–27, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2008.260402>.

54. Merkel's Knesset speech was extraordinary and historic because it was the first time a German chancellor had ever been invited to speak there. In fact, the Knesset had to change its bylaws to allow a head of government (and not a head of state, which had a precedent) to appear before the full plenary session. Further, the address was controversial because Merkel was permitted to speak in German, what Jewish critics refer to as the language of the murderers.

to the Jewish people, Europe and the entire world.” Continuing, she noted that though Germans had taken forty years to admit their guilt and their accountability to Israel, they were filled “with shame” over the Nazi Holocaust. She also said, “I bow my head before the victims” and “before all those who helped” the survivors.<sup>55</sup> Members of Knesset called out “Shalom!” as they gave the chancellor a standing ovation.<sup>56</sup> The moment marked a further affirmative shift in German-Israeli relations.

Merkel, like Weizsäcker and Brandt before her, achieved what scholar Robert Weyeneth says is the purpose of symbolic speech acts: “to be forgiven, to restore institutional integrity, to defuse volatile situations, to find closure, to establish accountability, to forestall retribution, and to point the way to a future relationship.”<sup>57</sup> These German leaders, by offering apologies for crimes of which none of them was personally guilty, but for which their country was accountable, have contributed markedly to Germany’s ongoing process of historical reconciliation.

## 6: Memorializing

“Monuments are not about history,” writes Susan Neiman. Monuments, she asserts, “are values made visible.” In choosing what it does and does not commemorate, a community honors certain values and dishonors others. “What is at stake” in choosing what to commemorate, Neiman warns, “is not the past, but the present and the future. When we choose to memorialize a historical moment, we are showing the values we want to defend, and pass on.”<sup>58</sup>

Among the memorials that have been established are the “Stolpersteine” (literally, “stumbling stones”), six-inch brass-covered blocks of cement embedded between cobblestones throughout twenty-five European countries. I frequently spot them as I walk the tree-lined avenues of Bad Homburg, a suburb north of Frankfurt, where my family and I have lived for many years. Their metal surfaces bear engravings: the name, birthdate, date of deportation, and place of death—a skeletal life sketch—of someone killed in the Holocaust who once lived right

55. “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Knesset in Jerusalem,” March 18, 2008, [http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech\\_merkel\\_2008\\_eng.pdf](http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech_merkel_2008_eng.pdf).

56. Ulrike Putz, “Merkel in the Knesset: ‘We Would Never Abandon Israel,’” *Spiegel International*, March 18, 2008, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/merkel-in-the-knesset-we-would-never-abandon-israel-a-542311.html>.

57. Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” *Public Historian* 23, no. 3 (2001): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2001.23.3.9>.

58. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 263.

where that stone has been installed. Going to the dentist, my steps freeze before the stone for a Dr. Bernhard Wiesenthal, deported in 1942 from this apartment, as the inscription states, and murdered in Sobibor. Picking up vegetables at the open market, I lower the kickstand of my bike near the edge of brass plaques for Eduard Rothschild and his family, deported in 1942 from this address and murdered in Mauthausen. And on my way home, I spot the muted sheen of two side-by-side stones: Robert and Frieda Altstuhl, both hauled off in 1942 to be murdered in Treblinka. Micromemorial by micromemorial, a chorus of witnesses surfaces from underground, silently attesting to Germany's Nazi legacy.

From small plaques like the nearly seventy thousand Stolpersteine that artist Gunter Demnig has placed across twenty-five European countries, to monolithic works stretching over acres (like the Holocaust Memorial in downtown Berlin and the concentrations camps—Ravensbrück, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and others—that have been turned into museums), Germany has erected, mostly since the 1980s, hundreds of monuments memorializing the tragic realities, not the romanticized myths, of World War II. Christian leaders who lost their lives to Nazism are forged in bronze. LGBTQIA+ victims who are often forgotten in discussions and textbooks are remembered in stone. The heroic efforts of the underground resistance are brought into the foreground. The Villa at Wannsee, where racist ideology was written into a Final Solution, has been transformed into a museum exploring the Final Solution itself. And the former Gestapo headquarters were turned into a museum named the Topography of Terror.

As significant as what is visible and visitable is what is absent. There are zero monuments in Germany celebrating the Third Reich and its Nazi leaders, “however many grandfathers fought or fell for them.”<sup>59</sup> No Eichmann, Rommel, Göring, Goebbels, Heydrich, Himmler, or Hitler statues. All tributes to such criminals were removed anyway when the Allies outlawed those symbols in their denazification campaign immediately postwar. Significantly, every German leader since has adopted and maintained that ruling until the present time. It is likewise illegal to display a Swastika and other tokens of Nazism, and descendants of Nazi leaders know to not openly memorialize those forefathers. If one goes looking for the one-time Führer's gravesite, it is nowhere to be found.

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59. Susan Neiman, “There Are No Nostalgic Nazi Memorials,” *The Atlantic*, September 14, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/germany-has-no-nazi-memorials/597937/>; see also Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 264–65.

Appropriately, the bunker in which Hitler spent his final hours and eventually committed suicide is buried under the tons of cement pavement of a drab parking lot.

Rather than spotlighting Hitler and his co-aggressors, “Germany has raised monuments to World War II’s real heroes—those who risked or gave their lives to oppose the Nazis—as well as to the war’s victims” and to none of the aggressors themselves, writes Neiman.<sup>60</sup> A chief reason behind why that type of memorial is absent from the German landscape is as reassurance to its global neighbors that Germany can be trusted. That it has learned from and abandoned its poisonous past. That it has reformed itself.

## 7: *Reparations*

Reconciliation is not a static destination, but a dynamic, intergenerational, and ongoing process, and its ultimate objective, peace, as Chancellor Angela Merkel often said, requires constant self-reflection and self-criticism. Sometimes, too, it calls for material compensation. Such reimbursement, or reparations, “are not punitive,” writes American rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz. “They’re restorative.” They are, as he continues, a “means to a more just society, not an end to attain absolution.”<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, reparations serve purposes larger than, but including, material compensation to any direct recipient. In the words of Joe Stewart, acting president of Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation, the disbursement of material restitution is best viewed as “transformative rather than payback.”<sup>62</sup> Reparations can signal the seriousness of the perpetrator’s contrition and can aid in cultivating a new relationship with victims while also providing victims (or descendants of victims) with capital to compensate for lost property, housing, employment, education, opportunities, and other elements central to their human dignity.

In the case of World War II and its accompanying brutalities, the Jewish community held a singular place with regards to reconciliation and reparations. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer approached Israel in the early 1950s, saying later, “I felt our duty to the Jews as a deep moral debt.

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60. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 267.

61. Shmuly Yanklowitz, “A Rabbi’s Plea: We Need Slavery Reparations in Order to Move Forward,” *YES! Magazine*, June 30, 2015, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/make-right/2015/06/30/rabbi-s-plea-slavery-reparations>.

62. David Crary, “Jesuits in US Pledge \$100M for Racial Reconciliation,” *Washington Times*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/mar/16/jesuits-in-us-pledge-100m-for-racial-reconciliation/>.

... One of my chief aims ... was to put in order our relationship to Israel and the Jews, both for moral and political reasons. Germany could not become a respected and equal member of the family of nations until it had recognized and proven the will to make amends.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1951, Adenauer announced plans to repay Israel for the monstrous crimes committed in the name of the German people. However well-intentioned, those overtures were not immediately welcomed by Israel. Understandably, many Israelis, including Menachem Begin, Israel’s later prime minister, were insulted by the very idea of reparations. The indignant Begin tried to convince then-prime minister David Ben-Gurion to not entertain those discussions with Adenauer, saying, “In this generation of ours that we call the last of bondage and first of redemption—in this generation that we have been privileged to gain back our dignity, in which we emerged from slavery to freedom—you are ready, for few millions of contaminated dollars and for impure goods, to deprive us of dignity we have earned.” But Ben-Gurion persisted, knowing that the new Israeli state desperately needed extra funding, and, in the end, healing had to begin somewhere.<sup>64</sup> Over the course of the decades since, Germany has indeed paid reparations to Israel of more than \$8 billion, resulting in an income that supports fifteen percent of Israel’s current economy.<sup>65</sup> The material and pragmatic act of paying reparations, in conjunction with Germany’s frequently repeated public statements of guilt and shame, have transformed relations with Israel. A 2015 poll from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation revealed that, of one thousand Israelis surveyed, 70 percent claimed Germany as their favorite European country.<sup>66</sup>

Germany’s attempts to atone for its past sins, however, have not always been met with acceptance and forgiveness. Although Germany apologized for what it termed “genocide” in its former African colony German South West Africa (now Namibia) and offered to fund projects worth more than \$1.2 billion in the country, Namibia’s vice president,

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63. Konrad Adenauer, quoted in Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 29.

64. Menachem Begin, quoted in Annabell Timsit, “The Blueprint the US Can Follow to Finally Pay Reparations,” Quartz, October 13, 2020, <https://qz.com/1915185/how-germany-paid-reparations-for-the-holocaust/>.

65. Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation*, 136–38.

66. Michael Borchard and Hans Maria Heyn, “The Holy Land and the Germans,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, January 12, 2015, <https://www.kas.de/en/single-title/-/content/das-heilige-land-und-die-deutschen1>.

Nangolo Mbumba, said, “I don’t think that any Namibian would think that the money is enough to compensate for all that happened.”<sup>67</sup>

### Implications for the United States

Over generations, Germany has kept at its commitment to reconciliation by offering robust and ongoing reparations. That such commitment to reconciliation heals wounds both native and foreign and thereby dramatically transforms our global neighborhood is an incontestable fact. Germany is a world leader today *precisely because* Germany has been a reconciliation leader. As journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates writes in his vitally important essay “The Case for Reparations,” “Reparations could not make up for the murder perpetrated by the Nazis. But they did launch Germany’s reckoning with itself, and perhaps provided a road map for how a great civilization might make itself worthy of the name.”<sup>68</sup>

And how is the United States doing at making itself worthy of the name “great”? Could the United States learn from Germany’s initiatives and convert markers and memorials that currently glorify our racist inheritance into symbols of reconciliation and peace? Social justice activist and author Bryan Stevenson believes so. Taking German holocaust memorials as a model, he converted a ten-thousand-square-foot former Alabaman slave house into the National Lynching Memorial, and his Equal Justice Initiative aims to build similar lynching memorials across

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67. “German Colonial-Era Genocide Reparations Offer Not Enough—Namibia Vice President,” *Reuters*, June 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/germany-colonial-era-genocide-reparations-offer-not-enough-namibia-vice-2021-06-04/>.

68. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* (June 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

Coates reminds us that African slave Belinda Royall was awarded fifteen pounds and twelve shillings when she petitioned the U.S. government for reparations after her American master abandoned her. That was 163 years before the U.S. began paying Native American tribes \$1.3 billion for taking their lands, 168 years before Adenauer’s offer to Israel, and 205 years before the U.S. paid \$1.6 billion to Japanese Americans who had been interned during World War II. Royall’s petition was submitted eighty years before General Sherman promised freed slaves forty acres and a mule, a promise President Andrew Johnson revoked. In contrast to President Johnson, Congressman John Conyers Jr. of Detroit introduced an act he called HR40 (40 for forty mules) in 1989 and in every successive year thereafter until 2017, to form a task force for the study of the feasibility of reparations for slavery. Finally, in April 2021, a House committee advanced the bill, but as of this writing it has not been taken up for consideration by the full House of Representatives. See Juana Summers, “A Bill to Study Reparations for Slavery Had Momentum in Congress, but Still No Vote,” NPR, November 12, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/12/1054889820/a-bill-to-study-reparations-for-slavery-had-momentum-in-congress-but-still-no-vo>.

the United States. He believes that strong leadership—good government—educates its citizenry about the crimes for which its nation ought to feel shame. Elizabeth Alexander—scholar, Pulitzer Prize-nominated author, and president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has recently focused on public monuments—concurs. With a quarter of a billion dollars, the biggest donation in the Mellon Foundation’s history, this eminent educator and activist is leading a nationwide initiative that will support efforts like Stevenson’s Lynching Memorials, with the understanding that “what we see around us, what is ambient, is teaching us all the time.”<sup>69</sup> Alexander and her colleagues at Mellon are proposing a five-year project that focuses on repurposing, reimagining, and recontextualizing monuments that currently sanitize or glorify shameful passages of America’s past. As we look across the nation, we see an Emancipation Monument featuring two twelve-foot figures of slaves was unveiled in Richmond, Virginia, on September 22, 2021. And in Charlottesville, the Robert E. Lee statue that sparked a white supremacist rally in August 2017, where a neo-Nazi murdered an antiracism protester, was taken down. Charlottesville’s mayor declared that this was “a small step closer to the goal of helping . . . America grapple with its sin of being willing to destroy black people for economic gain.”<sup>70</sup>

And where does the United States stand with regard to reparations? Though comprehensive programs are still in their embryonic stages, momentum appears to be building. Evanston, Illinois, has announced a reparation initiative that promises to spread \$10 million over a decade to Black residents whose families were discriminated against in the housing market. Allocation of funds begins with \$400,000 that will pay for residents’ home repairs and mortgage payments.<sup>71</sup> U.S.-based Jesuits have promised to raise \$100 million that will go to the posterity of those once enslaved by their Roman Catholic order with a long-range goal of raising \$1 billion.<sup>72</sup>

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69. Elizabeth Alexander, in “Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Pledges \$250 Million to Reimagine Monuments in U.S.,” NPR, October 8, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/08/921782086/andrew-w-mellon-foundation-pledges-250-million-to-reimagine-monuments-in-u-s>.

70. Andrew Webb, “Charlottesville Mayor and Activist Address Statue Removal,” NCB29, July 10, 2021, <https://www.nbc29.com/2021/07/11/charlottesville-mayor-activist-address-statue-removal/>.

71. Julie Bosman, “Chicago Suburb Shapes Reparations for Black Residents: ‘It Is the Start,’” *New York Times*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/22/us/reparations-evanston-illinois-housing.html>.

72. Rachel L. Swarns, “Catholic Order Pledges \$100 Million to Atone for Slave Labor and Sales,” *New York Times*, updated May 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/us/jesuits-georgetown-reparations-slavery.html>.



From Los Angeles to Tullahassee, Oklahoma, eleven mayors calling themselves MORE (Mayors Organized for Reparations and Equity) have initiated small-scale reparation programs for the Black residents of their communities. They hope to demonstrate that such a program is indeed possible on a federal level.

Despite America's rethinking of public memorials, offering reparations, and acknowledging the gains of the civil rights movement, the United States still lags far behind its European neighbor in doing the same with its history of slavery and the slaughter of indigenous peoples, Jim Crow, and the broad spectrum of racial injustice that now spans centuries. The results of that negligence are far-reaching and irrefutable. According to the best statistical research, today's America is in many ways as racially polarized as it has ever been. And signs forewarn that the situation is worsening precipitously.<sup>73</sup> Far-right hate groups in the United States are on the rise, outstripping a global trend to which Germany is not completely immune.<sup>74</sup> In both the United States and Germany, white supremacists have recently been linked to if not openly welcomed by major political parties. By all accounts, however, the prognosis for this trend in the United States is uniquely problematic and far-reaching and deserves scrutiny within the context of a Germany-U.S. comparison that this paper presents. Complex factors like some that prefaced the rise of the Third Reich and several other elements peculiar to twenty-first-century America converged on January 6, 2021, when armed mobs, including white supremacists and neofascists, breached police barriers at the U.S. Capitol, killing one officer and assaulting other law enforcement personnel and journalists. This homegrown militia, some of whom waved Confederate battle flags while others wore "Camp Auschwitz" and "6MWE" (Six Million Wasn't Enough) T-shirts, rioted and stormed, occupied, and pillaged the federal seat of government while terrorizing elected representatives, their staffs, and their families. Besides spreading human feces through the Capitol's hallways and vandalizing memorial artwork, they

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73. See Darrell M. West, "Our National Crisis," in *Ways to Reconcile and Heal America*, Brookings Institution, 12–41, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Reconciliation-v3.1.pdf>.

74. The Anti-Defamation League found that nationally the "distribution of racist, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ fliers, stickers, banners and posters" more than doubled from 1,214 in 2018 to 2,713 cases in 2019. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has documented that hate crime violence rose to a two-decade high in 2019 and included sharp rises in physical assaults, shootings, and other forms of violence targeting religious and racial minorities. "White Supremacists Double Down on Propaganda in 2019: A Report from the Center on Extremism," Anti-Defamation League, February 2020, 5, <https://www.adl.org/media/14038/download>.



erected gallows where they threatened to hang Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. The insurrection cost over \$30 million, injured 138 police officers, and resulted in the loss of five human lives.<sup>75</sup> Yet those domestic terrorists were permitted to leave unrestrained. With the entire world agape in utter shock and revulsion, America was yanked awake—yet again—to the truth about how fragile the state of democracy can be, and how that fragility is inextricably linked to race relations that have smoldered for centuries and can flare at any time, burning and blistering across the land of the free.

A Pew Research Center survey conducted across thirteen countries outside the United States in the summer of 2020 revealed that “positive views of the U.S. are at or near an all-time low” in the twenty years of Pew’s existence.<sup>76</sup> And most see racial and ethnic problems as greater in the United States than in their own countries.<sup>77</sup> At a time when the United States seems to be struggling with its place as a world leader, it is worthwhile to consider the ways that Germany recovered its leadership role just a few decades after driving the globe into a war generated by racism. The sharp drop in global confidence and trust in the United States ought to spur us to reflect on the steps Germany has taken to foster solid and mutually respectful foreign ties, redeeming itself in its own and in the world’s eyes.

The societal splintering and poor global image that plagues the United States can be countered as we cease romanticizing elements of our troubling history and instead face, admit, and repent of our original sin, namely racism. We start by asking ourselves unsparing questions. Have we protected ourselves from discomfort by whitewashing, deliberately distorting, or burying many of our nation’s racial injustices to

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75. Emily Cochrane and Luke Broadwater, “Capitol Riot Costs Will Exceed \$30 Million, Official Tells Congress,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/24/us/politics/capitol-riot-damage.html>; Editorial Board, “Opinion: The Jan. 6 Capitol Attack Was, in Fact, a Violent Insurrection,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/10/jan-6-capitol-attack-was-fact-violent-insurrection/>.

76. Richard Wike, Janell Fetterolf, and Mara Mordecai, “U.S. Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say Country Has Handled Coronavirus Badly,” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, September 15, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/09/15/us-image-plummets-internationally-as-most-say-country-has-handled-coronavirus-badly/>.

77. Laura Silver, “More People Globally See Racial, Ethnic Discrimination as a Serious Problem in the U.S. Than in Their Own Society,” Pew Research Center, November 2, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/02/more-people-globally-see-racial-ethnic-discrimination-as-a-serious-problem-in-the-u-s-than-in-their-own-society/>.

the point that white supremacy and myriad iterations of its venomous ideology have seeped into our common bloodstream? If, as I argue, the inequities and violence accorded racial minorities in the United States are not a passing fringe phenomenon but are calcified in our culture and in too many instances enshrined in institutions, what can we do?

## Church History and Church Present

We might begin by seriously studying our own Church history, including fraught issues like policies that banned Blacks from receiving the priesthood and entering the temple (reversed in 1978), which had been justified by the mythologized and, thankfully, now disavowed folk doctrine that Blacks carried a curse of Cain and had not been sufficiently valiant in the pre-existence. As an aid to that study, we can reference and share the Church's Gospel Topic Essays that address some more ambiguous, misunderstood, or thorny doctrinal and historical issues including one written specifically on "Race and the Priesthood"<sup>78</sup> and another entitled "Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints."<sup>79</sup> In that second essay, one of the most sinister events in the history of our faith, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, is introduced. The 1857 premeditated and unprovoked slaughter of 120 emigrants by sixty Mormon militiamen who then tried to blame local Paiute Indians for the butchery provides an example of heinous racial exploitation as well as a case where today's Church leadership has issued a retrospective public acknowledgement of "collective extirpatory violence" committed by Church members under another generation's institutional watch.<sup>80</sup> At the memorial event held on the site of the carnage in southern Utah in 2007, President Henry B. Eyring offered these words: "We express profound regret for the massacre carried out in this valley 150 years ago today and for the undue and untold suffering experienced by the victims then and by their relatives to the present time."<sup>81</sup> That President Eyring

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78. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

79. "Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/peace-and-violence-among-19th-century-latter-day-saints?lang=eng>.

80. Robert A. Goldberg and others, "Roundtable on Massacre at Mountain Meadows," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 1 (2009): 114.

81. "Mountain Meadows Massacre," Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://news-uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/mountain-meadows-massacre>.

and other ecclesiastical leaders also made the institutional decision to fling wide open the doors to all Church archives for researchers to produce *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, an exhaustive volume on this episode, suggests not only a significant shift in Church scholarship and LDS culture, but a definitive step toward working-through-our-past.<sup>82</sup>

For similar definitive steps we can look to President Russell M. Nelson, who has said that we must “do the rigorous work of building bridges of cooperation rather than walls of segregation and alienation.” In an effort toward reconciliation for the Church’s problematic racial past, he has forged strong partnerships with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), with whom he authored an op-ed on racial unity.<sup>83</sup> He has also worked closely with the UNCF (United Negro College Fund), to which the Church, under President Nelson’s direction, has donated substantially in the form of scholarships and fellowships.<sup>84</sup> We can heed the counsel voiced by President Dallin H. Oaks that “racism is probably the most familiar source of prejudice today, and we are all called to repent of that,”<sup>85</sup> and the exhortations of countless other twenty-first-century Church leaders who in so many words have called upon members across the globe to root out xenophobia and bigotry and “unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.”<sup>86</sup> We can echo their words in a spirit of love and patience in Church courses and callings while citing accurate history and personal experiences around the topic of race. Where possible, we can donate to organizations or initiatives that educate about racial issues and labor toward interracial reconciliation. My eighty-seven-year-old parents have recently made donations

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82. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

83. Russell M. Nelson, Derrick Johnson, Leon Russell, and Amos C. Brown, “Locking Arms for Racial Harmony in America,” Medium, June 8, 2020, [https://medium.com/@Ch\\_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f62180abf37](https://medium.com/@Ch_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f62180abf37).

84. Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Joins Senior Leaders of NAACP in Calling for Racial Reform; ‘Solutions Will Come as We Open Our Hearts,’ They Write in Op-Ed,” Church News, June 8, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-06-08/president-nelson-naacp-leaders-racial-reform-solutions-open-hearts-medium-op-ed-186115>; Tad Walch, “Church Provides Millions to NAACP, UNCF for Scholarships and Humanitarian Aid,” *Deseret News*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/6/14/22530395/latter-day-saints-give-to-uncf-naacp-provide-scholarships-to-black-students-lds-mormon>.

85. Dallin H. Oaks, “A Cause for Celebration,” address at the fortieth anniversary celebration of the 1978 revelation on the priesthood, June 1, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2018/08/be-one/a-cause-for-celebration?lang=eng>.

86. “Race and the Priesthood.”

supporting such efforts and have read, cover-to-cover, many of the texts cited in this paper, demonstrating that it is never too late for us to educate ourselves and work to make amends. We can gently correct in ourselves first, and only then in others, racist thinking, language, and behavior that can creep into our everyday interactions. We can openly support and vote for politicians who embody, and policies that embolden, antiracist values. (Better, we can *be* those politicians and civic leaders, ourselves.) And finally, we can actively seek to forge relationships with Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths from racial or ethnic backgrounds different from our own, sharing our most priceless commodity, our time.

## Conclusion

It took generations of Germans to fight to repair the scourge of hatred that found its full, foul expression in the Holocaust. It is long since time for our generation to elevate and intensify the fight against racial injustice, wherever we might live in the world. No, the postwar generation of Germans did not actually commit the crimes of Nazism, but they knew their world was still contaminated with inherited racist values and behaviors that, to be eradicated, needed first to be exposed, owned, and challenged. Similarly, Americans of today did not own slaves, write the tyrannical Jim Crow laws, or hurl the stones, metal pipes, and fire torches in the riots of the Red Summer of 1919.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, we know our world is diseased and that God calls us to be its healers. In the words of Isabel Wilkerson, we might not have built it ourselves, but we bear responsibility for this home we have inherited and inhabit:

Many people may rightly say, “I have nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.<sup>88</sup>

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87. See Abigail Higgins, “Red Summer of 1919: How Black WWI Vets Fought Back against Racist Mobs,” *History*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/red-summer-1919-riots-chicago-dc-great-migration>.

88. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 16.

This house—glorious, promising, but in many ways collapsing under its own onerous historical weight—is in desperate need of moral repair. It will not mend itself. We cannot simply groan and ignore the damage, shoving buckets under leaky ceilings and plastering over asbestos-filled walls. We need inspectors who explore the flooring, plumbers who probe the pipes, and even excavators with radars, sensors, shovels, and trowels, who unearth hidden and knotted root systems snaking through the surrounding property, exhuming what might be pressing against and cracking our foundation.

Working-through-our-past, like caring for our inherited home, is intergenerational spiritual schooling, with each age focused on recognizing, calling out, and preventing new forms of evil. In that spirit, I concur with Susan Neiman, who writes that the moral training of acknowledging and owning our national sins helps us “recognize complex forms of evil as well as simple ones and prepares us to begin to prevent them. It is training that should not be confined to historians but must become a matter of shared public memory—history no thinking man or woman can honorably ignore.”<sup>89</sup>

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A holder of two degrees from Brigham Young University (BA, German Language and Literature; MA, Comparative Literature), Melissa was the recipient of the 2018 BYU Alumni Association’s Service to Family Award. She has parlayed her training and her family’s thirty years of global nomadism across eight countries and six languages into an extensive body of writing, including articles published in journals, magazines, online sites, anthologies, and her book *Global Mom: A Memoir*, which won the Association of Mormon Letter’s award for Best Memoir.

Melissa’s speaking (she has addressed UN affiliate conferences, university and international upper school forums, and international women’s symposia) draws on her experience parenting four children in an international context and mourning the drowning death of her eldest. About that tragedy, she has written award-winning poetry and the anthology *On Loss and Living Onward*.

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89. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 19.

# Rise and Run

## Latter-day Saint Women and Good Government

*Susan R. Madsen*

Thomas Jefferson believed that “the care of human life & happiness, & not their destruction, is the first & only legitimate object of good government.”<sup>1</sup> According to Elder Wilford W. Andersen of the Seventy, one of the ways good government cares for human life and happiness is when it “protects religion and fosters religious freedom. And good religion encourages good citizenship and adherence to the law of the land.”<sup>2</sup> If we are to ensure that human life, happiness, and religious freedom will thrive and be protected in the years ahead, women must be active in government. Women’s participation is essential in political representation (for example, public elected office) and local, state, and federal government workforces, since critical decision making that impacts individuals, families, and communities occurs through all these channels.

Events of the past few years underscore the need for democratic governance processes—and government in general—to integrate diversity at all levels. In fact, American democracy is based on the concept of representation,<sup>3</sup> and research has found that when a government mirrors the population it serves, local, state, and national entities better

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1. Thomas Jefferson, “To the Republicans of Washington County, Maryland, March 31, 1809,” Founders Online, National Archives, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-01-02-0088>.

2. Wilford W. Andersen, “Religion and Government,” *Ensign* 45, no. 7 (July 2015): 49.

3. Gregg G. Van Ryzin, Norma M. Riccucci, and Huafang Li, “Representative Bureaucracy and Its Symbolic Effect on Citizens: A Conceptual Replication,” *Public Management Review* 19, no. 9 (2017): 1365–79.

represent the population in decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> This is known as representative bureaucracy,<sup>5</sup> which is based on the idea that people are shaped by their social experiences and that, as a result, the social experiences of political leadership and the government's workforce matter.<sup>6</sup> In fact, in terms of a public workforce specifically, diversity "implies equal access to government positions promoting empowerment and connection with government in diverse communities [and] can also signal the inclusion of group interests, attitudes, and experiences in government decision making and build government legitimacy."<sup>7</sup> Gender diversity in democratic governance matters.

I begin this article by laying the groundwork related to the positive difference women can bring to government and the importance of women's influence in these settings. Secondly, I discuss Church teachings related to the involvement of its members in government, narrowing to a specific focus on Latter-day Saint women. Next, I address categories presenting broad challenges for women in participating in government, with a focus on Latter-day Saint women. I conclude this article with some action items for Latter-day Saint women to better assist in furthering our contributions to good government.

## The Positive Differences Women Can Make

Hundreds of studies have found that when more women lead in a variety of settings, positive change occurs. For example, one study discovered that diverse teams are smarter, reporting that "companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians."<sup>8</sup> Other

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4. Mark Bradbury and J. Edward Kellough, "Representative Bureaucracy: Assessing the Evidence on Active Representation," *American Review of Public Administration* 41, no. 2 (2011): 157–67.

5. J. Donald Kingsley, *Representative Bureaucracy: An Interpretation of the British Civil Service* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch, 1944); Bradbury and Kellough, "Representative Bureaucracy."

6. Alexandru Roman, "The Roles Assumed by Public Administrators: The Link between Administrative Discretion and Representation," *Public Administration Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2015): 595–644.

7. Amy E. Smith, "Getting to the Helm: Women in Leadership in Federal Regulation," *Public Organization Review* 14 (2014): 479.

8. Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince, *Why Diversity Matters*, McKinsey, January 1, 2015, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20of%20functions/people%20and%20organizational%20performance/our%20insights/why%20diversity%20matters/why%20diversity%20matters.pdf>.

studies have found that more gender- and racial-diverse teams shared more facts, made fewer factual errors, were more willing to reexamine facts and remain objective, became more aware of personal blind spots, processed facts more carefully, and embodied more innovative thinking than nondiverse groups.<sup>9</sup>

For decades, organizational scientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and other experts have concluded that when women work and lead alongside men in teams and organizations—and other types of diversity also apply—creativity is enhanced, and teams and organizations can better generate novel ideas, understand various perspectives, make discoveries, and create breakthrough innovations.<sup>10</sup> Studies have also shown that when leadership teams are diverse, workers are more likely to be engaged and involved, people tend to behave more ethically, the culture is more open to diversity in hiring and promotions, employees are more satisfied with their jobs and have lower intentions to leave, and workers have higher perceptions of fairness. Researchers have even concluded that simply being exposed to people who think differently can improve the way work is done.<sup>11</sup>

One study based in Germany found that teams that included women performed better on highly complex tasks compared to all-male teams, in part because the range of different thinking patterns available increased team creativity overall.<sup>12</sup> A product development study found that teams with both men and women produced more patents for inventions and new products, demonstrating improved creativity and innovative thinking.<sup>13</sup> In addition, researchers recently conducted a study with military participants in the United Kingdom and found that adding

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9. David Rock and Heidi Grant, “Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter,” *Harvard Business Review*, November 4, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>.

10. Susan R. Madsen, “Why Do We Need More Women Leaders in Utah?” Utah Women and Leadership Project, Research and Policy Brief, no. 10 (January 12, 2015), <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/10-why-do-we-need-more-women-leaders.pdf>; Katherine W. Phillips, “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter,” *Greater Good Magazine*, September 18, 2017, [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_diversity\\_makes\\_us\\_smarter](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_diversity_makes_us_smarter).

11. “Diversity Matters (Infographic),” *Catalyst*, October 1, 2014, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-diversity-matters/>; Madsen, “Why Do We Need More Women Leaders?”; Phillips, “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter.”

12. Malcolm Higgs, Ulrich Plewnia, and Jorg Ploch, “Influence of Team Composition and Task Complexity on Team Performance,” *Team Performance Management* 11, no. 7/8 (2005): 227–50.

13. Catherin Ashcraft, and Anthony Breitzman, “Who Invents IT? An Analysis of Women’s Participation in Information Technology Patenting,” National Center for



just one female voice to an all-male team made a significant positive difference, as long as team members listened to her and acted on her suggestions (which is not always the case).<sup>14</sup> Some researchers through the years have concluded that having “a critical mass” of three or more women makes a difference in terms of better leadership overall, while other researchers argue that the benefits primarily emerge when women make up at least 30 percent of leadership team members.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned, these findings apply to a variety of workplace and organizational settings, including political bodies (for example, city councils, county commissioners, state legislatures, parliaments, and Congress) and government workforces. In addition, sector-specific research has found that women’s participation in politics affects the range of policy issues that arise and the types of solutions that are proposed in decision-making processes.<sup>16</sup> For example, one study discovered that the gender of a legislator had a direct impact on policy priorities.<sup>17</sup> In fact, this and other studies have shown that when more women are elected to office, policymaking also increases about the quality of life and priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>18</sup> After more than thirty-five years of research, the National Democratic Institute concluded that, more than men, women politicians tend to “work across party lines; be highly responsive to constituent concerns; help secure lasting peace; encourage citizen confidence in democracy through their own participation; and prioritize health, education and other key development indicators.”<sup>19</sup>

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Women and Information Technology, 2012, <https://ucd-advance.ucdavis.edu/post/who-invents-it-womens-participation-information-technology-patenting>.

14. Crystal I. C. Farh and others, “Token Female Voice Enactment in Traditionally Male-Dominated Teams: Facilitating Conditions and Consequences for Performance,” *Academy of Management Journal* 63, no. 3 (June 2020): 832–56.

15. Olga Emelianova and Christina Milhomem, *Women on Boards: 2019 Progress Report*, MSCI, December 2019, <https://www.msci.com/documents/10199/29f5bf79-cf87-71a5-ac26-b435d3b6fco8>; Mariateresa Torchia, Andrea Calabrò, and Morten Huse, “Women Directors on Corporate Boards: From Tokenism to Critical Mass,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 102 (2011): 299–317, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0815-z>; Madsen, “Why Do We Need More Women Leaders?”

16. Sandra Pepera, “Why Women in Politics?” *Women Deliver*, February 28, 2018, <https://womendeliver.org/2018/why-women-in-politics/>.

17. Craig Volden, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer, “The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress,” (working paper, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Vanderbilt University, August 2010), <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/csdi/research/files/CSDI-WP-04-2010.pdf>.

18. Pepera, “Why Women in Politics?”; see also Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer, “The Legislative Effectiveness of Women.”

19. Pepera, “Why Women in Politics?”

Another area of emerging research focuses on the benefits of women leading in national and international political peacekeeping efforts. War and conflict continue to ravage communities and nations across the globe, which makes the topic of peacekeeping vitally important in leadership conversations today. Many studies have reported that, although women continue to bear the brunt of war, they also have a critical role as peacebuilders and peacekeepers around the world.<sup>20</sup> One global study focused on preventing conflict, transforming justice, and securing peace, analyzing hundreds of data points in 181 peace agreements made since 2000.<sup>21</sup> The study found that if women participated in the peace talks, the chance a peace agreement would last at least fifteen years increased by 35 percent, and its chance of lasting at least two years increased by 20 percent. Overall, this report concluded that peace is more durable and more easily achieved when women are engaged in the peacemaking process.

Overall, when government more closely mirrors the population it serves, all residents are better represented in decision-making processes.<sup>22</sup> The research is clear that when there are more equal numbers of men and women serving and leading together, a host of benefits emerge, including the achievement of “care of human life and happiness” for all citizens.<sup>23</sup> Because men and women are most often shaped differently by their social experiences, it is critically important to have representation from both. Differing experiences, perceptions, and interests matter in political leadership and the government’s workforce,<sup>24</sup> particularly if the concept of good government is embraced.

## Teachings from Church Leaders

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a history of encouraging both men and women to be involved in government in a variety of ways. In a 1971 issue of the *New Era*, D. James Cannon wrote, “Encourage good men and women to enter politics and work to help them. Organize political discussion groups. Consider now taking your turn as a

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20. Hilary Charlesworth, “Are Women Peaceful? Reflections on the Role of Women in Peace-Building,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 16, no. 3 (2008): 347–61; Linda Rennie Forcey, “Women as Peacemakers: Contested Terrain for Feminist Peace Studies,” *Peace and Change* 16, no. 4 (1991): 331–54; UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, 2015, [https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf).

21. UN Women, *Preventing Conflict*.

22. Bradbury and Kellough, “Representative Bureaucracy.”

23. Jefferson, “To the Republicans of Washington County.”

24. Roman, “Roles Assumed by Public Administrators.”

candidate or party worker when the time is right.”<sup>25</sup> In 2015, Elder Wilford W. Andersen stated, “Latter-day Saints are encouraged to engage in the political process and to add their voices to the public debate. It is part of our religion to be good citizens wherever we live.”<sup>26</sup> In a session of the April 2018 general conference, President M. Russell Ballard stated, “Church members—both men and women—should not hesitate, if they desire, to run for public office at any level of government wherever they live. Our voices are essential today and important in our schools, our cities, and our countries. Where democracy exists, it is our duty as members to vote for honorable men and women who are willing to serve.”<sup>27</sup> And finally, according to President Dallin H. Oaks in the April 2021 session of general conference, “We should learn and advocate the inspired *principles* of the Constitution. We should seek out and support wise and good persons who will support those principles in their public actions. We should be knowledgeable citizens who are active in making our influence felt in civic affairs. In the United States and in other democracies, political influence is exercised by running for office (which we encourage), by voting, by financial support, by membership and service in political parties, and by ongoing communications to officials, parties, and candidates.”<sup>28</sup>

The Church’s *General Handbook* also includes several relevant statements related to the “Political and Civic Activity” of its membership:

Church members are encouraged to participate in political and governmental affairs. In many countries, this may include:

- Voting.
- Joining or serving in political parties.
- Providing financial support.
- Communicating with party officials and candidates.
- Participating in peaceful, legal protests.
- Serving in elected or appointed offices in local and national government.

Members are also encouraged to participate in worthy causes to make their communities wholesome places to live and raise families.

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25. D. James Cannon, “A Primer on Politics,” *New Era* 1, no. 10 (October 1971): 21.

26. Andersen, “Religion and Government,” 49.

27. M. Russell Ballard, “Precious Gifts from God,” *Ensign* 48, no. 5 (May 2018): 10.

28. Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 107–8, emphasis in original.

In accordance with local laws, members are encouraged to register to vote and to study issues and candidates carefully. Principles compatible with the gospel may be found in various political parties. Latter-day Saints have a special obligation to seek out and uphold leaders who are honest, good, and wise (see D&C 98:10).

The Church is neutral regarding political parties, political platforms, and candidates for political office. The Church does not endorse any political party or candidate. Nor does it advise members how to vote.<sup>29</sup>

In all cases, these statements refer to both men and women, even though significantly more men serve in public roles than women do.

In the early days of the Church, however, and even up through the 1970s, women of the Church played a particularly strong public role in efforts advocating for women, families, and related initiatives. In fact, they were encouraged and supported by Church leaders to do so. *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women*, a book published by The Church Historian's Press, is particularly useful in providing context. In the introduction, editors Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook write: "Like women elsewhere in the United States, Latter-day Saint women claimed a role in the political process. In part because of cultural backlash against the practice of plural marriage, contemporary writers often derided Latter-day Saint women as weak and mindless. Mormon women therefore had particular motivation to demonstrate their eloquence and strength, which they did in 'mass meetings' where they defended their faith and sought the right to vote. They also participated actively in national women's groups and by the late 1800s were regular speakers at national conferences of women's organizations."<sup>30</sup>

Chapters in the book highlight women who not only believed in the importance of women's engagement in politics and government but also acted on those beliefs. For example, one chapter discusses the 1893 Services of the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association (YLMIA), which was an evening session of the World's Congress of Representative Women held in Chicago. "Speakers included Elmina S. Taylor and other members of the YLMIA general board, addressing such topics as literature and art, the legal and political status of Utah women, and education."<sup>31</sup> In another chapter, Sarah M. Kimball is highlighted as an

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29. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2021), 38.8.29.

30. Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourse by Latter-day Saint Women* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017), xix.

31. Reeder and Holbrook, *At the Pulpit*, 84.

advocate “for the equality and rights of women, including promoting women’s suffrage in the 1870s and 1880s in Utah.” It is noted that she participated in the “National Council of Women, which coordinated efforts of various women’s rights organizations.”<sup>32</sup> Another chapter highlights a speech from Belle S. Spafford, ninth General President of the Relief Society from 1945 to 1974, given at Brigham Young University in 1975. She spoke of the “record number of experienced, qualified, dedicated women” who ran for public office that year and won.<sup>33</sup> Women’s involvement in good government was important to Spafford and other leaders of the Church throughout its history. The Church has a powerful history of women being advocates for important causes and, particularly in the early days of the Church, running for and serving in government. Yet, in Utah at least, Latter-day Saint women’s visible energy, excitement, and engagement have waned through the years, based on state data and anecdotal evidence.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, Church leaders have clearly articulated the need for women (and men) today to learn and advocate the inspired principles of the Constitution, engage in the political process, add their voices to the public debate, organize political discussion groups, vote for honorable men and women, encourage good people to enter politics and work to help them, run for public office at any level of government, financially support candidates and political parties, and be knowledgeable citizens who are active in making their influence felt in civic affairs. This is equally important for both women and men.

### Challenges for Women

Any productive dialogue about women and government should include a discussion of gender-specific barriers and challenges, particularly as they relate to women who run, serve, and advance in political and government settings. This section will highlight only a few of these common challenges, with a focus on religious contexts.

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32. Reeder and Holbrook, *At the Pulpit*, 90.

33. Belle S. Spafford, “Latter-day Saint Women in Today’s Changing World,” in *At the Pulpit*, 186.

34. Hannah Payne, Marin Christensen, and Susan R. Madsen, *The Status of Women in Utah Politics: A 2021 Update*, Utah Women and Leadership Project, February 3, 2021, <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/29-status-of-women-in-utah-politics-2021.pdf>; Robbyn T. Scribner and Susan R. Madsen, *Voting and Civic Engagement among Utah Women: A 2019 Update*, Utah Women and Leadership Project, September 4, 2019, <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/27.pdf>.

First, the lack of developmental opportunities for women in the Church does not prepare women to serve in government leadership and political positions at the same level that men in the Church are prepared. In a recent study of the leadership development gained by women serving full-time missions for the Church, more than four hundred returned sister missionaries expressed their thoughts regarding the optimal opportunities for growth and development they could have been offered while serving.<sup>35</sup> Although most women who responded said their missions did prepare them to lead at some level, they said that most elders had much greater preparation. For example, sister missionaries asserted that they needed substantially more opportunities for leadership roles. Many participants also mentioned unequal or unfair opportunities or treatment—either directly or indirectly—that limited their growth. Respondents stated they would have liked the chance to take workshops on confidence, gender challenges, communication, and management, to name a few, and to receive formal leadership training, whether they were in a leadership role or not. They also wanted more opportunities for developmental relationships, since they typically did not feel they had the same types of opportunities that the elders had to be coached, mentored, and sponsored by those with influence. Although the study focused on returned sister missionaries, it provides insights that may be applicable for women in other Church settings.

Second, groundbreaking national research by Drs. Chris Karpowitz, Jessica Preece, and Olga Stoddard at Brigham Young University found that even when women have a seat at the table, they do not necessarily have a voice.<sup>36</sup> These researchers found that in groups of mostly men, women are seen as less authoritative and influential, are interrupted more than men, speak up less often, and when they do, they are not listened to as much. When this happens, the value that women can bring to decision-making and problem-solving is substantially diminished. In addition, they found that women worried more about the reactions of

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35. Susan R. Madsen, Robbyn Scribner, Wendy Fox Kirk, and Sara McPhee Lafkas, *The Leadership Development Gained by Women Serving Full-Time Missions*, Utah Women and Leadership Project, January 7, 2020, <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/21-leadership-development-full-time-missions.pdf>.

36. Olga Stoddard, Christopher F. Karpowitz, and Jessica Preece, *Strength in Numbers: A Field Experiment in Gender, Influence, and Group Dynamics*, IZA Discussion Paper Series, no. 13741, September 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3704122>. See also Brittany Karford Rogers, “When Women Don’t Speak,” *Y Magazine*, Spring 2020, <https://magazine.byu.edu/article/when-women-dont-speak/>.

others if they were to speak their minds, because their doing so has been found to violate gender norms. In terms of solutions, the researchers spoke of the positive impact men can have when they support a woman's statement when she does speak up. However, the researchers emphasized the importance of changing the environment, not the women. In organizations and societies that are more patriarchal—including in the Church and other religious environments—these concerns for women are amplified.<sup>37</sup>

Third, in religious settings, scholars have found that political attitudes and behaviors are shaped by cues from religious leaders, doctrinal worldviews, social networks within churches, and religiously derived opinions that are reinforced within congregations and communities.<sup>38</sup> These attitudes often include underlying and often unconscious beliefs that female political leaders have lower capabilities,<sup>39</sup> that women's leadership in the public sphere should be less valued,<sup>40</sup> that men should have more public roles and women more private roles, and that the pursuit of policies to support gender and racial equality is not acceptable.<sup>41</sup> Overall, scholars have observed that a majority of American church attendees receive conscious and unconscious messages, situations, and worldviews that support male-dominated norms,<sup>42</sup> including benevolent sexism, which typically does not support women rising to positions of power and authority within and without its ranks. Two recent comprehensive studies connected religiosity and the gender pay gap, finding that states in the United States and countries around the world that have high religiosity have fewer women in political office and in influential decision-making roles in society.<sup>43</sup> This research also found that there is more sexual objectification in religious settings, which diminishes the overall value of women.

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37. Traci Sitzmann and Elizabeth M. Campbell, "The Hidden Cost of Prayer: Religiosity and the Gender Wage Gap," *Academy of Management Journal* 64, no. 4 (2021).

38. Mark Setzler, "Religious Differences among Congressional Districts and the Success of Women Candidates," *Politics and Gender* 12, no. 3 (2016): 518–48.

39. Mark Setzler and Alixandra B. Yanus, "Evangelical Protestantism and Bias against Female Political Leaders," *Social Science Quarterly* 98, no. 2 (June 2017): 766–78.

40. Setzler, "Religious Differences."

41. Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby, "Religious Influences on Understandings of Racial Inequality in the United States," *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (May 2007): 263–88; Brian D. McKenzie and Stella M. Rouse, "Shades of Faith: Religious Foundations of Political Attitudes among African Americans, Latinos, and Whites," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 218–35.

42. Setzler, "Religious Differences."

43. Sitzmann and Campbell, "Hidden Cost of Prayer."



Finally, the Utah Women and Leadership Project conducted two recent studies on the challenges of women running for and serving in elected positions, as well as the challenges related to women leaders in government.<sup>44</sup> The top four challenges for elected women included experiencing gender bias; being subjected to public criticism, rumors, and personal attacks; meeting the time commitment; and facing the general challenges associated with running for office more broadly. For women leaders in government, challenges included biased attitudes, lack of organizational support, stifled voices, pay inequity, caregiving responsibilities, hiring and interview processes, and social exclusion.<sup>45</sup>

Each challenge is complex and needs further exploration, particularly within the Latter-day Saint culture. However, if we are aware of these challenges, women and men in the Church can provide a foundation for positive change in terms of the visible and invisible culture that encourages the aspirations and actions of men toward more public roles and women toward more private contributions. Change is good when it focuses on lifting everyone to new heights and opportunities to serve.

## Conclusion

Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can make a positive difference in their homes, communities, states, countries, and the world. There is substantial counsel from past and present Church leaders for women to engage in the processes, activities, and opportunities that uphold and create good government, in spite of the challenges highlighted in the previous section. As President Joseph F. Smith stated about the Relief Society in 1914, “It is not for you to be led by the women of the world; it is for you to lead the . . . women of the world, in everything that is praise-worthy, everything that is God-like, everything that is uplifting and that is purifying to the children of men.”<sup>46</sup> As women are being encouraged to rise up to engage in important work, they are stepping into new roles that are not only leading the “women of the world,” as President Smith stated, but all people.

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44. See Utah Women and Leadership Project, [www.usu.edu/uwlp/](http://www.usu.edu/uwlp/).

45. April Townsend and Susan R. Madsen, *Women Leaders in Utah Government—Their Paths to Power*, Utah Women and Leadership Project, November 5, 2020, <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/26-women-leaders-in-utah-government-their-paths-to-power.pdf>.

46. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 184.



As women of the Church keep their allegiances and behaviors aligned with the eternal principles and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they can better contribute to good government and to the Lord. As President Russell M. Nelson stated in 2015, “I plead with my sisters . . . to step forward! Take your rightful and needful place in your home, in your community, and in the kingdom of God—more than you ever have before. . . . [I] bless you to rise to your full stature, to fulfill the measure of your creation.”<sup>47</sup> I believe that as more confident, covenant-keeping, committed Latter-day Saint women use their voices to lead in political roles and governments around the world, sisters will have the opportunity to work hand in hand with the Lord to further his work in ways this world has never seen before. This work matters. The time is now.

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Professor Susan R. Madsen is considered one of the top global scholars and thought leaders on the topic of women’s leadership, has authored or edited eight books, and has published hundreds of articles, chapters, and reports. Her research has been cited in the *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Parenting Magazine*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *The Washington Post*. She is also a regular contributor to *Forbes* and other local and state newspapers. Dr. Madsen is the Karen Haight Huntsman Endowed Professor of Leadership in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University and serves on many nonprofit and community boards. Her passion is to strengthen the impact of girls and women worldwide.

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47. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* 45, no. 11 (November 2015): 97.

# Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination

*Dallin H. Oaks*

*Joseph Smith Lecture at the University of Virginia, November 12, 2021.*

**F**riends:  
I feel privileged to be in this honored place. I love this country, which I believe was established with the blessings of God. I love its Constitution, whose *principles* I believe were divinely inspired.<sup>1</sup>

I am, therefore, distressed at the way we are handling the national issues that divide us. We have always had to work through serious political conflicts, but today too many approach that task as if their preferred outcome must entirely prevail over all others, even in our pluralistic society. We need to work for a better way—a way to resolve differences without compromising core values. We need to live together in peace and mutual respect, within our defined constitutional rights.

As a religious person who has served in government at both federal and state levels and now as a leader in the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have always known of the tensions experienced when persons who rely on the free exercise of religion are conflicted between duties to God and duties to country. More recently, I have come to understand better the distress of persons who feel that others are invoking constitutional rights like free exercise of religion and freedom of speech to deny or challenge their own core beliefs and their access to basic constitutional rights. I deeply regret that these two groups have been drawn into conflict with one another.

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1. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 105–8.

## I.

As you have seen, I have titled my remarks “Going Forward with Religious Freedom and Nondiscrimination.” This title acknowledges that our society is still painfully unsettled in managing the relationship between religious freedom and nondiscrimination, but also expresses my belief that it need not remain so. My goal is to suggest a helpful and feasible path forward without excessively accommodating either the Left or the Right or the religious or the nonreligious. I hope what I say will be helpful to those who seek a better way for the advocates of religious freedom and nondiscrimination to relate to one another as fellow citizens dedicated to maintaining a civil society.

I begin with a proposition I hope all will share. As a practical basis for coexistence, we should accept the reality that we are fellow citizens who need each other. This requires us to accept some laws we dislike and to live peacefully with some persons whose values differ from our own. Amid such inevitable differences, we should make every effort to understand the experiences and concerns of others, especially when they differ from our own.

We can only succeed in this effort to the extent that we acknowledge and respect each other’s highest ideals and human experiences. We must not be part of what Professor Arthur C. Brooks of Harvard’s Kennedy School describes as “a culture of contempt”—a habit of seeing people who disagree with us not as merely incorrect or misguided but as worthless.”<sup>2</sup> A basic step is to avoid labeling our adversaries with epithets such as “godless” or “bigots.” As the *Deseret News*, a paper published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, editorialized: “Conflicts between religious liberty and nondiscrimination principles are exacerbated when advocates for nondiscrimination paint people of faith as bigots, and when people of faith fail to appreciate the brutal history of the basic human rights of marginalized groups, such as gays and lesbians.”<sup>3</sup> When some advocates voice insults or practice other minor provocations, both sides should ignore them. Our society already has too many ugly confrontations. If we answer back, we tend to mirror the insult.

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2. Arthur C. Brooks, “More Love, Less Contempt,” Brigham Young University commencement address, April 25, 2019, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/arthur-c-brooks/more-love-less-contempt/>. See Arthur C. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt* (New York: Broadside Books, 2019).

3. “RFRAs under Attack,” *Deseret News National Weekly Edition*, April 12, 2015, 12; see also “Legislation Should Not Polarize Religious Liberties, Anti-Discrimination Protections,” *Deseret News*, April 4, 2015, <https://www.deseret.com/2015/4/4/20562022/legislation-should-not-polarize-religious-liberties-anti-discrimination-protections>.

A better response is that of the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. When he agreed to meet with a staunch atheist who detested everything he held sacred, the rabbi was asked whether he would try to convert him. “No,” he answered, “I’m going to do something much better than that. I’m going to listen to him.”<sup>4</sup>

Another basic imperative is that we should not seek total dominance for our own position; we should seek fairness for all. Specifically, people of faith should not contest every nondiscrimination law or policy that could possibly impinge, however insignificantly, on institutional or individual religious freedom. Likewise, proponents of nondiscrimination need not contest every religious freedom exemption from nondiscrimination laws. The goals of both sides are best served by resolving differences through mutual respect, shared understanding, and good faith negotiations. And both must accept and respect the rule of law.

Without acceptance of such ethical and political fundamentals on all sides, we are unlikely to move forward with this vital task.

I don’t mean to minimize the difficulty of what I am advocating. I simply invite my audience, who already understand the complexity of current divisions, to consider the possibility of reconciliation as I proceed with the most difficult address I have ever undertaken.

## II.

I will now suggest some important principles that will help us avoid potential pitfalls as we attempt to go forward.

Where there is genuine conflict, one constitutional right should not be invoked to try to cancel another constitutional right. Both must be balanced legally and negotiated politically in a way that upholds essential rights to the greatest extent possible. In doing so, people of faith should not assume that those who advocate nondiscrimination have no regard for religious freedom or that nondiscrimination lacks any constitutional basis. Similarly, those who advocate nondiscrimination should not assume that those asserting claims of religious freedom are seeking a “license to discriminate.” There are worthy constitutional and ethical arguments on both sides of such disputes, and, so far as possible, we should seek to accommodate them consistent with the most important interests of all sides. This is not easy when we differ so fundamentally on

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4. Deseret New Editorial Board, “The World Lost a Moral Voice, but Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ Wisdom Lives On,” *Deseret News*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2020/11/13/21564231/rabbi-lord-jonathan-sacks-death-boyd-matheson-meaning-atheist>.

matters of such immense importance. But the effort is essential if we are to live together in peace in a pluralistic society.

We should also be wary of the idea that one set of rights automatically trumps another in all circumstances. Both religious freedom and nondiscrimination are important values that are powerfully protected by law. Nondiscrimination principles have been given increasing social recognition in the last century and are now rooted in the constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the law. Yet they still cannot be said to obviate the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom.

The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights singles out the “free exercise” of religion for specific protection, along with the related freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. These rights enjoy singular status because of their paramount significance to the foundations of our constitutional republic. They are rights on which all other rights depend. Protecting them is essential to safeguarding and perpetuating all constitutional freedoms. That is why religious exercise and religious expression enjoy special constitutional protection.

But even though the First Amendment obviously guarantees the right to *exercise* or practice religious beliefs and affiliations, that right is not absolute. As advocates for religious freedom, we must yield to the fact that in a nation with citizens of many different religious beliefs or disbeliefs, the government must sometimes limit the right of some to *act* upon their beliefs when it is necessary to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all.

With equal sincerity, I invite nondiscrimination advocates to recognize the reality of the threat to religious freedom that is currently associated with expanding nondiscrimination laws. Those who demand that faith communities change their practices should not seek to force over-all changes by legal fiat but rather encourage selective accommodations through persuasion, good faith negotiation, and legislative reform. In this way, we can all unite in support of nondiscrimination in many areas of social life.

While we peacefully await resolution of conflicts, I strongly urge all participants in these controversies to acknowledge the validity of and to obey existing laws sustained by the highest available judicial authority in the Constitution. Executive officers responsible for executing and enforcing such laws must not assume authority they do not possess; they too are subject to the law. All such officials take an oath to support the Constitution and laws of their jurisdiction. That oath does not permit them to use their official position to override the law to further their personal beliefs—religious or otherwise.

This principle was violated following the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision by a county clerk who invoked religious reasons to justify her office's refusal to issue marriage licenses to same-gender couples. More far-reaching violations of the rule of law occurred earlier when a state attorney general and governor refused to enforce or defend a state law limiting marriages to those between a man and a woman because they personally opposed that law on secular grounds. Constitutional duties, including respect for the vital principle of separation of powers, are fundamental to the rule of law. Neither governments nor their citizens can afford to tolerate the revocation of a law (either its text or its operation) by officials not constitutionally authorized to revoke it.

### III.

This is not the setting, and I am not the authority to suggest how the separate guarantees of religious freedom and nondiscrimination should be adjudicated in specific head-to-head conflicts. My purpose is more modest. I advocate the moral and political imperative of reconciling existing conflicts and avoiding new ones, not to promote my favored outcome in any particular controversy. I come to you not as a lawyer with the experiences already mentioned, but as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom many of us worship.

Still, religious freedom has been a dominant interest of mine for many years. Seventy-three years ago, when I was only sixteen, the Supreme Court endorsed with particular force the metaphor of "a wall between Church and State, which must be kept high and impregnable."<sup>5</sup> The legal relationship implied by this metaphor has been confusing and much criticized and is being selectively displaced. Over time, I have come to wish for a better metaphor, one sufficient to define the limits but also allow accommodation of the mutual interests of religion and government. Less rigid than a "wall," the boundary should be permeable enough to admit light and flexible enough to allow mutual support. That change has not happened.

We are currently governed by the tests established in the 1990 case of *Employment Division v. State*,<sup>6</sup> but its influence is clearly waning. Subsequent cases have exposed its failure as a broadly applicable and publicly

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5. *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203, 212 (1948). See *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 16, 18 (1947); Dallin H. Oaks, ed., *The Wall between Church and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), especially 17–18.

6. *Employment Div. v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

understandable standard to help reconcile opposing parties.<sup>7</sup> Rather, it appears to have perpetuated, if not exacerbated, the divisiveness in our relationships. It has become increasingly clear that we now need a new, workable balance between religious freedom and nondiscrimination.

In these circumstances, it is timely to ask *how* we should go forward to resolve urgent conflicts between the widespread support for nondiscrimination and the constitutional guarantee of free exercise of religion. Most media coverage and public perception of these conflicts understandably focus on court rulings, especially those of the United States Supreme Court. We all know that the courts are intended to have the final word on constitutional issues. We also know that court opinions in this area are rigorously policed by litigation organizations on both sides who solicit and groom additional cases to advance their causes through favorable court rulings. Though such rulings are immensely important, I caution against primary reliance on judicial rulings to ultimately resolve these conflicts. What is needed is wise public policy, not a declaration of the winner in a legal contest.

Litigation should not be the first recourse in resolving our differences. Courts are constitutionally limited to resolving the specific cases before them. They are ill-suited to the overarching, complex, and comprehensive policy-making that is required in a circumstance like the current conflict between two great values. Notwithstanding my years of working with judicial opinions, I prefer the initial route of legislative lawmaking on big questions like the ones now before us. I find wisdom in the observation of Professor (later Dean) Martha Minow of the Harvard Law School. In her influential article on this subject, she concluded that “accommodation and negotiation can identify practical solutions where abstract principles sometimes cannot.”<sup>8</sup> Professor Minow further observed that problem-solving by negotiation “is highly relevant to *sustaining and replenishing* both American pluralism and constitutional protections for minority groups.”<sup>9</sup>

Successful negotiation requires that neither side be unduly influenced by the extreme voices that often drive litigation, especially litigation sponsored by ideological groups. Extreme voices influence popular

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7. See Steven H. Aden and Lee J. Strang, “When a ‘Rule’ Doesn’t Rule: The Failure of the Oregon Employment Division v. Smith ‘Hybrid Rights Exception,’” *Penn State Law Review* 108, no. 2 (2003): 573–609.

8. Martha Minow, “Should Religious Groups Be Exempt from Civil Rights Law?” *Boston College Law Review* 48, no. 4 (2007): 849.

9. Minow, “Should Religious Groups Be Exempt from Civil Rights Law?” 783, emphasis mine.

opinion, but they polarize and sow resentment as they seek to dominate their opponents and achieve absolute victory. Such outcomes are rarely sustainable or even attainable, and they are never preferable to living together in mutual understanding and peace.

Good-faith negotiation invites that seldom-appreciated virtue so necessary to democracy: tolerance, free of bigotry toward those whose opinions or practices differ from our own. But learning to live with significant differences requires much more than tolerance. Dr. Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian president's special envoy to the Middle East and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, made this point in an address to the faculty and students at Brigham Young University. Relying on the teachings of the Qur'an, he said, "We must respect this God-given dignity in every human being, even in our enemies. For the goal of all human relations—whether they are religious, social, political, or economic—ought to be cooperation and mutual respect." Thus, he added, "We must go . . . beyond tolerance if we are to achieve harmony in our world."<sup>10</sup> Obviously, followers of Christ also have a duty to seek harmony. Where there are conflicts, all should seek peace.

Far from being a weakness, reconciling adverse positions through respectful negotiation is a virtue. As Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."<sup>11</sup> The Apostle Paul followed this by teaching Christians to "follow after the things which make for peace,"<sup>12</sup> and "if it be possible, . . . live peaceably with all men."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Book of Mormon teaches that it is a "peaceable walk with the children of men" that distinguishes a true follower of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Such teachings impose duties and can create tensions that I will now address. On this subject, I counsel my fellow Latter-day Saints specifically, but also request the consideration of those who share our belief in the Bible, and even those who only embrace its wisdom. I will illustrate some of my points with the experience of the Latter-day Saints because I believe the lessons we have learned from that experience are applicable to any who seek to obey both the law of the land and the law of their God, even in circumstances of extreme tension.

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10. Alwi Shihab, "Building Bridges to Harmony through Understanding," Brigham Young University forum address, October 10, 2006, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/alwi-shihab/building-bridges-harmony-understanding/>; also published in *BYU Studies* 45, no. 4 (2006): 9–18.

11. Matthew 5:9.

12. Romans 14:19.

13. Romans 12:18.

14. Moroni 7:4.



## IV.

What I have described as necessary to going forward—namely, seeking harmony by finding practical solutions to our differences, with love and respect for all people—does not require any compromise of core principles. Both religious and secular rule are ordained of God for the good of his children. As is generally known, Jesus taught this during his ministry. Some who sought to trap him asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. They wanted to force him to declare publicly that his followers were not subject to the civil law. Instead, using a coin of the Roman overseer as a visual aid, Jesus answered, “Render [meaning give] . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”<sup>15</sup>

The religious duty to obey the law of the land and to live peaceably with all people does not contemplate that the religious will abandon the public square. In a free society like ours, all are lawfully privileged and morally obligated to exert their best political efforts to argue for what they think is most desirable. For example, it is well-known that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints exercised its constitutional right to express its position that the traditional legal definition of marriage should be preserved. But in 2015, when the Supreme Court pronounced the legality of same-sex marriage, the Church immediately ceased all such opposition and publicly acknowledged its acceptance of the constitutional law established by the nation’s highest court.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, a church’s *religious* marriage law and practice, which upholds the Biblical understanding of marriage, remains in force on its adherents when it does not violate what Jesus called Caesar’s law. Joseph Smith, for whom this lecture is named, taught that “religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberty of others.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, notwithstanding its heavily criticized opposition in the political debate over same-sex marriage, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reached out to nondiscrimination advocates and participated in Utah negotiations over shared concerns on housing and employment. The discussions that followed were previously thought impossible for either side. Over a six-year period, however, they were

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15. Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.

16. Tad Walch, “What the LDS Church Said about the Supreme Court Ruling on Gay Marriage,” *Deseret News*, June 29, 2015, <https://www.deseret.com/2015/6/29/20567372/what-the-lds-church-said-about-the-supreme-court-ruling-on-gay-marriage>.

17. Doctrine and Covenants 134:4.

able to craft suitable local and statewide legislation because adversaries gradually learned to understand each other's positions, including what they deemed most important to affirm and protect by law. One participant told me that he recalls them as "an effort in peacemaking, learning how to live together" with mutual respect, even love.

At issue was a head-to-head conflict between free exercise of religion and nondiscrimination in housing and employment in a Salt Lake City ordinance first proposed in 2009. In time, a jointly designed proposal gained traction, and its adoption at the city level prompted an effort to adopt a similar law statewide. The resulting law, later called "the Utah Compromise," was enacted with the Church's full support in 2015. This law offered protections to both sides. One side obtained significant legal protection from discrimination in employment and housing. The other side gained protection for religious freedom in its most sensitive areas of Church employment and student housing. While the law gave neither side all that it sought, its reconciliations did grant both sides significant benefits—a win-win outcome—that could not have been obtained without the balancing of interests made possible by the dynamics of the legislative process.

In contrast to the tendencies of the judicial branch to decide complex issues in a winner-take-all adversarial process, the legislative process in Utah provided an opportunity to forge enduring relationships and to craft workable long-term solutions. Here is how Troy Williams, executive director of Equality Utah, described the process: "We found solutions together. Neither side compromised our values, but rather, we discovered new ways forward that respected each other and forged areas of common ground. Bringing diverse voices to the table is hard. It requires expanded empathy and patience. But when we ratchet down the vitriol, and seek areas of agreement, incredible things can happen."<sup>18</sup>

The resulting Utah Compromise on housing and employment was a pathbreaking beginning that has been embraced by all parties, including the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As a church, we are committed to the free exercise of religion to allow us to practice the principles of our faith. But we are also committed to fundamental fairness and the rule of law. We see the process that succeeded in Utah as a promising way to have both religious protection and fundamental fairness, particularly on individual issues like housing and employment. Whether it can be applied to other sensitive issues remains to be seen.

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18. In Matt Canham, "Read What Key Figures Say 'the Utah Way' Is," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 25, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2021/07/25/read-what-key-figures-say/>.

In this regard, I must add that the Utah Compromise required more than political engagement. Essential to our side was the principle of honoring both divine and mortal laws. Rendering to Caesar *in good faith* requires religious persons and associations to acknowledge what their government does for them and to be faithful in fulfilling the reciprocal responsibilities they owe to the government and their fellow citizens. All should observe the laws and respect the values of the country that guarantees their freedoms. This is a debt of gratitude that should be paid gladly.

But what if neither side to a controversy over religious freedom and nondiscrimination can make the concessions necessary to reconcile their differences? On a broader front, what if the conflicting demands of civil and religious law are such that they cannot be resolved by negotiation? Such circumstances rarely exist. If they do, the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints suggests that a way can be found to reconcile divine and human law—through patience, negotiation, and mutual accommodation, without judicial fiat or other official coercion.

That was the outcome of the painful, nationally debated contest over seating Latter-day Saint Apostle Reed Smoot in the United States Senate in 1903. I do not have time to tell the story of this four-year Senate hearing but recommend it to you as a fascinating account of a political negotiation which, according to a brilliant scholarly analysis by your own Kathleen Flake, “hammered out a twentieth-century model for church-state relations, shaping for a new generation of Americans what it meant to be free and religious.”<sup>19</sup> Where coercive efforts against a church (by mob violence, public shaming, military might, statutory criminalization, and even disincorporation) had failed, politics—“the art of the possible, the attainable—the art of the next best”<sup>20</sup>—finally succeeded, and one of its leaders was seated in the Senate.

Mutual accommodation between the Latter-day Saints and the rest of the country was achieved by adversarial parties who were able, by political means, to identify and “preserve the deepest interests of the greatest number of parties.”<sup>21</sup> That is the essence of constructive politics, which is something to be emulated in our own day. Indeed, the terms for maintaining a workable relationship between church and state that emerged

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19. Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 11.

20. Otto von Bismark, in conversation with Fredrich Meyer von Waldeck of the *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*, August 11, 1867, W. Andreas, ed., *Gesammelt Werke*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Strollber, 1924), 222.

21. Flake, *Politics of American Religious Identity*, 10; also see pages 8–9 and 50–51.

from the Smoot Hearings are applicable to all sides today: obedience to the law, political toleration, and commitment to the common good.

United States history is replete with failures and successes in protecting religious and other civil rights. Let us hope that current efforts will add another success to the troubled history of the intersection of divine and civil law.

## V.

In the meantime, religious leaders must not overlook the fact that the preservation of religious freedom ultimately depends on public appreciation and support for the related First Amendment freedoms of religious conscience, association, and free exercise. In turn, such appreciation and support depend on the value the public attaches to the positive effects of the practices and teachings in churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship. Those effects include their encouraging observance of civil law and church-goers' improved health and longevity recently highlighted in a cover story in *Christianity Today*.<sup>22</sup>

Teachings based on faith in God—however defined—have always contributed to moral actions that benefit the entire nation. This will continue to be so as religious people love and serve their neighbors as an expression of their love of God. As Lance B. Wickman, general counsel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, recently observed: “When we exercise our religious freedom to serve and lift to strengthen community ties and to pour oil on troubled waters, and to make America better—when we use our religious freedom to bring people together in unity and love—we are defending and preserving religious liberty and the Constitution in a most profound way.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, more than any other, the importance of religious freedom will be better understood and better protected.

I earnestly invite all religious leaders and associations to coalesce more effectively—and that often means out of court—to seek peaceful resolution of painful conflicts between religious freedom and nondiscrimination. This does not require an examination of doctrinal differences or even our many common elements of belief. All that is necessary

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22. Tyler J. Vanderweele and Brendan Case, “Empty Pews Are an American Public Health Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/church-empty-pews-are-american-public-health-crisis.html>.

23. Lance B. Wickman, “Shrapnel in a Bible: Reflections on Patriotism, Charity, and Religious Liberty,” St. George [Utah] Interfaith Devotional, July 4, 2021.

for unity and a broad coalition to promote our common need for religious freedom is our shared conviction that God has commanded us to love one another, including our neighbors with different beliefs and cultures.<sup>24</sup> This invites all believers, as President Russell M. Nelson has challenged our members, to “expand our circle of love to embrace the whole human family.”<sup>25</sup>

In doing so, we must not allow that fears about losing our own freedoms make us insensitive to others’ claims for theirs. Let us unite with those who advocate nondiscrimination to seek a culture and laws that respect the rights of all to the equal protection of the law and the right to the free exercise of religion. From the experience of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I believe we can proceed toward this goal by mutual respect and willing accommodation. The right relationship between religious freedom and nondiscrimination is best achieved by respecting each other enough to negotiate in good faith and by caring for each other enough that the freedom and protection we seek is not for ourselves alone. I pray for that result under our inspired Constitution, as we pledge to be “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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24. See, for example, Matthew 22:36–40; Luke 10:29–37.

25. Russell M. Nelson, *Teachings of Russell M. Nelson* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 83.

# Pursuing Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle in Today's Divided Politics

*Keith Allred*

**I**t is hard not to despair over the dysfunction in American politics today. The chaos created by the partisan rancor is continually before us. Angry tweets, bitter protests, and personal attacks are increasingly the norm, while civil discourse about sound policy is rare. No republic ever effectively managed its challenges this way.

## **The Commonsense Principle: Broad Support Indicates Wisdom**

As is so often the case in turbulent times, the application of core principles can be a source of hope by providing practical guidance for how we can get to a better place. The contours of our current political crisis make a principle of good government found both in the Book of Mormon and at the heart of the Constitution more relevant than ever. The idea can be called the “Commonsense Principle,” because it is based on one of the definitions of the term *common sense* as the “collective sense or judgment of humankind or of a community.”<sup>1</sup>

Mosiah puts the Commonsense Principle at the center of his argument that government by the people is superior to government by kings. In Mosiah 29:26, he explains, “Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.”

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1. Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 454, s.v. “common sense.”

Few have noted the connection, but just over forty years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, James Madison also put the Commonsense Principle at the heart of his argument for why the Constitution should be ratified. On February 6, 1788, the Father of the Constitution emphasized that when a *sense* is held in *common* across our differences in America, it is a more reliable indicator of wisdom than a sense shared only within one segment of the country. In terms strikingly similar to Mosiah's, Madison explains in *Federalist* No. 51 that "in the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good."<sup>2</sup>

The full logic behind Madison's argument becomes more apparent in connection with an astute observation he makes about human nature that anticipated a large body of modern social science research by nearly two hundred years. In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison notes that a natural "connection" exists between our "reason" and our "self-love." Our "opinions," he argues, "attach themselves" to our "passions."<sup>3</sup>

Social psychologists have found compelling empirical evidence for Madison's observation. Hundreds of studies document a "confirmation bias," a tendency to seek out information that confirms our preexisting views or supports our self-interest while turning a blind eye to information that disconfirms our preexisting views or runs counter to our self-interest.<sup>4</sup>

Together, *Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51 provide a powerful explanation for why broad and diverse support is a sound indicator of wisdom. When a view that a policy or candidate is wise is held in common across so many differences, Madison argues, it cannot be readily explained by self-interest, since those interests cut in so many conflicting directions. Instead, Madison reasons, broad consensus typically forms for reasons that transcend self-interest, reasons like justice and the general good.

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2. James Madison or Alexander Hamilton, "The *Federalist* No. 51, [6 February 1788]," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0199>.

3. James Madison, "The *Federalist* Number 10, [22 November] 1787," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0178>.

4. Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175–220, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175>.

*Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51 are the culmination of the argument Madison builds over a ten-month period. He starts with the publication of “Vices of the Political System of the United States” in April 1787, the result of his preparation for the upcoming Constitutional Convention. Madison argues that differences among the people constitute a check and balance as important as the separation of powers. An “enlargement of the sphere” of a republic better secures liberty, he argues, because a larger, more diverse republic is “broken into a greater variety of interests, of pursuits, of passions, which will check each other.”<sup>5</sup>

Two months later, Madison elaborates the Commonsense Principle further in what Ralph Ketcham, Madison's most respected biographer, calls “his most important speech” of the Constitutional Convention. On June 6, early in the Founders' deliberations in Independence Hall, Madison concludes his remarks by telling his fellow delegates that the only remedy for the partisan tyranny so devastating to republics is to “enlarge the sphere” so that there is “so great a number of interests and parties” that consensus would not likely emerge separately from the common good.<sup>6</sup>

Madison's next refinement of his case comes a month after the conclusion of the convention. In his lengthy October 1787 letter to Thomas Jefferson in France describing the Constitution that the convention drafted, Madison explains to his closest mentor and colleague that the size and diversity of the United States means that “no common interest or passion will be likely to unite” the people “in an unjust pursuit.”<sup>7</sup>

Madison's *Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51 and the three works leading up to them constitute one of the most intense bursts of consequential political thought in history. Together, they echo Mosiah and make a compelling case for why broad and diverse support is a sounder indicator of wisdom than a view held only by those who share the same interests or political perspective.

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5. James Madison, “Vices of the Political System of the United States, April 1787,” Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-09-02-0187>.

6. Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 200–201.

7. James Madison, “To Thomas Jefferson from James Madison, 24 October 1787,” Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0274>.



## The Commonsense Principle and the Constitution

Madison goes far beyond a compelling theoretical explanation of the Commonsense Principle over his ten-month burst of political innovation. He also makes it the cornerstone of the Constitution that governs the most successful republic in history.

### *“The Spirit of Party” Is the Chief Challenge to Republics*

The centrality to our constitutional structure of the principle that broad support suggests wisdom is more obvious when one understands the main problem that the Founders were trying to solve. When the American Founders staked their lives and property on waging a war of independence from the most powerful empire in the world to establish the American republic, it was a stunningly audacious move. They were keenly aware that every one of the dozens of attempts at self-government over the preceding three thousand years had failed.

But it is not simply the boldness of their vision that is impressive. We continue to look to the Founders for wisdom because they made it work in practice. By establishing a lasting, vibrant republic, they bent the arc of history. Before the American revolution, self-government was considered a utopian ideal that could not last for any length of time or at any but the smallest scale. Since the success of the republic the Founders established, self-government has become the dominant form of government in the world.

They accomplished this remarkable feat by combining their audacious vision with a clear-eyed, relentlessly practical examination of why self-government had so consistently failed over the preceding three thousand years. They concluded that they had better understand why republics fail and have a better answer for it. Otherwise, they reasoned, they would suffer the same failures. Consequently, many of the key Founding Fathers—including James Madison, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton—studied the history of failed republics closely.

Although they conducted their historical investigations largely independently, a striking consensus emerged about the central problem they had to solve if the American republic was to succeed where all others had failed. Throughout their writings, they identified the “spirit of party” or the problem of “faction” as the main cause of republics’ demise. They observed a consistent pattern. As soon as the ultimate power was placed in the people, the people divided themselves

into different groups seeking to drive the government in different directions. The contention that ensued among those parties, the Founders observed, made the government so incompetent and unstable that it opened the door for despotism to take hold again.

George Washington made warning his and succeeding generations of Americans about this existential challenge to republics the main theme of his Farewell Address. His departing words drew the nation's attention to the topic Washington considered "all important" to preserving the system of government that he had dedicated his life to establishing. The central theme of his Farewell Address in 1796 was his warning "in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party." Those effects are so dire, he warned, that partisan animosity is the gravest threat to republics. In governments "of the popular form," Washington cautioned, the "Spirit of Party" is "seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy." Sounding like he had been watching cable news in our day, he observed, "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge natural to party dissension, . . . is itself a frightful despotism." Washington concluded that the "common & continual mischiefs of the spirit of Party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise People to discourage and restrain it."<sup>8</sup>

Like Washington's Farewell Address, no theme is more prevalent in the *Federalist* than warnings about the "spirit of party." The core argument in the *Federalist* is that the Constitution should be ratified because it is better structured to withstand the problem of faction than any previous republic. In all, fifty-five of the eighty-five essays (65 percent) that James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote include an argument for the Constitution that involves its superior ability to control partisan dysfunction.

For example, in *Federalist* No. 10, Madison famously and explicitly argues that the rancor among factions is the main problem the Constitution must address. He observes, "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction. The friend of popular governments never finds himself so much

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8. George Washington, "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0440-0002>.

alarmed for their character and fate, as when he contemplates their propensity to this dangerous vice.”<sup>9</sup>

Madison further explains in No. 10 that this is the central challenge for republics because partisan strife is the chief cause of their failure. He concludes that “the instability, injustice and confusion introduced into the public councils” by factional contention “have in truth been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have every where perished.” The *Federalist* makes clear that the Founders’ rationale for the structure of our Constitution simply cannot be understood without comprehending that first and foremost they aimed to address the excesses of partisanship, the chief infirmity to which previous republics had succumbed.

### *Framing a Constitution against Partisan Tyranny*

If the Founders concluded that partisan dysfunction was the main problem to solve in establishing a successful republic, what then was their answer to that problem? In short, their answer was to erect constitutional barriers to, in Mosiah’s words, “the lesser part of the people” imposing their unwise purposes on everyone else (29:26). Structuring the Constitution this way, as Madison explains, makes it necessary for the American people to conduct themselves according to the Commonsense Principle. Only measures wise enough to attract broad and diverse support, Madison reasons, should be able to overcome the barriers to partisan tyranny built into the Constitution.

The two main structural barriers, in Madison’s view, that require common sense are separation of powers and establishing a republic that encompasses a large and diverse people. Although the American Founders did not invent the idea of separating powers, they took it much further than it had ever been taken before. A constitution of separated powers by which a diverse people with many competing interests and perspectives would govern themselves, Madison conceives, would prove to be a powerful check against measures that could not attract support beyond one party or the other. The only alternative, by intentional design, is to find and champion solutions wise enough to attract support beyond one party or another.

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9. Madison, “*Federalist* Number 10.”

## **The Departure from the Commonsense Principle in Contemporary American Politics**

It seems obvious to the most casual observer that today we have strayed far from the Commonsense Principle that Mosiah and Madison articulate. We may disagree about why it has happened or who is chiefly to blame, but most of us have a creeping suspicion that something is disturbingly different today. Our political discourse seems increasingly like tribal warfare. Rather than following the Commonsense Principle, today's politics seem too often characterized by its opposite. To the most fervent partisans, the other side's agreement with an idea is treated as definitive evidence that it must be a bad one that should be vigorously opposed.

Nostalgic sentiments that things were better in the "good old days" are often contradicted by an honest review of the facts. It is certainly true that we have been more deeply divided before. We remain far from the carnage of the Civil War. The turmoil of the 1960s grew out of especially deep divisions.

Unfortunately, however, the empirical evidence in several respects supports our sneaking suspicion that something really has gone wrong that is new, or at least not typical. What is different about our time is how consistently our differences break along party lines. There were pro- and antislavery wings in both the Democratic and Whig Parties that dominated American politics in the years leading up to the Civil War. The civil rights movement also didn't play out along purely partisan lines. A higher percentage of Republicans in the House (80 percent) voted for President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Civil Rights Act than Democrats (61 percent).<sup>10</sup>

### ***Empirical Evidence on Congressional Polarization***

It is not just the vote on the Civil Rights Act. Perhaps the clearest evidence of an unprecedented level of polarization that breaks along party lines comes from an analysis of all roll call votes in Congress. Political scientists Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, and their colleagues have developed a rigorous method of analyzing the more than 14 million roll

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10. David Winston, "A Needed Lesson in Bipartisanship: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Roll Call*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.rollcall.com/2021/03/31/a-needed-lesson-in-bipartisanship-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964/>.

call votes cast by members of Congress since it first convened in 1789.<sup>11</sup> Their method reveals that the 114th Congress that served from 2015 to 2016 broke the previous record for party-line voting that had stood for 218 years.<sup>12</sup> Today, congressional Republicans and Democrats are quantifiably more divided in how they vote on bills than they have ever been.<sup>13</sup> The parties' ability to work together to pass the broadly supported measures for which the Constitution was designed has never been so feeble.

Political scientists like Matthew Levendusky<sup>14</sup> and Alan Abramowitz,<sup>15</sup> along with Poole and Rosenthal, conclude that the increased party-line voting in Congress is largely a reflection of ideological sorting. For the vast majority of our more than two hundred years under the Constitution, both major parties were a mix of conservatives, moderates, and liberals. Until the 1980s, conservative southern Democrats and liberal "Rockefeller" Republicans, mostly from the north, were common.<sup>16</sup> As noted above, one prominent example of this is that a higher percentage of Republicans voted for the 1964 Civil Rights Act than Democrats. Today, the parties are much more ideologically sorted. There are virtually no conservatives in the Democratic Party, and the number of moderates continues to decline. Similarly, there are virtually no liberals and a declining number of moderates in the Republican Party.

Our sinking feeling that this is not just a passing problem is also confirmed by the roll call vote data that Poole, Rosenthal, and their colleagues have provided. Today's partisan trend started in the 1970s. It has been building ever since, making the forty-year acceleration in party-line roll call voting the longest in American history. The unprecedented long-term trend reflects a deeper, systemic change that is unlike the shorter-term spikes in partisan polarization that we have previously experienced.<sup>17</sup>

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11. Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Ideology & Congress*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2007), x.

12. Jeffrey B. Lewis and others, "Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database," Voteview, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://voteview.com/data>.

13. Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016), 2–3.

14. Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–2.

15. Alan Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), 2.

16. Levendusky, *Partisan Sort*, 2.

17. Jeffrey B. Lewis and others, "Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database," Voteview, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://voteview.com/data>.

At a theoretical level, ideologically coherent parties would seem to make sense. The unprecedented challenge they pose in our system, however, is that ideological parties in practice prove to be poor at pursuing solutions wise enough to attract support beyond their base. The ideologically mixed parties that have characterized virtually all of American history prior to the last forty years were reasonably good engines for broadly supported solutions, by necessity. Given the mix of liberals, moderates, and conservatives in both parties, candidates and policies had to attract broad support to be viable. The mix also made it easier for the two parties to work together.

In contrast, today's parties focus on solutions that attract support only from the committed members who constitute their base. At most, the bases of the Republican and Democratic parties each represent about 30 percent of Americans. Roughly 40 percent of Americans consider themselves independent.<sup>18</sup>

No republic will ever be successful or stable if 30 percent of the country imposes its will on the other 70 percent. Even without knowing the chief reason that prior republics failed or understanding the Founders' dire warnings about such dynamics, that much should be painfully self-evident. Parties that are intent on imposing the fervent will of their base on everyone else are particularly dysfunctional, however, in a constitutional republic purposely structured to frustrate such narrow, partisan measures. Parties can sometimes win elections by stirring the pot of political divisions to mobilize their base. However, they cannot govern effectively within a constitutional structure designed to check such partisan aims.

### *Social Sorting and the Formation of Political Tribes*

Unfortunately, the dysfunctional and systemic changes unique to our day have not stopped with sorting the parties into more purely conservative and liberal groups. Starting in earnest in the 1990s, the United States also began an unprecedented alignment between party identity and other powerful social identities. In the 1960s and 1970s, if you knew whether someone went to church frequently, lived in an urban or rural area, or what their race was, it told you almost nothing about what party they belonged to. Parties were ideologically mixed and also contained a healthy mix of these other defining identities. Today, religious activity,

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18. "Party Affiliation," Gallup, December 7, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx>.

race, and whether one lives in an urban or rural area are highly correlated with party identification. Our party identification is no longer simply a reflection of dispassionate judgments about what is wise public policy. It now defines who we are in a very personal way. Our political party today defines our tribe to an extent that is unique in American history.<sup>19</sup>

More than the ideological sorting, it is this social sorting that fuels the anger driving our politics now.<sup>20</sup> Rather than a sober debate on the merits of policy proposals, policy battles today are proxies for defeating a competing tribe.

The social rancor side of today's partisan battles makes the Founders' warnings about the "spirit of party" more relevant for our generation than any preceding one. We do not have a commonly used term today that is synonymous. The closest term we have is "partisanship." By using the term "*spirit of party*," however, the Founders were emphasizing the angry animosity that attends the most dysfunctional kind of partisanship. In Washington's eerily apt words for our day, it is "party dissension" that is "sharpened by the spirit of revenge" that is so devastating to republics.<sup>21</sup>

### *Cause for Hope:*

#### *Everyday Americans Are Much Less Polarized on the Issues*

Amid the sobering evidence of the ways in which today's partisan polarization poses unique challenges for our structure of government, there is a crucial bright spot. The evidence indicates that everyday Democrats and Republicans are far less polarized on the issues than it seems.<sup>22</sup>

To characterize polarization in contemporary American politics accurately, political scientists have found it necessary to distinguish between social, or affective, polarization and issues polarization.<sup>23</sup> Social polarization is the level of animosity that Republicans and Democrats feel toward each other. Issues polarization is the distance between

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19. Abramowitz, *Great Alignment*, 43–71.

20. Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 4.

21. Washington, "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796."

22. Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

23. Shanto Iyengar and others, "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (May 2019): 130–32, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>.

Republicans and Democrats on specific policy questions. It is also important to distinguish between key groups to describe polarization today. In addition to distinguishing between elected officials and citizens, it is useful to distinguish between the small minority of citizens who are very active in politics and the vast majority of everyday Americans who are not.

The general pattern is that both issues polarization and social polarization are currently at the highest levels ever recorded and rising rapidly. The critical exception is that issues polarization among everyday citizens remains low and is rising only slowly.

Reviewing the evidence, the political scientist Lilliana Mason has aptly described us as a nation that agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless.<sup>24</sup> Such a curious state of affairs requires an explanation. If Republican and Democratic voters agree on so much, why are we so angry at each other?

Two related factors explain most of the paradox. First, as discussed above, the increased alignment between our partisan and other tribes, including our ideological, religious, racial, and geographic identities, contributes to high animosity, even though we agree on much. A vast body of social psychological research consistently finds that we judge members of a competing group much more harshly and become much angrier at them than we do members of our own group.<sup>25</sup>

Second, we are mad at the other side because of a “perception gap” leading us to think they are far more extreme than they really are.<sup>26</sup> In fact, research indicates that Americans *think* the differences in policy views between everyday Republicans and Democrats are on average about twice as big as they actually are.<sup>27</sup> Thinking that those on the other side are twice as extreme as they really are obviously fuels anger because they are seen as working to foist such unreasonable and dangerous views on the country. In fact, exaggerated perceptions of the extremity of other

24. Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 4.

25. Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

26. Daniel Yudkin, Stephen Hawkins, and Tim Dixon, *The Perception Gap: How False Impressions Are Pulling Americans Apart* (New York: More in Common, June 2019), accessed December 9, 2021, <https://perceptiongap.us/>.

27. Jacob Westfall and others, “Perceiving Political Polarization in the United States: Party Identity Strength and Attitude Extremity Exacerbate the Perceived Partisan Divide,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 2 (March 11, 2015): 145–58, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691615569849>.



groups is a common social psychological dynamic between groups of all sorts in all times, not just Republicans and Democrats in the United States today.<sup>28</sup> The increasingly polarized structure of American politics, however, amplifies this universal psychological tendency.<sup>29</sup> For example, more politically active Americans really are more extreme than the vast majority of us who are less engaged.<sup>30</sup> Talking louder and longer about politics than the rest of us, including on social media, they create an outsized impression. The news media also give these extreme voices disproportionate airtime. No wonder we have exaggerated views of our differences.

More alarmingly, politicians stoke the exaggerated perceptions because they understand that they can mobilize support by painting the other side as being more extreme and a greater threat than they really are. No one has explained this timeless political ploy better than George Washington. He recognizes that there are always politicians more interested in their own power than in the good of the nation, people who are mere politicians rather than real leaders. Recognizing the timeless political temptation to stoke the spirit of party, he warns that we as a people must be wise enough not to fall for these ploys. “One of the expedients of party to acquire influence,” he says in his Farewell Address, “is to misrepresent the opinions & aims of other” parties. He warns that “designing men” try to “excite a belief” that there are greater differences in Americans’ “interests and views” than actually exists. These designing men seek to acquire power by rendering “alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection.” He implores, “You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations.”<sup>31</sup> The changes in our two-party system have made Washington’s warnings truer and more critical than ever.

### **Being Anxiously Engaged in Political Common Sense**

If we are to move from the toxic dysfunction of today’s politics to a place where we can govern ourselves more effectively, the American people will need to be our saving grace. The most fundamental point is that the

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28. Abrams and Hogg, *Social Identifications*.

29. Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 4.

30. Abramowitz, *Great Alignment*, 17.

31. Washington, “Farewell Address, 19 September 1796.”

majority of us who have not been very involved politically must become more engaged, as Church leaders have continually encouraged. If the broad swath of us who are less polarized on the issues cede the stage to the minority who are the most extreme, we can hardly expect anything but extreme politics.

Many of us understand that we need to be more engaged. We just struggle to find ways to be involved that are feasible and effective and that do not require the demonizing tribal politics that we find abhorrent.

Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle points the way. The alternative approaches that the nation needs involve everyday citizens engaging across our divisions to champion policies and candidates wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support. It is important to note that Madison does not call for a "go along to get along" attitude in which we compromise on our convictions. It is the principled, substantive, and respectful advocacy of different perspectives, in fact, that Madison believes provides the rigor that produces wiser decisions.

The research on low issues polarization creates a solid foundation for hope that the Commonsense Principle can prevail. Being anxiously engaged in advancing commonsense candidates and solutions is easier and more effective than it seems. If you are hungry for a more respectful, practical, problem-solving-oriented politics, you have far more company than you know.

The Commonsense Principle is in many ways easiest to pursue at the local level. Relatively small groups who come together across divisions within a community to champion commonsense solutions can have a profound effect at the school district, town, and county levels.

At the state and federal levels, there are options for engagement both in elections and on issues that are especially promising. For involvement in elections, the most promising, and the simplest, option is voting. It should be obvious that people need to register to vote and then, in fact, turn out to vote. What may be less obvious is how important it is that we turn out to vote specifically in primary elections. The electorate that turns out for primary elections is often more ideologically extreme than the electorate for the general election.<sup>32</sup> The result in the general election is often a choice between what many regard as the

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32. David W. Brady, Hahrie Han, and Jeremy C. Pope, "Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (February 2007): 79–105.

lesser of two evils. One of the most important and effective ways that we can better follow Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle is for more of us to turn out in primary elections and then vote for commonsense candidates. Commonsense candidates are characterized by a desire to bring us together, rather than divide us further, and by an ability to draw support beyond the base of their own party.

Effective commonsense engagement on issues at the state and federal level is admittedly more challenging, requiring a greater level of citizen organization. It has been the driving passion of my career to develop effective ways for everyday Americans to identify and then champion solutions wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support in their state legislatures and in Congress.

I am delighted to report recent and remarkable success on this front. In January 2019, the National Institute for Civil Discourse launched the CommonSense American program. We now have over thirty-five thousand members from across the nation and political spectrum. Each member commits to spending ninety minutes per year reviewing a policy brief and then weighing in. We then engage Congress with the results in two ways. First, members share their own views with their representative and two senators. Second, our staff conducts congressional briefings on the overall results, focusing on identifying those solutions wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support.

It is already working. The first issue we took on was surprise medical billing. CommonSense American members played a significant role in helping convince Congress to pass an act in December 2020 that ended the practice. For years there had been wide recognition that the practice should stop. Regardless of party, few defended this practice in which out-of-network providers cared for tens of thousands of patients per year without patients' knowledge or consent and then sent high, unexpected bills that the patients were legally obligated to pay. Still, Congress had not been able to act. Our more than 150 congressional briefings on the results from thousands of Americans informing themselves and weighing in helped make the difference. The more than fifteen hundred unique emails our members sent to their members of Congress also had an important impact.

More recently, we worked on infrastructure. We engaged the White House, 42 Senators, and 178 Representatives with the results from thousands of members who reviewed our infrastructure brief. Another important channel through which everyday Americans' voices were heard on the topic was the coverage of our results in *USA Today* shortly

before the Senate vote on August 10, 2021, and in *The Hill* shortly before the House vote on November 11, 2021.<sup>33</sup> The combined effect contributed to passing the bipartisan infrastructure bill that focused on physical infrastructure separate from the Democrats' social spending bill.

You are invited to join this national effort to pursue the Commonsense Principle that Mosiah and Madison explained. You can join at [www.CommonSenseAmerican.org](http://www.CommonSenseAmerican.org).

Regardless of how each of us chooses to pursue the Commonsense Principle, we all need to do our part as our generation meets the challenge of bitter partisan polarization. It falls to us to ensure that American self-government not only endures but thrives. We inherited the most successful republic in world history. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option in times like these. We owe it to our children and our children's children to pass onto them a republic that fulfills the vision the Founders had for it, a system of self-government with less partisan tyranny and frustration, and more liberty and justice, for all. As Mosiah and Madison taught, the key is common sense.

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33. Keith Allred, "Building Bridges: Why Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Is a Win for America's Moderates," *USA Today*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/08/09/why-bidens-infrastructure-deal-rejection-political-extremes/5509577001/>; Keith Allred, "Voters Oppose Holding Infrastructure Hostage," *The Hill*, November 11, 2021, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/580253-voters-oppose-holding-infrastructure-hostage?rl=1>.

## March Morning, New York City

At last the earth lifts the cobbled street  
between Church and City Hall  
back in line with the sun.

The host of sparrows in their barren scaffold  
catch fire again, flickering and dancing  
like bright bits of glass.

The forsythia hedge at the iron gate—  
yesterday a row of tattered sticks, today  
a shining brass parade.

And the grey coated regular strangers,  
befriended by this old street, drink  
the new light with their eyes and faces,

tasting maybe the very beginning of time  
when the sun first made the world  
a thing that could be filled with joy.

—David Passey

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This poem was an honorable mention in the 2021 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.

# Women of Faith Speak Up and Speak Out

## The Genesis and Philosophical Underpinnings of Mormon Women for Ethical Government

*Sharlee Mullins Glenn*

Good government is ethical government. That is the premise upon which the nonprofit organization Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) was founded.

Like millions of people across the United States, I found myself growing increasingly alarmed during the 2016 U.S. election cycle as I watched the great rifts in our political landscape widen and deepen, abetted by the divisive and often vitriolic discourse on all sides. This division, combined with the flagrant flouting of basic human decency by some who were running for public office, awakened many of us to a sense of our duty as citizens.

During this time, Melissa Dalton-Bradford and I often volleyed our dismay (and simultaneous resolve) back and forth across the Atlantic via email and phone calls. Melissa, a dear friend of mine since grad school and a native of Provo, Utah, was currently living with her family in Germany. With the call from our leaders in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to reach out and actively help refugees wherever and however possible ringing in our ears,<sup>1</sup> we were particularly distressed by the anti-immigrant, anti-refugee policies and rhetoric coming from certain spaces. We both knew that we could no longer remain silent. We felt unambiguously called to action.

In one of our exchanges in late January 2017, Melissa and I asked each other, “But what do we do?” Our response to that question was the spark

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1. “I Was a Stranger—an Effort to Serve and Include,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/refugees?lang=eng>.

that ignited and guided the creation of Mormon Women for Ethical Government:

*We must turn our dismay into action. But we can't panic. First, and above all, we seek the Spirit. We stay on our knees and pray our hearts out until we know we have the Spirit with us. And then we get to work. Calmly, with focus, impelled by the ferocity of love, not fear, not anger. What do we do? We write and call our members of Congress, over and over again. We flood them with phone calls and letters and emails, and let them know that this kind of unethical and divisive behavior must not stand. And we use whatever other platforms are available to us to make our voices heard. We must work hard, but we also must work smart. Our power is greater the greater our numbers, so we have to mobilize.*<sup>2</sup>

*We have to mobilize.* At the time, both Melissa and I sat on the board of *Segullah*—a literary journal and blog for Latter-day Saint women.<sup>3</sup> The board had an online forum wherein we conducted business related to the journal, but often our conversations would turn to our concern about what was happening in the wider political world. On January 25, 2017, shortly after the above email exchange with Melissa, I announced to my *Segullah* sisters that I would be setting up a separate space—a Facebook group—where we could talk about how best to move forward as newly awakened political activists and advocates. This new group, I emphasized, would not be a forum for merely venting, but for organizing, for planning direct action. I asked who wanted to be added, and nearly everyone (around twenty-five women) said, “I’m in!”

Late that same night, I sat down at my computer—a prayer in my heart and fire in my soul—and got to work. I named the group Mormon Women for Political Action, though we soon changed it to Mormon Women for Ethical Government.<sup>4</sup> I worked late into the night and into the wee hours

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2. Thoughts expressed in private exchange between Sharlee Mullins Glenn and Melissa Dalton-Bradford, January 25, 2021.

3. *Segullah*, <https://segullah.org/>. *Segullah*, which takes its name from the Hebrew word signifying a cherished possession or treasure, was founded in 2005 as a print journal and later moved online. According to the *Segullah* website, the journal seeks to “encourage literary and artistic talent, provoke thought and promote greater understanding and faith among Latter-day Saint women.”

4. MWEG was founded a year and a half before President Nelson asked people to stop using the terms “Mormon” and “LDS” as a substitute for the full name of the Church and asked Church members to refer to themselves as “members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” or “Latter-day Saints.” See Sarah Jane Weaver, “‘Mormon’ Is Out: Church Releases Statement on How to Refer to the Organization,” Church News, August 16, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/mormon>

of January 26, setting up the group and writing the group description. Even though I thought this would be a space for just twenty-five or so like-minded friends (at least initially), I felt compelled to formalize the guidelines and foundational principles by which the group would operate and which still guide MWEG today: the absolute commitment to civility and peacemaking, the laser-like focus on ethics and ethical government, the requirement that this *not* be a space where we criticize the Church or discuss Church governance and policies, the guarantee that it be a strictly nonpartisan group, and the insistence that the group be action oriented. We later encapsulated these guiding principles into what we call MWEG's four core attributes: faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, and proactive. Because of my grave concern about the contempt and general lack of civility abounding in political discussions, I also felt prompted to stipulate that anyone joining the group would need to commit to the Six Principles of Nonviolence as articulated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>5</sup> We later adapted these principles into our own Principles of Peacemaking.<sup>6</sup>

All of these things were in place by the time I finished setting up the group at about 2:30 a.m. on January 26, 2017, before I added a single person. I know now, given how high emotions were running then, that had these guidelines and principles not been firmly established from day one, the group almost certainly would have imploded within the first few weeks.

The first person I added to the newly formed group was Melissa, followed by my daughter, Erica. I then added all of the *Segullah* sisters who had expressed interest. What I did not do (because I did not realize I needed to) was ask people not to add anyone else just yet.

What happened next is MWEG history. Almost immediately, those original MWEG members began adding like-minded friends who added

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-is-out-church-releases-statement-on-how-to-refer-to-the-organization?lang=eng. For an explanation of why MWEG chooses not to change its name at this point, see "Frequently Asked Questions: Why do you still use the name 'Mormon?'" MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/FAQ>; and "Announcement Regarding MWEG's Name," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, December 11, 2018, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/announcement-regarding-mwegas-name/>.

5. "Six Principles of Nonviolence," The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, [https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/lesson-activities/six\\_principles\\_of\\_nonviolence.pdf](https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/lesson-activities/six_principles_of_nonviolence.pdf).

6. "The Six Principles of Peacemaking," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/six-principles-of-peacemaking>.



friends who added friends. And within a few days, our numbers had grown to over one thousand members. Within just a few weeks, we had over four thousand.

What I did not know—could not have known—in those early hours of January 26, 2017, is that there were literally thousands of other Latter-day Saint women out there who were feeling exactly as Melissa, Erica, and I were. There were thousands of our sisters in the restored gospel who felt the exact same call to action, who were ready to claim their moral authority as women and as citizens, who refused to be complicit by being complacent—and they were just waiting for someone to build the field of dreams, so to speak, so that they could come and play some activist ball! One of our members wrote this shortly after finding the group: “I am in tears. I thought I was almost alone—and here are my sisters, already gathered, ‘fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners’ (Song 6:10)!”<sup>7</sup>

We later wrote the following in *The Little Purple Book: MWEG Essentials*, a book outlining MWEG’s founding and core principles that was published by the nonprofit By Common Consent Press in 2018: “Mormon Women for Ethical Government was born of desire, frustration, and hope: the desire to act, to push back with faith, love, and light against what we see as a tidal wave of corruption and self-interest; the frustration that comes from feeling directionless and alone in our efforts; and the hope that, working together, we can actually make a difference.”<sup>8</sup>

Well, those early days were wild and heady. Hundreds of smart, strong, energized women were pouring into the group every single day, heeding President Russell M. Nelson’s call for women to “speak up and speak out,”<sup>9</sup> and they were ready for action, and eager to share their thoughts and ideas. We had no moderators at that point and no system for screening new members. But thank goodness our inviolable guiding principles were in place! Melissa, Erica, and I were working, very literally around the clock, trying to stay on top of member and post approvals, moderate the discussions, and put in place a structure and organization that could accommodate thousands of women who were ready to roll! Very quickly, we brought others on board to help: fellow writers Linda Hoffman Kimball and Michelle Lehnardt, and Jacque White, a business leader. We also recruited our first lifesaving team of discussion group moderators: Nicole Terry,

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7. Post in MWEG’s Facebook Discussion Group, February 6, 2017.

8. *The Little Purple Book: MWEG Essentials* (Salt Lake City: BCC Press, 2018), 2.

9. Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign* 45, no. 11 (November 2015): 97.

Courtney McQuain, Jillaire McMillan, MaryJan Munger, Megan Lagerberg, and Maren E. Mecham. (Within the first few months, Erica, Michelle, and Jacque had to step away from active leadership because of competing life demands, and Diana Bate Hardy, an attorney, joined Melissa, Linda, and me as an invaluable member of the core leadership team.)

Right out of the gate, we were organizing committees and chapters, designing logos and other graphics, issuing calls to action, building a website, researching how to incorporate as a 501(c)(4), and, and, and . . . *And* we were already in the trenches, doing the work that we had all felt so called to do—organizing vigils, advocating for families who were being torn apart by unjust immigration practices, meeting with members of Congress, writing op-eds, helping register voters, and so on.

As Melissa so aptly put it, we were racing at breakneck speed down the autobahn, building the car as we went. Thanks to that early direct inspiration, we had a motor, a steering wheel, and a solid chassis—but we did not yet have doors, or bumpers, or brakes!

Yet we managed to hold the road. Within the first few weeks, we already had functioning committees in place, chapter coordinators in nearly every state, and a whole team of remarkable, committed leaders. We had claimed our privilege and were making our voices heard.

### **Early Media Attention**

The initial plan was to work more or less behind the scenes. We did not want to draw attention to ourselves. Rather, we wanted the focus to be on the issues, the work, the cause of ethical government. Very soon, however, we discovered that flying under the radar was going to be virtually impossible. Our first public action, in April 2017, was a prayer vigil at the Salt Lake City airport on behalf of a woman who was being deported back to Colombia. Teresa was a faithful member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the sole caregiver to her disabled son, a U.S. citizen, and her elderly mother, a legal permanent resident. Teresa was a woman of the highest moral character who worked, paid taxes, had medical insurance that covered her son's needs, and had no criminal record of any kind. Teresa had entered the country legally many years before but had overstayed her visa (not a criminal offense). Because of her son's medical situation, her exemplary character, and her family ties in the United States, Teresa was granted deferred action (meaning that she was permitted to stay in the United States as long as she maintained her clean record, continued to demonstrate good moral character, and reported regularly to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(ICE)—which she faithfully did, without exception). Over the years, Teresa was granted stays of deportation at each appointment—until early 2017. She was told then that “priorities have changed” and that she had just a few weeks to leave the country.

We wanted to follow the lead of the Church in calling for more humane immigration policies that “strengthen families and keep them together,”<sup>10</sup> so we organized the prayer vigil at the airport on the morning that Teresa, flanked by ICE agents, was placed on a plane to Colombia, leaving her heartbroken son and mother behind, without insurance or any of the essential support she had always provided for them.

Despite our best efforts to keep the event firmly focused on Teresa and the immigration practices that were tearing her from her son and mother, the headlines in the local press instead highlighted our own identity: “Mormon Women, Others Gather at Salt Lake City Airport to Try ‘Last-Minute Save’ for Woman’s Deportation” and “LDS Women Protest Deportation at Salt Lake Airport.”<sup>11</sup>

Our next public event was a vigil held in front of the Department of Homeland Security offices in West Valley City on behalf of Silvia, a Dreamer who had come to the United States as a seven-year-old child, had lived here her entire life, was married to a legal permanent resident (now a citizen), and was the mother of three young children, all three U.S. citizens. The event was covered by every major news outlet in the state of Utah as well as by *USA Today* and *Public Radio International*.<sup>12</sup> Soon we were being contacted by writers and journalists from publications as wide-ranging as *California Sunday Magazine*, *The Washington Examiner*,

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10. “Church Calls for Unity, Compassion in New Statement on Immigration,” Church News, June 18, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/church-calls-for-unity-compassion-in-new-statement-on-immigration?lang=eng>.

11. Mariah Noble, “Mormon Women, Others Gather at Salt Lake City Airport to Try ‘Last-Minute Save’ for Woman’s Deportation,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 7, 2017, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=5146762&itype=CMSID>; Erik Neumann, “LDS Women Protest Deportation at Salt Lake Airport,” KUER 90.1, April 6, 2017, radio report, 1:59, <https://www.kuer.org/immigration/2017-04-06/lds-women-protest-deportation-at-salt-lake-airport#stream/o>.

12. “Groups Protest Pending Deportation of Utah Mother of 3,” *USA Today*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/utah/articles/2017-05-03/groups-protest-pending-deportation-of-utah-mother-of-3>; Andrea Smardon, “Trump’s Policies Have Turned Some Mormon Women in Utah into Political Activists,” *Public Radio International*, June 7, 2017, radio report, 4:43, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-06-07/trumps-policies-have-turned-some-mormon-women-utah-political-activists>.

and *Jyllands-Posten*, a leading Danish newspaper.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, MWEG was even featured in two books—*Thin Places: Essays from in Between* by Jordan Kisner and *On the Road in Trump's America: A Journey into the Heart of a Divided Nation* by Daniel Allott.<sup>14</sup>

It became clear that, in the eyes of the national media, at least, we were the story—faithful Mormon women (often stereotyped throughout history as submissive and repressed) who were speaking up and taking action. We quickly came to realize that we could leverage this unwanted attention for good and that one of our strengths lay in subverting that stereotype. It is what gave us the platform to advance our cause.

The Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination hearings brought further national attention to MWEG, particularly after Senator Cory Booker read one of our official statements during the proceedings and formally entered it into the hearing records.<sup>15</sup> The statement, which took no position on Kavanaugh's guilt or innocence, called for a thorough investigation given the seriousness of the allegations against him: "If these accusations are proved false, an investigation will prevent harm to the court's legitimacy. If they are true, then Judge Kavanaugh must not be confirmed."<sup>16</sup>

Major articles followed in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *TIME* magazine, *The Hill*, *HuffPost*, *World Religion News*, *Religion and Politics*, and more.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Jordan Kisner, "Mormon Women Join the Trump Resistance," *California Sunday Magazine*, September 25, 2017, <https://story.californiasunday.com/mormon-trump/>; Daniel Allott, "Meet the Women of the Mormon Resistance against Trumpism," *Washington Examiner*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/tag/donald-trump?source=%2Fopinion%2Fmeet-the-women-of-the-mormon-resistance-against-trump>.

14. Jordan Kisner, *Thin Places: Essays from in Between* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 145–62; Daniel Allott, *On the Road in Trump's America: A Journey into the Heart of a Divided Nation* (Alexandria, Va.: Republic Book Publishers, 2020), 162–81.

15. "Confirmation Hearing on the Nomination of Hon. Brett M. Kavanaugh to be an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States," second session, September 4–7, 27, 2018, serial no. J-115-61 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2020), 2736, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg32765/html/CHRG-115shrg32765-pt2.htm>.

16. "Official Statement from Mormon Women for Ethical Government with Regard to the Brett Kavanaugh Confirmation Proceedings," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, September 24, 2018, <http://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/official-statement-from-mormon-women-for-ethical-government-with-regard-to-the-brett-kavanaugh-confirmation-proceedings/>.

17. Elizabeth Dias, "Mormon Women's Group Seeks Inquiry into Kavanaugh Allegations," *New York Times*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/25/>

We learned in time, if not to embrace the attention, at least to use it to amplify our message.

### The Ethos of MWEG

From the beginning, MWEG was meant to be a different kind of organization—a group that welcomed women from all across the political spectrum and was driven not by any partisan agenda but by an unwavering focus on ethics and a commitment to peacemaking, both of which were motivated by our discipleship to Jesus Christ. Through what can only be called a profoundly holy experience, we came to understand early on that a critical component of MWEG’s *raison d’être* is the schooling of God’s daughters—for purposes so vast and varied that we can’t even conceive of all of them. MWEG is to be a place of learning and growth as, together, her members practice the principles of peacemaking and learn how to be effective advocates and leaders.

### Vision and Mission

MWEG’s early group description reads, “Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) is a nonpartisan group dedicated to the ideals of decency, honor, accountability, transparency, and justice in governing. We are faithful, peaceful, and proactive. We are both watchdogs

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us/politics/kavanaugh-mormon-women.html; Michelle Boorstein, “Mormon Women Demand LDS Senators Halt Kavanaugh Hearings So Misconduct Allegations Can Be Investigated,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/09/25/mormon-women-demand-lds-senators-halt-kavanaugh-hearings-so-misconduct-can-be-investigated/>; Haley Sweetland Edwards, “How Christine Blasey Ford’s Testimony Changed America,” *TIME*, October 4, 2018, <https://time.com/5415027/christine-blasey-ford-testimony/>; Chris Mills Rodrigo, “Mormon Women Call on Senators to Postpone Kavanaugh Confirmation,” *The Hill*, September 25, 2018, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/408264-mormon-womens-group-calls-on-senate-to-postpone-kavanaugh>; Nick Visser, “Mormon Women’s Group Calls on LDS Senators to Investigate Claims against Kavanaugh,” *HuffPost*, September 25, 2018, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mormon-women-kavanaugh\\_n\\_5baadc6ee4bofi43d10e5cae](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mormon-women-kavanaugh_n_5baadc6ee4bofi43d10e5cae); Elisa Meyer, “Mormon Women’s Group Calls on LDS Senators to Investigate Claims against Kavanaugh,” *World Religion News*, September 27, 2018, <https://www.worldreligionnews.com/religion-news/mormon-womens-group-calls-lds-senators-investigate-claims-kavanaugh>; Kristine Wright, “What the Brett Kavanaugh Protests Revealed about Mormonism and Women,” *Religion and Politics*, October 9, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/09/what-the-brett-kavanaugh-protests-revealed-about-mormonism-and-women/>.

and activists, guided by our discipleship to Jesus Christ and His teachings. Our goal is to oppose unethical proceedings and to promote positive change.”<sup>18</sup>

We later formalized a more concise vision—“Women of faith building a more peaceful, just, and ethical world”—and mission statement—“To inspire women of faith to be ambassadors of peace who transcend partisanship and courageously advocate for ethical government.”<sup>19</sup>

### Core Attributes

MWEG was and continues to be unconditionally bound to her commitment to be faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, and proactive.<sup>20</sup> These four core attributes are further elucidated on MWEG’s website as follows:

- As a function of *Faithful*, MWEG will never oppose a stand taken by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor will we criticize the Church or Church leadership. We also recognize God’s hand in the formation of MWEG and continue to seek God’s guidance in all we do. We believe in, exercise faith in, and seek to reflect in our own lives the example of Jesus Christ.
- As a function of *Nonpartisan*, we will abide by the MWEG principles of nonpartisanship and will continue to remain open to members of all political parties who are willing to abide by our basic principles and guidelines. We will not ever endorse political candidates or take overtly partisan stands. In MWEG, we are defined not by labels but by our common commitment to ethics.
- As a function of *Peaceful*, we will strive to abide by the Six Principles of Peacemaking and will remain absolutely committed to civility in the true sense of the word—not mere politeness, but a deep and genuine honor and respect for every other human being that emerges from an acknowledgement that we are all children of the same God and, hence, sisters and brothers. We are committed to elevating the level of public discourse and healing the divide and will not countenance ad hominem attacks or vitriol of any kind.

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18. *Little Purple Book*, 1.

19. “About Us: Who We Are,” MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/aboutus>.

20. “Inviolable Principles and Practices of Mormon Women for Ethical Government,” MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/inviolable-principles-and-practices>.

- As a function of *Proactive*, we assert that our purpose is to take effective action after appropriate and prayerful discussion, research, and strategizing. We were established to be both watchdogs and activists for ethical government.<sup>21</sup>

### Focus on Ethical Government

MWEG's focus is on ethics and ethical government. As much as our members care about a plethora of other important issues, if it doesn't have anything to do with ethical government, it's not something MWEG will address. Early on, we formulated some clear advocacy guidelines. MWEG's focus on ethical government meant that the organization would do all it could to (1) guard against corruption and the abuse of power in government; (2) uphold democratic principles, norms, and institutions; and (3) protect the basic human rights and dignity of all God's children.

Eventually, with MWEG senior directors Rachel Esplin Odell and Lisa Rampton Halverson as primary drafters, our leadership team framed MWEG's Principles of Ethical Government, which are organized around these three basic concepts:

1. Every government official and institution has a duty to respect the rule of law, including accepted processes for how the law is to be established, executed, and interpreted.
2. Every human being is endowed with rights that governments are obligated to protect and not violate. These include both universal human rights such as the rights to life and liberty, as well as civil rights such as the rights to equitable political representation and equal protection under the law.
3. All human beings are mutually accountable to their fellow human beings in their local communities, their countries, and the world.<sup>22</sup>

These are the principles that currently guide all of our advocacy decisions.

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21. "Inviolable Principles and Practices," emphasis added.

22. "Principles of Ethical Government," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-ethical-government>.



## Principles of Peacemaking

While the Principles of Ethical Government inform *what* we do, our foundational Principles of Peacemaking guide *how* we do it.

As I noted earlier, while setting up the Facebook group January 26, 2017, I felt prompted to stipulate that anyone joining the group must agree to abide by the Six Principles of Nonviolence as defined and practiced by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>23</sup> (I was familiar with the writings and philosophy of Dr. King from teaching his texts, specifically his masterful “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in a writing and rhetoric class that I taught for many years at Brigham Young University.)

The idea of nonviolence as a political practice has evolved over time, and the general principles of nonviolence have been adapted by many individuals and movements to fit their own circumstances and world-views. For example, Dr. King was influenced by and adapted the ideas of Gandhi, who was influenced by both Hindu philosophy and the writings of Henry David Thoreau, and so on. Fairly early in MWEG’s history, we too decided to adapt the principles of nonviolence and frame our own Six Principles of Peacemaking. These six principles are as follows:

1. Peacemaking is proactive and courageous.
2. Peacemaking seeks to unify instead of divide.
3. Peacemaking demands great tolerance for people and none for injustice.
4. Peacemaking views human suffering as sacred.
5. Peacemaking chooses love instead of hate.
6. Peacemaking believes that ultimate peace is not only possible, but sure.<sup>24</sup>

As members of MWEG, we truly believe that, to use the powerful words of Dr. King, “darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”<sup>25</sup>

As I wrote in an article that was published in the *New York Times* in 2020, as members of MWEG, “we believe that Jesus really meant it when he said that we should love our neighbors—and that means everyone, as the parable of the good Samaritan makes clear—and care for the poor, the

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23. “Six Principles of Nonviolence.”

24. *Little Purple Book*, 13–16.

25. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 37.



sick, the homeless, the vulnerable. This is the calling of all Christians. We have been called to love.”<sup>26</sup> MWEG’s vision—a more peaceful, just, and ethical world—is just another way of saying that the ultimate goal of MWEG is Zion, or what Dr. King called the Beloved Community.

### Organizational Model

The founder and founding members of MWEG clearly understood that our call was to create a different kind of organization—an organization specifically for women and for the schooling of God’s daughters. This meant that we needed an organizational model that reflected the way women work. It was to be built “not after the manner of men”<sup>27</sup> but after the manner of women. As part of our schooling, we were to see and do things in a new way, a way that deliberately rejected the traditional male-dominated, hierarchal model of corporate America.

This meant there would be no centralization of authority, no top-down chain of command in MWEG. Rather, this was to be an organization of the members, by the members, for the members. It was to be based on the notions of individual empowerment, stewardship spheres, cooperation, mentorship, transparency, and accountability.

On June 6, 2017, approximately four months after the group was created, I elaborated on this idea in a post in the MWEG Facebook Discussion Group and described the organizational model that we settled on (this model was later formalized in *The Little Purple Book*):

As we’ve continued to evolve at MWEG, we’ve spent a lot of time thinking, praying, and talking about how we might best structure our organization. We even consulted with experts in the fields of business management and organizational design. But all the talk of hierarchy, top-to-bottom management, etc., just didn’t feel right. One day I took a brisk early morning walk. Winter had turned to spring without me really even noticing. (Hmmm. Wonder what has kept me so pre-occupied since, oh, say, January 26th!) I took particular notice of the trees. Glorious trees—birches, maples, aspens, oaks—rising up from the nourishing ground toward the sun. Roots, trunks, branches, leaves.

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26. Sharlee Mullins Glenn, “Why I Became an Activist against Fear,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/19/opinion/mormons-religion-trump.html>.

27. See 1 Nephi 18:2.

And it hit me. MWEG is like a tree—organic, synergistic, cooperative. . . . It's not a perfect analogy (and like most analogies, it will break down at some point if pushed too far), but it's a useful visual for us, I think.<sup>28</sup>

MWEG's organizational model, then, was to be not a pyramid but a tree. Our roots—MWEG's four core attributes (faithful, nonpartisan, peaceful, proactive)—are guarded by senior directors (root directors, in MWEG parlance). The strong, sturdy trunk, overseen by an executive team, houses our internal support teams. The limbs, cared for by limb directors, embody the broad arms of MWEG's four core objectives (to encircle, educate, empower, and engage). And each individual member is a leaf, gathering light and producing life-sustaining energy.

In this model, the members themselves have the responsibility of oversight—of ensuring that the organization stays true to its inviolable principles and practices.<sup>29</sup>

## Challenges

To say that all has been smooth sailing with MWEG would be disingenuous. The early days were challenging, not only because we were attempting to build the organization as we went (at breakneck speed!) but because we had to help all our members (and the public) understand that we really were serious about our foundational principles and practices. Our focus really is going to be limited to ethical government. We really do plan to unabashedly identify ourselves as women of faith who are guided in our advocacy by our discipleship to Jesus Christ, and we really are going to honor and sustain the Church's leaders and doctrines. We truly are going to try our best to be nonpartisan and to make space for any woman who is willing to abide by our principles and guidelines and work for ethical government, no matter her political party affiliation or lack thereof. We truly are going to actively practice kindness and deep civility and strive to be transformed by the principles of peacemaking.

Fairly quickly, we lost the women who just did not agree with our approach or who wanted MWEG to take positions that aligned consistently with their own partisan agendas. (We were neither liberal enough for the far left nor conservative enough for the far right.)

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28. Post in MWEG Discussion Group, June 6, 2017. This model was later formalized in *Little Purple Book*, 17–18.

29. See "Inviolable Principles and Practices."

Protecting the integrity of our original vision and mission has continued to be a challenge as new members join MWEG and as the founders have stepped back to allow others to assume the key leadership positions. This is one reason we memorialized our founding precepts in what we call MWEG's Inviolable Principles and Practices.<sup>30</sup>

Another challenge has been ensuring diversity within our board and operational leadership team, and we hope that MWEG will continue to make this a priority by working to establish trust and inviting greater participation—within both MWEG's leadership and her general membership—from women of color, women of various ages, women from across the political spectrum, and women from various geographic regions.

It has been fairly disappointing to learn that women-led groups are not exempt from some of the same tendencies and pitfalls that have always plagued largely male-run organizations. Further, just because an organization is focused on ethical government does not mean that it will not at times grapple with ethical dilemmas of its own or be tempted to compromise on ethical standards in its own governance.

As we transitioned from a founders-led organization to one with a governing board and a robust operating team, one fairly significant hurdle we encountered was the difficulty of integrating MWEG's unique organizational model with traditional paradigms for board governance. It can be tricky to challenge the status quo and reject familiar practices in order to implement a different kind of vision, particularly one that is not one's own, and our attorney advisors were not always encouraging of thinking outside the box. As a result, communicating MWEG's bold and unique vision to new leaders who come with their own set of ideas and backgrounds has not always been easy or fully successful.

There have also been some missed opportunities to fully develop certain aspects of MWEG's vision. The notion of mentorship, for example, is a critical component of MWEG's philosophy. As MWEG moves forward, we hope to see more opportunities for ongoing mentorship, as opposed to the "calling" type of system LDS Church members are familiar with, where leaders are released and immediately dismissed when new leaders are called. Sister Aileen H. Clyde—former member of the Relief Society General Presidency, recipient of MWEG's first Woman of Valor award, and enthusiastic member and advisor of MWEG until her passing<sup>31</sup>—

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30. See "Inviolable Principles and Practices."

31. See Margaret Blair Young, "Aileen Clyde: Leader, Counselor, Sister," *The Welcome Table*, blog, January 5, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/welcome-table/2020/01/aileen-clyde-leader-counselor-sister/>.

spoke often about her frustrations with transitions in Church callings. In MWEG, we have an opportunity to implement a true mentorship model that provides ongoing support and tutelage for new leaders and builds upon the experience and institutional knowledge of outgoing leaders.

Even with these challenges, though, we remain hopeful that MWEG will continue to learn and grow as she seeks to fulfill the measure of her creation.

## Moving Forward

Despite the unavoidable challenges, in the five years of MWEG's existence, it has not only survived but flourished. MWEG, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit with an affiliated 501(c)(3) sister organization (The MWEG Foundation), now has nearly seven thousand members and even more supporters and friends. As founder, I served as the first executive director on a completely volunteer basis for nearly two years until November 2018, when Diana Bate Hardy took the reins while MWEG's board of directors worked to raise the funds to support a permanent full-time executive director.<sup>32</sup> Diana was a visionary leader who worked hard to flesh out and solidify the formal structure of the organization. A trained attorney with significant experience in immigration law, Diana also led out on immigration efforts and drafted MWEG's "A Citizen's Proposal for Fair and Ethical Immigration Reform."<sup>33</sup>

At the time of this publication, MWEG is led by co-executive directors Emma Petty Addams and Jennifer Walker Thomas. The organization has an active board of directors and a healthy operational leadership team. We have successfully launched significant, impactful initiatives such as "Protecting Democracy," "Protect the Vote," and "Shoulder to Shoulder"<sup>34</sup> and have plans for new initiatives focused on practical peacemaking and what it means to be a principled citizen. MWEG hosts

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32. See Scarlett Lindsay, "Pushing for Immigration Reform," *The BYU Advocate* (Fall 2019): 44–45.

33. Mormon Women for Ethical Government, "A Citizens' Solution for Ethical Immigration Reform," Medium, January 11, 2019, <https://medium.com/on-common-ground/a-citizens-solution-for-ethical-immigration-reform-eda1ea68fo2>.

34. "Protecting Democracy: Calls to Action," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/protectourdemocracy>; "Protect the Vote," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, [https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/protect\\_the\\_vote](https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/protect_the_vote); "Shoulder to Shoulder: Calls to Action," MWEG: Mormon Women for Ethical Government, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/shouldertoshoulderCTAs>.

weekly “GROW” and “Town Halls and Deep Dives” meetings; sponsors an annual conference; maintains a vibrant website; supports an active internal discussion group as well as public-facing Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts; participates in voter registration efforts; partners with other like-minded organizations; maintains an ongoing focus on media literacy; and has issued numerous carefully researched “Calls to Action.” MWEG members have published hundreds of op-eds in papers across the country, including in the *New York Times*,<sup>35</sup> *The Hill*,<sup>36</sup> and *USA Today*.<sup>37</sup> MWEG has been invited to help plan and participate in national and international events such as the National Institute for Civil Discourse’s Golden Rule 2020 campaign,<sup>38</sup> the National Summit for Democracy,<sup>39</sup> the United Nation’s “Ethics of Reciprocity Interfaith Dialogue,”<sup>40</sup> and the 2021 National Inaugural Prayer Service.<sup>41</sup>

And the list goes on.

MWEG has made a mark and is here to stay.

There will always be a need for peacemakers, advocates, and watchdogs for ethical government, no matter who occupies the White House

35. See Glenn, “Why I Became an Activist against Fear.”

36. See Diana Bate Hardy, “Congress, Passing DACA Is Now a Moral Responsibility,” *The Hill*, September 15, 2017, <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/350889-congress-passing-daca-is-now-a-moral-responsibility?fbclid=IwAR1Dvbp5U-YtEFESDk1n1ocmWl9PQ1ds48xVf1bmXJJgaZU9rcpdzD4OXhI>; Diana Bate Hardy, “Know the Issues in This Election,” *The Hill*, September 25, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/518283-know-the-issues-in-this-election>; Diana Bate Hardy, “Apathy Could Be Our Biggest Challenge This National Voter Registration Day,” *The Hill*, September 26, 2017, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/352347-apathy-could-be-our-biggest-challenge-this-national-voter-registration-day>.

37. Emma Petty Adams, “Joe Biden Asked Me to Pray for America. I Said Yes Because I Value the Truth,” *USA Today*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/01/24/my-prayer-joe-bidens-inauguration-america-pursue-truth-column/6668726002/?fbclid=IwARokeMARTyG7s8o7PnuX6XX5FqFTHCsaxflgdzbNQ1acbJOOp775t8-gA28>; Sharlee Mullins Glenn and Jennifer Fuentes Langi, “Congress Could Help This Young Mom and Other Families Trapped in an Immigration Catch-22,” *USA Today*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/26/fix-immigration-bars-to-reentry-that-separate-families-column/4762940001/>.

38. Golden Rule 2020, <https://goldenrule2020.org/>.

39. National Summit for Democracy, 2019, <https://www.summitfordemocracy.com/>.

40. “Ethics of Reciprocity: A United Nations Historic Interfaith Dialogue,” Global Interfaith Network, <https://gin-ssogie.org/uncategorized/ethics-of-reciprocity-a-united-nations-historic-interfaith-dialogue/>.

41. “The National Prayer Service for the Fifty-Fifth Presidential Inaugural,” January 21, 2021, [https://cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-Program-2021-Inaugural-Prayer-Service-1-21\\_compressed.pdf](https://cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Final-Program-2021-Inaugural-Prayer-Service-1-21_compressed.pdf).

or controls Congress. The great hope of the founder and founding members is that MWEG will continue to be vigilant in guarding against corruption and the abuse of power, in defending democracy, in advocating for the human rights and dignity of all our sisters and brothers, and in being proactive makers of peace. In many ways, the hard work of repairing rifts, building unity, and working toward Zion has only just begun.

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Sharlee Mullins Glenn has published articles, poetry, criticism, and short stories in periodicals as varied as *The Southern Literary Journal*, *Women's Studies*, *Ladybug*, and the *New York Times*. She is also an award-winning author of children's books, including *Just What Mama Needs* (Harcourt, 2008), *Keeping up with Roo* (Putnam, 2004), and, most recently, *Library on Wheels: Mary Lemist Titcomb and America's First Bookmobile* (Abrams, 2018), winner of the 2020 Norman A. Sugarman Children's Biography Honor Award. In 2017, Sharlee founded the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization Mormon Women for Ethical Government and served as its executive director for two years. She currently sits on the external advisory board of BYU's Office of Civic Engagement and volunteers for Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS). Sharlee and her husband have five above-average children and six (soon to be seven) perfect grandchildren.

## Muster

*for MWEG*

It's not that she's been silent until now,  
though those who haven't trained themselves to hear  
the creak of mountains, work of wind, might claim  
she hasn't had a voice. It's that she knows  
the power of slow growth, of listening.  
Now, as she turns her mind toward the world,  
she'll teach it what she's learned, a better strength:  
the strength of sea that, rising, can't be caught  
or kept restrained; the strength of milk and sun  
and ink; the strength of those she's raised to speak  
the truth—the children who will match her stride  
into the world and build it better. Now  
her voice will not be hushed; this wind is fierce.  
It winnows, working mysteries in the world.  
There's power in a truthful woman's voice.

—Darlene Young

# Bending the Arc of Politics toward Zion

## Voices from Mormon Women for Ethical Government

*Jennifer Walker Thomas and Emma Petty Addams*

At the conclusion of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. paraphrased the words of Theodore Parker to situate small battles for justice within a larger movement toward God's ideal world. Parker, a Boston abolitionist, beautifully described the ache of discipleship that results when spirits reach for worlds they cannot quite see: "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."<sup>1</sup>

Though we cannot see beyond a little way, the members of Mormon Women for Ethical Government (MWEG) share in this vision of a more peaceful, just, and ethical world. This vision is grounded firmly in a vision of Zion and a hope in Christ and his redemptive power.

Over the last five years, we have sought to transform the way women of our faith community engage with the temporal mechanisms of power. Can a set of women, many without specific political training but who are willing to ground their work in faith and discipleship, make a difference? Can they wield power in new ways? Our lived experience is teaching us daily that they can.

We are realizing that engaging with politics this way is not only productive but protective. By creating a community of women with political identities that reflect their most authentic selves, and by teaching them

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1. Theodore Parker, "Of Justice and the Conscience," in *Ten Sermons of Religion* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, 1853), 84–85.



to communicate peacefully, we are becoming powerful advocates not just for ethical government but also for our faith. This emerging power is being used in creative ways to defend and support our norms and institutions, to be moderating voices in political conversations at every level of government, and to advocate for real and lasting policy solutions that bless the lives of others.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share our story in our own voices. For us this work is engaging and deeply pragmatic—we seek for measurable change now. We believe that the doctrines and scriptures of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ contain a theological vision of a Zion that could be. As women of faith, we are working to bend society toward that end.

### **Building toward Zion**

Zion is a compelling and exciting objective. Because it is multifaceted and promises the creation of a society where we can be our most authentic selves while living in harmony with all of God's children under his law, it may appeal to each of us differently. If we are hungry and suffering from want, in Zion we will be fed. Are we fearful for ourselves or others who face injustice and cruelty? We will find equality and safety. Citizens of Zion will not suffer under the threat of violence and war or face societal contention. Zion offers the promise of productivity without exploitation, collaboration without compulsion, and security from corruption. The promise of Zion is a promise of peace for all who desire it.

The term Beloved Community originated with nineteenth-century religious philosopher Josiah Royce, who used it to describe the highest form of community: one in which members exhibit loyalty to universal principles, use pure communication, and have congruent understandings of truth.<sup>2</sup> Royce's vision of a collaborative effort in pursuit of higher ideals resonated deeply with Martin Luther King Jr., and he adopted the term Beloved Community to describe an idealized but achievable civic community. King and his followers envisioned societies where citizens were motivated by love and worked through nonviolent means within government systems to establish economic, social, and political justice.<sup>3</sup> The founding members of MWEG adopted this language to describe the community that we are working together to build.

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2. Kelly A. Parker and Scott Pratt, "Josiah Royce," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, December 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/royce/>.

3. See "The Beloved Community," The King Center, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>.

We envision the Beloved Community as a bridge between our current political systems and the vision of Zion. As we experience them today, these systems do not allow for the fullest exercise of agency nor do they promote collaboration. Instead, they are increasingly marked by rancor, discrimination, violence, and enmity. Within these systems, citizens live with growing disparities in opportunity, safety, and wealth.

King and Royce also lived in periods characterized by violence and injustice, but they nonetheless believed that the Beloved Community could take root in our national soil. This was not naïve. So many of the elements necessary to construct a new moral framework for our politics have been evident in American civic life and our political tradition. By remembering the best of what we have been and using it to pave a new vision for the future, we believe as they did in the possibility that we can grow beyond a cynical and hopeless view of American politics. The promise of Zion cannot be fulfilled if we retreat to our homes and congregations, caring only for our own. We must engage hopefully and bravely with the world.

Faith is “the substance of things hoped for”; we believe that by dedicating ourselves to building the Beloved Community we are offering to the world “evidence of things” that they cannot otherwise see (Heb. 11:1). As children of the covenant, we have the opportunity to provide light and vision—illuminating spaces and lives that would otherwise suffer in darkness. We help others to look for “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

## **Developing Women**

Bridging the gap between our current political reality and the lofty goals of Zion will require many laborers with a diverse array of perspectives and skills. Our organizational efforts are focused on building a society in which the women of our faith are able to participate in impactful ways, alongside their fellow citizens. MWEG allows individual women to fulfil their potential and encourages the unique contributions that women can make to the common good.

Our objectives are political, but our process is rooted in personal change. It won't be possible to develop a new kind of political engagement without defining and supporting a new pattern of citizenship. Women still trail men in almost every measure of political engagement,<sup>4</sup> and our nation is poorer for it. MWEG is providing the scaffolding to

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4. Miki Caul Kittilson, “Gender and Political Behavior,” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, May 9, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.71>.

help women build a new identity as peaceful, competent, and principled citizens with the expectation that they will have the ability to change the political landscape in lasting and ethical ways.

### A Women's Organization

*Throughout history, women have been denied the opportunity to fully contribute. But this is counter to what our Heavenly Father wants for his children, including his daughters. I love that MWEG empowers women to understand issues, know how those issues intersect with their own values, and take action to defend the values and the issues that matter to them. I also now understand much more deeply how important it is to use my capacity to defend those whose opportunity is constricted by unjust laws.*  
—Lisa Rampton Halverson, director of Engage Communications<sup>5</sup>

Zion is a complex endeavor based on the idea that all of its citizens consecrate their talents and means to achieve its aims. A Zion community will also provide an environment in which all of our heavenly parents' children can develop those talents; we cannot consecrate what we have not been allowed to grow. As MWEG has developed beyond its first days as a Facebook discussion group, our leadership has tried to consciously build an organization around what women need and what they have to offer. Governing by a core set of values, prioritizing a diversity of voices, and making decisions in councils all support two critical objectives: building the capacity of women and directing that capacity outward to structure a society that allows others to achieve their own potential.

The four core values at the root of our organization (faithful, peaceful, nonpartisan, and proactive) ground our efforts. These values balance and inform each other and are overseen by four senior leaders, each with the title "root director," who work together to keep us centered and on course. Giving these values equal weight in political discussions created an unexpectedly productive tension. That tension has supported innovative political and civic thought.

Weaving these values into our day-to-day work operations requires cultivating concrete collaborative skills to support a diversity of voices. Peace born of sameness is illusory. To rise above partisanship and respect

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5. It is the authors' intent that this article reflect the experience and contributions of current MWEG leadership. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from MWEG leaders found in this piece are drawn from an internal MWEG survey that invited open-ended responses. Every member of our current leadership team participated, and their perspectives provide the basis for this article.

the spectrum of ways that faith can meaningfully inform politics, we need input from a broad group of women with diverse life experiences.

This sort of a collaborative ideal takes time, patience, and clear intent. It also means allowing for conflict and recognizing that peace is not merely an absence of tension—true peace can never take root where women are afraid to disagree. Organizationally, we had to learn to distinguish between productive conflict and discordant contention. Relational change strategist Dr. LaShawn Williams offered us a new framework that allowed us to think about and utilize the tensions that arise from diversity: *mutual empathy*. This framework describes the process of trying “to understand another’s meaning system from his/her frame of reference and [maintaining an] ongoing and sustained interest in the inner world of the other.”<sup>6</sup> Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director Charlotte Mountain played a pivotal role in paving the way for all our leaders to recognize the essential nature of mutual empathy within the work we do, describing these efforts toward inclusion as honoring the “bouquet of humanity.”<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Williams, Mountain, and others have taught our leaders and members that advocating for ethical government requires understanding lives and circumstances different from our own. Mutual empathy implies something beyond interest or compassion but also an intent to pursue a sincere relationship. Our discussion spaces help create those empathetic relationships among women who otherwise would not know one another, and these relationships contribute to the growth of a complex community. Mountain describes how we can each foster this empathy: “Often when we do not understand . . . we instinctively want to belittle or ridicule. We often feel that our ways are superior to others. This can be because of an insecurity of our own or because of a fear of appearing less than knowledgeable in a certain scenario. Pushing past fears and insecurities can turn an internal conflict into a constructive conflict in which one can ask for help and education.”

Mastering constructive conflict is a critical skill for citizens of a diverse community who share a desire for unity based on sincere love rather than conformity.

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6. Judith V. Jordan, *The Meaning of Mutuality* (Wellesley, Mass.: Wellesley Centers for Women, 1986), 2.

7. Charlotte Mountain, “Stand as a Witness—and Join the Bouquet of Humanity,” *Voices of MWEG*, April 21, 2021, <https://womenmakingpeace.org/2021/04/stand-as-a-witness-and-join-the-bouquet-of-humanity/>.

As we try to create a new kind of organization, we have a chance to practice these skills in our own governance. MWEГ has adopted a model of internal governance supported by collaborative councils. Our very best work happens when it is designed, written, and executed collaboratively by women who experience the world in different ways, and these councils accommodate a diversity of perspective. They also facilitate the sharing of information and decision-making throughout leadership. We are learning that councils work only when all parties are informed, humble, courageous, secure, and open. Jill Piacitelli, our director of development, explains: “MWEГ has taught me more about how functional councils feel. Even though there is a semblance of hierarchy with the MWEГ organizational structure, I don’t find myself deferring or withholding. I think I have done that in church settings (and it had bled into work), thinking I was simply deferring to someone in a particular role, but I am only now realizing that I was worried about challenging authority.”

By assigning women distinct roles in councils, allowing them to be contributors, collaborators, or stewards, we are able to increase participation and offer clear expectations, thereby reducing confusion and conflict that in other settings is managed authoritatively.

## Community

*As a woman, specifically a Mormon woman, I have frequently felt the pressure of “supposed-tos”—look, behave, talk, think, and even aspire in a prescribed manner—and an accompanying guilt when I felt I was an outlier. The sisterhood of MWEГ gives me confidence to claim my thoughts, my voice, and my individual worth, while encouraging me to learn, grow, and act. A place to belong. A desire to do more. Tools for growth. That’s my MWEГ. —Kimberly Powell, chapter director*

Women of faith building a more peaceful, just, and ethical world—this is MWEГ’s vision statement. There are likely millions of women in our faith alone who harbor a desire to contribute to the peace and justice of the world around them, who have felt the whisper of a voice saying, “Peace, peace be unto you because of your faith in my Well Beloved, who was from the foundation of the world” (Hel. 5:47). That peace is strengthened when we experience that witness alongside others, as Nephi and Lehi did. The three hundred Lamanites who heard this message of peace joined together in a communal effort to share their vision, and their efforts led to a period of great conversion and joy.

This is the kind of expanding community that we are attempting to build as we serve the needs of women associated with our faith who want to make an impact. A sustaining and catalyzing community should support them spiritually and emotionally, offer them the freedom to express and develop independent opinions, coalesce around shared values, and exhibit respect and understanding for the wide variety of obligations and commitments that women must also meet.

Each year MWEG conducts a survey of our members to keep in touch with their expectations and needs. Open-response questions repeatedly tell us that during an unsettling period, the organization has provided a place of belonging and personal development. They offer words like *lifesaver*, *respite*, *anchor*, and *comfort* to describe their relationship with our community. They describe what the community offers using terms like *empowerment*, *knowledge*, and *light*.

This has been particularly true for women trying to reconcile politics and faith. When pushed aside by family or church communities because of political opinions that might diverge from those of other individuals, women have found an antidote to isolation and loneliness in a faithful community of supportive friends. The group has also helped women to build and sustain personal faith. Meredith Gardner, our media literacy director, is a convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and she explains that “being a part of MWEG has cultivated within me a true sense of belonging within our faith community. I have been enriched and spiritually nourished through the relationships I have built with my fellow MWEG sisters.”

Our members find ways to contribute to their civic environment alongside obligations to home, work, and family. Recognizing this, we provide a variety of ways that women can engage, depending on their available time, interest level, and talents. Megan Woods, our nonpartisan root director, articulates the type of service the community provides for her: “I feel free to be and express myself in ways I don’t in other communities. In addition to expressing my political views, I can ask questions and receive answers without judgment. It is also a space where other members understand and relate to the specific challenges of being a mother and the many demands on all women.”

For many of our MWEG members, this community has been transformative, enhancing their ability to engage proactively with a troubled world. They wanted to be involved, but before MWEG they were unsure of where to obtain information and form political associations they could trust. This kind of civic confusion in combative settings can lead

to despair and detachment, leaving good women unwilling to do the work of citizenship. Fortunately, this detachment can be counteracted by community and hope.

*At a time when it would be easy to fall into despair about the polarization in our country, MWEG helps me hold on to hope. It fills me with hope when I see the women of MWEG—who often see the world very differently from each other—step away from the partisan strongholds that have gripped our political landscape to unite in the cause of creating peace and promoting ethical government. To find a space where women are engaging with difficult topics in creative and peaceful ways has been refreshing and inspiring. —Amy Gold Douglas, past faithful root director*

### Peaceful and Principled Citizens

*MWEG has helped me hone my peacemaking skills and helped me engage in a less combative way, which more authentically reflects my religious beliefs. —Cristie Carter Bake, engage director, Environmental Stewardship*

Even within a community where the bonds of sisterhood are strong, there will inevitably be conflict. Such conflict offers the opportunity to learn new skills and to practice the peacemaking that is needed with friends and family members and in the offices of elected officials. The messy, uncomfortable part of community building helps us grow and develop the resilience needed to engage in politics, but it also becomes a hallmark of a particular type of advocacy informed by Christian beliefs and is a fulfillment of the Savior's promise, "Walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me" (D&C 19:23).

Like any other skill, peacemaking must be repeatedly practiced in order to be useful in stressful situations. MWEG provides specific, direct training for our leaders and members in the form of Practical Peacemaking,<sup>8</sup> a program led by trained mediator and MWEG peaceful root director Emily Taylor.

The skills provided in peacemaking training are needed in a wide range of settings that are currently marked by significant tension. Denise Grayson, a past proactive root director, explains how this initiative has changed her social media interactions: "As I comment on [social media] posts, I focus on being peaceful, not confrontational. I shared my opinion of the Floyd killing last year. Instead of blowing up to a remark by

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8. "Practical Peacemaking," Mormon Women for Ethical Government, February 15, 2022, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/practicalpeacemaking>.

a fellow Church member, I tried to address his frustrations and understand his point of view.” Social media—a vehicle for many political interactions—thrives on contentious, toxic, and fear-based communication. MWEG members are participating differently.

These peacemaking skills are practical in a variety of other areas, such as communications with difficult family or ward members, or engagement with dismissive or contentious legislators. Women now have the ability to redirect conversations that are spinning toward contention and instead help people feel heard and understood. These skills strengthen connections and increase the capacity of our women to be forceful and principled advocates. Peaceful engagement is a distinctive expression of power.

*MWEG honestly has let me be comfortable to not align myself with any political ideology because I have learned to find value in a variety of political viewpoints. This has truly allowed me to weigh candidates and issues from a core principled place. And it has allowed me to act freely, and not render my agency to a political party.* —Shauna Fisher, senior director of operations

As Americans have become more politically polarized, they have begun to see party affiliation as a core aspect of personal identity.<sup>9</sup> This overidentification with political parties and ideologies makes us less willing to negotiate, more likely to see our neighbors as our enemy, and generally increases the stakes of elections. It will take conscious efforts to trade enmity for empathy. Tiffany Tertipes, our creative director, notes, “MWEG reminds me regularly that those who embrace differing ideals from my own do so not out of lack of care or understanding, but rather because their life experiences have shown them the benefits of a different path to a similar goal. Remembering this, that there are many roads to the same destination, keeps me from becoming unintentionally swept up in partisan rhetoric and helps me stay focused on how my personal faith intersects with my advocacy work.”

As a nonpartisan organization grounded in faith, we try to respect those different roads, assessing issues and policy using the doctrines of our faith and MWEG’s Principles of Ethical Government.<sup>10</sup> But to do this as

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9. Michael Dimock and Richard Wike, “America Is Exceptional in the Nature of Its Political Divide,” Pew Research Center, November 13, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/>.

10. “Principles of Ethical Government,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, February 15, 2022, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-ethical-government>.



an organization, we must be able to do this as individuals. This reassessment is made easier by opportunities to hear the perspectives of others who share our faith but not necessarily our politics, or to examine how our life experiences may have shaped our opinions and political affiliations, and to practice the peacemaking skills developed within MWEG. These interactions build the capacity for flexibility and charity in our members.

During the 2020 election season, the MWEG team came up with a name to describe the identity that our members were increasingly moving toward: *principled voter*.<sup>11</sup> This is “Golden Rule” voting, which looks closely at the needs of the broader community. Like so many others, Rachel Scholes, our encircle director, found that the experience of being a principled voter opened her up to new ways of thinking:

*I had long believed that members of the church, if truly living the gospel, had to belong to one political party. And I belonged to that party. . . . I voted, but I put little thought into my decisions. I had lots of excuses as a mother of 7 littles with no extra time on her hands, but the truth is, I was politically lazy when it came time to cast my ballot. Everyone with a certain letter in front of their name got my vote.*

*For the 2020 election, I took MWEG’s challenge to be a principled voter. Before I took to studying the candidates, I made a list of my values and beliefs. I clarified on paper my beliefs about immigration, about health care, about voting rights, about the environment, about education. After I made this list, I studied the candidates—what they had said, what their voting records showed, and who was supporting them. I got together with MWEG friends and shared what we had learned with each other. And then I gathered my voting eligible family members and we shared what we knew. And we sat and voted according to our consciences and beliefs and values. It felt so freeing and so good to do that. And I ended up voting for candidates from both parties.*

As women carefully evaluate their political choices rather than voting and advocating in a knee-jerk way, their religious beliefs and political choices are more thoughtfully aligned. They feel the comfort and peace that comes from living true to their faith and who they are. Kimberly Powell wrote, “My time in MWEG has shown me that my political identity is not the name of a political party. Instead, my political identity is a reflection of who I am as a child of God. My responsibility is to listen more and strive for understanding and connection, not bound by party lines.”

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11. “Know Your Vote: Grow Your Vote,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, February 15, 2022, <https://www.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/know-your-vote>.

## Principles of Ethical Government

*The process of working with my fellow MWEG sisters to draft the Principles of Ethical Government was an edifying experience. It was deeply enlightening to study stories and principles in the scriptures and other Church teachings about ethical government, coupled with the principles in various civil documents such as the U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, Federalist Papers, and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to weave them together into a foundational framework to guide MWEG's advocacy and priorities.* —Rachel Esplin Odell, past proactive root director

Early in our organizational development, we realized that our organizational actions and advocacy efforts needed to be pinned to distinct principles that were independent of the opinions of MWEG leaders. Led by Lisa Rampton Halverson and Rachel Esplin Odell, a group of women collaborated to create our Principles of Ethical Government.<sup>12</sup> In broad terms, these principles can be described as the three sides of a balanced triangle (see fig. 1):

**Rights:** Every human being is endowed with rights that governments are obligated to protect and not violate.

**Rule of Law:** Every government official and institution has a duty to respect the rule of law.

**Responsibilities:** All human beings are mutually accountable to their fellow human beings.

The Principles of Ethical Government acknowledge that the health of our democracy rests on the rule of law and balancing the rights and responsibilities of citizens. We

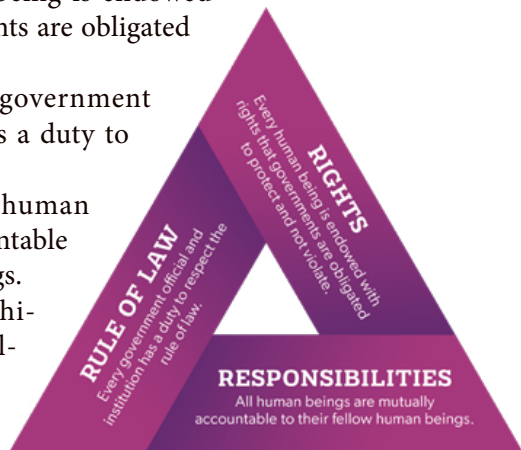


FIGURE 1. Principles of Ethical Government.

believe that rights, responsibilities, and legal structures must each be respected, protected, and strengthened to maintain ethical governance. We use this document to shape both our immediate responses to political events and our long-term advocacy efforts. It also allows us to introduce

12. "Principles of Ethical Government."

modern scripture and our unique religious values to other individuals and organizations with which we work.

These principles help guide our members as they link their own inherent value systems to the defense of government norms. Jill Piacitelli describes how highlighting these core ideas expanded the lens through which she viewed her own government: “The first time I’d ever even consciously heard the phrase ‘rule of law’ was at an MWEG meeting. I’ve now gone to every session offered by MWEG on this [subject] and become much more aware of it. . . . It has been powerful to understand how the rule of law holds democracy together, and how this looks in other places outside of the United States.”

Citizens who understand our systems, what benefits they offer us, and what is at stake should we lose them are better able to engage purposefully in their defense.

The Principles of Ethical Government also require the ethical work of protecting others’ rights as vigorously as we defend our own, acknowledging that citizens’ rights are periodically in competition. The full expression of rights by one individual can directly inhibit the rights of another. At MWEG we have come to see our constitutionally granted rights as temporal approximations of the divine laws dictating the value of all human beings. These rights ideally create a society in which each individual can freely exercise their agency without meeting unjust oppression. This vision for a just community is beautifully expressed by Mosiah: “And now I desire that this inequality should be no more in this land, especially among this my people; but I desire that this land be a land of liberty, and every man may enjoy his rights and privileges alike, so long as the Lord sees fit that we may live and inherit the land, yea, even as long as any of our posterity remains upon the face of the land” (Mosiah 29:32).

Once we begin to approach politics from a perspective of love and with an eye toward a more just future, it is easier to understand the idea of mutual accountability. We can more clearly see that assaults on anyone’s rights are assault on our own, and that these assaults slowly undermine the integrity of our political and governing systems. They generate anger and cynicism that corrodes our trust in institutions and our fellow citizens. Catherine Eslinger, who directs our empower limb, explains how she herself experienced this transformation: “I was reflecting today about a recent polarizing news story. . . . Our organization’s pull toward faith and reminders of our covenants to love one another have increased my empathy for all sides and all people affected, and

helped me to better ‘mourn with those that mourn’ and see where their rights are being impacted.”

Using the Principles of Ethical Government to guide our advocacy has moved us away from narrow and combative ideological frameworks and toward political and civic interactions that reflect our religious ideals.

*Theologically, LDS people claim a Christian heritage that celebrates community. The Old Testament followers of God wrote about themselves as a people with whom God interacted and planned for collectively. Yet in LDS theology we also claim the premortal existence in which each individual spirit had the ability to choose to follow Christ and accept mortality. The influence of MWEG has helped me create space to think through both of those identities in regard to policies. Democracy reflects both of these for me. Each person deserves a voice, an opinion, a right to vote. Yet we live collectively in community, so policies can't just be about ‘the one’; they must be about us as a people. —Abby Greenwald, chapters director*

### **Principles in Action**

MWEG was born in a moment of chaos and reckoning that revealed our constitutional government and its institutions to be more fragile and susceptible to abuse than we had realized. These disruptions also brought to the surface significant and systemic inequities that helped us to see, in some instances for the first time, the full weight of our civic responsibilities. However, by grounding our efforts in the hope of redemption and a desire to express discipleship, we are making political efforts that involve women in the work of both building and restoring.

### **Protecting Constitutional Government and Political Systems**

*Before joining MWEG, I had a sense that the government was a negative institution that needed to be minimized and controlled. Since joining MWEG, I have developed a great admiration and trust in our systems and the good that can come from the government. I have also begun to recognize the frailty of our systems when everyday citizens aren't actively engaged and defending those institutions and norms. —Christie Black, engage manager, compassionate immigration*

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have always had an appreciation for the Constitution, acknowledging that the Lord allowed it to be established and maintained expressly “for the rights and protection of all flesh” (D&C 101:77). Over the years, the document has been amended in critical ways that have expanded access to these rights and protections

to an ever-widening circle of citizens. These expansions have brought the document itself into closer alignment with our highest national values.

As women, we are acutely aware that expanding democratic representation and bringing our existing government into alignment with lofty values has been the work of generations. We are also aware that this same inspired document contained deep flaws that intentionally exposed many souls to centuries of violence, tyranny, and oppression. We can see and embrace both of these realities at once, using our faith in what is good to drive our efforts to rectify and repair the bad.

Linking government to the will of the people was an act of significant hope with a hidden risk: the health of our intricate systems of government reflects the virtue of our citizens. Understanding this fragility and our individual responsibility to sustain our way of government for current and future generations, our members have made significant commitments to support our constitutional system. Over the last year these efforts have focused on protecting the right of every citizen to vote in free and fair elections.

*When I found MWEG, I finally felt I had a safe, principled space to articulate how my spiritual beliefs inform my politics. My recent effort within MWEG to support the protection of voting rights for every American is inseparable from my core belief in the equal humanity and divinity of all children of God. I hope in my discipleship to follow Christ's example of speaking out for justice even when you may face resistance.* —Erin Young, assistant engage director, Protecting Democracy

The decision to prioritize work to protect the freedom to vote has its foundations in our belief that democratic government is a “political manifestation of the worth of souls”<sup>13</sup> and that this form of government is best suited to protect the people against coercion and corruption. By ensuring access to the vote, the women of MWEG are expressing a sincere commitment to obey the second great commandment—promising that as disciples we will love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Loving our neighbors includes assuring their right to self-determination.<sup>14</sup>

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13. “Official Statement from Mormon Women for Ethical Government on a Faith-Based Defense of the Freedom to Vote,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, October 28, 2021, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/official-statement-from-mormon-women-for-ethical-government-on-a-faith-based-defense-of-the-freedom-to-vote/>.

14. “Principles of Ethical Government: Maximize Participation and Equitable Access,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government May 7, 2021, <https://library.mormon>

On the other hand, when political structures and electoral systems are manipulated to structurally aggregate power in the hands of the few, those structures devalue souls, allow for the exercise of unrighteous influence, and undermine efforts to build communities driven by Christ-like love. Wendy Dennehy has tirelessly led our Protecting Democracy initiative during a particularly turbulent period. She explains how small changes in policy, motivated by a desire to exercise unrighteous power, can do lasting damage:

*As we were creating the structure for Engage: Protecting Democracy, I began researching the processes of representation. We were headed into a census year, and I learned that representation involves census taking, reapportionment, and redistricting, which all culminate in the personal act of voting. As I have watched these processes play out, I have realized that they are being executed in ways that are neither fair nor just. They dilute the power of the individual vote and make it difficult for elections to be fair. We are seeing power—particularly political party power—overpowering the voice of the people at each of these steps. This has steeled my desire to make a difference in some small way to ensure the sanctity of the vote for every eligible voter.*

Other examples of the attempt to subjugate our neighbors can be found in voter disenfranchisement,<sup>15</sup> disparate access to polling and ballots,<sup>16</sup> gerrymandering,<sup>17</sup> racially discriminatory voter registration laws,<sup>18</sup> foreign interference in elections,<sup>19</sup> and efforts to privilege voters of one party

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[womenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-ethical-government-maximize-participation-and-equitable-access/](https://womenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-ethical-government-maximize-participation-and-equitable-access/).

15. “Everyone Deserves the Freedom to Vote,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, October 14, 2021, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/every-one-deserves-the-freedom-to-vote/>.

16. “Official Statement from Mormon Women for Ethical Government on the Importance of Counting Every Vote,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, November 3, 2020, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/official-statement-from-mormon-women-for-ethical-government-on-the-importance-of-counting-every-vote/>.

17. “MWEG UT Official Statement on 2021 Redistricting,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, November 11, 2021, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/mweg-ut-official-statement-on-2021-redistricting/>.

18. “Call to Action: Ask Your Senator to Bring the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to Debate,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, October 26, 2021, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/call-to-action-ask-your-senator-to-bring-the-john-lewis-voting-rights-advancement-act-to-debate/>.

19. “Official Statement from Mormon Women for Ethical Government on the House Impeachment Vote,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, December 18, 2019,

over those of another.<sup>20</sup> The Book of Mormon clearly and repeatedly warns us that those who work to suppress freedom and aggregate power to themselves are not of God. Ultimately, and without exception, they bring destruction upon their societies.

In our efforts to protect democratic representation and the sanctity of our elections, we have had the opportunity to collaborate with left- and right-leaning organizations—Americans who are motivated by faith, heritage, love of the law, or simple patriotism to protect this fundamental civil right. In each of these spaces, the women of MWEG are able to act as moderating voices bridging diverse viewpoints and perspectives. We have also found great hope in the knowledge that there are many good people working to respond intelligently and peacefully to antidemocratic efforts.

### Advocacy of Discipleship

*As a disciple of Christ, I have a solemn responsibility to love and care for others. MWEG has empowered me to be a knowledgeable advocate not only for my own family, but also for other families and individuals who are marginalized and in need of support. Our Principles of Peacemaking have helped me understand that true peace is a peace that encompasses justice for all groups.* —Melarie Wheat, Utah chapter co-coordinator

The aim of our political frameworks is to defend “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>21</sup> The practical building blocks of those ideals are the legal and policy decisions that create opportunity, safety, health, community, and equality. Perhaps as women we are particularly attuned to these practically applied ideals because of our work in a range of environments that directly connect us to human needs. As teachers, caregivers, mothers, family members, employees, employers, and in our unique religious sisterhood focused on providing relief, we are called to grapple with others’ lived experiences.

As women, we are particularly drawn toward policy and systems that protect the totality of the human soul, both body and spirit (see D&C 88:15),

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<https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/official-statement-from-mormon-women-for-ethical-government-on-the-house-impeachment-vote/>.

20. “Principles of Nonpartisanship,” Mormon Women for Ethical Government, February 15, 2022, <https://library.mormonwomenforethicalgovernment.org/principles-of-nonpartisanship/>.

21. “The Declaration of Independence,” National Archives, updated October 7, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>.



because we know that our bodies are integral to our exaltation; they connect us to our future inheritance as our spirits connect us to our premortal heritage. We believe we have a covenant responsibility to relieve temporal suffering, patterning our engagement on the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ, who attended to the physical needs of those he taught, modeling compassion for the ways in which functional bodies impact spiritual development.

We have tried to lead in these policy efforts with sincere and Christ-like love. The most recent period of American politics has been marred by a sharp rise in enmity. As citizens, we seem to feel that the political sphere is a morality-free zone where we can speak harshly of our opponents, cruelly about the needy, and indifferently and disdainfully regarding the marginalized. This harms others, but it also harms us and weakens our disciple-hearts. Megan Seawright, our senior director of communications, describes an alternative path: “The commandment to love one another is at the heart of my discipleship and my advocacy. Inequities pull me to advocate for change that will bless and benefit all members of our community. As I have come to understand the role that effective policy plays in this, I see advocating for improved policies and laws as a way to put my discipleship into action, to actively love my brothers and sisters.”

Shauna Fisher beautifully describes the ways that women are making advocacy part of their lives as a response to a spiritual impulse. She describes what she sees in our chapters: “I have seen women connect in local areas and step up because they have found themselves called to do something. They have felt the promptings that they must act and because of that they do the hard things that are difficult for them and get to work. They squeeze their advocacy work into the nooks and crannies of their lives and are moving mountains.”

This perspective has also framed our wide-ranging political engagement. In addition to protecting democracy and speaking out against unethical actions by leaders, discipleship has pulled us toward the fight for bipartisan and compassionate immigration reform, protecting the environment for future generations, rooting out racism, and protecting vulnerable women.

These are policy objectives that protect the vulnerable from the strong. In alignment with scriptural admonitions, we focus on supporting policies that protect the weak, the marginalized, and the young from those who would exploit them for personal gain. Exploitation corrupts all parties, diminishes moral and individual capacity, inhibits



personal responsibility, and borrows from the future to pay for present indulgence. Jillaire McMillan, our director of volunteers, explains, “My political involvement is often motivated by a desire to see all of God’s children—especially the vulnerable—treated with greater compassion, equality, and equity. I think people see politics as a separate thing from the gospel, as a hobby or profession rather than an extension of believing that our actions affect each other and that our governing should be done with a sense of how policies can relieve suffering. The Savior spent his life relieving suffering, and political advocacy is as much a way to do that as a service project or individual ministering relationship.”

### Redefining Power

*MWEG has changed how I look at power in a couple ways. First, it has shown me that there is greater power in collective good. There really is strength in numbers. Second, MWEG has taught me that there is power within each of us to call on heaven to ask for things we need in our advocacy work as much as in our personal lives. Using our spiritual gifts for the betterment of our communities by having more courage to love others than we may ever have for ourselves has given me power and confidence in God.* —Rachel Albertsen, director of special projects

Advocating for policies that protect the vulnerable paradoxically requires that we acknowledge our strengths and claim our power. Sometimes women of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints carry over patterns from their ecclesiastical relationships into community and civic engagement. Claiming power can feel transgressive. We have made significant progress in this regard by thinking about power differently, both redeeming our understanding of it and helping women to use it justly.

Doctrine and Covenants section 121 offers a view of how we can think differently about the ability to act and influence outcomes. This section is described by Patrick Mason and David Pulsipher as a “sublime meditation on the peaceful nature of godly power. . . . In contrast with the fleeting influence of coercive force, the revelation articulated a more expansive notion of enduring influence based on deep, unfailing love.”<sup>22</sup> This description of power in the spiritual realm expands how we think about what it takes to be effective advocates, for while our political

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22. Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher, *Proclaim Peace: The Restoration’s Answer to an Age of Conflict* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2021), 2–3.

engagement is not an expression of priesthood power, it is for us an expression of love.

How power is accumulated and used invests it with moral weight and is reflective of the presence or absence of love in those who claim and exercise it. When power emerges from collaboration and is sought with the intent to distribute it widely, it is less likely to corrupt the powerful, particularly when the end goal of using influence is driven by Christlike love and the desire to benefit others. Generating and utilizing power this way requires humility from all participating parties, and we believe that it enhances rather than diminishes trust between collaborators. This concept of righteous power can be utilized by anyone willing to lead “by long-suffering, by gentleness, by meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41).

Following divine guidance about power that flows from love is proving to be protective and enlightening.

Our first lesson in putting power to use has been to recognize the influence we have and take responsibility for the ways that we are impacting those around us. This is critical, because when exercising power is seen as transgressive, individuals may pretend that power differentials do not exist, even as they exercise influence. This is dishonest and can be damaging to those effected. When power is framed positively and women are allowed to have a healthy relationship with it, they are more likely to act with an honest awareness of the ability to determine outcomes and be more cognizant of where they can both bless or do harm. Danica Baird, our proactive root director, describes how her perspective of power is changing: “Power is ultimately the ability to make change or influence others. Too many women shy away from the word ‘power,’ when power is neither good nor bad in and of itself. It’s what you do with it that matters. MWEG has helped me realize we need more faithful women of integrity using power. Those who are cautious about using power are often the ones who should be wielding it.”

Naming, defining, and claiming individual power is only the first step. As we join together to advocate for change, we see the profound impact that we can have collectively. We strongly support structures and norms that distribute broadly both the expression of power and its benefits. The sharing of power not only inhibits those who would use it to “gratify pride or vain ambition” (D&C 121:37), but it also yields an exponentially greater good. In contexts where power is shared, more individuals are able to participate in its righteous exercise. Given the choice of one very good person exercising disproportionate power and millions of adequate people exercising a limited amount of power, we believe that

the latter will be productive of a much greater good. As Wendy Dennehy explains, “I have learned that individual power combined with others can create exponential power. I have realized that while I can use the power that I possess, it is most important that I use it thoughtfully and exercise it with others to champion causes that help the underserved and those whose voices our political society has silenced.” When we empower God’s children, we honor their agency and decrease the likelihood that they will suffer oppression.

Perhaps the most critical lesson in power has been to understand the connection between persuasion and the exercise of just power. In Doctrine and Covenants 121:37, we clearly learn that “to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men” is to cross the boundaries into the unrighteous use of power. When persuasion is the primary means to achieve change, agency is respected, individuals have the chance to grow, and change happens without inequities in force. Persuasion allows both parties to be equal participants in the use of power to accomplish a shared objective. Women often understand this intuitively, having experienced situations where an imbalance of power was used to manipulate individuals or control outcomes. Of necessity, they have learned how to exercise power through persuasion.

As MWEГ has increased in influence, we have recognized that in order to make lasting peace, we need to understand real and righteous power. This understanding is exactly what is needed in a nation marked by political violence in both word and deed. MWEГ women recognize that in this critical area we can only lead by example, trying to live and model what it looks like to use power righteously.

*MWEГ has helped me put into action a concept I have always known: that women have great talents and perspective and influence and that they should use them for good in the world. Power is not a bad word, although many inside and outside our community might think of it in a negative sense. But God gave us gifts, talents, abilities to help change the world for the better, and this is what it means to have and use power in righteous ways. —Meredith Gardner, director of media literacy*

## Conclusion

At the outset of this article we shared our vision of Zion. Paired with our desire for a Beloved Community that bridges the gap between that inspiring vision and our current reality, these aspirations drive our efforts. They push us forward when the work of political engagement in

defense of ethical government is draining and difficult. At this article's conclusion we ask each reader if you too share a vision of an earthly community that reflects our highest spiritual understandings, and if so, who do you see playing important roles there?

We offer two possible reasons that members of a covenant community do not yet feel the pull toward Zion. The first reason speaks more to our realities and natural response to them. Perhaps we do not seek Zion because individually we do not think we need it. We are not hungry or afraid. We live in safety and have community; the world has afforded us sufficient opportunities to grow, advance, and develop. In short, if we are not oppressed and hold sufficient power, we may not hunger for the relief that Zion will bring. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord offers a cautionary tale to those of us who are comfortable. He reminds us that the inheritors of God's kingdom are not those who enjoy a surfeit now but instead those who lack (see Matt. 5:3–12).

The other reason is less problematic. Perhaps we do not seek Zion because we have not yet sensed the beauty of its promise and vision. None of us have lived experience with such a divine community; we only have sparse narratives of people living in pure fellowship with each other and their God. Because of this, Zion is as elusive as it is perfect, and finding our way to it will require countless individual and communal choices made in faith. Those choices will need to be visionary, building upon prayer, discipline, and sacrifice. Ultimately, Zion must be constructed on shared principles, requiring us to embrace an entirely different kind of culture, economy, and community.

That community is born from unity. Zion is achieved when its people are of "one heart and one mind" (Moses 7:18), and it cannot be achieved by individuals complacent about the state of their own understandings and motivations. We walk toward it only when our own hearts are somehow broken open and we desire to align our will with God's. The call to Zion resonates with us when our broken hearts are touched by its beauty, when it answers our own prayers, or when we realize that there are those among us who desperately need what it has to offer. This last path to Zion is selfless and reflective of pure discipleship.

While we wait for the formal call to Zion, we can use this brokenness to offer healing to the world. The members of MWEG are internalizing the scriptural declaration "that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society" (D&C 134:1). We all have the

opportunity to come together in a fallen world to support policy and governing systems that are reflective of our covenant relationships. By prioritizing the least among us and governing our fellow citizens as we ourselves would be governed, we can build a more ethical government in this place and in this moment.

We have deep faith that loving heavenly parents have provided a divine pathway for us to do what the world tells us is impossible—reconcile competing needs and create a society characterized by security and justice. The ideal of Zion provides patterns for political systems that will accomplish this, and the Lord has made clear repeatedly throughout scripture that those who walk the disciple’s path will enjoy an “everlasting dominion” that will flow unto them “forever and ever” (D&C 121:46). As we do our work in the political sphere, we are unexpectedly developing the skills and perspective of discipleship, and finding our way along that divine pathway toward reconciliation.

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*Note from the authors: In alignment with the values of a Zion community, MWEG has sought to be a collaborative and cooperative working environment. We have drawn on the ideas and thoughts of many women to develop our writings, opinion pieces, and programs. This article is no exception, and the authors are grateful for the many MWEG leaders who have contributed to the development of the organizational systems, ideas, and governing philosophies represented here.*

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# “To Moderate and Unify”

## The Role That Latter-day Saint Citizen-Rhetors Can Play in Healing American Political Discourse

*Kristine Hansen*

In the April 1997 general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then-Elder Henry B. Eyring stated, “When the words of prophets seem repetitive, that should rivet our attention.” Repetition, he asserted, means the Lord’s servants are “warning the people, telling them the way to safety.”<sup>1</sup> In both the October 2020 and the April 2021 general conferences, President Dallin H. Oaks stressed the importance of the rule of law and the best ways to participate as citizens in political processes. Although he focused on the United States, President Oaks reassured his global audience that the principles he taught applied in all nations. On both occasions, he spoke of “this troubled time”<sup>2</sup> we live in, a “time of anger and hatred in political relationships and policies.”<sup>3</sup> In both sermons, he noted the vital importance of being governed by law, working peacefully within the framework of constitutions (in the United States and elsewhere), and following applicable laws to change whatever we see amiss in society. Both times, he referred to scriptures that teach Latter-day Saints to “follow the laws of men, . . . to live peacefully under civil authority,” all while “we follow the laws of God toward our eternal destination.”<sup>4</sup> Each time, he noted the evils of slavery and racism, and he denounced mob violence.

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1. Henry B. Eyring, “Finding Safety in Counsel,” *Ensign* 27, no. 5 (May 1997): 24–25.

2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 105.

3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 26.

4. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” 27.

Like many others, I was riveted by both sermons and heard each one as both warning listeners and offering directions for safety. The first talk, “Love Your Enemies,” came after a summer of Black Lives Matter protests across the United States, some of which included violent lawbreaking,<sup>5</sup> and just before the U.S. election of 2020. The second talk, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” came three months after a mob violently stormed the United States Capitol, attempting to interfere with the constitutionally mandated process of confirming the election of the next president of the United States. According to an affidavit later filed by an FBI agent, some members of this mob were also bent on murdering the vice president of the United States and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.<sup>6</sup> President Oaks delivered these sermons in a time of great political polarization in the United States and in a time when uncivil, caustic, even toxic political speech has seemingly become the norm. Along with many people I know, I have felt close to despair about finding a way to heal the rifts, civilize and elevate our political discourse, and recapture the unity that seemed to prevail in the United States in times past. In these two sermons, delivered six months apart, President Oaks avows “we must do better” to eliminate racism,<sup>7</sup> and he notes “threats that undermine the inspired principles” of the Constitution,<sup>8</sup> comments that indicate he must also feel concerns about our current political state. Knowing that President Oaks must surely have prayed for and received divine inspiration to prepare these two sermons, I believe we can safely conclude that the Lord is directing us through one of his prophets, seers, and revelators.

Corroboration for my response to Oaks’s sermons came as I listened to four scholars speak in a June 2021 panel at a Brigham Young University Law School symposium called the Religious Freedom Annual Review.<sup>9</sup>

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5. In some people’s minds, all or nearly all of the Black Lives Matter protests included lawbreaking. However, professional analysis showed that 94 percent of all 2020 demonstrations (10,330 demonstrations at 2,730 locations in all fifty states) “involved no violent or destructive activity.” NGO Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project and Bridging Divides Project, “U.S. Crisis Monitor Releases Full Data for 2020,” ACLED, February 5, 2021, <https://acleddata.com/2021/02/05/us-crisis-monitor-releases-full-data-for-2020/>.

6. Aila Slisco, “Proud Boys Intended to Kill Mike Pence and Nancy Pelosi, FBI Witness Says,” *Newsweek*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/proud-boys-intended-kill-mike-pence-nancy-pelosi-fbi-witness-says-1562062>.

7. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” 29.

8. Oaks, “Defending the Divinely Inspired Constitution,” 107.

9. Christine M. Durham, W. Cole Durham Jr., Thomas B. Griffith, Paul E. Kerry, and Jane Wise, “Discussion on President Oaks’ Talk ‘Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,’” Religious Freedom Annual Review, June 15–16, 2021, video recording,

The panel discussion focused on Oaks’s second sermon, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution.” The panelists commented on how unusual it was for him to use his allotted time on Easter Sunday to speak about political matters rather than about Christ’s Resurrection. They saw this as evidence of the “urgent” nature of what Oaks was communicating and of the “perilous times” we live in. Because Latter-day Saints believe that the Constitution is divinely inspired, Oaks said, they have “a unique responsibility to uphold and defend the United States Constitution and principles of constitutionalism wherever we live.”<sup>10</sup> One panelist, Judge Thomas B. Griffith, singled out part of that unique responsibility by quoting this charge that Oaks gave his listeners: “On contested issues, we should seek to moderate and unify.”<sup>11</sup> Griffith added that he believes Latter-day Saints should adopt “a style of our own” in political discourse, instead of mimicking the words and actions of those around us.<sup>12</sup> He heard Oaks calling us “to approach these issues with a spirit of amity and mutual deference,” showing our fellow citizens “the things that people must be willing to give up for the sake of unity.”<sup>13</sup>

The moderation that Oaks calls for would undoubtedly entail compromise; *moderation* means avoiding extremes by seeking to restrain, mitigate, and temper. Likewise, the unity Oaks calls for would entail amity, or friendship, for who can be unified with those they can’t tolerate or even detest? Each of the BYU symposium panelists spoke of the spirit of amity and compromise that prevailed among the delegates at the 1787 convention that produced the United States Constitution. Without the willingness of those delegates to compromise, to give up cherished personal opinions, and to sacrifice peculiar interests of the states they represented, the Constitution would not have been created. As president of the convention, George Washington wrote a letter transmitting the new Constitution to the Congress of the Confederation of American States. In it, he stated that the delegates had crafted a document that would unite the individual states into one nation:

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1:08:29, <https://www.iclrs.org/religious-freedom-annual-review/religious-freedom-annual-review-2021-religions-role-in-overcoming-divides-and-strengthening-american-democracy/>.

10. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” 107.

11. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” 107.

12. Griffith, in Durham and others, “Discussion on President Oaks’ Talk,” 43:23–44:21.

13. Griffith, in Durham and others, “Discussion on President Oaks’ Talk,” 32:40–37:00; see also 1:02:06–1:04:58.



We kept steadily in our view, that which appears to us the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety, perhaps our national existence. This important consideration, seriously and deeply impressed on our minds, led each state in the Convention to be less rigid on points of inferior magnitude, than might have been otherwise expected; and thus the Constitution, which we now present, is the result of *a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession* which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the “spirit of amity” and “mutual deference and concession” were indispensable to the writing of the Constitution in the first place, they are indispensable to upholding, preserving, protecting, and defending the now 234-year-old Constitution and the democratic-republican form of government which is founded upon that document. If the people of the United States, and particularly Latter-day Saints living in the United States, want to see the Constitution remain fixed as the fundamental document from which the powers of the U.S. government are derived, then we must heed the warnings and the charges President Oaks gave.

But how exactly do we put into practice President Oaks’s charge that, when it comes to “contested issues, we should seek to moderate and unify”? Many issues these days are contested, and many Americans have strong feelings about the best way to act on such matters as race relations, guns, immigration, health care, abortion, climate change, voting rights, and so on. We may have no desire to moderate our views and unify with those who don’t see issues the way we do. In this essay, I will draw on the twenty-five-hundred-year-old discipline of rhetoric as well as contemporary research in social science to suggest some ways we can communicate more effectively with those whom we may view as political adversaries. My aim is to show that as we engage more thoughtfully in political rhetoric, we can show love for both our neighbor and our country, and promote the welfare of both by being willing to moderate and unify.

In any rhetorical situation, three things must be present: a rhetor, an audience, and a message encoded in a language shared by rhetor and audience. I will first discuss what I mean by the term “citizen-rhetor” used in my title and why it is important for each of us to aspire to become a

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14. George Washington, “Letter Transmitting the Constitution,” September 17, 1787, Varsity Tutors, <https://www.varsitytutors.com/earlyamerica/milestone-events/transmitting-the-constitution>, emphasis added.

more effective citizen-rhetor, one who speaks from a personal ethos that inspires trust and willingness to cooperate on political matters. Then I will focus on how we might address various audiences by appealing to positive emotions and attitudes as a way of influencing and motivating those whose political ideologies differ from our own. Finally, I will discuss how we can craft messages that are as truthful as possible when we seek to persuade others, so that our disagreements can be about reliable, objective facts, not about misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, or outright lies.

### **What Is a Citizen-Rhetor?**

A citizen-rhetor is a member of a democracy who can speak effectively to others to help them understand issues clearly and, if possible, persuade them to take needed action to make government more effective. The idea of ordinary citizens governing themselves comes from the world's first democracy, the city-state of Athens, when from about 500 to 300 BC, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and creators of other admirable cultural developments established a legacy that still influences Western civilization today. The Athenians of that day had found by bitter experience that allowing a single, often despotic, ruler or a small elite group of leaders to determine all courses of action for the body politic too often led to tyranny or class warfare. They wanted a form of government that would "engage everyone's good will on behalf of the state," thus preventing internal divisions that could be exploited by enemies. They realized that distributing governing power broadly would help to prevent "the rise of tyrants and to ensure that money or aristocratic birth never conferred high privilege on anyone."<sup>15</sup> By making the rule of law supreme instead of an individual or a small group, they hoped to create maximum harmony and freedom for all. The Athenians believed this goal would be met by allowing citizens from all walks of life—from artisans to farmers to playwrights—to participate equally in making laws about property, taxes, inheritance, crime, warfare, the rights and duties of citizens, and so on.

To be sure, the label "citizen" in ancient Athens applied only to males born in Athens and over eighteen years of age. Women, slaves, and emigrants from other Greek city-states were excluded from participating, though all were still subject to the laws. Because Athens was small (about

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15. Paul Woodruff, *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30–31.

two hundred thousand to three hundred thousand people), and the number of citizens even smaller (perhaps thirty thousand in the second century of its democratic rule), it was a true democracy in which every citizen could participate directly in making laws.<sup>16</sup> The *ecclesia*, or citizen legislature, met on a hill above the marketplace, where thousands of men could assemble at one time; a high outcropping of limestone formed a wall where speakers stood so that their words could reverberate off the stone barrier and be widely heard. Predictably, not all citizens showed up for the assembly, so six thousand citizens constituted a quorum for voting. Proposed legislation was debated and voted on in the *ecclesia*.<sup>17</sup> If approved by a majority, it became the law. Any citizen could speak for or against a proposed law, but not all took the opportunity to speak, so those who could speak persuasively helped build majorities by swaying the votes of others.

When people govern themselves by majority rule, it is inevitable they will need rhetoric—speech intended to inform and persuade others to join the speaker in refining a proposal and advancing it toward a favorable vote. Unsurprisingly, then, Athens was also the place where the formal study of rhetoric arose. This study was quickly theorized, and many teachers offered to help citizens learn to persuade others. Some of Athens's greatest texts for learning rhetoric are still used today.<sup>18</sup> The word *rhetoric* means “speech” and the related word *rhetor* means “speaker.” The word *rhetoric* in our day often has the whiff of deception or needlessly flowery language about it—and, to be sure, at some points in its history, rhetoric did devolve into mere show and flattery. But its finest manifestations in its twenty-five-hundred-year history reveal it to be an ethical art situated at the center of human affairs, highly valued for its utility and its power to stir the mind and heart. So important was it that

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16. Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 32.

17. Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 46. Proposed laws originated in a five-hundred-person council called the *boule*, which was composed of fifty men from each of the ten “tribes” of Athens. All were chosen by lot for one-year terms, with no one allowed to serve more than twice in his life. Once a proposal had been refined and was ready for a vote, it was submitted to the *ecclesia*.

18. For example, Aristotle's treatise *On Rhetoric* is still a rich resource for scholars today. The Athenians needed to use rhetoric not only in the legislature but also in the courts. There were no attorneys, and anyone might have to defend himself against a criminal or civil charge or prosecute a fellow citizen. Juries were often as big as five hundred people, so skill in arguing the facts and the law was obviously important. Citizens might also have to give speeches on holidays, at festivals and funerals, and on other ceremonial occasions.

rhetoric was at the center of liberal education in Western civilization from the Golden Age of Athens through the nineteenth century.

Even after Athens lost its independence to Macedonia, its local government continued to function democratically for another 236 years.<sup>19</sup> The Romans who conquered Athens in 146 BC found much to admire and adopt from this first experiment with democracy, including the art of rhetoric. Though Rome didn't form a democratic government, it did create a republic that lasted nearly five hundred years, in which representatives of the people used rhetoric to conduct the affairs of government. The founders of the United States looked to the Roman republic as a model for how to form a representative government that would enshrine the rule of law. Moreover, all of the American founders who had received the traditional education of their day were students of rhetoric, a fact well-attested by the eloquent documents of the American founding. They were citizen-rhetors.

Why this detour into the history of rhetoric? We live in a time of partisan political rhetoric that in my lifetime has become uglier, more contentious and contemptuous, more tribal, more divisive, and, as a result, much less conducive to promoting the aims of government as outlined in the United States Constitution. Demonizing opponents and winning at almost any cost seem to have become the goals, rather than finding ways to work together to "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty," as the Preamble to the Constitution states.<sup>20</sup> Just as their representatives have become more partisan, too many citizens today have siloed themselves in echo chambers of partisan media outlets that serve mainly to confirm their audience's biases. Far too many have become constant consumers of unregulated social media feeds that spread conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation. What can help us reverse this alarming trend?

I propose that, like the ancient Athenians, we Latter-day Saints start to view ourselves as citizen-rhetors, practitioners of an art of rhetoric that will produce the amity and concession we need "to moderate and unify," as Oaks counseled. While it is true that very few of us will hold elected office, all citizens with voting rights can be involved in the processes that select and elect candidates. Everyone can talk face-to-face

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19. Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 57–59.

20. "The Constitution of the United States," Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution>.

with family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to try to influence and moderate both political discourse and political action. Everyone can address our elected leaders and our fellow citizens through letters to the editor, opinion editorials, phone calls, email, social media posts, and so on. Moreover, we can expect better of our leaders and representatives if we will hold them accountable for their political rhetoric and actions. To do this, we will need to be knowledgeable and conscientious rhetors ourselves. I believe Latter-day Saint citizen-rhetors can practice an effective rhetorical style of our own, as we present ourselves and our ideas to others. Perhaps we can set an example, influencing the nature of political discourse on a national level by helping others see that moderation and unity are a better path.

### Establishing a Credible Ethos

What should a citizen-rhetor know and do today? Both classical and contemporary theories of rhetoric pay much attention to what is usually called the *ethos*, or character, of the rhetor. Aristotle was the first to describe how ideal rhetors must, using only words, present themselves as persons of virtue, practical wisdom, and good will toward the audience.<sup>21</sup> All subsequent theorists have agreed that the ideal rhetor acts consciously and strategically to choose words, organize them, and deliver them in such a way as to present an issue effectively for the instruction and contemplation of an audience, who then decide how to act. Ethical rhetors value the agency of the audience and never aim to deceive, manipulate, or coerce listeners or readers. By their choices of appropriately decorous language and timely, well-founded arguments that appeal to both logic and emotion, rhetors project their ethos. In turn, audiences who perceive that a rhetor is honest, trustworthy, intelligent, and well-informed are generally disposed to listen and to consider the rhetor's arguments.

For centuries, the goal of the rhetor has been to win over the audience through persuasion, whether the audience is simply undecided about or outright opposed to the rhetor's position. But an early twentieth-century rhetorician, Kenneth Burke, reframed the goal of rhetoric. What rhetors should aim for, says Burke, is not to persuade an audience but to bring both the audience and the rhetor into a state he called *identification*. Rather than taking an antagonistic stance, one that views the audience as

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21. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 112, 2.1.1378a.

an adversary to be conquered by the overwhelming strength of an argument, the rhetor takes an inviting stance, one that sees the audience as *consubstantial* (of the same substance) with the rhetor, possessing shared interests, values, and attitudes. The aim of identification is to overcome difference and division by emphasizing what Burke called "the 'margin of overlap' between the rhetor's and the audience's experiences."<sup>22</sup> Burke believed that when a rhetor invites an audience to identify with him, or when a rhetor shows how she identifies with the audience, feelings of alienation and estrangement are reduced. To Latter-day Saints, Burke's ideas should resonate with our belief that all of us share an identity and common substance as children of God, as brothers and sisters. Regarding each other as antagonists to be subdued, even silenced, by rhetorical prowess contradicts the Christian teachings we have received and bars the way to unity. Latter-day Saints are taught to influence others through persuasion characterized by "long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

Arthur Brooks's recent book *Love Your Enemies* doesn't use "identification" to name the salve he prescribes to heal our currently divided body politic, but like Burke, Brooks describes how we must find ways to engage fellow citizens in discourse that will diminish our differences and highlight the common ground we share. Brooks says the source of our national division is the "culture of contempt" we have allowed to develop. Contempt is an ambient mixture of anger and disgust that he claims has sprouted largely from the "outrage industrial complex," a metaphor for ideologically driven media outlets that, in effect, constantly work to stoke the contempt of one side for the other.<sup>23</sup> The barrage of contemptuous messages that many people consume daily, not only on social media but also from "elected officials, academics, entertainers, and some of the news media," are, Brooks says, the "ideological equivalent of meth." Research shows that we can literally become addicted to compulsively consuming these messages. This obsessive need to hear and read messages that keep us enraged has the effect of turning partisans on one political side sharply against partisans on the other side.<sup>24</sup> Brooks asserts that the only way to break the cycle of addiction to contempt is to love those we consider our enemies.

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22. Robert L. Heath, "Identification," *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 377.

23. Arthur C. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt* (New York: Broadside Books, 2019), 29.

24. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 28–29.

That is, of course, the prescription that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount and the admonition that President Oaks stressed in his October 2020 sermon. While we expect such counsel from religious leaders, it might sound a bit strange coming from a social scientist. Yet Brooks enumerates practical ways to actually bridge the chasms in our political culture, ways that have been proven to work by the social scientific research that he cites. Interestingly, he says that loving others doesn't mean we can't disagree with them.<sup>25</sup> It doesn't even mean that we can't sometimes feel or express anger—because anger is not the same as contempt. It simply means we must disagree respectfully. First, Brooks says, we must treat opponents with respect and “warm-heartedness.”<sup>26</sup> These allow a rhetor to establish a human connection with others. Taking the time to do this—to ask people sincerely about their lives, their families, their jobs, their beliefs—is essential to stop viewing the “other” as someone who is evil, stupid, not worthy of talking to, or not entitled to participate in society. We must stop defining ourselves by the people and the groups we hate or mistrust.<sup>27</sup>

Next, we must learn to welcome diversity, even radical diversity, by ceasing to focus on the historical and demographic, especially racial, differences that tend to sort us into groups. Instead, we must focus on the “shared moral ‘why’ of our lives as brothers and sisters.”<sup>28</sup> To explain this, Brooks draws on Robert Putnam's notion of “bridging identity,” which means ignoring another's as well as *one's own* demographic, educational, political, or religious identity in order to look for the “why” that you share.<sup>29</sup> For example, you might be a White, male, college-educated Republican member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and find yourself working on a committee with a Black, female, high-school-educated Democratic member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. If each of you can set aside these demographic differences, you might find that you share a passion for human dignity and helping the poor escape poverty. With that shared “why,” you have a way to begin negotiating concrete strategies for some sort of political change.

Brooks also prescribes actually expressing gratitude for one's opponents. Here's why: “If you join me in being grateful that we don't live in a one-party state, then by definition you must be grateful for people who

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25. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 37.

26. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 39–43.

27. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 120.

28. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 117.

29. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 119.

disagree with you. They are the ones who make pluralism and democracy possible. You should be grateful and express that gratitude for people who are on the other side in the competition of ideas."<sup>30</sup> Competition, Brooks reminds us, is healthy in sports, business, and politics. Watching sporting events would be boring if one player or team consistently dominated; both players and spectators want a contest of worthy opponents.<sup>31</sup> Products in the marketplace would be of poor quality if different manufacturers weren't motivated by competition to improve; economic competition generally leads to better products and lower prices.<sup>32</sup> Disallowing opposing speech, narrowing the range of acceptable speech, and attempting to shout others down with invective, thus silencing the free competition of ideas, are all detrimental to the health of a democracy.<sup>33</sup> So when someone disagrees with you about a political matter, express gratitude for their viewpoint. It is likely to surprise and disarm them; it will make them more ready to enter into a dialogue where you can eventually find Burke's "margin of overlap" between your positions.<sup>34</sup>

But if the competition of ideas is to be productive, Brooks reminds us, it must be based on "mutually agreed-upon (and enforced) rules and principles" that "grant legitimacy to the competitive process" and "keep us from descending into chaos."<sup>35</sup> Such rules for discourse and debate once seemed to be implicitly understood and followed most of the time in American politics; now they may need to be rewritten and expressly promulgated, adopted, and followed by all those who engage in political rhetoric, whether they are candidates or voters. When all sides recognize the rules that govern competition and agree to comply with them, then competition forms a symbiotic relationship with cooperation. All sides know they can trust others to play fair and to abide by the rules. The paradoxical result is that "competition, properly understood and practiced, *unites* people."<sup>36</sup>

The value of Brooks's suggestions is illustrated by a study conducted in 2019 called "America in One Room" (A1R). Cosponsored by Helena (a nonpartisan problem-solving institution), the People Productions, and the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, the experiment brought together 523 registered voters, a scientifically representative

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30. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 62.

31. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 155.

32. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 159–62.

33. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 169–73.

34. Heath, "Identification."

35. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 158.

36. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 159, emphasis added.



sample of Americans, recruited by the National Organization for Research at the University of Chicago. The 523 participants met in Dallas for a four-day dialogue about politics and policy related to immigration, health care, the economy, the environment, and foreign policy. The A1R participants' attitudes and opinions about these matters were measured with surveys at the start of the four-day conference and again at its end. Over the duration of their stay, they read a fifty-five-page book prepared by policy experts from both major parties, which offered arguments for and against each policy proposal to be discussed; they heard speeches from party members; and they participated in small-group discussions moderated by neutral facilitators. At the end of the four days, surveys showed that members of both parties had moderated their starting positions, sometimes significantly. The shifts were summed up this way: "The most polarizing proposals, whether from the left or the right, generally lost support, and a number of more centrist proposals moved to the foreground. Crucially, proposals further to the right typically lost support from Republicans and proposals further to the left typically lost support from Democrats."<sup>37</sup> Not only did the participants moderate their positions on specific policy proposals, but they also learned to appreciate their fellow Americans from across the aisle. "Democrats' views of Republicans improved by nearly 12 points on average. For Republicans, the jump was even larger, almost 16 points." The participants also left the experiment with a better opinion of democracy and of its chances for success through better dialogue.<sup>38</sup> The greater unity through moderation that President Oaks called for is clearly a goal that can be reached when people of different persuasions interact in a civil, patient way, following rules that ensure listening and cooperation.

### **Influencing an Audience**

In addition to projecting a trustworthy, credible ethos, a citizen-rhetor must also carefully study the audience he or she is addressing. The nature of the audience will constrain almost every choice the rhetor makes when constructing a message. For example, if you are speaking to children, you must choose words and examples they can understand. If

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37. James Fishkin and Larry Diamond, "This Experiment Has Some Great News for Our Democracy," *New York Times*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/02/opinion/america-one-room-experiment.html>.

38. Sarah Frostenson, Maddie Sach, and Laura Bronner, "What Would Happen If American Voters All Got Together and Talked Politics?" *FiveThirtyEight*, October 9, 2019, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/what-would-happen-if-american-voters-all-got-together-and-talked-politics/>.

you are speaking to people from another culture, you must know about their culture so that you can draw examples from it or translate your own cultural ideas and values into concepts they understand. A rhetor also needs to think about what genres of discourse are likely to succeed with particular audiences. Identifying the right rhetorical strategies makes it more likely we will find the margin of overlap.

One genre that has been empirically validated as an effective strategy to create identification with an audience is narrative. Brooks cites research from Princeton University, where scientists used magnetic resonance imaging to study brain activity in both tellers of and listeners to a story. Prior to the start of the story, speakers' and listeners' brain waves were highly divergent. However, once the storyteller began relating the narrative, the brain waves of the listeners immediately locked into a common pattern with those of the storyteller. Brooks quotes Uri Hasson, a neuroscientist at Princeton: "The more listeners understand what the speaker is saying, the more closely their brain responses mirror the speaker's brain responses." Scientists call this "neural entrainment" or "brain-to-brain coupling."<sup>39</sup>

A recent example of narrative's power in political discourse comes from the struggle of voters in Belarus to remove President Alexander Lukashenko from office. Lukashenko has been a dictator since his election in 1994. His government holds elections, which he always wins by suspiciously huge margins. In early 2020, Sergei Tsikhanovsky, a prodemocracy activist who successfully used video blogging on YouTube to share his dissident views, announced his intention to challenge Lukashenko in the upcoming election. Two days later, he was jailed. His wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, decided to run in her husband's place for the presidency. Up to then, she had been a mother and English teacher, so her application for the office was apparently not considered a threat. But her campaign quickly drew massive support from across the spectrum of Belarus's divided political opposition. Her simple message was that she was running because of her love for her husband, whom she wanted to free, and because she wanted to enact democratic reforms. So popular and stirring was her message, it is thought she probably won the election. No one believed the "official" result showing she got only 10 percent of the vote.<sup>40</sup> As in previous elections,

39. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 132.

40. Kostya Manenkov and Daria Litvinova, "Belarus Poll Workers Describe Fraud in Aug. 9 Election," *Washington Post*, September 1, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-poll-workers-describe-fraud-in-aug-9-election/2020/09/01/b8920390-ec20-11ea-bd08-1b10132b458f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-poll-workers-describe-fraud-in-aug-9-election/2020/09/01/b8920390-ec20-11ea-bd08-1b10132b458f_story.html).

Lukashenko declared himself the winner with over 80 percent, prompting six months of mass demonstrations in the country. The Belarusian population is less than 10 million, but “up to 1.5 million people would come out in a single day, among them pensioners, villagers, factory workers, and even, in a few places, members of the police and the security services, some of whom removed insignia from their uniforms or threw them in the garbage.”<sup>41</sup> Many of the protestors were beaten and jailed, but it didn’t stop the demonstrations.

Lukashenko forced Tsikhanouskaya out of the country immediately after the election, so she fled to Lithuania, where she attempted to marshal Western democracies to aid Belarusians in their struggle for democracy. At first, she thought she could simply call on the leaders of Germany and France to do something to help. When that didn’t work, she tried to talk to them “in sophisticated political language.” It was only when she began using “the plain English that she had learned in school, in order to convey plain things,” that she succeeded. As she said herself, “I started to tell stories that would touch their hearts. I tried to make them feel just a little of the pain that Belarusians feel.” Anne Applebaum notes, “To [Tsikhanouskaya’s] surprise, Tsikhanouskaya became, for the second time, a runaway success. She charmed [Angela] Merkel and [Emmanuel] Macron, and the diplomats of multiple countries,” and trade between Belarus and Europe diminished to “a trickle.” In July 2021, she met with President Joe Biden, who increased U.S. sanctions on Belarus. Although sanctions impose a hardship on Belarusians, Tsikhanouskaya inspires them to make sacrifices. Lukashenko is still in power, but his authoritarianism is now nakedly on display to the entire world. In contrast, Applebaum states, Tsikhanouskaya “has on her side the combined narrative power of what we used to call the free world. She has the language of human rights, democracy, and justice.”<sup>42</sup> As the narrative of Belarus’s struggle joins the larger narrative of the struggle for human rights of other nations, those who love freedom and justice anywhere in the world will want to see those established in Belarus.

Latter-day Saints are familiar with the power of narrative, as it is evident in the parables that Jesus used to teach important principles of forgiveness and love, such as the parable of the good Samaritan or the prodigal son. We identify with the generous good Samaritan—or possibly with the wounded man left for dead on the highway. We are moved

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41. Anne Applebaum, “The Bad Guys Are Winning,” *Atlantic* 328, no. 5 (December 2021): 44–45.

42. Applebaum, “Bad Guys Are Winning,” 46.

as we resolve not to be cruel like the Levite and priest who passed by the wounded man. We identify with the prodigal son or with his father, who wept when his son returned—or with both of them at once. Like the prodigal son, we feel a desire to change and seek forgiveness. We may even recognize ourselves in the prodigal's self-righteous brother, who was jealous of his father's solicitude for the wayward brother, and resolve to rejoice more freely in the lost one who finds his way home. I submit that the effectiveness of narrative rhetoric lies in the way it teaches a deeply impactful lesson without pointedly moralizing. It relies on the innate empathy of listeners to be motivated to change themselves. It is a different style of rhetoric than is taught in classical or contemporary textbooks, but a different style—a style of our own—seems to be what is called for right now in our political discourse.

One great power of narrative is that it engages the emotions. In western civilization, the emotions have long been considered suspect; people often claim they want to act on reason alone and not to be influenced by their emotions. But humans can no more expect to be free of emotions than they can expect to be free of hunger. Appealing to the emotions of the audience has been a part of the theory and practice of rhetoric since Aristotle. Ethical rhetors understand the power of the emotions, but because they value the agency of any audience, they rule out appealing to emotions in a way that is deceptive, manipulative, or coercive. Such are the tools of the sophist and demagogue. While rhetoricians still don't have a complete and reliable theory of how emotions function in rhetoric, current work by neuroscientists offers hope that someday we will have a better understanding. One emotion that neurobiologists are currently studying is perhaps the most important one we humans feel: love. As it turns out, this emotion is strongly connected with the use of narrative.

Scientists studying love have discovered that it has a biological basis in oxytocin, a hormone sometimes called the "love molecule." Oxytocin is partly responsible for the pleasurable bonding feelings experienced when couples fall in love, when mothers give birth, and when fathers hold their newborns.<sup>43</sup> Because oxytocin stays in the blood for about three and a half minutes, its level can be measured with a simple blood test. Its relationship to narratives has been demonstrated by Paul Zak of Claremont Graduate University, who found that narratives "actually change brain chemistry and allow us to achieve greater unity with each other" as oxytocin is released.<sup>44</sup> Zak conducted an experiment in which

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43. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 134.

44. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 135.

subjects saw a video of a father (not an actor) watching his two-year-old son play and describing how the boy would soon experience a recurrence of cancer. The father explains that when the cancer comes back, the child will die. Immediately after seeing the video, subjects registered high levels of oxytocin in their blood, which correlated with high levels of empathy. Empathy was measured by the donations subjects were asked to give a childhood cancer charity from the compensation they received for participating in the study. Zak repeated the experiment later, measuring not only oxytocin levels but imaging subjects' brains as well. The most active brain regions were the ones high in oxytocin receptors.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the story the participants heard directly produced the outcome of empathy by causing a release of oxytocin.

This research about brain-to-brain coupling and the release of oxytocin, both of which result when hearing narratives, suggests that citizen-rhetors can connect with people on the other side of an ideological divide by telling each other compelling stories. And it is not only stories that will bridge the divide but also any task that requires cooperation. Other scientists have discovered that as people complete tasks in pairs or groups, such as putting a puzzle together, their brain oscillations increasingly align as the tasks require more cooperation. This alignment predicted higher feelings of "affinity, empathy and social connection" in the participants.<sup>46</sup> The success of the A1R experiment described above was likely due to the cooperation the experiment required from all participants as they discussed political topics and sought to find common ground. As noted, the A1R participants also increased in their affinity for people of the opposite political persuasion, most likely because they experienced a release of oxytocin as they worked together.

Research like this offers hope: If people who espouse different political ideologies will listen to each other's stories and cooperate on solving important problems, they may be able to overcome political division by creating greater feelings of unity, even love, among them. Sadly, this hope is considerably dampened when we consider that, in the United States today, there is a rigid division between proponents of political ideologies that seems as deep and unyielding as at other perilous times, such as the Vietnam War or the Civil War. When the parties are about equally represented in Congress, as they are in 2022, the result is too often governmental

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45. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies*, 136–37.

46. Conor Feehly, "Brains Might Sync as People Interact—and That Could Upend Consciousness Research," *Discover Magazine*, July 26, 2021, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/mind/brains-might-sync-as-people-interact-and-that-could-upend-consciousness>.

gridlock. Frustrations and anger rise as the majority party attempts to accomplish its aims in governing, and the minority party maneuvers to block any action. The partisans on either side seldom find legislation they want to cooperate on, and the contentious rhetoric they use seems aimed at evoking anger and hatred toward those they deem their political enemies. Instead of working toward love and unity through cooperating with fellow representatives, many partisans seem instead determined to short-circuit any effort that might foster cooperation. This should be troubling to Latter-day Saints since we know that the "father of contention" is Satan, "and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another." Christ says his doctrine is not to "stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away" (3 Ne. 11:29–30).

What can we do? To start, we can remember that our goal is to find Burke's "margin of overlap," to find ways to identify with each other so that we can moderate and unify. As citizen-rhetors, we could set an example at the local level by loving our political adversaries, trying to find ways to cooperate and compromise on issues that affect us all, such as education, housing, zoning, transportation, utilities, and so on. We could befriend and talk to those whose ideological positions are different from our own. We could engage in patient and loving discussion with them about the differences we have. We might not succeed in changing people's minds to the extent that they renounce their party and join ours, but we could find ways to cooperate and compromise for the common good. Perhaps we could also agree that electing representatives at the state and national level who pledge to moderate their positions and unify with members of the opposition will be better for our state and nation. Then we could throw our support behind candidates who run on a platform of moderation and unity.

The ancient Athenians realized that harmony was an indispensable underpinning of democracy. One effective metaphor they used for democratic harmony was a woven fabric,<sup>47</sup> in which some threads go one way and some the other, some threads are one color, and some another, but the individual threads all work together to create a strong fabric that includes all.<sup>48</sup> The green threads don't try to change all the other threads to green because the various colors are what give variety and interest to the pattern. The vertical threads don't try to change the direction of the

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47. Two other metaphors the Athenians used for political harmony were a bundle of sticks and music. See Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 84–88.

48. See Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 85–88.

horizontal ones because that will weaken the fabric. The metaphor of the woven fabric teaches us that, as Charles Woodruff says, “living in political harmony means three things: adhering to the rule of law, working together for common goals, and accepting differences.”<sup>49</sup> Everyone in the body politic should agree that we can only protect the common good by making the rule of law reign supreme, so while we accept differences, we also must be willing to moderate them. If the ideal of being governed by law is compromised, the fabric unravels.

### Crafting a True Message

The fabric also unravels when rhetors attempt to lie to and deceive their audiences. For centuries, the art of rhetoric was accused of trafficking in beliefs, opinions, and probabilities rather than in demonstrable, absolute truths. Plato was the first to make this charge, declaring rhetoric the art of flattering and appeasing the appetites of an audience rather than telling the cold, hard truth.<sup>50</sup> Plato’s pupil Aristotle had to agree that rhetoric may not always be about the truth simply because it is impossible always to know the truth, particularly in political issues, which tend to focus on how to create a better future.<sup>51</sup> Since the future is still unknown, political arguments will be probabilistic to a certain extent. Even so, such arguments can be based on the best evidence and reasoning available. They can also be subjected to scrutiny by means of debate, logic, precedent, comparisons to known empirical data, analysis by experts, and so on. Whether we are the producers or the consumers of political rhetoric, we need to be careful that the messages we disseminate or listen to are as factual, accurate, and fair as possible. In addition to being the author of contention and anger, Satan is “the father of lies” (2 Ne. 9:9). Half-truths, falsehoods, misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories will undermine the attempt to create national unity just as surely as toxic emotions will.

But studying political messages has become more difficult in the age of the internet. In the past, partisanship was evident in all kinds of political rhetoric, but norms of civility and truth-telling were generally followed. Moreover, the publicizing of news was considerably slower in

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49. Woodruff, *First Democracy*, 90.

50. See Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13–24, 29–33.

51. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, see especially pp. 33–36, 1.1.1355a–b, and 47–49, 1.3.1358b–1359a. Aristotle sees judicial rhetoric as concerned with the past and epideictic rhetoric as concerned with the present. Epideictic rhetoric praises or blames personal or cultural values, ideas, laws, ceremonies, events, and so on. Inaugural addresses are one kind of epideictic rhetoric.



the past and limited to fewer outlets, which were subject to strong fact-checking and editorial control. Today, however, we live amid an explosion of internet platforms, online publications, cable TV outlets, and radio talk shows that constantly bombard us with political news, analysis, and commentary. With a huge array of electronic devices to choose from, most of us have constant access to online media and can consume what is breathlessly called “breaking news” whenever we want. But all of this has led to a new danger: The truth value of what many people see, read, or hear may be highly questionable. Because much so-called news has not been rigorously checked for accuracy and fairness and because editorial controls are much weaker than in the past, rumors and conspiracy theories spread like wildfire. Outright lies are planted by internet trolls, some domestic and some foreign, on online platforms where they will be seen by thousands and shared and reshared until the lies are so pervasive they seem true. When we consume less-than-accurate information and then spread it further in conversation, in texts, in email attachments, in Facebook posts, in tweets and retweets, truth is degraded even further, and confusion begins to reign rather than clarity. Jonathan Rauch’s 2021 book *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth* admirably outlines the history and nature of the epistemic crisis we now face, which is nothing less than an assault on facts, objectivity, and truth. I will summarize a few of Rauch’s major points and show how they are relevant to the moral obligation every citizen-rhetor has to communicate messages to an audience that are as true and as fair as possible.<sup>52</sup>

In his book, Rauch describes the rise of what he calls “the Constitution of Knowledge.” Just as the United States Constitution was the product of the American Revolution, the Constitution of Knowledge was the product of the scientific revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Constitution of Knowledge is not a written document, but rather a “social operating system” that allows experts to cooperate and create knowledge for the public good “on the basis of rules, not personal authority or tribal affiliation or brute force.”<sup>53</sup> This constitution exerts its sway through institutions, values, and norms that have been established to ensure that the knowledge produced by experts will be valid and reliable. Rauch calls those who submit to the government of the Constitution of Knowledge

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52. See Jonathan Rauch, *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 118–88, for an extensive discussion of how digital media have disabled information gatekeeping and hugely enabled disinformation and trolling.

53. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 47.



the “reality-based community.”<sup>54</sup> Many highly educated and creative individuals belong to this community, made up of all those who work in their specialized spheres to produce true statements about whatever reality they investigate. They might be scientists and scholars of all stripes working at many different kinds of institutions; attorneys, judges, detectives, and forensic investigators making sure our judicial system is fair and operates on facts; professional journalists who attempt to gather and report facts accurately as they investigate ongoing events; and government agents such as intelligence analysts, meteorologists, budget specialists, labor statisticians, and agricultural experts. All of these experts are educated in the knowledge, rules, norms, and values of the community they belong to, and they adhere to codes of ethical conduct. Members of the reality-based community have an allegiance to truth above all. They do what they do in order to serve the broad public interest, knowing that we make progress together as we apply reliable knowledge to solving problems in many different realms. Both politicians and voters are well-advised to heed the knowledge that is produced by these experts because of the careful way it is produced before being put to use.

Members of the reality-based community understand that knowledge is, in effect, validated propositions created by the social networks they belong to. Because knowledge is social, it exists independent of individual minds and bodies and can be stored in books, libraries, archives, databases, equations, and the like.<sup>55</sup> It can be referred to and used as a precedent for creating new knowledge. As experts seek answers to questions and confirmation of hypotheses, they actually welcome disagreement and doubt because the resolution of such produces stronger knowledge. The knowledge-producing system encourages autonomy, freedom, and diversity—especially diversity of opinion—and does “not allow any person or faction to use force or intimidation to control what others say or believe.”<sup>56</sup> The Constitution of Knowledge, Rauch says, is like the United States Constitution in that both create “dynamic stability” in large, diverse, and argumentative populations; both have to adapt to change without losing continuity; and both have to be “open to many factions and viewpoints, yet captured by none.”<sup>57</sup>

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54. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 16.

55. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 86–87.

56. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 76.

57. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 79–80.

The foregoing explanation of the reality-based community is important as we consider how to make our political rhetoric contribute to moderation and unity. Expertise, particularly scientific expertise, is increasingly under attack by some in our political system. They seem to want to substitute their private opinions, feelings, and theories for the public knowledge carefully created by experts. But Rauch identifies ten principles which those who create knowledge for the public good must be committed to in order to regulate their work and keep it from serving merely private interests. These principles are all important and work together, but I will address only five here.<sup>58</sup> The first principle is objectivity, the notion that truth is truth regardless of who is expressing it; it isn't subject to the perspective of one person or group.<sup>59</sup> The next principle is exclusivity, an understanding that chaos would reign if there were no unified public commitment to one objective reality. Exclusivity means there can be no "alternative facts."<sup>60</sup> The principle of fallibilism, the understanding that one could be wrong, requires one to be humble, tolerant, and forbearing. Fallibilism is related to the principle of disconfirmation, which means that anyone who offers a proposition for confirmation as a fact has to expect it to survive the tests of impersonal peer review, replication, and counterarguments in order to be accepted by the community as a whole.<sup>61</sup> The principle of accountability is secured by layers of protection built into the knowledge-producing system, first by each person's internal "epistemic conscience" that forbids hiding evidence, falsifying data, cherry-picking quotes, and so on; and second, by other members of the community, who can challenge or ignore claims that don't withstand scrutiny. In extreme cases, institutions preserve accountability by sanctioning those who violate rules, including firing and withdrawing credentials.<sup>62</sup> The commitment of experts to

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58. The other principles are pluralism, which means all members welcome competing ideas, and they follow the principle of civility by decorously criticizing only ideas, not individuals; professionalism, which means that one has not only credentials but an earned reputation for integrity; institutionalism, which is realized through universities, organizations, associations, and agencies that keep knowledge-making networks functioning effectively. The final principle is that no one tells bald-faced lies of the sort that evince utter disdain for whether their statements square with reality or not. Commitment to these principles demonstrates that the core value of the epistemic community is learning; the principles ensure that the path of inquiry will not be blocked. See Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 103–8.

59. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 103.

60. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 103–4.

61. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 103.

62. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 104–5.

these five bedrock principles of the reality-based community makes it possible for the rest of us to determine whether, in the words of the *General Handbook* of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sources of information are “credible, reliable, and factual.”<sup>63</sup> If members of different political parties each have their own “realities” and “facts,” a moderate path to governing will be impossible to achieve. If we citizen rhetors don’t base our political arguments on knowledge we can all agree on, the goal of finding unity is hopeless.

The creation of the Constitution of Knowledge is in its own way as miraculous as the creation of the U.S. Constitution. The professional communities that adhere to its rules were developed mainly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and new ones are continuing to arise. Taking just one example—medicine—we can see the rapid pace of innovation once the social networks were formed among doctors and scientists to establish guidelines for knowledge making, and to collect, test, peer review, and disseminate research. Medical researchers gave us “penicillin and cortisone in the 1940s; streptomycin, open-heart surgery, and polio vaccine in the 1950s; kidney transplantation in the 1960s; chemotherapy, in vitro fertilization, and angioplasty in the 1970s, and much more.”<sup>64</sup> Only ten days after a novel coronavirus was identified early in 2020, scientists from different nations, working together, decoded its genetic sequence. Twelve days later, “scientists at the National Institutes of Health published an analysis of how the virus invaded human cells.”<sup>65</sup> By late 2020, the first vaccines had been developed to blunt the deadly effects of this virus. President Russell M. Nelson declared the development of the first vaccines “a literal godsend,” and alluding to the knowledge-making networks that brought about this achievement, he added, “We are thankful for the countless doctors, scientists, researchers, manufacturers, government leaders, and others who have performed the grueling work required to make this vaccine available.”<sup>66</sup>

The praise of President Nelson, a former pioneer in heart surgery turned spiritual leader to millions of Latter-day Saints around the globe,

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63. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (2021), 38.8.40.

64. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 66.

65. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 70.

66. Tad Walch, “President Russell M. Nelson and the COVID-19 Vaccine: What the Church Leader Has Said and Done,” *Deseret News*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/fairfax/2021/4/29/22407953/president-nelson-on-covid-19-vaccine-comments-speeches-actions-prayers-shot-church-news>.

illustrates a point that Rauch is careful to make in his book: There is no hypocrisy, no conflict of interest, in a scientist who is also a believer in God and a member of a religion. Having faith in God does not disqualify one from participating in or using the work of the reality-based community. “The Constitution of Knowledge needs supremacy in the realm of public knowledge but not in the realm of private belief.”<sup>67</sup> Thus it makes no judgments about the paths people take to acquire their religious beliefs, such as faith, revelation, study, or upbringing. As Latter-day Saints, we can feel confident in blending divinely revealed knowledge with knowledge produced by secular experts following rules sanctioned by the Constitution of Knowledge. There are stumbles in every knowledge-making community, to be sure—facts that must be corrected, qualified, expanded, even superseded on the basis of further evidence and testing—but such stumbles don’t invalidate the whole endeavor. Indeed, the identification and correction of errors show that the enterprise is working to constantly refine our understanding. Understanding how valid, reliable knowledge is created will help a citizen-rhetor find the best evidence to use in arguments about political matters.

What does the foregoing imply for the quest to improve the level of political rhetoric today? One implication is that any citizen-rhetor who listens to a political message or who gathers information and evidence for crafting such a message must be careful to separate fact from fiction. Keith A. Erikson, the former director of the Church History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, offers excellent advice for judging the reliability of information in his book *Real vs. Rumor: How to Dispel Latter-day Myths*. Although the book aims to help Latter-day Saints judge the quality of historical writing about the Church, many of its guidelines can be applied to judging written and spoken statements about political issues as well. For example, to determine whether a source is trustworthy, Erikson advises considering its rhetorical situation first. Ask questions such as these: “When and where was this written? Who is the author? Who is the intended audience? What was the author’s purpose? What type of writing is this—an article, a speech, an essay, an editorial, a newspaper report, a blog post?” Answers will help you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the source. Connecting the source to wider contexts may help illuminate its purpose and contents. The historical context is almost always relevant as is the biographical one—what else is known about the author or about other people who

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67. Rauch, *Constitution of Knowledge*, 115.

may be named in the source? Other contexts that may cast light on the source are literary, ethical, material, and eternal.<sup>68</sup>

Erekson advises analyzing the assumptions and values of the author as well as the argument. He recommends reading a source to uncover what he calls the storyline, the structure, the situation, and the script. The storyline is the basic narrative, including characters; the structure is the organization, which might be chronological or some other order; the situation is the time and place of the storyteller. By “script,” he means “a general template,” often hidden, for a specific story.<sup>69</sup> Scripts for stories tend to be repeated; they are themes that may underlie many similar stories. Erekson’s advice will not always apply to reading a political source, but it might. Sources you find in the political domain might try to persuade readers to believe the script that “Senator X is a tax-and-spend liberal” or “Representative Z cares nothing about minorities.” As you read, ask yourself whether the storyline and structure justify the script (that is, the underlying point you are meant to infer), or whether a different script might be drawn from the story, or whether the story itself needs to be replaced.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, after you read the source, you should evaluate its significance. Erekson distinguishes significance from truth. Some things may be true but hardly significant to others, either historically, contemporaneously, or personally. And some things might seem significant but not be true.<sup>71</sup> Because significance should be based on truth, Erekson devotes several chapters to explaining how to determine if a source is accurate, authentic, reliable, fair, and comprehensive.<sup>72</sup> If a source is inaccurate, inauthentic, unreliable, or unfair, it will not provide a sound basis for a credible argument. A source that is not comprehensive may still have value, provided it is used with other sources that compensate for its limits. A strong argument will consider all relevant facts, sources, and stories. As we apply Erekson’s advice to judging political news and commentary from the internet, television, newspapers, or radio, we need to consider the limits of whatever we are reading or listening to. We should read, watch, and listen to multiple sources so that we can compare them and try to discern the reasons for differences. Perhaps one or more of the sources is biased

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68. See Keith A. Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor: How to Dispel Latter-day Myths* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 120.

69. See Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 55.

70. Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 57–58.

71. Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 108.

72. See Erekson, *Real vs. Rumor*, 118–79.

or intentionally misleading. We can discover that by applying Erikson's advice.

The Latter-day Saint citizen-rhetor who wants to engage fellow beings in political discourse must be careful to support claims with evidence that is trustworthy. Offering anything less damages the ethos of the rhetor and insults the intelligence of the audience. It hardly needs saying that arguments based on lies, conspiracy theories, misinformation, or disinformation will not promote healthy outcomes in the political realm. Because we want better political discourse in this time of division, hatred, and anger, we can't afford to make flimsy or morally objectionable arguments. We must base our beliefs and our arguments on evidence that is accurate, credible, reliable, fair, and as comprehensive as possible. Only then can we establish a strong and workable margin of overlap with our audience.

## Conclusion

We have an obligation to do all we can to improve the quality of political rhetoric in the United States (and in other nations) today. As citizens we can do much, even if we don't hold elected office, to reach out to our friends, neighbors, family members, and fellow citizens to engage them in dialogue about political matters that will help lower the temperature in our overheated, distrustful, and polarized environment. Our numbers are small, but Christ has called the members of his kingdom, his Church, to be the salt of the earth (see Matt. 5:13 and 3 Ne. 12:13) and the leaven in the loaf (see Matt. 13:33). A little salt goes a long way to flavor a pot of soup, just as a little yeast can make several loaves of bread rise. As disciples of Christ, we must see to it that we are using our small strength to do great things, even in the world of politics. "Disciples . . . must do politics," says Griffith, "but our politics must be of a different sort," presented through rhetoric that exhibits "a style of our own," a different way of approaching political argument.<sup>73</sup>

As citizen-rhetors, we can create and project a genuinely loving, warm, interested ethos to all the audiences we might encounter in political discussions. Instead of trying to conquer them through our rhetorical prowess, we can invite them to join us in finding the margin of overlap between our interests and theirs. We can understand audiences better by respecting the values that animate their political choices. Rather than

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73. Thomas W. Griffith, "A Politics of At-one-ment," *Humanities* (Spring 2021): 24.

denigrate their choices, we must realize that their beliefs bring strengths to the body politic by countering the weight of opposing beliefs. We should realize that there are ways to compromise with those whose ideological foundations and political priorities are different from ours. The founders of the United States knew compromise was indispensable to creating a national government. The framers of the Constitution deliberately made compromise a necessary component of government by having the various branches of government balance and check each other. Likewise, we must recognize the necessity of compromise and see it, when we reach it, as a success, not as a failure.

Finally, we must realize that all our attempts to connect as rhetors and audiences will founder if we do not value truth, reality, and facts. The messages we convey to each other cannot be based on lies, misinformation, conspiracies, and the like, for these generally inspire only anger, hatred, and division; they won't help establish a common basis on which we can build lasting laws and policies to promote the common good. If we realize that we as citizen-rhetors must moderate our discourse to connect with audiences, we must also realize that the people we elect to represent us in government cannot be extreme partisans who view compromise as an evil and refuse to engage colleagues on the other side of the aisle. We cannot elect those who campaign or attempt to govern by using lies and half-truths, who don't listen to their opponents but shout them down at every opportunity, who troll and smear their adversaries with *ad hominem* attacks. If we desire to moderate and to unify in this nation, we must elect representatives who are willing to moderate their positions and their rhetoric for the sake of unity, for the sake of protecting and realizing the common good. Our national and state legislatures should be functioning like the "America in One Room" study cited earlier—with representatives sitting down together, studying the issues dispassionately, discussing them, and seeing whether there is a middle way to resolve political issues that will satisfy the majority. Perhaps we haven't stopped to realize how much we have in common with those we consider our opponents because we have been too busy throwing rhetorical bombs on social media and elsewhere. We must cease contributing to the anger and start to love those whom we deem our enemies. We must realize that, in truth, no one should be our enemy. Everyone is our neighbor—Samaritan, Jew, Gentile, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Buddhist, and so on. Christ said to love our neighbors as ourselves. Political progress can only be made when we look for the common humanity in our neighbors, when we consider how to identify our desires, values, and interests with theirs, and when we

approach them with love and concern to discuss how we can both moderate our political positions to find greater unity.

There is more at stake here than political stability and progress in the United States. “Our political allegiances must be secondary to our commitment to help the Church become an instrument for healing and reconciliation in the world. And if our political allegiances get in the way of that commitment, if they become a source of division within the Church, we must understand that those allegiances are impeding the most important work in the world today.”<sup>74</sup> In this profound statement, Griffith is surely referring to the work of gathering scattered Israel, which the Church does through both its worldwide missionary efforts and its extensive global network of temples. Both efforts bring the gospel of peace to all—living or dead—who will accept it. The Church’s headquarters are in the United States, where anger, hatred, division, and lies threaten to pull our government and our nation apart. All committed Latter-day Saints must contribute to the Church’s ability to operate from within a peaceful, orderly environment, secured by the rule of law. It is incumbent upon each of us who wants the Church to succeed in its mission to do our part to help the United States, the cradle of the Restoration, succeed as well. Let us all be willing to sacrifice, just as the framers of the Constitution did, to moderate our political positions and our political rhetoric for the sake of greater national unity.

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74. Griffith, “Politics of At-one-ment,” 24.



# The American Political Animal

Which one animates you?  
Which do you harbor?  
The bald eagle with its intense  
vision and predatory eye?  
Or Benjamin Franklin's choice,  
the wild turkey?

Do you turn to New Hampshire's  
rattlesnake, *Don't Tread on Me*?  
Or hold within yourself an amorphous  
jellyfish, whose dangling tentacles  
cause burning, seizure, death?

Each American in landscapes  
inland or coastal, urban or rural  
has invited one political animal  
to take root inside—the bed bug,  
the bad-tempered badger,  
the porcupine, the hobo spider  
spewing poison through mouthparts  
shaped like boxing gloves.

Or the honey bee maintaining  
its hive. The mother duck.  
The beaver, with its dams and lodges.  
The surefooted mountain goat. The single  
llama in a herd of sheep, taking on  
coyotes, protecting the weak.

—Susan Elizabeth Howe

# “Truth Is the Only Ground”

## How Journalism Contributes to Good Government

*Edward L. Carter*

Growing up in the years after Watergate, I became a true believer in the power of the press to make society better by reporting on government’s corruption, lies, ineptitudes, and inefficiencies—as well as genuine public service, improvements, and accomplishments. In junior high school, I wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper critiquing the city garbage trucks in my neighborhood that left a trail of trash in their wake. In high school, I reported for the school newspaper about events and people as well as things I thought could be improved. I worked as a journalist during and after college, covering local politics and government, police, and courts. As a graduate journalism student with a White House press credential, I reported from the Senate Press Gallery during the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton.

Now, after twenty years of teaching journalism as a college professor and fifteen years of periodically representing journalists as a lawyer, I believe the viability of our system of government at local, state, and national levels depends more than ever on good journalism. But amid rapid and unsettling social and technological change, journalism and government are degenerating. Journalists and public officials need to do better, and I believe informed community members should influence reforms and innovations while insisting on adherence to core values. Doing so will require community members to set aside some selfish interests and ask the same of journalists and government employees and officers. Although citizens do not vote for their journalists like they do their elected officials, community members nonetheless impact the quality of their community’s journalism by the news they tolerate, consume, and support financially.

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should have a particularly strong interest in ensuring that good journalism contributes to good government. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, and his modern followers have been encouraged to inform themselves about government and other topics in ways that quality journalism can uniquely provide.<sup>1</sup> In order for that to happen, we have to differentiate between high-value sources of news that can contribute to understanding and wisdom, on the one hand, and low-value sources of information that contribute to noise and confusion, on the other hand.<sup>2</sup> Then we have to choose the harder path to understanding and wisdom even though it may require additional time, money, and sacrifice of preconceived notions or the comforts of echo chambers. Fortunately, the blessings associated with the restoration of Christ's Church include hope and faith to counter the cynicism infecting too much of politics and government, along with the journalism that reports on them.

I have come to understand that not all journalists are Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and not all public officials are President Richard Nixon. Still, the example of Watergate remains relevant because it teaches both journalists and government officials to focus on the public interest, abide by the rule of law, and make decisions that build rather than erode trust. The overwhelming majority of American journalists and government officials do not work inside the Capital Beltway of Washington, D.C. Local journalists can do investigative journalism, and they also should engage in explanatory journalism—helping readers and viewers understand how government works, why it does what it does, and how it can get better.<sup>3</sup> By working to make journalism more community-focused, and working to make the community more engaged with its journalism, we can make the future of self-governance better than its present. I know that seems idealistic, but I have worked

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1. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:77–80.

2. "Church Policies and Guidelines: Seeking Information from Reliable Sources," *General Handbook: Serving in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 38.8.40, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/38-church-policies-and-guidelines?lang=eng>.

3. Andrea Wenzel, *Community-Centered Journalism: Engaging People, Exploring Solutions, and Building Trust* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2020). Vox Media (<https://www.vox.com>) has built an entire news operation on explaining things, especially government processes.

with too many excellent journalism students and professionals around the country to believe in anything less.

The purpose of this article is to provide justification and a road map for community members of good faith to engage productively with the quality journalism available to them and to contribute to improvement in journalism when needed. That includes making informed choices about which news sources and media platforms are worthy of attention and which are not. Doing so would strengthen the good in our media ecosystem and diminish the bad. As a result, community members and journalists could collaborate to improve the system of government we have currently and the system we will pass on to our children and grandchildren in the future. I do not presume to have all the answers, or even many of them, for the domestic and international challenges we face. But I do not think we as a society will discover those answers without high-quality, independent journalism that accomplishes its central role to report on the activities of government while maintaining the trust and attention of its audience.

This article first discusses a few lessons learned from Watergate, including some from the unique perspective of a Latter-day Saint Apostle. Then I discuss the values of modern American journalism and its contributions to a transparent and representative democracy. Next, I provide my perspectives on how to define high-value journalism and distinguish it from low-value information, including propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation. I then propose some methods for community members to practice news literacy, drawing on a Latter-day Saint perspective.

### **Elder Christofferson and Rationales for Freedom of Press**

On the day President Richard M. Nixon announced his resignation—August 8, 1974—the *New York Times* reported on a courtroom drama in which a twenty-nine-year-old law clerk in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia played a central role. The clerk, a Brigham Young University graduate with a law degree from Duke University named D. Todd Christofferson, worked for Judge John J. Sirica. The day before Nixon went on prime-time television from the White House to announce he would resign, lawyers for the disgraced president appeared in Judge Sirica's courtroom and handed Christofferson tape recordings and other materials that had been the subject of a subpoena by Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski. Nixon did not want the court and the public to have secret tape recordings he had made of White House conversations, but

his claim of executive privilege had been denied by the U.S. Supreme Court just two weeks earlier.

The *Times*' reporter, Lesley Oelsner, shared the skepticism of the assistant special prosecutor, Richard Ben-Veniste, in light of the Nixon administration's many obfuscations. Nixon's attorney, James D. St. Clair, said there had been a problem with one of the recordings:

He told Judge Sirica that the tape recording of one of the subpoenaed conversations—of a meeting April 19, 1973, between the President and Mr. Ehrlichman—had been broken in the course of transcribing it.

The lawyer said that rather than try to splice it together, he was presenting both portions to the court, each portion on a separate reel in a separate box. He presented two boxes to the judge's clerk, D. Todd Christofferson, and continued on to discuss the next conversation on the list.

Mr. Christofferson, however, opened one of the two boxes. There was no tape in it.

"The two-part tape is now one tape," said Mr. Ben-Veniste, who had been watching Mr. Christofferson.

"You don't mind if I have a slight heart attack," said Mr. St. Clair, his voice sounding only partly jesting.<sup>4</sup>

The Watergate scandal stemmed from a break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters on June 17, 1972, and subsequent cover-up efforts, dominating news coverage for two years and eventually landing in Judge Sirica's courtroom. Christofferson was a regular source for journalists during the criminal prosecution of seven Nixon aides for various crimes. Having been authorized by Judge Sirica to serve as a media spokesperson for the District Court, Christofferson was quoted in more than two dozen *New York Times* articles in 1973 and 1974. The mystery of the boxes handed to Christofferson in August 1974 was eventually resolved by an explanation from Nixon's attorneys that the two tapes had indeed been rejoined without St. Clair's knowledge and placed in one of the boxes. The experience serves to illustrate that skepticism is healthy in news reporting about government activities, and the Nixon administration merited special scrutiny. At the same time, cynicism can be unhelpful and even destructive.

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4. Lesley Oelsner, "Court Fails to Get Tapes of 9 Talks," *New York Times*, August 8, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/08/archives/court-fails-to-get-tapes-of-9-talks.html>.

Decades later, Elder Christofferson—retired from a long career in private law practice and by then serving as a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—participated in a panel discussion about Watergate. In January 2019, Christofferson joined Woodward at the Newseum in Washington, D.C., to discuss the lessons learned from their respective experiences during the Nixon years. Along with his *Washington Post* colleague Bernstein, Woodward was an early, dogged journalist pursuing the Watergate news story. As a result, the *Post* won the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for public service. At the Newseum, Christofferson said journalists can play a key role in holding government officials accountable.<sup>5</sup> It is a message he has repeated.

In 2017, for example, Elder Christofferson spoke in Spanish to a group of news media executives from Latin America, gathered at the Church’s Conference Center in Salt Lake City. As a member of the local organizing committee for the Inter-American Press Association, I had the privilege to hear his remarks in person. It remains the single most compelling defense of freedom of the press I have heard from a senior leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Journalism makes societies better, he said, when it facilitates fundamental rights such as religious freedom and freedom of expression. He quoted the 1994 Declaration of Chapultepec, a press-freedom statement endorsed by more than sixty nations in the Western Hemisphere, and then Christofferson stated that “such declarations provide a common framework by which we can construct fair and open societies.”<sup>6</sup>

Elder Christofferson noted the marketplace of ideas justification for free speech, as articulated in a dissenting opinion of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. in the 1919 *Abrams v. United States* case: “The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.”<sup>7</sup> Christofferson explained the concept that has become the central analogy of U.S. jurisprudence on freedom of expression and freedom of the press:

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5. “Apostle Discusses Lessons from Watergate with Famed Journalist Bob Woodward,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org, January 14, 2019, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/apostle-discusses-lessons-watergate-journalist-bob-woodward>.

6. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression and Protecting Conscience,” ChurchofJesusChrist.org, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/transcript--elder-christofferson-speaks-atinter-american-press-association-general-assembly>.

7. Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression.”

All societies need fresh ideas and new perspectives to address the conditions of the moment. Writers and journalists play a key role in this discovery. Freedom of speech for everyone is important because wisdom often comes from the unlikeliest of places and the simplest of people. Thoughts that may be forbidden one day may turn out to be useful the next. Safety does not come from stifling speech but from giving it a chance to breathe. Not everything that comes from our pens or our mouths will be useful, but when freedom is discouraged, nothing good will come out of them either. To get the sublime, sometimes we have to put up with a little of the ridiculous. . . .

The concept of a free marketplace of ideas requires that all people, minorities as well as majorities, have access to the media. Your privilege and calling as a journalist is to facilitate discussion and debate between people who have different beliefs, races, nationalities, and political opinions. An informed citizenry, it is often said, is the bulwark of democracy.<sup>8</sup>

His argument for freedom of the press did not stop there. Elder Christofferson then proceeded to advance what amounts to an international human rights justification, based on the role of a free press to promote human dignity and facilitate the exercise of other rights, including freedom of religion and belief. He cited an example of a 2015 speech he gave about religious liberty in Brazil, and he observed that “media reporting on this event was insightful” and “the press was doing what it can do best—using its freedom to promote other freedoms.”<sup>9</sup> He ended his 2017 Inter-American Press Association speech with an elevated vision of the role of journalism: “We honor your efforts to give voice to the voiceless, to shine light on the difficulties of our world, and to bestow dignity on the human experience.”<sup>10</sup>

In several settings, Elder Christofferson has discussed integrity, trust, and truth as keys to journalism and self-governance. For example, at the Inter-American Press Association, he called a “disinterested duty to the truth” one of the “basic principles of journalistic integrity.”<sup>11</sup> At the Newseum with Woodward, Christofferson described the shock and disappointment he and Judge Sirica felt when they became the first people outside the White House to listen to the tape recordings that substantiated the abuse of power and disregard for the rule of law in the Nixon administration. He expressed

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8. Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression.”

9. Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression.”

10. Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression.”

11. Christofferson, “Preserving Freedom of Expression.”

optimism that good people could restore the integrity of institutions through a commitment to fundamental values.<sup>12</sup> Commitment to the truth in journalism goes beyond reporting facts. There is an old newsroom saying that journalism seeks to report not just the facts, but the truth about the facts. I teach journalism students that the substantive truth is what matters, and sometimes identifying the substantive truth requires journalists to make judgments and not just function as stenographers for what people in power say.

One of the most respected and historic journalism organizations in the country, *The Atlantic*, observed in 2021 that "all presidents lie" and then shared examples. While "the Trump administration weaponized dishonesty to a remarkable degree," the Biden administration has restored a normal level of presidential deception.<sup>13</sup> Journalists should be skeptical and should verify public officials' claims but not become cynical. Journalists should not assume every public official is always lying, but journalists should not dismiss or diminish false statements by public officials when they do occur. The public needs to know when its representatives are wrong. The truth or falsity of some statements by public officials only becomes clear over time, requiring patience and diligence from journalists and the public. We as community members should fight the urge to downplay the errors of our preferred political party's candidates and officeholders while trumpeting the errors of the other party. Getting at substantive truth requires our best efforts, plenty of humility, and willingness to look beyond flawed journalism or, even worse, inflammatory commentary by cable TV and radio talk-show hosts or know-it-alls on Twitter. Not all media content should be conflated with the core of high-value journalism, as a later section discusses.

## Marketplace of Ideas and the Fourth Estate

As the United States entered World War I, Congress passed the Espionage Act of 1917 to prohibit the use of national defense information to the detriment of the United States and also to criminalize obstruction of military enlistment and functioning. A year later, Congress

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12. Jennifer Graham, "Integrity in Government, and Why It Matters: A Conversation with Bob Woodward, Elder D. Todd Christofferson and Michael Dimock," *Deseret News*, January 14, 2019, accessed December 18, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/2019/1/15/20663523/integrity-in-government-and-why-it-matters-a-conversation-with-bob-woodward-elder-d-todd-christoffer>.

13. Adam Serwer, "Biden Will Lie to You," *Atlantic*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/biden-will-lie-you/617820/>.



amended the Espionage Act in a law known as the Sedition Act. That statute, since repealed, prohibited speech that incited disloyalty in the military, advocated labor strikes, or brought the form of U.S. government into disrepute. In early 1919, Justice Holmes wrote majority opinions for the Supreme Court in three cases—*Schenck v. United States*,<sup>14</sup> *Debs v. United States*,<sup>15</sup> and *Frohwerk v. United States*<sup>16</sup>—upholding the constitutionality of the Espionage and Sedition Acts and affirming criminal convictions of antiwar protesters. However, after a summer spent reading theories about the free market and free expression by historical figures Adam Smith, John Milton, and John Stuart Mill—as well as receiving entreaties from contemporaries including Felix Frankfurter, Harold Laski, and Zechariah Chafee—Justice Holmes reversed course in the fall of 1919.<sup>17</sup> In *Abrams*, Holmes decried the criminal convictions of four antiwar protesters and wrote eloquently in defense of freedom of expression even in wartime.<sup>18</sup> In making the marketplace analogy, Justice Holmes emphasized that information consumers must identify and act on truth: “But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground on which their wishes safely can be carried out.”<sup>19</sup>

Holmes was a Unitarian with a “lifelong interest in religious questions” but also a skeptic or agnostic who believed in “a creative spirit whose presence he felt but whose character remained beyond his comprehension.”<sup>20</sup> So while he acknowledged the possibility of absolute truth from God (or “the universe,” as he put it), Holmes did not concern himself much with it. Instead, he focused on truth as “a present or an

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14. 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

15. 249 U.S. 211 (1919).

16. 249 U.S. 204 (1919).

17. Thomas Healy, *The Great Dissent: How Oliver Wendell Holmes Changed His Mind—and Changed the History of Free Speech in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013), 198–210.

18. A fifth protester died in police custody prior to trial. For a history of the case, see Richard Polenberg, *Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

19. *Abrams v. United States*, 250 U.S. 616, 630 (1919) (Holmes, J., dissenting).

20. Catharine Pierce Wells, *Oliver Wendell Holmes: A Willing Servant to an Unknown God* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 84.

imagined future majority in favor of [a particular] view" and something "I cannot help believing."<sup>21</sup>

In the journalism and other classes I teach, I discuss with students how the marketplace of ideas is a valuable concept in seeking lowercase, societal truths such as the best domestic or foreign policies. In order to ascertain those policies and discover the will of the people, the government should allow a wide and diverse expression of viewpoints. As individual community members, our duty is to sift through those viewpoints to determine the most productive ways forward and then act accordingly. But I also tell students that uppercase or absolute Truth comes through revelation from God by way of prophets, the scriptures, and the Holy Ghost. On questions for which there is a revealed answer, we do not need to resort to the marketplace of ideas because the Truth is evident through spiritual means. Journalism, then, is valuable to help facilitate the search for social truth in the marketplace of ideas but less valuable as a commentator on revealed or divine Truth. I also believe a key part of any person's education is learning to distinguish truth from error, and that job is now made increasingly difficult because of numerous bad-faith actors—including some government officials—with social-media megaphones and a penchant for intentional falsehoods in their own interest. The marketplace of ideas fails when a majority of the people believe something that is not true.

A core function of journalism is to serve as a check on government use of official power. This role is sometimes referred to as the watchdog, the Fourth Estate, or the checking value.<sup>22</sup> While journalists at times take it upon themselves to monitor and report on the use of power in nongovernment hands such as corporations (including nonprofits such as churches) and unincorporated associations, I believe journalistic efforts should focus on government activities. This is in part due to the overwhelming powers granted to the government, not just to regulate our conduct and impose taxes in routine ways but principally to deprive us—if due process is met—of our property, our liberty, and even our lives. Journalists should resist the urge to focus on cultural fights and instead expend their best efforts helping viewers and readers to understand how a particular public official, political party, or government entity is either strengthening or undermining long-term values such as

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21. Wells, *Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 199.

22. Vincent Blasi, "The Checking Value in First Amendment Theory," *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 2, no. 3 (1977): 527–28.

the rule of law, trust and accountability, and transparent representation of the people who are the ultimate sovereign. Of course, all of us who consume journalism should expect and demand the same focus of ourselves and our fellow community members.

The single most important free press case in the United States combines the search for truth and the checking value in a way so compelling that it remains relevant today even though nearly sixty years have passed. *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*,<sup>23</sup> decided by the Supreme Court in 1964, teaches the value of journalism for good government in a society riven by political divisions, racial injustice, and disinformation. A police commissioner in Montgomery, Alabama, sued the *New York Times* for defamation based on the newspaper's publication of an advertisement written and paid for by civil-rights groups and supporters of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Although Sullivan was not named or identified by the ad, he claimed his reputation was harmed by statements—some of which turned out to be true and others unintentionally false—about police suppression of the movement to end racial segregation and achieve civil rights in the South. The lawsuit was part of a coordinated campaign to drive northern journalists away from covering the struggle against official segregation in southern states.<sup>24</sup>

Reversing a \$500,000 jury award for the police commissioner given and affirmed in Alabama courts, the U.S. Supreme Court observed “that erroneous statement is inevitable in free debate, and that it must be protected if the freedoms of expression are to have the ‘breathing space’ that they ‘need . . . to survive.’”<sup>25</sup> The court recognized the core function of journalism to report on the activities of government when it held that false statements made without knowledge of their falsity, or without reckless disregard for their falsity, could not justify defamation liability in a claim by a public official. The so-called “actual malice” rule, the court said, was required by the First Amendment’s command that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.”

The constitutional doctrine of actual malice protects more speakers than just journalists, but the core rationale for *Sullivan* hinges on the checking value. The Supreme Court’s opinion in *Sullivan* cites James Madison’s observation that “the press has exerted a freedom in canvassing

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23. 376 U.S. 254 (1964).

24. Melvin I. Urofsky, “*New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* as a Civil Rights Case,” *Communication Law and Policy* 19, no. 2 (2014): 157–83.

25. 376 U.S. at 271.

the merits and measures of public men” before concluding that “the right of free public discussion of the stewardship of public officials was thus, in Madison’s view, a fundamental principle of the American form of government.”<sup>26</sup> The effect of *Sullivan*’s actual malice rule is to shield news reporting about public officials that turns out to be inaccurate as long as journalists are engaged in a good-faith effort to get the truth. The result is more vigorous news reporting about the government because journalists do not have to worry about liability for defamation for unintentional or non-reckless inaccurate statements. This does not mean journalists can engage in intentional falsehood, just that they are insulated from vexatious lawsuits for doing what the Constitution envisions. While the United States is exceptional in this regard, variations of the actual malice rule have been adopted in foreign and international law.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, Congress or the Supreme Court could choose to change the actual malice rule from *Sullivan*. Citing evolutions in media technologies since 1964, some scholars, as well as two sitting Supreme Court justices, have suggested reexamining the precedent.<sup>28</sup> The scapegoating of journalists by public officials only reinforces the notion that American society needs journalists to be supported and protected in their work. Citizens should not follow the course set by former President Donald J. Trump, who falsely called journalists the “enemies of the people” and tacitly approved physical attacks on journalists.<sup>29</sup> Trump also popularized the phrase “fake news,” but that phrase is meaningless. Trump used it to refer to any news or information about himself he did not like, but citizens should instead study the definitions and uses of propaganda (government persuasion, sometimes true and sometimes not), misinformation (unintentionally false), and disinformation (intentionally false).<sup>30</sup> The solution

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26. 376 U.S. at 275.

27. Edward L. Carter, “Actual Malice in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights,” *Communication Law and Policy* 18, no. 4 (2013): 395–423; Edward L. Carter, “‘Error but without Malice’ in Defamation of Public Officials: The Value of Free Expression in International Human Rights Law,” *Communication Law and Policy* 21, no. 3 (2016): 301–22.

28. Adam Liptak, “Two Justices Say Supreme Court Should Reconsider Landmark Libel Decision,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/02/us/supreme-court-libel.html>.

29. Martin Pengelly and Joanna Walters, “Trump Accused of Encouraging Attacks on Journalists with CNN Body-Slam Tweet,” *Guardian.com*, July 2, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/02/trump-body-slam-cnn-tweet-violence-reporters-wrestlemania>.

30. Congressional Research Service, *Defense Primer: Information Operations*, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10771>.

to the challenges presented by an increasingly cacophonous marketplace of ideas is not for public officials to selfishly attack journalists but rather for those officials to support the public interest in journalism. In a society struggling with political divisions, racism, foreign wars, and autocratic tendencies, what is needed is more high-quality journalistic scrutiny of government, not less.

In reality, while national issues are prominent, the most frequent and perhaps most impactful cases of journalists facilitating democracy and the search for truth happen in local communities. I have represented and consulted with dozens of local journalists protecting the newsgathering process from fishing-expedition subpoenas, seeking public records and access to public meetings, and warding off litigation. In twenty-five years of practicing, teaching, and defending journalism, I have seen a few bad apples, but I am struck by the altruistic public-service orientation of the overwhelming majority of local journalists. They are not in it for the money, and there is not usually a lot of that, anyway. Some like to see their names in print or their faces on TV, but that is hardly sufficient compensation for the long days, weekend assignments, and missed family events to bring relevant news and information to the public. Much of journalists' work makes our communities better.<sup>31</sup> They are not enemies of the people or intentional purveyors of false information. While journalists do make mistakes, the First Amendment allows for that, and the marketplace of ideas generally results in corrections toward truth.

Unfortunately, local news organizations are disappearing due to economic and other forces. The disappearance of local newspapers, in particular, has resulted in swaths of the country—known as “news deserts”—where no journalists are watching out for the public interest by monitoring government officials and activities.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, even as technology promised to democratize information, our democracy has suffered because technology innovations and ease of accessing information have not resulted in more and better local journalism. An emerging

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31. I recently represented several news media organizations by filing a friend-of-the-court brief in a state appeals court in a public-meetings case. We successfully argued that the government entity's improper closure of a public meeting undermined the public's trust and also harmed the government body itself because it could not be confident in its unscrutinized process.

32. Penelope Muse Abernathy, *The Expanding News Desert* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2018), accessed December 20, 2021, [https://www.cislm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Expanding-News-Desert-10\\_14-Web.pdf](https://www.cislm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Expanding-News-Desert-10_14-Web.pdf).

nonprofit funding model for local news may provide some relief.<sup>33</sup> Foundation funding is becoming an important source of media development and news reporting around the world, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars each year.<sup>34</sup> The result for consumers is a more complex news media landscape in which intentionality matters. Passive consumption of media content presented to us via prominent television, online, and social media platforms will not lead to an informed citizenry capable of governing themselves effectively. The next section discusses some ideas for practicing news literacy.

### Latter-day Saints and News Literacy

Journalists and news organizations traditionally have resisted attempts to define journalism because they fear doing so would lead to some valuable free-expression activities being excluded and thus subject to government regulation. Still, both domestic and international law have outlined functional rather than formalistic definitions of journalism for purposes of determining who is entitled to an evidentiary privilege for news reporting.<sup>35</sup> The Utah Supreme Court, for example, approved a definition of news reporter that centers on "gathering information for the primary purpose of disseminating news to the public."<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has crafted a definition of journalism focused on acting independently and in good faith to seek and disseminate truth in the public interest, particularly about justice and civic virtue in government activities.<sup>37</sup>

The ubiquity of cell phones with cameras and internet access means any person could carry out journalism at any given time if the person acts with independence and good faith toward the dissemination of truth relevant to the public. The person need not work for a news organization

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33. Rosalie C. Westenskow and Edward L. Carter, "Journalism as a Public Good: How the Nonprofit News Model Can Save Us from Ourselves," *Communication Law and Policy* 26, no. 3 (2021): 336–75.

34. Martin Scott, Mel Bunce, and Kate Wright, "Foundation Funding and the Boundaries of Journalism," *Journalism Studies* 20, no. 14 (2019): 2034–52.

35. Edward L. Carter, "Reporter's Privilege in Utah," *BYU Journal of Public Law* 18, no. 1 (2003): 163; Edward L. Carter, "'Not to Disclose Information Sources': Journalistic Privilege under Article 19 of ICCPR," *Communication Law and Policy* 22, no. 4 (2017): 399–426.

36. Rule 509(a)(1), Utah Rules of Evidence, December 2, 2021.

37. Edward L. Carter and Rosalie Westenskow, "Freedom of Journalism in International Human Rights Law," *Communication Law and Policy* 25, no. 2 (2020): 113–43.

or even have formal journalistic training, as evidenced by the 2021 Pulitzer Prize Special Citation and Award given to Minneapolis teenager Darnella Frazier for her cell-phone video footage of George Floyd's murder by police.<sup>38</sup> The inverse is also true. Employees of news organizations who are not acting independently and in good faith to disseminate truth in the public interest are not doing journalism. Most of what Lawrence O'Donnell and Rachel Maddow do on MSNBC and most of what Laura Ingraham and Tucker Carlson do on Fox News is not news reporting or journalism. Political commentary has its place but should not be confused with the core of high-value journalism. One America News Network on the right and Palmer Report on the left cannot be considered credible journalism organizations at all but rather political propaganda outlets. The *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times* all produce much high-quality journalism on their news pages, but the commentary on their opinion pages is not the core of journalism under my narrow definition. It goes without saying that most social media content is also not journalism likely to get us closer to fact-based truths.

Rather than categorizing news media organizations and rating their political biases, I think it is more fruitful to understand what constitutes news, how political actors attempt to manipulate news, and how consumers can find and support high-value journalism. Traditional American news values include timeliness, relevance, conflict, impact, prominence, and proximity. Scholars have observed that modern American journalism derived its character from the Progressive Reform era and thus tends to believe government should solve societal problems pointed out by reform-minded but detached journalists. Sociologist Herbert J. Gans observed that journalism exhibits upper-middle-class values toward order, moderatism, ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, and small-town pastoralism.<sup>39</sup> Gans also saw that journalists considered the president of the United States the most newsworthy person in the country and covered the president's every word and deed even though the judicial and legislative branches—as well as somewhat autonomous agencies in the executive branch—do much of actual governing. Journalistic content is also influenced by deadlines, routines, and other relatively mundane processes inherent in translating

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38. Joe Hernandez, "Darnella Frazier, Who Filmed George Floyd's Murder, Wins an Honorary Pulitzer," *NPR*, June 11, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/11/1005601724/darnella-frazier-teen-who-filmed-george-floyds-murder-wins-pulitzer-prize-citati>.

39. Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Random House, 1979).



the dynamics of life into a two-dimensional representation.<sup>40</sup> News consumers should also understand that economic forces, including ownership and advertising, may affect news content.<sup>41</sup>

Savvy political actors have long understood news values and how to manipulate them to get coverage in their favor. Some have gone so far as to say journalists have been captured by or subsumed within politics and government.<sup>42</sup> Trump, hardened over many years dealing with New York City tabloids, understood better than most that virtually any public attention—even if about unnecessary conflict and silly controversy—can be beneficial to a political actor. This is particularly true for the president of the United States, given the newsworthiness attached to that role. Trump's attacks on journalists served to undermine public trust and confidence in the news media, thus enabling him and his supporters to write off any news report that reflected negatively on him and to make Trump himself the sole source of truth.<sup>43</sup> Public officials, citizens, and journalists should protect values such as the rule of law, civil discourse, separation of powers, and respect for the constitutionally appointed role of the free press even when there may be personal or political advantage to undermine those values. Integrity can be restored, but only if journalists, political actors, and community members commit to acting on actual truth and not the alternative truths some conjure up.

High-value journalism today generally requires subscription payment. For decades in the twentieth century, high-quality American journalism was largely supported by advertising revenues. Editorial content appeared to be free. With the introduction of the internet, news organizations initially made their editorial content freely available online. Some legitimate news organizations still do. However, digital advertising revenues today pale in comparison to the print advertising revenues of the previous century. While there is freely available information content via social media and other digital channels, the content produced by

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40. Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

41. Melissa Tully and others, "Defining and Conceptualizing News Literacy," *Journalism*, March 31, 2021, 6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211005888>.

42. Timothy E. Cook, *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998).

43. W. Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston, "The Disinformation Order: Disruptive Communication and the Decline of Democratic Institutions," *European Journal of Communication* 33, no. 2 (2018): 122–39; Andrew S. Ross and Damian J. Rivers, "Discursive Deflection: Accusation of 'Fake News' and the Spread of Mis- and Disinformation in the Tweets of President Trump," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 2 (2018): 1–12.



reputable journalists generally requires subscription revenue. So, news consumers who want to support good journalism should prepare to do so with their wallets.

News consumers should understand that social media are not Holmes's marketplace of ideas. The stream of information we receive on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and similar platforms is controlled by algorithms that attempt to maximize our attention rather than to give us high-value information for community well-being. Additionally, we tend to separate ourselves on social media into echo chambers so even though we are constantly getting new information, we may not be learning or gaining wisdom. Also, the ease of sharing posts or tweets may detract from the need for careful selection and verification. In the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, it became clear that large social media platforms such as Facebook facilitated widespread sharing of misinformation and disinformation, viral hoaxes, conspiracies, and foreign propaganda campaigns.<sup>44</sup> Social media also seem to have played an important role in the radicalization that led to the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.<sup>45</sup> While digital technology can be a great tool, the editorial choices made by public-minded professional journalists rather than profit-oriented algorithms make print books, magazines, and newspapers still worthwhile. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said at Brigham Young University in 2004 that "diminished readership of newspapers and books" was "leading us to a less concerned, less thoughtful, and less informed citizenry, and that results in less responsive and less responsible government."<sup>46</sup> That trend has only accelerated since then.

Some universities have started to teach news literacy as a matter of general education, based on the belief that a critical skill for adults in any field of work is to differentiate truth from error in media content and act on truth. It is important to reiterate that the entire marketplace of ideas analogy since its inception in Holmes's 1919 *Abrams* dissent was tied to the prerequisite that people could identify truth, discard error, and make private and public decisions based on truth. In what some have

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44. Alexis C. Madrigal, "What Facebook Did to American Democracy and Why It Was So Hard to See It Coming," *Atlantic*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/10/what-facebook-did/542502/>.

45. Rebecca Heilweil and Shirin Ghaffany, "How Trump's Internet Built and Broadcast the Capitol Insurrection," *Vox*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/platform/amp/recode/22221285/trump-online-capitol-riot-far-right-parler-twitter-facebook>.

46. Dallin H. Oaks, "Where Will It Lead?" *BYU Speeches*, November 9, 2004, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/will-lead/>.

called a post-truth society, there is a basic need for retraining ourselves to identify and act on truth. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recognized this in the *General Handbook* revision of 2020 that includes a section titled “Seeking Information from Reliable Sources”:

In today’s world, information is easy to access and share. This can be a great blessing for those seeking to be educated and informed. However, many sources of information are unreliable and do not edify. Some sources seek to promote anger, contention, fear, or baseless conspiracy theories (see 3 Nephi 11:30; Mosiah 2:32). Therefore, it is important that Church members be wise as they seek truth.

Members of the Church should seek out and share only credible, reliable, and factual sources of information. They should avoid sources that are speculative or founded on rumor. The guidance of the Holy Ghost, along with careful study, can help members discern between truth and error (see Doctrine and Covenants 11:12; 45:57). In matters of doctrine and Church policy, the authoritative sources are the scriptures, the teachings of the living prophets, and the *General Handbook*.<sup>47</sup>

Stony Brook University in New York has created a news literacy curriculum that serves as a good example for the kind of wisdom we should develop. Core learning outcomes are to recognize the difference between journalism and other types of information; recognize the difference between news and opinion; recognize the difference, in news stories, between evidence and verification, on one hand, and assertion and inference, on the other hand; analyze news reports based on the quality of evidence and reliability of sources; and distinguish between news media bias and audience bias.<sup>48</sup> One academic study showed that the Stony Brook curriculum did result in more critical thinking and analysis about news but that further development about news media ownership ideology was needed.<sup>49</sup>

One other concrete thing news consumers can do is push back against online, verbal, or physical attacks on journalists. Female and minority journalists, in particular, suffer the brunt of these attacks. Verbal attacks

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47. “Church Policies and Guidelines: Seeking Information from Reliable Sources,” *General Handbook: Serving in the Church*, 38.8.40.

48. “Stony Brook University News Literacy Course Outline,” August 2017, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1moNqVNCsow6foY4lRmZfjBPOXODlgjz5Hm4MSSxcfbg/edit>.

49. Jennifer Fleming, “Media Literacy, News Literacy, or News Appreciation? A Case Study of the News Literacy Program at Stony Brook University,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 69, no. 2 (2014): 146–65.

are often a harbinger of actual physical violence against journalists, and worldwide since 2006, there have been more than a thousand journalists killed, with 90 percent of the crimes going unresolved.<sup>50</sup> No error or disagreement justifies threats or physical violence. A 2021 *General Handbook* revision reinforces this: “Members should avoid all statements of prejudice toward others (see 38.6.14). They strive to be Christlike to others at all times, including online, and reflect a sincere respect for all of God’s children. Members should not use threatening, bullying, degrading, violent, or otherwise abusive language or images online. If online threats of illegal acts occur, law enforcement should be contacted immediately.”<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the connection between journalists and members of the community should be strengthened and enhanced. Journalists are being encouraged to set up storytelling networks to build trust and support civic participation.<sup>52</sup> Individuals in the community could also reach out to local news reporters and editors to discuss issues of importance to them. Journalists and their audience members should build collaborations with mutual benefits. Journalists’ detachment or objectivity should not be allowed to get in the way of actually understanding and serving their community, and this means in part sharing the power to determine what is newsworthy.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

Elder D. Todd Christofferson’s parting words to the Inter-American Press Association news executives in 2017 provide a fitting conclusion here. He praised journalists for giving voice to the voiceless, shining light on the difficulties of the world, and bestowing dignity on people and their experiences. Giving voice to the voiceless can mean journalistic interviewing, quoting, and bringing attention to marginalized groups in society, and it can also mean reporting that strengthens fundamental constitutional and societal principles that cannot enforce themselves. These principles include things like the rule of law, separation of powers, federalism, individual rights, and popular sovereignty.<sup>54</sup> If a political

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50. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists*, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory>.

51. “Church Policies and Guidelines: Personal Internet and Social Media Use,” *General Handbook: Serving in the Church*, 38.8.19.3.

52. Wenzel, *Community-Centered Journalism*.

53. Wenzel, *Community-Centered Journalism*.

54. Justin Collings, “The Inspired Constitution: 5 Principles That Animate Our Country’s Governing Document,” *Deseret News* (based on talks by President Dallin H.

actor or party attempts to restrict voting access, for example, journalism need not hide behind false equivalencies and "both-sidesism" or "what-aboutism." Journalists should call it like it is so representative democracy can be preserved. Journalists do not need to be agnostic about the success or failure of our system of government.

Shining light on the difficulties of the world is a role journalists often undertake in pointing out the flaws and problems of government and society. I believe that is part of it but not all of it. Journalists should also be solutions oriented, helping their communities to resolve their problems. Certainly, journalists are not competent to solve all of society's problems, but the work of groups like Solutions Journalism Network demonstrates productive ways in which journalists can assist the community to improve itself.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the bestowal of human dignity is not something most journalists have likely thought about in those terms. But dignity is the foundation for international human rights law, and freedom of the press is a critical and fundamental human right because of its ability to contribute to the fulfillment of all other rights.<sup>56</sup> There is much good nonfiction narration or storytelling in journalism today that can uplift us through highlighting heroic and inspirational acts, events, and people.

Most importantly, good journalism can contribute to good government, but only if we as a society require and support it. Journalists make mistakes, but news consumers who understand how to identify high-quality news and act on truths they find there will be the key for representative democracy to continue to work. Otherwise, the hardened divisions of political tribalism fueled by untruths seem poised to throw out the ideals that have animated American government and life for nearly 250 years, all in the name of scoring political points. Let's not allow that to happen.

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Oaks), accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2021/9/17/22679928/the-inspired-us-constitution-5-principles-that-animate-our-countrys-governing-document>.

55. Solutions Journalism Network, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/>.

56. United Nations Human Rights Committee, "General Comment No. 34," September 12, 2011, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/GC34.pdf>.

## Cradled

Son, if my breath were mine to give.  
If I could spend more than a ragged few  
to welcome and say goodbye to you.  
If we knew your mother could live

without or with this choice. *Go in peace,*  
I sing, and *He has sent you here,*  
then come Himself achingly near.  
His hand upon my shoulder, I release

you with my blessing and my name.  
How, from so slight a father's touch  
can I miss you, miss Him, this much?  
Was He homesick too when the same

call to save sent His son away?  
*Hush little baby,* and your heart  
stops racing, stops. We start  
life over: His breath into our clay.

—Kevin Klein

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BYU Studies.

# The Role of the Article III Judge

*Thomas B. Griffith*

The Constitution says precious little about the role envisioned for federal judges in the new government that document created: “The judicial power of the United States, shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish. The judges, both of the supreme and inferior courts, shall hold their offices during good behaviour, and shall, at stated times, receive for their services, a compensation, which shall not be diminished during their continuance in office.”<sup>1</sup>

The framers’ brevity in writing that description may be one reason that there has been a vigorous debate over the scope and content of this “judicial power” since the founding of the Republic. (Indeed, that debate was a major feature of the 2020 presidential election campaign and led to President Biden’s creation of the Commission on the Supreme Court, on which I served.)

Determining a judge’s role under the Constitution is central to the successful working of the separated powers which are the hallmark of the government the framers created. Some argue that they are a more important guarantor of our liberties than even the Bill of Rights and the Civil War Amendments.<sup>2</sup> And yet we live in a time when the roles

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1. U.S. Const. art. III, § 1.

2. “Justice Scalia expounded on what sets the United States apart from other countries: not the Bill of Rights, which ‘every banana republic has,’ but the separation of powers.” Emmarie Huetteman, “Breyer and Scalia Testify at Senate Judiciary Hearing,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/us/politics/breyer-and-scalia-testify-at-senate-hearing.html>.

assigned to our public officials under the Constitution seem of less interest to people than whether those officials' decisions align with the citizenry's favored outcomes. We seem not to care as much about who decides what we want achieved—be it the president, the Congress, or the judiciary—as we care that it simply gets done!

In his 2020 book, *A Time to Build*, Yuval Levin bemoans the corrosive effect on civil society from this lack of interest in the roles we are called to play. As Levin sees it, we have lost sight of a question that is central to the success of the institutions that give life to civil society: “Given my role here, how should I act?”<sup>3</sup> Too many officeholders seem less interested in the role they are to play within the institution in which they serve than they are in using that institution as a platform on which to perform.<sup>4</sup>

From 2005 to 2020, I was one of the “Judges” on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, one of the “inferior Courts” that the Constitution authorized Congress to create. In this essay, I will use my experience to attempt to explain my understanding of the nature of the “judicial power” my colleagues and I were commissioned to use.

## I

Although it was far from a pleasant experience, the Senate's confirmation of my nomination as a circuit judge by President George W. Bush was smooth sailing compared to the tempestuous proceedings others have endured. For that I am grateful. In fact, I was surprised that I was not asked some hard questions, which in hindsight seem indispensable to the Senate's properly performing its constitutional duty to give the president “advice and consent” on his judicial nominations.<sup>5</sup> For example, I should have been asked my views on how a judge ought to interpret the Constitution (“Are you an originalist, a legal realist, a believer in the ‘living Constitution’?”), read statutes (“Do you favor Eskridge's ‘dynamic’ interpretation, or are you a textualist?”), and apply regulations (“Is *Chevron* deference an abdication of the judicial role or a properly deferential response to a delegation of legislative power from the Congress to the executive branch?”). I don't recall a single question along any of those lines. Except one.

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3. Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build: From Family and Community to Congress and the Campus, How Recommitting to Our Institutions Can Revive the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 168.

4. Levin, *Time to Build*, 33–34.

5. U.S. Const. art. II, §2, cl. 2.

That question came early in the process, even before the president had nominated me. I was invited to the White House to interview with Alberto Gonzales, counsel to President Bush, and several of his colleagues in the West Wing. The interview went well, and I was told afterwards that it would be helpful to my chances of being nominated by the president if I could show that I would have the support of the Republican and Democratic Senate leaders I had worked for as Senate legal counsel, the nonpartisan chief legal officer of the United States Senate.

I went immediately to see Senator Orrin Hatch, then the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, who, I was happy to learn, was willing to be an enthusiastic supporter. Next was a visit with Senator Harry Reid, then the whip of the Democratic conference, who was similarly encouraging. Senator Reid insisted that I meet with Democratic leader Senator Tom Daschle. I had come to know Senator Daschle well during my service as Senate legal counsel, and we both respected and liked one another. As is often the case when meeting with a busy senator, especially when not part of his planned schedule, I had to wait for a while in his office before seeing him.

Upon learning that I was waiting to see Senator Daschle, his chief of staff kindly invited me into his own office for a pleasant reunion in which we recalled projects we had worked on together. Senator Daschle briefly joined us, greeting me with a warm hug as he voiced his pleasure that I was under consideration by the president for an appointment to the D.C. Circuit. It was all very heady stuff. But there was another person in the room whom I did not know personally. He had not been on Senator Daschle's staff while I served the Senate. I did know, however, that he was the architect of the Democrats' strategy to filibuster some of President Bush's judicial nominees, including the nominee whose withdrawal from consideration created an opening for me.

When Senator Daschle left the room, this staffer started asking me questions to probe who I was and what I was about. It was during that conversation that the tough question came.

Predictably, he asked me which judge had most shaped my thinking about the law.

"John Marshall," I said. A safe answer, I assumed.

Then he added, "*Other* than John Marshall."

I paused for a moment. The answer was Robert Bork, but I hesitated to confess this to the architect of the Democrats' filibuster strategy. Bork was anathema to progressives. Many senators carried scars from his confirmation battle. With more than a little anxiety, I answered



truthfully. “Bork. Robert Bork. I agree with his views about the role of a judge. The judge is bound to follow the law as ratified in the Constitution, enacted by Congress, or promulgated by the executive with authority delegated by Congress. And the judge is to apply the law neutrally, not favoring an outcome just because it aligns with his favored political position or his own sensibilities about what is fair and just.”

Apparently sensing my anxiety, the staffer assured me that my answer was acceptable. “Don’t worry, Tom. We understand that President Bush gets to appoint conservatives to the bench.”

Emboldened by that response, I declared myself an acolyte of Bork throughout the confirmation process. It must have worked. I was confirmed by the Senate and appointed by the president.

## II

A few months later, I found myself, as a judge on the D.C. Circuit, being asked to render decisions in cases raising a host of issues I had never thought about deeply before. Some involved determinations that would affect only the litigants, such as whether the Federal Aviation Administration had wrongly stripped a license from a commercial pilot.<sup>6</sup> Others had a broader and more consequential reach, such as whether a dying child had a Constitutional right to use promising experimental drugs that had not yet run the gauntlet of the approval process required by the Food and Drug Administration,<sup>7</sup> the power of the police to use GPS to track the movements of a suspect without a warrant,<sup>8</sup> whether the Second Amendment recognized an individual right to use a firearm for self-defense at home<sup>9</sup> and elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> and the legality of the detentions in Guantanamo Bay.<sup>11</sup> As I worked through these and other cases, I began to wonder whether I should have read more than Bork to help me understand my role.

A federal judge can supplement his salary only by writing books and teaching classes at law schools. I love the classroom and so opted for that

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6. *Casino Airlines, Inc. v. NTSB*, 439 F.3d 715 (D.C. Cir. 2006).

7. *Abigail Alliance for Better Access to Developmental Drugs v. von Eschenbach*, 495 F.3d 695 (D.C. Cir. 2007).

8. *United States v. Maynard*, 615 F.3d 544 (D.C. Cir. 2010).

9. *Parker v. District of Columbia*, 478 F.3d 370 (D.C. Cir. 2007).

10. *Wrenn v. District of Columbia*, 864 F.3d 650 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

11. For example, see *Kiyemba v. Obama*, 561 F.3d 509, 522–27 (D.C. Cir. 2009) (Griffith, J., concurring in part); *Abdah v. Obama*, 630 F.3d 1047 (D.C. Cir. 2011) (Griffith, J., dissenting from denial of rehearing en banc).

course. Dean Kevin J. Worthen was kind enough to offer me the chance to teach at Brigham Young University's law school. He also generously allowed me to choose the courses I would teach. I decided to take this opportunity and read more than Bork. I have now taught a course on the role of the Article III judge every academic year since 2008, first at BYU, then at Stanford, and now at Harvard. At the beginning of the course, I tell my students that I started my service as a judge committed to Bork's views, but that I wanted to use this course to test whether that was a commitment I should keep. After grounding ourselves in Bork's writings, we bring on his sympathizers and challengers and study the history. We read the views of Antonin Scalia, Benjamin Cardozo, Stephen Breyer, Cass Sunstein, Ronald Dworkin, and other thoughtful judges and scholars.

It has been an exhilarating experience, but in the first few years, it was a troubling one. Prior to teaching the course, I had been persuaded by Bork's insistence that a judge is bound by the terms of the Constitution as they were understood by those who ratified them. A judge is not free to "update" the Constitution to make its provisions align with more modern sensibilities. We leave that to We, the People, through the amendment process. This view is called "originalism"—the idea that law has a meaning that is best captured by what the public understood it to mean at the time it was enacted. In this view, the role of a judge is limited to applying that meaning. Bork offered this view in contrast to those who saw the judge as the custodian of a "living Constitution," whose protections for political minorities expand over time through judicial decisions following the "arc of history."

To my surprise and concern, the history of the early years of the Republic seemed to suggest that the framers may have had something like that latter view of a judge in mind. After all, "the judicial Power" with which they were acquainted was formulated in England over centuries and involved judges trying to determine the just result, the fair disposition, the equitable outcome.

This information created something of a faith crisis for me. What if the framers' understanding of the role of a judge was far different from Bork's? Bork was no historian, after all. Indeed, his work has been targeted by withering criticism on that very ground.<sup>12</sup>

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12. For example, see the book review of Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America: The Political Seduction of the Law* (New York: Touchstone, 1990), in Bruce Ackerman, "Robert Bork's Grand Inquisition," *Yale Law Journal* 99, no. 6 (1990): 1419–39.

My faith was restored, however, when I discovered the insight of John F. Manning, now dean of Harvard Law School. In a clash of the Titans, Manning and William Eskridge of Yale Law School, wrote dueling (and lengthy) articles in the *Columbia Law Review* on the public understanding of the role of a judge in the earliest years of the Republic.<sup>13</sup> Their debate is required reading in my class.

Here is my take on that debate. Eskridge seems to have the better of the argument that the predominant view of the earliest judges in the Republic is that “the judicial Power” was of the same sort that common law judges in England had exercised. That power included the authority to go beyond the express terms of the law and update legislative acts to achieve what the judge believed was the purpose of the legislation. This is a view similar to those who argue for a “living constitution.” But Manning wins the day, I think, by pointing out that regardless of the type of judge the framers had in mind, the structure of government they created left no room for a judge who would make law. Instead, the Constitution created a government in which the determinations as to what is just, fair, and equitable are made by We, the People, through their elected representatives in enacted law.

The unelected, life-tenured judiciary created by Article III plays no role in making law under the Constitution’s scheme. The role of the judge is to apply law made by elected representatives. In short, even if the framers thought “the judicial power” under the Constitution would allow for the common law judges with which they were familiar, the structure of government they created left no oxygen for such judges. Instead, the framers created a new type of judge.

I am reminded of the cartoon from my high school civics class titled “How a Bill Becomes a Law.” (My children and grandchildren know its more recent formulation, the song “I’m Just a Bill” in the movie *Schoolhouse Rock*.) There were no judges in the cartoon or song—a silent witness to a fundamental point that undergirds the Constitution. The most pressing issue for the framers of the Constitution in 1787 was not which rights of individuals were free from government interference. That was an important question, to be sure, and was addressed largely by implication in the original Constitution and later by amendment. The most

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13. John F. Manning, “Textualism and the Equity of the Statute,” *Columbia Law Review* 101, no. 1 (January 2001): 1–127; William N. Eskridge Jr., “All About Words: Early Understandings of the ‘Judicial Power’ in Statutory Interpretations, 1776–1806,” *Columbia Law Review* 101, no. 5 (June 2001): 990–1106.

pressing issue for the framers in the summer of 1787 was “Who decides the rules that govern the nation?” and they were careful to create separate spheres of decision making for the three branches of the federal government.

In fact, judges who take it upon themselves to determine what the law should be by their own refined sensibilities rather than acting as faithful agents of the elected representatives do great damage to the form of government the Constitution created. The laws of the government the framers established would not be determined by a monarch or a prelate or a body of wise people. They would be created according to a complicated process that involved bicameral passage by different legislative bodies representing different regional interests and presentment to a nationally elected president. Under the Constitution, lawmaking is meant to be difficult, and it is a role reserved to Congress and the president, not judges.

The robed and unelected Article III judge who serves for life is an odd duck in the Constitutional scheme. We are reminded of that during every State of the Union address. The justices of the Supreme Court look out of place amid the partisan ballyhoo. That is as it should be. Judicial independence is a vital feature of the rule of law and is best achieved when federal judges act, as Justice Felix Frankfurter said they must, as “merely the translator of another’s command.”<sup>14</sup> The command comes from the law established by the political branches. The judge’s role is to translate that command to the case at hand, not to advance his own sense of what is just, fair, and equitable.

Which means that as a judge I would rule to strike down gun regulations I might favor as a private citizen because they run afoul of the Second Amendment’s guarantee of the personal right to armed self-defense.<sup>15</sup> Or that my citizen’s sympathies for children dying of leukemia couldn’t help me find a constitutional right for them to bypass the gauntlet for access to promising experimental drugs created by Congress.<sup>16</sup> Or that my interest as a citizen in finding out whether President Trump told his White House counsel to obstruct justice should not lead me to grant to the federal courts a power which they do not have to resolve a dispute between Congress and the president.<sup>17</sup> Without the guardrails on judges

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14. Felix Frankfurter, “Some Reflections on the Reading of Statutes,” *Columbia Law Review* 47, no. 4 (May 1947): 534.

15. *Parker*, 478 F.3d 370; and *Wrenn*, 864 F.3d 650.

16. See *Abigail Alliance*, 495 F.3d 695.

17. 951 F.3d 510 (D.C. Cir. 2020).

created by the Constitution's separation of powers, my decision in each of these cases (and others) would have been different.

### III

There are four discrete procedural steps to the making of an Article III judge. The president nominates, the Senate confirms, and the president appoints. But the Constitution also requires that no judge can take office until he has first sworn an oath. Oaths are mentioned three times in the Constitution. The words of the president's oath are set forth in the Constitution.<sup>18</sup> Senators must take an oath before participating in an impeachment proceeding.<sup>19</sup> And all state and federal officeholders, including judges, must take an oath to support the Constitution.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the first act of the first Congress created the words of that oath, which have been amended only rarely since then.

Today the Article III judge swears, with God as his or her witness and help, to "administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich, . . . faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me . . . under the Constitution and the laws of the United States,"<sup>21</sup> and "that I support and defend the Constitution . . . against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same."<sup>22</sup>

In 2018, there was an extraordinary moment that played out in the national media. President Donald J. Trump had criticized a decision made by what he called "an Obama judge." Immediately, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. rebuked the president, explaining, "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges. What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them."<sup>23</sup> To President Trump, judges were mere partisans whose loyalty, he assumed, should run to him. The chief justice would not allow such a demeaning view of the judiciary from the president of the United States to go unchallenged.

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18. U.S. Const. art. II, § 1, cl. 8.

19. U.S. Const. art. I, § 3, cl. 6.

20. U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 3.

21. 28 U.S.C. § 453.

22. 5 U.S.C. § 3331.

23. Adam Liptak, "Chief Justice Defends Judicial Independence after Trump Attacks 'Obama Judge,'" *New York Times*, November 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/21/us/politics/trump-chief-justice-roberts-rebuke.html>.

I am with the chief justice. In my fifteen years on the D.C. Circuit, I never once saw a judge cast a vote that I thought was tainted with partisan concerns. To be sure, we disagreed over how to interpret precedent, the Constitution, statutes, regulations, treaties, and contracts. Those disagreements are vital to a collegial enterprise. But never did I see a colleague whose agenda was to advance the political aims of the president who appointed him or her or the party to which he or she once belonged. Each of my colleagues took seriously the oath to be impartial.<sup>24</sup>

Is it fanciful to think that something as fragile as an oath can work to protect the structure of government created by the Constitution? Just such a skeptic sent me an email to that effect in the wake of a controversial opinion I wrote with which he heartily disagreed. The opinion had sided with the views of the Trump Justice Department in a politically fraught matter: “You old pathetic fool,” the email began. “Do you honestly believe the Founding Fathers intended Presidents to be constrained by oaths? I hope whatever [President Trump] has given you was worth the time you’ll spend in hell.”

Upon the advice of the U.S. Marshals, I did not reply to the email, but if I had, I would have said, “Yes, I really do believe the framers intended that officeholders, including judges, would be constrained by oaths.” And then I would have been sorely tempted to add, with a touch of self-righteousness, no doubt, that my personal views of the matter did not come into play in my decision.

I would then have quoted a famous passage from *A Man for All Seasons*, a dramatic portrayal of the martyrdom of St. Thomas More, the patron saint of lawyers and politicians, executed by Henry VIII because he took seriously the value of an oath. In this scene, the members of More’s family have urged him to arrest Richard Rich, who they suspect of ill intent:

Margaret [More’s daughter]: Father, that man’s bad.

More: There’s no law against that.

Roper [Margaret’s husband]: There is! God’s law.

More: Then God can arrest him.

...

Alice [More’s wife]: While you talk, he’s gone.

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24. Justice Stephen Breyer has said the same about his service on the Supreme Court: “Justice Breyer said he had not seen a decision influenced by politics in his 17 years on the court.” Huettelman, “Breyer and Scalia Testify at Senate Judiciary Hearing.”

More: And go he should if he were the Devil himself until he broke the law.

Roper: Now you'd give the Devil benefit of law!

More: Yes. What would you do? Cut a road through the law to get after the Devil?

Roper: I'd cut down every law in England to do that.

More: Oh? And when the last law was down—and the Devil turned round on you—where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—Man's laws, not God's—and if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (*Quietly*) Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake.<sup>25</sup>

I believe that the judicial oath requires a judge sometimes to give “the Devil benefit of law.”

Recently, I revised the way I begin our class. Now I start with the oath. We read about the history of the judicial oath, and then we parse its words. Next, we watch the scene from episode 5 of season 1 of *The Crown*, where the young Elizabeth hears from her father about the transformative power of the oath.<sup>26</sup> Then we watch *A Man for All Seasons*.

But the highlight of this section of the course comes with a visitor. Judge Jeffrey Sutton of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, which sits in Cincinnati, Ohio, teaches a course on state constitutions during the same term that I teach, and I ask him to come speak to my class. But it is not state constitutions that I care about, so when Judge Sutton finishes his lecture and leaves, I explain the reason for his visit. He is, in my mind, the model Article III judge because he kept his oath of office, and it cost him.

For years, thoughtful commentators had suggested that Judge Sutton would be an ideal appointment to the Supreme Court. He has the perfect resume, having clerked on the Supreme Court and been the solicitor general for Ohio before becoming a distinguished judge on an important court. He is an extraordinary scholar and classroom teacher with a winning personality. But Judge Sutton wrote the opinion that the Supreme Court overturned in *Obergefell*.<sup>27</sup> Not that he is personally opposed to

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25. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Drama in Two Acts* (1960; New York: Samuel French, 1990), 56.

26. *The Crown*, season 1, episode 5, “Smoke and Mirrors,” directed by Stephen Daldry, written by Peter Morgan, released November 4, 2016, Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/title/80025678>.

27. *DeBoer v. Snyder*, 772 F.3d 388 (6th Cir. 2014), reversed in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015).

same-sex marriage (I have no idea as to his views on the matter), but he did not think the Supreme Court's precedents would allow a circuit court to find that right in the Constitution. Judge Sutton also wrote an opinion upholding the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act.<sup>28</sup> Not that he favored Obamacare as a policy (again, I have no idea about his views on healthcare), but he did not think the Supreme Court's precedents would allow a circuit court to strike down this act of Congress. For those partisans who fail to see that the role of an Article III judge is to apply law as it exists and not to advance the political aims of partisans with whom they might agree as a citizen, Judge Sutton's principled decisions disqualified him from an appointment to the Supreme Court. Their misunderstanding of the role of a judge not only leaves the nation poorer but does great damage to the structure of government the framers created. And they do not understand the power of an oath.

Perhaps my email critic was right. Maybe human nature is such that we cannot rely on an oath to keep judges within the narrow lane the Constitution creates for them. But I am betting otherwise. To the framers, taking the oath was more than ceremony and ritual. It would transform the oath taker into a judge whose primary loyalty when performing the duties of his or her office was to the Constitution and the laws enacted by Congress and not to any other commitment, be it his or her faith, family, political views, the party that supported him or her, or the president who appointed him or her.

Remember the joke about the quarrel between two disputants over the proper form of Christian baptism? When one asked the other whether she believed in baptism by immersion, she replied, "Yes. I've even seen it done!" I believe in the power of the judicial oath to limit the role of the Article III judge under the Constitution because I've seen it done. By Judge Sutton. By my colleagues on the D.C. Circuit. By judges throughout the nation.

#### IV

One of Abraham Lincoln's favorite quotes was from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*: "Act well your part, there all the honor lies."<sup>29</sup> The wisdom of that exhortation can be applied across many activities of life. It is at the heart of Yuval Levin's plea for "hope and renewal" in a badly fractured

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28. *Thomas More Law Center v. Obama*, 651 F.3d 529, 549–566 (6th Cir. 2011) (Sutton, J., concurring in part).

29. William Lee Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 38–39.



America whose institutions are in desperate need of repair.<sup>30</sup> And it is central to understanding the framers' vision for the republic they created, but which they knew would be a daunting challenge to keep.<sup>31</sup>

The most fundamental freedom the framers created was the liberty to make the laws by which society is governed. The people make those laws through their elected representatives.<sup>32</sup> The role of judge in this system is important, but limited. It is to follow the law, not to make it, and to resist the temptation to replace the judgments of those elected by We, the People with his or her own sensibilities.

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30. Levin, *Time to Build*, 199.

31. Dennis Rasmussen, *Fears of a Setting Sun: The Disillusionment of America's Founders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

32. See Akhil Reed Amar, *America's Constitution: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005), 10.

# “Things Which Are Abroad”

## Latter-day Saints and Foreign Affairs

*Patrick Moran*

When the Lord instructed Joseph Smith in May 1833 to “obtain a knowledge of . . . countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man” (D&C 93:53), that counsel may have seemed incongruous to the young prophet. After all, the entirety of the revelation that preceded it dealt with lofty theological concepts of light, truth, progression, and grace, in addition to exhortations to make family and home life more in keeping with God’s will. The sudden commandment to learn about countries, kingdoms, and earthly law might have struck the twenty-seven-year-old Joseph as out of place, even though it built on a previous revelation that taught him to “be instructed more perfectly in . . . things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, . . . and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms” (D&C 88:78–79).

In both instances, the Lord’s instruction related directly to the accomplishment of his purposes—the “salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53) and preparation for effective missionary work (D&C 88:80)—and no doubt early readers of the revelations understood the counsel in this context. However, beginning in the twentieth century, the admonition to learn of “things which are abroad” has acquired a secondary implication to several generations of Latter-day Saints, an implication of conducting secular foreign affairs in a way consistent with their understanding of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Latter-day Saints and Historical Foreign Policy Questions

To appreciate Latter-day Saints’ past approaches to international affairs questions, it is helpful to define the ideological spectrum along which

scholars of international affairs define policy positions; the opinions of Latter-day Saints, like those of others involved in formulating, implementing, and studying foreign policy, will generally fall somewhere along this range.

At one end of the international relations spectrum is the *utopian* school of thought, which is optimistic both about humanity's ability to shape the world for good and about the possibility of peace through democratic governance. According to international affairs scholar Ray Hillam, this model emphasizes "how men ought to behave in international relations rather than how they actually do behave."<sup>1</sup> Scriptural support for such an optimistic outlook ranges from the Psalmist's declaration that humans are "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5) to Isaiah's prophecy that nations will "beat their swords into plowshares" (Isa. 2:4) to King Mosiah's assertion that "it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right" (Mosiah 29:26).<sup>2</sup>

Opposed to utopianism is the *realist* position, which is pessimistic about human nature and emphasizes interests and power as driving forces in nations' behavior over ideologies and benevolent impulses. As Hans Morgenthau, the founding father of the realist school in the twentieth century, summarized, "Nations, like men, act like beasts of prey driven by the lust for power."<sup>3</sup> In the scriptures, evidence of the realist position includes the Prophet Joseph Smith's statement that "it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (D&C 121:39).<sup>4</sup>

In practice, Latter-day Saints' positions on international affairs, like those of their contemporaries, have spanned the spectrum between the realist and utopian extremes rather than representing one or the other in their pure, theoretical form. No one hews entirely to one or the other of these schools of thought, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, like others, vary in the extent to which they apply theoretical constructs (even ones with which they are not familiar) to real-world situations.

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1. Ray Cole Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought in International Relations: Some Scriptural Perspectives," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 100.

2. See Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 100–102.

3. Hans J. Morgenthau, quoted in Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 100.

4. See Hillam, "Utopian and Realistic Thought," 102–3.

*LDS Foreign Policy Positions in  
the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

The earliest Church efforts to engage diplomatically with the outside world involved calling on world leaders to facilitate missionary work and defend the rights of the Saints in the United States against persecution.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the first efforts by a Church leader to officially make diplomatic overtures came during Orson Hyde's mission to dedicate the Holy Land for the return of the Jews. During Hyde's epic 1840–1842 journey (of which he spent a mere four days in Jerusalem), he traveled through modern Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, availing himself of opportunities to stop at American consulates along the way to seek letters of recommendation and support.<sup>6</sup> In general, Church members in the first half of the nineteenth century were preoccupied with spreading the gospel, ensuring the immediate survival of God's kingdom on the earth, and countering constant threats to its establishment; they were therefore unable to devote more than scant rhetorical efforts to matters of U.S. national policy. Further, at this early period, religious prejudice and misunderstandings meant that, even had they been inclined to do so, Church members would have been unable to devote time and resources to foreign affairs (beyond missionary work and their efforts as part of the Mormon Battalion).

However, even in the Church's earliest days, American Church members were conscious of the foreign policy questions affecting their country and expressed opinions on them that were largely consistent with those of their non-Latter-day Saint compatriots. Joseph Smith's 1844 presidential platform demonstrated a concern for the major foreign affairs questions of the day by advocating for joining Oregon (then disputed with Britain), Texas (independent territory in 1844), Canada, and Mexico to the United States, contingent on those territories seeking such union. The platform also called on "all the world" to unite and abandon artificial divisions, becoming "one great family" enjoying

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5. Robert S. Wood, "International Diplomacy and the Church: Wise as Serpents and Harmless as Doves," April 8, 2013, Brigham Young University Kennedy Center, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://kenedy.byu.edu/international-diplomacy-and-the-church/>.

6. David M. Whitchurch, "The Restored Church of Jesus Christ and the Holy Land: Beginnings," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2020), 18–33; Blair G. Van Dyke and LaMar C. Berrett, "In the Footsteps of Orson Hyde: Subsequent Dedications of the Holy Land," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 57–93.

“universal peace.”<sup>7</sup> Joseph was clearly familiar with the foreign policy matters affecting his country and was keen to apply his practical understanding to solving them.

Further, as historian Walter Nugent has argued, although the early Saints were rejected by American society and eventually driven out of U.S. territory, they remained thoroughly committed to the American project and what they and their contemporaries considered its natural implications. They took for granted then-current American ideals of westward expansion and America’s “manifest destiny” to spread from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts of North America. “There was never a wide separation between Mormons and general American ideas of empire,” Nugent writes, and Latter-day Saints were “strongly patriotic, expansionist, pro-imperial, [and] Manifest-Destinarian, from the start,” despite their ill treatment at the hands of other Americans on the country’s westward frontier and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

Following the conclusion of America’s westward expansion, from the time of the Spanish-American War (1898) onward, Church leaders preached against war consistent with the scriptural mandate to “renounce war and proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16), but they called upon members to support U.S. war efforts once war had begun. Consistent with the attitudes of many European and American contemporaries, many Latter-day Saints came to regard the First World War as a righteous effort to end war generally. And despite initial hesitation on the part of some Church leaders to publicly take sides in the early stages of the Second World War (see below), Latter-day Saints in the United States wholeheartedly committed to U.S. efforts following the attacks on Pearl Harbor. Even in the midst of the conflict, however, the First Presidency affirmed that “the Church is and must be against war. . . . It cannot regard war as a righteous means of settling international disputes; these could and should be settled—the nations agreeing—by peaceful negotiation and adjustment.”<sup>9</sup>

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7. Joseph Smith Jr., “General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States, circa 26 January–7 February 1844,” 10, 12, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/general-smiths-views-of-the-powers-and-policy-of-the-government-of-the-united-states-circa-26-january-7-february-1844/10>.

8. Walter Nugent, “The Mormons and America’s Empires,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 26–27, <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=mormonhistory>.

9. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “Message of the First Presidency to the Members of the Church,” in *One Hundred Twelfth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day*

### *J. Reuben Clark and the Dawn of LDS Involvement in U.S. Foreign Policy*

J. Reuben Clark is probably best known among Church members today for his long tenure as a member of the First Presidency, but before being called to full-time Church service, he enjoyed a distinguished career in international law and diplomacy and was the first Church member to achieve prominence as a representative of the U.S. government involved in international affairs. After studying law at Columbia University, Clark served as assistant solicitor and then was appointed solicitor in the U.S. Department of State by President William Howard Taft in 1910. Clark's efforts in that position resulted in an international settlement in favor of the United States that was one of the largest ever awarded up to that time. During World War I, he served in the United States Army Judge Advocate General's Officer Reserve Corps; his efforts prior to and following the war included assignments representing the United States government at numerous peace conferences, arbitration panels, and disarmament events. During the interwar period (1918–1939), before his call to the First Presidency, Clark was appointed undersecretary of state and U.S. ambassador to Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Clark's service in these two positions in particular provided him with key opportunities to represent his country and promote his personal vision of good governance to international audiences. During his short tenure as undersecretary (August 1928–June 1929), he was the second-highest ranking official in the State Department and was acting U.S. secretary of state in the absence of the two secretaries under whom he served, Frank B. Kellogg and Henry L. Stimson.<sup>11</sup> As U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Clark demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of varying cultural norms, despite his relatively limited experience living outside the United States for extended periods, writing that "Mexican ethical, moral, and legal standards are different from those in the United

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*Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1942), 94, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/97ba1680-e238-460f-a305-61461b9e1b04/o/95>.

10. David H. Yarn Jr., "Biographical Sketch of J. Reuben Clark, Jr.," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 237–40.

11. Lee H. Burke, "J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Under Secretary of State," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 396–98. As assistant secretary of state, Clark would have functioned as acting secretary whenever the secretary of state was on vacation, ill, or away from the office for any extended period. In such a capacity, Clark would have made decisions and provided guidance on routine State Department business that could not wait for the secretary's return.

States, but not necessarily lower, and at any rate controlling here.”<sup>12</sup> Clark advocated for the personal responsibility of Americans in Mexico, rejecting the argument he sometimes encountered from his countrymen that they were not subject to Mexican laws while south of the U.S. border. Mexican officials highly regarded Clark and feted him upon his departure more than was customary for a U.S. ambassador.<sup>13</sup>

Clark’s philosophy of international relations, cultivated over a lifetime of participation in foreign affairs, is a prime example of a Latter-day Saint developing an approach to foreign policy and then applying it to real-world developments. Although Clark’s views were heavily influenced by his historical context, and many today would disagree with his positions, he was consistent in his advocacy of certain foreign policy stances, and he remained engaged in policy debates throughout his life.

Clark was an untiring advocate of the isolationism that had largely characterized U.S. foreign policy since the days of George Washington. “I am a confirmed isolationist,” he reported, “a political isolationist, first, I am sure, by political instinct, next, from experience, observation, patriotism, and lastly, because, while isolated, [the United States] built the most powerful nation in the world. . . . I stand for the possession of, and exercise by our nation of a full, complete, and unimpaired sovereignty.”<sup>14</sup>

Clark’s isolationism extended even to U.S. entry into the Second World War, which Americans of later generations would come to consider the archetypal righteous crusade against despotism and oppression. He had no sympathy for the ambitions of Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan, but he saw the conflicts stemming from their aggression as alien to American interests and ideals, and he considered the natural position of the United States to be that of a neutral arbiter rather than party to conflicts between foreign powers. Inasmuch as the U.S. took sides, Clark posited, it could have no credibility as an impartial referee in the court of international opinion. Even after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ entry into the war, Clark lamented what he saw as his country’s reliance on military might rather than principled example. In 1943, in a statement that would no doubt resonate with many Americans in

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12. Martin B. Hickman, “The Ambassadorial Years: Some Insights,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 410.

13. Hickman, “Ambassadorial Years,” 409–14.

14. Marion G. Romney, “The Political Thought of President Clark,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 252.

the post-Vietnam and post-Iraq invasion eras, he lamented that "as the situation stands today, we of America have lost our own moral force in world affairs, a force which was once very great; we speak now only as our brute force may sustain us."<sup>15</sup> For Clark, America's position as a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14) entailed remaining above the fray and leading by example, rather than actively engaging in the battles then engulfing the rest of humanity.

Throughout his professional life, Clark was concerned with the question of how states should ideally associate with one another without entangling themselves in alliances that would invariably lead to lost sovereignty and unnecessary conflict. Despite his idealism, he adamantly opposed the post-World War I League of Nations and portions of the Treaty of Versailles because he saw them as unnecessarily harsh toward defeated Germany. In contrast, his adherence to the utopian principles of international relations described above were on full display in his efforts to oversee the U.S. implementation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, a 1928 effort to formally outlaw war as an instrument of state policy, and in his advocacy for the creation of a "World Congress" and "World Supreme Court" to resolve international disputes.<sup>16</sup>

The question of great-power relationships with other states formed the basis for Clark's most enduring contribution to American foreign policy: the so-called "Clark Memorandum" on the Monroe Doctrine (the longstanding position that the U.S. would regard European interference in the Western Hemisphere as potentially hostile to the United States). Written during Clark's tenure as undersecretary of state, the document essentially repudiated the Doctrine's Roosevelt Corollary, which previous U.S. administrations had used to justify American intervention in Latin America. Clark argued, in contrast, that the Monroe Doctrine applied only to relations between the United States and European powers, not to relations between the states of the Americas. If Washington, D.C., sought to justify interventions elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere, Clark famously argued, it would have to do so on the basis of national self-defense rather than appealing to the Monroe Doctrine, unless the disputes in question involved European powers.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Edwin Brown Firmage and Christopher L. Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 285.

16. Firmage and Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," 278–79, 282, 291–92.

17. Burke, "J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Under Secretary of State," 398–400.



*LDS Thoughts on Cold War Dynamics*

For J. Reuben Clark's successors, both in the Church and in international affairs, Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated worldwide foreign policy debates, and Latter-day Saints, like others, were concerned by the implications of the global confrontation, especially in the age of nuclear weapons. The Cold War and the nuclear standoff meant that, for the first time in human history, international rivalries were capable of destroying life on earth, with major implications for the Church's ability to do the Lord's work.

Although American Church members as a whole probably supported U.S. Cold War policy, Church leaders and thinkers were often outspoken in their criticism of foreign policy positions they considered inconsistent with the teachings of Christ. The destructive potential of modern military weaponry seems to have had a particularly profound effect on their thoughts. Remarking on nuclear weapons development efforts in 1946, J. Reuben Clark described them as "unholy experimentations," remarking, "We in America are now deliberately searching out and developing the most savage, murderous means of exterminating peoples that Satan can plant in our minds. We do it not only shamelessly, but with a boast. God will not forgive us for this."<sup>18</sup>

Thirty years later, President Spencer W. Kimball was no more sanguine—and no less forthright—about what he considered to be the inconsistency between national foreign policies and the doctrine of the Lord. He lamented, "We are a warlike people, easily distracted from our assignment of preparing for the coming of the Lord. When enemies rise up, we commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become antienemy instead of pro-kingdom of God."<sup>19</sup> For Kimball, foreign policy was clearly not a sacrosanct set of ideals, but a collection of manmade positions to be judged, like all things, against the doctrine of Christ.

President Gordon B. Hinckley was equally adamant about the divide between military might and divine assistance as a means of ensuring peace. He remarked in 1983, "We live in a world of pomp and muscle, of strutting that glorifies jet thrust and far-flying warheads. It is the same kind of strutting that produced the misery of the days of Caesar,

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18. Firmage and Blakesley, "Clark, Law, and International Order," 322.

19. Spencer W. Kimball, "The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign* 6, no. 6 (June 1976): 6.

Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler."<sup>20</sup> Notably, President Hinckley did not tie this "strutting" and glorification of armaments to one nation or bloc of nations in particular, apparently condemning equally all those who trusted in military might rather than in the God of Israel as the primary means of national salvation.

### *The Post-9/11 World*

Like responses to Cold War confrontations, Latter-day Saint responses to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror and Second Gulf War varied widely. Some LDS commentators argued, in conformity with a utopian approach to international affairs, that military responses to the attacks were equivalent to fighting fire with fire and that the only morally palatable option was a "non-violent, spiritually transformative approach to combating terrorism."<sup>21</sup> On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, others argued that war was an unavoidable reality in a fallen world and that only just military action could deter aggression in a world dominated by the "carnal, sensual, and devilish."<sup>22</sup>

In April 2003, a middle-of-the-road, common-sense approach to the national response to terrorism and aggression came from then-Church President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley, who during the 1980s had decried the "pomp," "muscle," and "strutting" of a militaristic approach to foreign affairs, now acknowledged that changing times required flexibility in national policy, especially where direct attacks were concerned: "There are times and circumstances when nations are justified, in fact have an obligation, to fight for family, for liberty, and against tyranny, threat, and oppression."<sup>23</sup> Far from glorifying war or violence, President Hinckley simply acknowledged that extreme circumstances sometimes required nations to act in self-defense.

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20. Gordon B. Hinckley, "What Shall I Do Then with Jesus Which Is Called Christ?" *Ensign* 13, no. 12 (December 1983): 3.

21. Robert A. Rees, "America's War on Terrorism: One Latter-day Saint's Perspective," *Dialogue* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 29.

22. Alma 42:10. For an example of this argument, see Robert M. Hogge, "War is Eternal: The Case for Military Preparedness," *Dialogue* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 166.

23. Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace," *Ensign* 33, no. 5 (May 2003): 80; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Times in Which We Live," *Ensign* 31, no. 11 (November 2001): 72-74.

## Current Latter-day Saint Involvement in the Foreign-Policy World

### *General Considerations*

The remainder of this paper will focus on the experience of contemporary Latter-day Saints involved in the world of foreign policy. It relies on the ideas of numerous professionals with decades, if not centuries, of combined experience in foreign affairs. It is important to note from the outset that, unlike President Clark, many Latter-day Saints involved in foreign affairs today are involved in implementing rather than making policy. As a political appointee, Clark was charged with formulating a U.S. approach to international affairs consistent with the views of the presidents under whom he served; in contrast, many of today's LDS foreign affairs professionals are civil servants who are (ideally) apolitical and committed to advancing any policy promulgated by the administration in power.

Several important considerations should be kept in mind in any discussion of modern LDS involvement in the practice of foreign affairs. First, and most obviously, foreign policy is the exclusive preserve of the state. Whatever the involvement of Church members in professions related to international relations, the Church as an organization has no responsibility for the formulation or implementation of the foreign policy of the United States or any other country.<sup>24</sup> Even in a hypothetical state in which all citizens were Church members, state institutions rather than ecclesiastical authority would be responsible for international affairs; until Christ's return, the kingdom of God on earth will be an institution that exercises moral, rather than political, suasion among its members, and the conduct of interstate relations will remain the duty of presidents and prime ministers rather than prophets and seers.

Second, Church members involved in foreign policy must reconcile their dual identities as Latter-day Saints and as representatives of the governments they serve.<sup>25</sup> These identities can complement one another but also present unique challenges. For example, as previously noted, Latter-day Saints are under scriptural injunction to "renounce war and proclaim peace" (D&C 98:16), and there can be no doubt about the superiority of peace over war from a scriptural perspective.<sup>26</sup> And yet

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24. Wood, "International Diplomacy and the Church."

25. See discussion below under the heading "Latter-day Saints and the Practice of Foreign Policy."

26. See Ray C. Hillam and David M. Andrews, "Mormons and Foreign Policy," *BYU Studies* 25, no. 1 (1985): 57–58.

all Latter-day Saints in the modern world live under the jurisdiction of a state, constraining their ability to insist on peace when those who are legitimately granted political power over them opt for military action.<sup>27</sup> Because Church members believe in "being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates" (A of F 1:12), they are duty bound to either support the state in its policies or, where possible and on an individual rather than a corporate basis, obtain a legal status (such as that of conscientious objector) that would preclude them from doing so.

### *Size of LDS Contingent among Foreign-Policy Professionals Generally*

In the early twenty-first century, many Latter-day Saints participate in the practice of foreign affairs. LDS diplomats frequently encounter fellow Church members even in far-flung postings. That being said, involvement in foreign policy among members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is almost exclusive to the U.S. context. To be sure, there are small numbers of LDS diplomats from other countries throughout the world, but their experiences differ greatly from those of their American counterparts. Foreign policy workers from other countries are frequently the sole Church member from their home country in their profession, making their experience a much lonelier one, at least as far as their religious lives are concerned, whereas American Latter-day Saints serving in the foreign policy sector are likely to cross paths frequently with fellow American Church members.

If the participation of relatively high numbers of Latter-day Saints is a largely American phenomenon, it is also a recent one. LDS officers in the U.S. foreign service were very rare in the 1950s and were still limited to probably less than twenty total in the 1980s, despite much larger numbers of Church members in the U.S. military. As recently as the early 1990s, the number of Latter-day Saints serving in the U.S. State Department remained small. Beginning around 2005, larger numbers of Church members began embarking on careers in the U.S. foreign service, and their presence has remained steady ever since.

Today, in the U.S. State Department alone, Latter-day Saints serve in positions ranging from undergraduate summer interns to ambassadors confirmed by the U.S. Senate. At one point in the recent past, there were simultaneously three Latter-day Saints serving as chief of mission (the highest-ranking official in an embassy) in three of the most challenging

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27. Hillam and Andrews, "Mormons and Foreign Policy," 58.

diplomatic posts for Americans. No one (including the United States government) knows precisely how many Church members serve in the foreign policy world, given that U.S. government employees are not asked about their religious affiliation, but one general indicator is the eight hundred or so members of the closed “LDS Foreign Service Families” group on Facebook.

Latter-day Saints are well represented in the U.S. foreign-policy apparatuses, then, but their numbers are not overwhelming. Among foreign-policy practitioners, the perception of large numbers of LDS colleagues probably arises primarily from the fact that few other groups in American society define themselves primarily by their religious affiliation. (The discovery that a diplomat is a Church member almost invariably leads to the question, “Do you know such-and-such? She’s a Latter-day Saint too.” This almost certainly does not happen among Presbyterians or Methodists or Episcopalians.)

If Latter-day Saints are slightly overrepresented, though, in proportion to their overall share of the U.S. population, it is almost certainly a result of the practice of sending their young people throughout the world as missionaries. The Church is one of the few sectors of American society that consistently dispatches large numbers of young people abroad, and although missionaries’ purposes are religious and spiritual in nature, they frequently gain valuable secondary experience with peoples, languages, and cultures. If other groups of Americans sent their eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds abroad in similar numbers, Latter-day Saints would almost certainly be less prominent as a subculture within the world of foreign affairs.

The number of Church members involved in foreign affairs in the United States is potentially a two-edged sword, however. Latter-day Saints find camaraderie and companionship in the presence of fellow Church members in their chosen profession, and they also provide exposure for the Church in the various parts of the world in which they serve. However, if they are unnecessarily vocal about the allegedly large LDS contingent in the U.S. foreign affairs apparatus, they can also give the mistaken impression that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an international organization with more members outside the United States than in it, is an American church or even an extension of the U.S. government. Such a perception could obviously do great damage to the Church’s evangelizing mission, especially were foreign governments to come to view LDS missionaries as representatives of

U.S. national power rather than of the Church. Thankfully, such a situation does not seem to prevail at present, but the possibility is worth bearing in mind.

### *Latter-day Saints and the Practice of Foreign Policy*

Whatever their numbers, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints whose professional endeavors involve representing their respective countries note that their faith presents important benefits and challenges in their day-to-day efforts. LDS foreign affairs professionals consistently acknowledge the importance of having a community of Saints to join upon arrival at a new foreign posting. This is the case for Latter-day Saints worldwide, but foreign affairs professionals are perhaps more keenly attuned to this benefit because of the frequency with which they relocate (typically every two to three years) and the dramatic nature of their moves (oftentimes to new countries and cultures with a new language). Colleagues of other faiths or of no faith sometimes comment on the advantage that Church members have in arriving in a wholly foreign environment and instantly finding a group of loving fellow Saints.

In addition, the group of local disciples with whom Latter-day Saint diplomats interact often provides the most legitimate window into a country that they or their colleagues receive. On a professional level, foreign affairs practitioners interact almost exclusively with a country's elites. These scions of a society's political, economic, media, and business sectors provide valuable insights into the functioning of their country, but they are often not representative of the "ordinary" people who make up the majority of any given population. These "ordinary" people are often just the individuals with whom Latter-day Saint diplomats interact in their wards and branches. Their meetings with government elites during the week allow for increased understanding of certain societal issues, but their gatherings on Sunday with fellow Church members allow them to see how a country's "real" population lives, works, and thinks. Sometimes, Latter-day Saints are the only foreign affairs professionals in an embassy who have friends from the regular fabric of the societies in which they serve.

Like Church members involved in any professional endeavor, LDS diplomats also face a variety of challenges related to the intersection of their religion and their work. Issues related to the Word of Wisdom come to mind quickly, given the frequency with which evening professional

gatherings (“representational” events) involve alcohol; senior diplomats are expected to serve alcohol at functions for which they host foreign dignitaries. Frequent involvement in events at which alcohol plays a prominent role, however, also provides faithful Latter-day Saints with opportunities to quickly establish their religious identity among both colleagues and foreign interlocutors, and both groups are generally accepting of Church members’ choices.

Other challenges are equally practical in nature. Frequent attendance at representational events can take a heavy toll on family life, particularly when there are small children in the picture, and families must decide how to balance professional and personal demands. Family religious observance can also be made more difficult when families with youth are posted to areas without strong youth programs; such young people benefit from friendships with young men and women from other faiths but miss out on opportunities to develop strong relationships with peers who share their unique religious values. This is not, of course, a problem unique to the children of LDS diplomats, but it can be a vexing issue for such families. Awkwardness can also result from the often-stark socioeconomic differences between expatriate Western diplomats and the local Church members with whom they worship, requiring careful judgment but also providing critical opportunities to serve.

On a more philosophical level, Latter-day Saints involved in the conduct of foreign affairs are at some point in their careers likely to be asked to implement policies with which they personally disagree. Diplomats are civil servants, after all, and they spend the majority of their careers implementing policies that have been developed by national processes in which they have no part. (And the level of commitment involved in climbing the corporate ladder high enough to participate in the formulation, rather than just the implementation, of policy often involves such extensive and consistent sacrifices of family time that it becomes unattractive as a career path for many.) Church members in the foreign affairs world, like those involved in other professional pursuits, must ultimately decide for themselves how they will react to the requirement to promote externally imposed mandates that they personally find distasteful at best or morally untenable at worst. Those who find that they cannot in good conscience advance such positions must be prepared to travel a lonely road, recognizing that their organizations, their colleagues, and their fellow Church members are unlikely to have the same redlines or support them in their dissents and that, in extreme scenarios, they may even be required to seek alternative employment.

### *Gospel Principles and the Practice of Foreign Affairs*

Despite the practical or moral conundrums that LDS diplomats sometimes encounter, the vast majority find that their faith provides key perspectives as they fulfill their professional duties, and that gospel principles affect their work in important ways. These principles do not, of course, directly determine LDS foreign policy practitioners' approaches to policy positions, which are determined by national processes rather than personal preferences, but they do determine how individuals fulfill their responsibilities in their day-to-day activities. The same is true, of course, for Latter-day Saints involved in any other profession.

The doctrine that all men and women are spiritual children of God—and therefore brothers and sisters despite national, cultural, and linguistic divides—is key to Latter-day Saint understandings of foreign affairs. Because work in and with foreign countries brings differences to the fore, it can easily tempt those involved in foreign policy to be dismissive of people with different outlooks and backgrounds. The teaching that all are children of God, which aligns with the Judeo-Christian Western insistence on the value of the individual, ideally serves as an added inducement to Church members to treat all with respect, to appreciate cultural differences rather than disparaging them, and to avoid “us versus them” mentalities that are dangerous in all walks of life and especially in international relations.

An understanding that all are children of God can also create tensions for LDS foreign affairs professionals. At times, foreign affairs work requires diplomats and others to “play hardball,” encouraging others to change their positions to align with the stances of the country they represent; such a requirement can be complicated by the knowledge that an adversary is a spiritual sibling and can become even more challenging in the case of national security issues where lives are potentially at stake. Acknowledgement of the spiritual ties binding all people can also cause heartache when national policy conflicts with the religious imperative to love and serve everyone; the 2021 hasty U.S. departure from Afghanistan and the abandoning of Afghans who had served the United States in that country for years provides one poignant example.

On a broader level, Latter-day Saint foreign affairs professionals may question whether a dichotomy exists between the nation-state system that shapes the world's political framework and the gospel requirement that all be considered children of God and potential brothers and sisters in Christ. As public servants, foreign affairs professionals necessarily privilege the interests and citizens of their respective countries above those of all others.



Latter-day Saints accept that “governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man” (D&C 134:1), but they may still question, on a theoretical level, whether a system of national interests and priorities is ultimately compatible with God’s plan for his children.

Setting aside such esoteric questions regarding the justification of the modern concept of the state, however, Latter-day Saints continue to serve in large numbers in foreign affairs professions, and the ethic of service for which Church members are widely known tends to characterize their efforts. Many LDS foreign affairs professionals originally entered the field because of a desire to be of service and to be able to respond affirmatively to the query, “Have I done any good in the world today?”<sup>28</sup> Practicing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are, of course, accustomed to serving wherever and whenever asked, regardless of the assigned field of labor, because their Church responsibilities come as “callings” issued by ecclesiastical superiors and not as a result of personal preferences. In fact, one senior U.S. State Department official, not a member of the Church, jokingly remarked that she could convince her LDS subordinates to accept challenging assignments by telling them she was “extending them a calling.”<sup>29</sup>

The LDS ethic of service does not go unnoticed at the highest levels of foreign policy. Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted that the U.S. foreign service “requires the highest regard for the United States and what it can be. It requires the highest commitment. . . . It requires a kind of selflessness that I associate with BYU and the community that BYU represents, the Latter-day Saints.” Rice further remarked that Church members were characterized by a “sense of how you go out into the world to serve—that what you learn and your intellectual pursuits are not just to be hoarded internally but are really to go out into the world. That’s how I would characterize people I’ve known from BYU.”<sup>30</sup> Rice’s high regard for the Church’s members and its flagship university are clearly founded in her perception that they, in the words of the BYU motto, “go forth to serve.”

Service, whether in a professional foreign affairs setting or in a Church context, necessarily implies Christian humility, an attribute that

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28 Will L. Thompson, “Have I Done Any Good?” *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 223.

29. Author’s personal correspondence with an LDS foreign affairs professional.

30. Brittany Karford Rogers, “A Diplomatic Life,” *BYU Magazine*, Winter 2012, <http://magazine.byu.edu/article/a-diplomatic-life/>.

can provide an important anchor for Latter-day Saints in their relationships with others, whether with colleagues in their countries' embassies or foreign interlocutors across the negotiating table. The gospel mandate to approach human interactions in a spirit of humility can be particularly important for those serving abroad in high-profile positions; the temptation to adopt an inflated sense of self-importance can be great when foreign affairs professionals (largely middle-class civil servants who would not be recognized walking down the main streets of their home towns) are constantly in the spotlight or the glare of the TV cameras. In such instances, gospel warnings about the perils of pride can serve as important sources of balance. In the same vein, cross-cultural communication is inevitably enhanced when those conducting it demonstrate humility rather than arrogance. The effective diplomat will constantly keep in mind the principle suggested by J. Reuben Clark: "In human affairs no nation can say that all it practices and believes is right, and that all others have done that differs from what it has is wrong. Men inflict an unholy tragedy when they proceed on that basis. No man, no society, no nation is wholly right in human affairs, and none is wholly wrong."<sup>31</sup>

A gospel-centered belief in the inherent value of human freedom and the righteousness of democratic governance also influences the activity of LDS foreign affairs practitioners. American Latter-day Saints involved in the foreign policy world may see particular value in defending and advancing policies inspired by the U.S. Constitution, of which the Lord described himself as the creator in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith. God's declaration that he "established the Constitution of" the United States "by the hands of wise men whom [he] raised up unto this very purpose" provides divine sanction for the principles of government contained in that document (D&C 101:80). In April 2021, First Presidency member and legal scholar Dallin H. Oaks distilled these principles into the following key considerations: the people are the source of government power; the power they delegate is best exercised in a federal system; the separation of powers among government entities allows for critical checks and balances; individual rights limit government authority; and government is by law and not the whim of individuals.<sup>32</sup> Given

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31. James B. Allen, "J. Reuben Clark, Jr., on American Sovereignty and International Organization," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (1973): 356.

32. Dallin H. Oaks, "Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution," *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 106–7, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2021/04/51oaks?lang=eng>.

the Lord's statement that "that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs *to all mankind*" (D&C 98:5, emphasis added), Latter-day Saints may see value in promoting these principles of democratic governance and human freedom throughout the world. And because similar principles are now enshrined in the written or traditional constitutions of nearly all the world's liberal democracies, LDS diplomats worldwide can be equally confident that their efforts to promote freedom and good governance align with scriptural admonitions in this regard.

A gospel outlook also provides Latter-day Saints involved in foreign affairs with an important understanding, sometimes difficult for their secular colleagues to fully appreciate, of the importance to billions of people worldwide of religion and faith. Latter-day Saints share such an appreciation, of course, with their colleagues who are believers of any stripe. As the West grows increasingly secular and consciously rejects the Judeo-Christian heritage that provides its cultural underpinnings, a legitimate appreciation for the role religion continues to play among the world's population, especially in the Islamic world, Latin America, and Africa, can be critical. Alongside other Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other believers, Latter-day Saints are better positioned to see how genuinely held faith contributes to the lived experience, including the foreign policy choices, of others. In this sense, Latter-day Saints and other religious adherents can help temper dismissive attitudes toward religion—especially minority Western religions—held by some of their colleagues and contribute to broader understanding of the importance of such issues as the right of conscience and religious freedom.

This appreciation for the realities of religion can be particularly important in the Muslim world, which stretches from Morocco in the west to Indonesia (the world's most populous Muslim country) in the east. The secular, highly educated Westerners who generally populate Western foreign services often consider religion a quaint, outmoded relic of an unenlightened past, so it can be challenging for them to appreciate how religion continues to inform every aspect of life for the adherents of Islam. Although Latter-day Saints do not view religion as appropriately influencing politics to the same extent as Muslims often do, Latter-day Saint participation in a belief system that makes heavy demands on their time and their worldview makes it possible for them to engage their Muslim brethren as helpful interlocutors rather than *de facto* critics.

Finally, Church members involved in foreign policy ideally benefit from appreciating the need for a charitable approach to differences of

opinion. They recognize that, just as citizens of the same country can disagree on policy matters while maintaining a patriotic dedication to their homeland, Latter-day Saints can hold different opinions on foreign policy without sacrificing their Christlike love for each other and for policy opponents outside the faith. President David O. McKay, for example, considered the Korean War justified as a means of containing communism, while his counselor, J. Reuben Clark, considered the conflict unconstitutional.<sup>33</sup> Despite these strongly held differences of opinion on a foreign policy question, though, Presidents McKay and Clark had no trouble working harmoniously in doing the work of the Lord.

At the same time, Latter-day Saint foreign affairs practitioners recognize that their personal preferences, including their agreements or disagreements with national policy, are not the positions of the Church, however doctrinally justifiable they may consider them. Although J. Reuben Clark believed his isolationist views were justified by Church teachings, he consistently took personal responsibility for his opinions and did not conflate his positions with Church doctrine.<sup>34</sup> Church members' and leaders' varying reactions to every major U.S. foreign policy issue in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries provide ample evidence of the need for charity in matters of international policy, as in all other aspects of life.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Even if they have not participated directly in diplomacy, Latter-day Saints have opined on foreign affairs since the dawn of the Restoration. They have recognized the implications of international developments, both for their own sake and for their potential impact on the work of the Lord. In the early twentieth century, very small numbers of Church members began participating directly in the foreign policy apparatus of the United States; J. Reuben Clark, with his distinguished career in international affairs prior to his call to the First Presidency, was the outstanding example of this early involvement by Latter-day Saints. Toward the end of the twentieth century and in the first decades of the twenty-first, LDS involvement in foreign policy expanded dramatically. That being said, a definitive history of Latter-day Saint involvement in diplomacy and foreign affairs has not yet been written, and there is much work that

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33. Hillam and Andrews, "Mormons and Foreign Policy," 63.

34. Allen, "Clark on American Sovereignty," 348.

remains to be done. Future scholarly efforts could examine the careers of specific LDS pioneers in the foreign affairs realm as well as how extensive LDS participation in domestic politics, particularly in the United States, has influenced foreign policy questions.

Further, it bears keeping in mind that there can be no “Latter-day Saint” foreign policy as such, even if LDS diplomats are influenced in their personal views by gospel principles. Foreign policy will remain the prerogative of the state, not of the Church, and until Christ’s millennial reign, the two will remain separate (although fruitful collaboration between the two power centers can and should continue). The nature of the interplay between Church members and national foreign policies, though, will remain another area on which future studies could profitably focus.

Finally, future widespread participation by *non-American* Latter-day Saints in their respective countries’ diplomatic corps will be key to understanding how the LDS experience influences the foreign policy world. Because the vast majority of Church members involved with foreign policy represent the United States, their experience provides a relatively limited window into the intersection of discipleship and diplomacy. It is to be hoped that, as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes increasingly international and as countries around the world see the emergence of multigenerational Latter-day Saint families, Church members across the globe will embrace the opportunity to advance their countries’ interests abroad. Such a possibility will provide endless material for future studies in this area.

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# “The Least of These”

Tinesha Zandamela

While imprisoned in Birmingham, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote of the struggle for civil rights: “I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>1</sup>

If we take an honest, hard look at our society, we can see seemingly endless examples of government actors creating, perpetuating, or ignoring a system that uplifts some while simultaneously oppressing or abandoning others. But if the government can create systemic *injustice*, it can surely implement reforms to create systemic *justice*; indeed, that should be among its primary goals! The preeminent attribute of good government should be that it diligently surveys the system it has created in order to identify and eradicate inequality, inequity, and injustice in that system. As Dr. King said, we are all “tied in a single garment of destiny,” which means that the whole system is broken if any part of our society is frayed or unraveling. And just like with a garment, the fraying in a society usually begins at the margins. For that reason, good government should work to create systemic justice by focusing on the marginalized—those referred to in scripture as “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40).

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1. Martin Luther King Jr. to C. C. J. Carpenter and others, April 16, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute, 2, [http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document\\_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf](http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf).

Government officials and agencies can make a difference in marginalized and neglected communities in many ways, particularly at the state and local levels. Oftentimes we focus so much on national politics that we overlook the potential of state and local government programs to do good in the community in creative and inexpensive ways. I first learned about the positive power of local government as a teenager when I participated in a county-run youth commission in my hometown. The commission was a youth-driven advisory board that provided diverse youth from across the county an opportunity to learn about civic engagement, gain leadership skills, and provide a generationally different perspective to the county council. Each year, the youth commission would study a topic, conduct research using a variety of methods, and prepare and share a report with the county council. This was important for the council; they needed the voices of youth from across the county to help them in their policymaking. The adult leaders of the youth commission supported us as we researched, planned, and prepared. Through their government service, I could tell that the leaders of the program cared about me and my fellow youth commissioners. Even when I didn't feel I had anything valuable to add, they encouraged me. I was a quiet kid, and I was scared of using my own voice. I originally joined the youth commission because I wanted to be more involved in my community, but at the time, I had no idea the impact it would have on my life. It was a formative experience that helped me find my voice and see how I could make a positive impact in my community. The youth commission showed me how government can make a difference in the lives of young community members.

I also saw the power government can have in our lives through the work my father did in my community. My father is a proud African immigrant who honors our Mozambican heritage while also celebrating his American citizenship through active civic participation. When I was in high school, he decided to run for a city council position. He was disappointed with some local government decisions, and he decided to get involved. He made it clear to me that, when you see difficulties in your community, you have a responsibility to fix them, rather than simply complain or lament them. When he was elected, he had opportunities to make changes in the community and be part of the decisions that influenced the lives of others. I learned firsthand that some of the most important and impactful public policy is debated and passed at city council meetings that are scarcely attended by the community. It is up to each of us to get involved in local government and in our community if we want to make a difference.

It was those lessons that spurred me to make my own run for the Provo city council in 2017, while still an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University. By 2017, I had lived, worked, and volunteered in the community around BYU for years. During that time, I had become keenly aware that many of my fellow Provo residents did not feel heard or represented by our city’s leadership. I knew I had the obligation to help but was initially unsure how best to make a meaningful difference. Emblazoned on a local sign is Provo’s motto: “Welcome Home.” As I contemplated the many challenges confronting my community, I resolved that Provo could not honestly claim to welcome *anyone* home until it seriously sought to welcome *everyone* home. When I learned that the city councilman representing my district would be running unopposed for the second consecutive election, I realized how I could fulfill the obligation I felt to my community. At that moment in time, running for elected office was the way for me to do it. So, at twenty-three years old, I filed to run for the Provo city council. There were certainly challenges and difficulties, but there were also immense learning opportunities. Most importantly, it was an opportunity to give back to a community about which I cared deeply. I found opportunities to listen to residents, to find commonalities with people with vastly different life experiences, and to celebrate our differences. It is said that successes build confidence, but setbacks build character; while I did not win that election, the experience reaffirmed to me that local governments have a unique power to amplify marginalized voices and meet the needs of those who struggle.

Around that same time, some of my BYU classmates and I noticed similarly unmet needs on campus. So, we decided to organize a student group, the Women of Color Club, to provide support and community for students whose difficulties lie at the intersection of race and gender. In cofounding BYU’s Women of Color Club, I learned from so many women how to show love and acceptance and how to foster a sense of understanding among those from different backgrounds. It had been difficult for many women of color to find community at the university. Individuals stepped up to make the club a reality on campus. Women of color and others pitched in to help. Even those who had good experiences on campus and didn’t long for that community recognized our needs and difficulties as valid, and they took initiative to be part of the solution. We were able to create a club that could foster a community for women of color, and it was because of the work of people who cared and wanted to work with a clear purpose and an understanding that



“whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” The Women of Color Club did not change policies, but its creation served to aid members of the campus community who were struggling and needed space. This is a model of what good government can and should do—create spaces for diverse groups to find community, celebrate their differences, and learn from one another.

After graduating, I worked at a Utah state agency, where I set a goal to develop a youth council program for the state of Utah. I remembered my own experience as a youth commissioner, and I wanted more young people to have the opportunity to feel that their voice mattered. After several months of work, the Youth Council of the Utah Commission on Service and Volunteerism began operating in 2019. My work with those inspiring youth taught me so much about the power of service and the influence that young people can have on their local communities. In conjunction with nonprofits, schools, and city councils, these youth, each in their own corner of the state, were able to address a specific issue in their respective cities. Again, local government had provided a program to engage with an often overlooked group (for example, young people) and empower them to improve their communities.

In addition to my job responsibilities, I also had opportunities to work with youth as a volunteer with Peer Court, a juvenile justice diversion program for youth in Salt Lake County. Employing a restorative justice framework, this program works specifically to help kids who have committed minor offenses in school. While the program is under the umbrella of a nonprofit organization, it has significant support from government agencies. It gives the offending youth an opportunity to counsel with their peers, make amends, and learn and grow from their choices. This program is another example of how government can serve to help offenders and victims in order to build stronger communities through kindness, love, and clear purpose.

All these experiences helped me understand that government action, while necessary, is only part of the solution; the other part is the willingness of community members to engage with those programs. Good government needs people to contribute in a variety of ways. It starts with being informed, voting in local elections, and remaining engaged between elections by attending community meetings and communicating our wishes to government officials. It also involves volunteering to serve the needs of marginalized or at-risk community members. Maybe it is through running a business that allows employees to do pro bono work while being paid by the company. It could take the form of

marching in a rally or even organizing an event to showcase art that highlights an important issue. Some people do research to find clear ways to solve problems; some people donate items to those in need. There is no shortage of ways to be involved when we actively engage with purpose to support the positive programs and initiatives put in place by justice-minded government actors. In thinking of purpose, I am often reminded that scripture commands us to "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees" (D&C 81:5).

Ultimately, there are so many different ways to be involved. It is through a clear purpose that meaningful impact happens, and our purpose must include service for the marginalized with a remembrance that "all are alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33). In working in the community, I have learned so much from others about how to ensure that this purpose is clear in impactful work.

It may seem that the work individuals do is not important or that you must be in a leadership position in order to create change, but that is not true. Good government starts with individuals deciding to be "anxiously engaged in a good cause," and it starts with focusing our efforts on meeting the needs of the marginalized in our community (D&C 58:27). Good government starts with us.

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Tinesha Zandamela is a native of southern Washington and a lifelong member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Throughout her life, community involvement has been deeply important to her, especially as a Black woman and daughter of an immigrant. She has directed a pedestrian advocacy organization and worked for domestic and foreign NGOs and government organizations. Tinesha is an honors graduate of Brigham Young University. As a student, she ran for Provo City Council in 2017 and cofounded the BYU Women of Color Club. Recently, Tinesha worked as a community engagement specialist for the Utah Commission on Service and Volunteerism and later as a victim advocate at a county Prosecuting Attorney's Office. She currently lives in Virginia and attends Georgetown University Law Center.

# On Being a Disciple of Hope

Jessica Robinson Preece

I am a political scientist, which means that I study patterns in politics. Most of the patterns in politics that I study are patterns of sexism. I work to accurately measure and carefully describe patterns of sexism in how political parties recruit candidates, how voters vote, how we deliberate with each other, or how Congress operates. Some of my work even identifies sexism in the methods other political scientists have used to study these topics in the past. On top of that, as a professor, I spend a significant part of my workday introducing these and other patterns of sexism to students. We talk about coverture in early America; the origins and consequences of hurtful stereotypes about Black women; intimate partner violence, sexual assault and abuse; pressures parents face as they balance work and home demands; abortion; and the gender pay gap. It can be heavy. It can be easy to want to look away or give up. This essay is an attempt to explain how I maintain hope in the face of so much heaviness. It is a testimony that sometimes I have to bear to myself.

Activist and writer Mariame Kaba is known for embracing the motto “hope is a discipline,” a phrase she first heard from a nun who was deeply engaged in addressing the problems of our world even though her faith was rooted in the next.<sup>1</sup> I meditate on this phrase frequently. Hope requires focus, concentration, and choice. I think about Abraham, “who against hope believed in hope” (Rom. 4:18). I think about how our

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1. Mariame Kaba, *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Naomi Murakawa (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 26–27.

scriptures describe hope as “lively” (1 Pet. 1:3) and “bright” (2 Ne. 31:20). I think about how our vision of creation is not a tidy *ex nihilo* one; it is one where “they, that is the Gods, *organized and formed* the heavens and the earth” (Abr. 4:1, emphasis added), which must have required exceptional discipline to act on their vision of beauty despite the chaos. And I especially think about hope’s role as the middle virtue of the faith, hope, and charity trio (1 Cor. 13:13).

Each semester, I do an activity with my students. I ask them for synonyms for faith—belief, conviction, trust, fidelity. I ask them for synonyms for hope—optimism, expectancy, anticipation, confidence. I ask them for synonyms for charity—love, kindness, generosity, selflessness. We talk about how faith in the Atonement of our Savior Jesus Christ leads to hope that God really does care about us and for us. As our faith grows, our confidence that God is committed to providing a way for us to heal from everything that limits, hurts, or harms us also grows. The hope that comes from believing in these practical implications of God’s love can open space in our hearts for charity because it lowers the risks associated with kindness, trust, and generosity.

Then I ask my students for antonyms of faith—fear, disbelief, distrust, doubt. I ask them for antonyms of hope—despair, pessimism, gloom, discouragement. I ask them for antonyms for charity—selfishness, hate, apathy, enmity. We talk about how fear makes us insecure, and that leads us to anxiety and pessimism. Ultimately, we turn to selfishness, apathy, or hatred as defense mechanisms. There is so little room for charity when we feel like we are all on our own.

What does this have to do with politics? While we may easily affirm the value of acting in faith, hope, and charity in the context of families, friendships, and neighborhoods, when it comes to politics, we often walk the pathway of fear, insecurity, and hostility.<sup>2</sup> We call it “being realistic” or “not being naïve.” We take the position that everyone in politics acts in self-interest and that it therefore follows that nothing good can come from it (a conclusion that, by the way, many democratic theorists dispute). Perhaps we adopt this perspective because even in the healthiest democracies, politics can be messy, contentious, slow, and disappointing. Perhaps politics has been the source of pain and suffering in

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2. I wish to be very clear that it is not always our own agency that points us down the path of fear and self-protection. For example, abuse and trauma can interrupt our ability to respond to situations with trust and hope. That is part of what makes perpetrating them such a serious sin.

our lives or in the lives of those we care about. Perhaps it's because we know politics isn't, ultimately, what will save us.

I don't think those are reasons to abandon the path of faith, hope, and charity, though—perhaps quite the opposite. Politics is a tool, and whoever uses that tool helps to determine what is built. Because we live in a democracy, there are some choices each of us will face, though we may not ever consciously engage with them. First, will I try to use the tool of politics? Second, if so, what will I help build?

There are all sorts of real considerations and barriers that people face as they make decisions about political involvement. Some face resource constraints. Some are disenfranchised. Some choose to concentrate their efforts outside of the structures of the state. It is not my position that people are morally obligated to expend all their energy registering people to vote or reading the news or fundraising for candidates, though I think we should seriously consider doing these things when we have the privilege to do so. It is my position, however, that the attitudes with which we approach politics have profound implications for ourselves and others. In particular, the approach I wish to focus on is the common glorification of cynicism about politics. Cynicism takes the view that earnestness cannot be trusted and that it is wise to be skeptical of all things that seem to be trying too hard. It tends to make us believe that it is foolish to hope for a better world and especially foolish to act on that hope. In my life, cynicism has been one of the chief impediments to engaging with politics (or any other tool of change) in a faithful, hopeful, charitable, and sustainable way.

Most cynics flatter themselves that they are being clever, savvy, and smart. In their contempt for sincerity and guilelessness, they see themselves as being too sensible to be duped. But in my experience, what is actually most seductive about cynicism is that it allows cynics to feel superior while also excusing them from actually having to do anything. Suspicion and mistrust allow the cynic to feel justified disengaging from the pain and suffering that is ever-present in the world. If people and politics are a lost cause, then one might as well just check out. The end of this road is apathy, an antonym of charity.

When cynics do get involved, I believe they have a hard time building good things. Most cynics flatter themselves that they are savvier than the naïve rubes who try so hard. But this is ultimately a manifestation of condescension and pride. (It is also often a manifestation of privilege—many people have no other option but to try hard for survival.) So when cynics engage in politics, are they likely to do so with the true charity

that comes from seeing each person as a full and complete agent rather than just the object of their scorn? No. Even if they intellectually understand charity, they are not practiced in the humility, curiosity, kindness, and generosity necessary for it. They are, instead, practiced in enmity. In short, cynicism derails us from the path to engaging with humans and the problems of humankind with charity.

How do we fight against the temptation of cynicism and reclaim hope? How do we simultaneously acknowledge the limitations of our ability to effect change while also continuing to try? As someone who has had to fight this battle her whole life, I have developed two strategies. First, I try to discipline myself to remember that I have covenanted to be a person of faith, hope, and charity. That means I don't get to indulge certain thought processes. I have to identify when I am deviating from my values and do my best to school my thoughts—or at least my behavior—to align with them. People sometimes characterize this strategy as putting one's head in the sand. But I see the bad very clearly. I have just chosen to approach it as a challenge to address rather than a foregone conclusion. I can (and must) be wise in these efforts, but I can't abandon them.

Second, I try to remember that cynicism is a defense mechanism. It's rooted in the reality that when you try, failure is a possible (or maybe even probable) outcome, and failure is very painful. The only antidote I have found for this is to acknowledge my fear and try to remember that God will take care of me. If I truly have faith that the Savior's Atonement can fix everything, I can have hope that I'll be okay no matter my embarrassments or inadequacies. That relieves enough insecurity that I can focus on approaching the world with generosity even in the face of uncertainty about the outcomes of my endeavors.

In a passage that I find deeply clarifying and moving, Rebecca Solnit writes,

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes—you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting. It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterward either, but they matter all the same, and

history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, uncertainty is filled with possibilities when paired with hope and her sisters. We often repeat the scripture that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), but until I began thinking in a disciplined way about hope, I found this conceptual construction confusing. I now understand the scripture this way: true faith leads to substantial action in the direction of the good things we hope for. As we act, we make the as-yet-unseen things we hope for much more likely to appear. Occasionally this happens through reason-defying miracles that come as answers to prayers, but more often it happens through hard work that is inspired, magnified, and sanctified by God.

So, how do I fight against the heaviness that comes from seeing the ugliness of the world? How do I fight the urge to opt out? I remember my faith in God’s perfect love—and its perfect manifestation, the Atonement—and lean into the hope that comes from this. Once recentered on this foundation, I find more space in my soul to take the risk of trying to make beauty out of ashes through patience, sincerity, and love.

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3. Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), xiv.

*Proclaim Peace: The Restoration's Answer to an Age of Conflict*  
By Patrick Q. Mason and J. David Pulsipher

Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship;  
Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021

*Reviewed by Kristine Haglund*

Let's start at the end.

The achievement of *Proclaim Peace* is particularly evident in its endnotes, which comprise balanced references to Restoration scripture, the Bible, Latter-day Saint authorities, and academic Mormon studies and peace studies literature. Scholars ranging from early Americanists like Bernard Bailyn to sociologist Max Weber and even geneticists like Marc Haber provide interdisciplinary contextual richness. There are references to thinkers from Catholic, Protestant, Latter-day Saint, Community of Christ, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu traditions. This broadly informed and carefully applied framework for reading scripture and exploring a key aspect of the restored gospel and Church history is a model of scholarship that distills important insights from academic work in a way that can benefit a broad range of readers. *Proclaim Peace* brings the theological resources available within Mormonism to bear on important questions about peace and justice, and it brings them into conversation with the abundant resources of the Christian tradition with which many Latter-day Saints are not yet familiar.

For scholars and readers from outside the Restoration tradition, the discussion that contrasts being subject to governments with “befriending” the law and the Constitution serves as an excellent introduction to the theological resources Latter-day Saints might bring to Peace Studies. The language of friendship comes from Joseph Smith’s assertion that “friendship . . . is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism,” with the power “‘to revolutionize [and] civilize the world’ as it ‘pours forth love’” (174) and from an 1833 revelation (Doctrine and Covenants section 98) that declares “I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land.” Pulsipher and Mason use this concept of a civilizing and revolutionizing



principle of friendship to interrogate the perennial dilemma of Christians who must struggle to balance their allegiance to the Prince of Peace with the necessity of existing in the context of earthly nation-states and economies. In Mason and Pulsipher's analysis, such friendship requires a complex and thoughtful sort of citizenship, which may require being willing to lay down one's life for the befriended state but also may require conscientiously objecting to the requirement to kill for it. When we engage in this careful and deliberate friendship with the political power of our home places, "we are freed from the blind love of dumb idols and instead can love our political communities as God intended them to be loved—as their friends. In offering our nations true friendship, we might then hold them accountable and assist them in becoming communities of care that protect the vulnerable and provide for compassionate and just sharing of goods and opportunities for all" (195–96).

For Latter-day Saint readers, two other sets of complementary ideas—individual peace versus societal peace and negative peace versus positive peace—may productively unsettle some of the habitual ways Church members have thought about issues of conflict and peace.

Negative peace is defined simply as the absence of conflict. Suppressing destructive conflict is a precondition for creating positive peace, but it is not itself a sufficient mode of peacemaking. Positive peace grows out of generative or creative conflict. Latter-day Saints are especially prone to feeling the need to suppress *all* conflict, perhaps because of Restoration scripture's injunction to avoid "contention" (3 Ne. 11:28–29). Pulsipher and Mason point out that "contention" is always used to describe violent and destructive conflict, and they offer readings of several scriptural passages in which conflicts are engaged in ways that are ultimately productive of deeper and more just peace. For instance, they cite the conflict between the Apostles Paul and Peter over whether and how to fully accept gentile converts. Paul reproved Peter for "hypocrisy" but continued to respect him as a pillar of the church in Jerusalem. As Mason and Pulsipher put it, "Christianity would emerge out of this tension between law and grace, God's ancient covenant and the adoption of new Israel, as articulated by strong and diverse personalities" (73). They also carefully read the Book of Mormon account of Ammon as a missionary to examine both episodes of contention and violence and the acts of loving service that eventually allowed Ammon to persuade and convert Lamoni and his father. Showing the application of this scriptural analysis to contemporary problems, Pulsipher and Mason point out that "the moral genius and tactical success of the American civil rights movement

came when African Americans began to confront the segregationist system with loving resistance—deliberately crossing unjust boundaries but refusing to strike back against the inevitable violence, to be beaten back into submission, or to hate their oppressors. They endeavored, in King’s words, to ‘create such a crisis and establish such a creative tension’ that it would compel the entire community, both Black and white, to confront its destructive tendencies and to repent” (92).

When the word *peace* occurs in Latter-day Saint contexts, it most often refers to the peace an individual may experience when living in harmony with gospel principles. The emphasis is on a *feeling* of tranquility and calm, even in the face of familial or societal conflict. And, like almost all feelings, this peace is individual and interior, experienced by one person alone. Pulsipher and Mason contrast this personal peace with societal peace, which Latter-day Saints often call Zion and generally consider to be an aspiration for the Millennium or later. Mason and Pulsipher insist that a “beloved community of those who collectively follow the principles taught by Jesus Christ . . . [is] an achievable aim for this world if individuals and societies embrace love, equality, justice, and peace as a way of life” (xvi–xvii). Societal peace requires vanquishing not only the direct violence of warfare but also the “structures of sin” (200)—cultural and structural violence—that perpetuate inequality. “They are insidious forms of sin that we collectively inherit, choose, create, and perpetuate; they represent deep alienation from God on both individual and societal levels” (200). While the individual experience of peace and comfort is one of the kinds of peace Christ promised, Mason and Pulsipher are at pains to show that Christ’s teachings and his incarnate suffering are intended to redeem us and bring us peace *collectively*, and not just individually. The “positive peace of Zion” is revealed in scriptural accounts of Zion communities: Enoch’s, Melchizedek’s, Alma’s, and finally, the people of Christ described in 4 Nephi. Mason and Pulsipher note that this fourth community “is characterized not only by negative peace but also by the durable and comprehensive presence of positive peace” (212), evident in the relationships of equality grounded in the understanding that each person was a precious child of God. The citizens of this polity were “truly free—free from the enslavements of caste, class, nation, race, ethnicity, neighborhood, profession, partisanship, ideology, and every other artificial divide that alienates members of the human family from one another” (213).

The authors draw powerfully on the imagery of the Atonement to characterize these two kinds of peace—individual and societal—as redemptive. They read the two sites of Christ’s suffering—Gethsemane

and Golgotha—as having twinned soteriological purposes: in Gethsemane, Christ made possible each person’s individual salvation and gained the empathy necessary to judge righteously; at Golgotha, his suffering on the cross worked as an act of nonviolent resistance, forcing those who witnessed it to recognize the evil being perpetrated by Jesus’s oppressors and bringing them back into moral harmony with their own consciences and with their neighbors. The cross thus points the way toward the redemption of society, the possibility of turning away from oppressive and sinful social structures toward a communal life modeled on the kingdom of heaven.

One final pair of complementary ideas is not explicitly articulated but does perhaps the most important work in this volume. Latter-day Saints are accustomed to thinking of their encounters with scripture as *exegesis*—an effort to extract the “correct” meaning from the text. Of course, this is always aspirational; we all bring unexamined assumptions and different experiences to the act of reading, and texts are not self-interpreting. Mason and Pulsipher’s modeling of conscious and careful *eisegesis*—reading meaning into the text as well as extracting meaning from it—offers tremendously hopeful possibilities for reengaging scriptural texts that have often been interpreted in ways that align more with imported political commitments or thoughtlessly received tradition than with the teachings of Jesus and the restored gospel’s strenuous and unstinting requirement to “proclaim peace” (D&C 98:16). By engaging scriptural texts that discuss the spiritual and intellectual apparatus of peacemaking, Mason and Pulsipher gently remind readers that they have agency, that not only the act of reading scripture but also the quality of that reading has moral consequences.

The productive tensions that enliven *Proclaim Peace* resist the tidy resolution of most endings. They are, instead, an invitation to begin doing the work suggested by the book’s title.

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*The Saints and the State: The Mormon Troubles in Illinois*

By James Simeone

Athens: Ohio University Press, 2021

*Reviewed by Brent M. Rogers*

The history of the Latter-day Saint experience in Nauvoo, Illinois, still has a great deal to teach us. It is not just the simplistic story of religious persecution and expulsion that is often rehearsed. In seven dense chapters, James Simeone, professor of political science at Illinois Wesleyan University, unveils a complex political milieu to explain the tension that led to the 1846 departure of the Saints from Illinois—and ultimately the United States. Relying on political theory and philosophy and his deep knowledge of politics in frontier Illinois, Simeone unpacks the paradox of a developing democracy, which he defines as the demand that the state produce popular justice for its citizens even while the state lacked the capacity to enforce the law. That inability emboldened groups within the civil society to take up the mantle of the state and impose their own group ideals in the place of a weak government. Simeone uses this lens of state power and its intricacies to understand the breakdown in group dynamics, toleration, and accommodation between the Latter-day Saints and the old settlers in Hancock County, Illinois. The state, meanwhile, did not fairly or actively manage the majority-minority relations. Instead, its inaction widened the gulf between the groups. In the end, in Simeone's telling, the Latter-day Saint difficulties in Illinois provide a useful example of failed governance.

*The Saints and the State* is an erudite contribution to the state-formation debate and the place of Latter-day Saint history therein. Simeone explains "how the Illinois regime came to be, dissecting its powers, and detailing how its uneven authority shaped and drove the Mormon troubles" (7). He reconstructs the operable ideas, interests, and institutions within the Illinois political regime to map the breakdown of toleration for Latter-day Saints and for law and order in Hancock County. Simeone traces the dynamics of the Latter-day Saint community's arrival

into and encounter with a developing democracy that had existing patterns, background norms, and ideals. The Saints, a socially marginalized minority group, had their own patterns, background norms, and ideals. Even still, the old settlers provisionally accepted the Saints as independent producers. According to established thought, the independent producer was an individual who was independent in politics and a productive contributor to society and the economy. This, Simeone shows, was the ideal in frontier Illinois.

However, within a couple of years of the Latter-day Saints' migration to Illinois, the old settlers came to view the Saints as violating that ideal. Simeone elucidates how the perception of the local majority shifted. The old settlers no longer considered the Saints as valuable independent producers as their rage grew over the Saints' political and legal choices. The old settlers believed the Saints to be under the sway of a powerful religious leader who dictated voting patterns and abused the law for his own short-term advantage. The old settlers no longer viewed the Saints as free decision makers, particularly in the political arena, and therefore felt they no longer held worth. Simeone deftly analyzes the rules of civic worth demonstrating how the majoritarian conception of worth changes and how those shifts influence not only political action but also social action. As determinations of worth were changing on the ground in Nauvoo and Hancock County, tension between the minority and the majority increased. While this tension increased, the state, as represented by Illinois Governor Thomas Ford, took a neutral stance in law enforcement. Ford's legalistic neutrality, Simeone explains, focused on the humanity all parties had in common but prevented action to deescalate the rising conflict.

At the crux of the problem was the pursuit of popular justice. The Latter-day Saints had found no justice for actions perpetrated on them in Missouri. They came to Illinois and built a political regime dedicated to popular justice from their perspective as a minority and designed for their own protection. Joseph Smith's ability to create a successful city-state, however, had disastrous ramifications. Outsiders initially tolerated the religious difference of Latter-day Saint refugees but came to observe Smith's consolidation of power as a replacement of democracy with divinity. Power politics brought a significant challenge to the status quo and to the old settlers' conception of their own worth as self-governing independent producers. Simone states, "Expulsion came because the Mormons challenged the Illinois way, the old settlers' claim to rule and recognize independent-producer worth on their own terms" (118). In

other words, the minority challenged the majority rules of worth. He demonstrates further that “what from the Mormon perspective looked like Joseph Smith’s effective use of the writ [of habeas corpus], prudent deployment of the militia, and adroit manipulation of the two parties looked to the Hancock settlers like a mockery of the law and a travesty of justice. The old settlers concluded they had lost control over their government and with it their self-determination” (203). To reinforce the established rules, the majority group, the old settlers, now sought their own pursuit of popular justice.

Seeing Smith as an outlaw and his followers as fanatics, non-Mormons in western Illinois banded together to strengthen and advance their worth and contributions, and to end the threat of this minority group. These group dynamics revealed the limits of toleration and accommodation in Illinois. As the groups polarized and became increasingly isolated, Illinois governor Thomas Ford remained focused on legal assessments and neutrally enforcing the law rather than on what actions the state could take to ameliorate the situation. His efforts, or lack thereof, were castigated by both Latter-day Saints and their unified opponents. Ford’s approach inhibited the state from exercising any authority in the escalating conflict. “When state authority is tenuous,” Simeone argues, “and a majoritarian story of peoplehood is under construction, groups matter greatly” (283). Each group—the Latter-day Saints and the old settlers—wanted their vision of civic worth recognized, but Ford’s neutral, idealistic approach was blind to the politics of civic worth. He could not satisfy the demand for popular justice from either the minority or majority perspective. Ford ultimately failed both groups, which led to the extralegal action that killed Joseph and Hyrum Smith and led to the eventual expulsion of the Saints from the state of Illinois.

Understanding the political theories and philosophies driving decisions and actions by actors such as Joseph Smith, Thomas Ford, and Thomas Sharp, *The Saints and the State* offers a more complete, albeit complicated and theoretically heavy, portrait of the Latter-day Saint experience at Nauvoo. While the general contours of this history will not be new to students of the Latter-day Saint past, the explanation of the political forms of the story will provide for most readers a new angle to comprehend it. In that way, the book is a fresh look at events well told. Beyond this contribution, Simeone’s book forces us to ask difficult questions that remain relevant in politics today. How do groups become polarized? How can groups improve toleration? When toleration breaks down, how equipped (and willing) is the state to protect

and aid minority groups? Is the majority willing to accommodate the minority and on what, and whose, terms? How can we see and understand the civic worth of groups that are different from us? How groups become polarized within the context of the state's capacity and power to act to enforce the law is well illustrated by Simeone's analysis of the history of the Saints' difficulties in Nauvoo. The tension over political machinations, government institutions, and law enforcement in Illinois provides a powerful example to see how the state works and how it can be improved. These are just a few reasons why the Latter-day Saint experience in Nauvoo still has much to teach us.

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*Stretching the Heavens: The Life of Eugene England and  
the Crisis of Modern Mormonism*  
By Terryl L. Givens

Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021

*Eugene England: A Mormon Liberal*  
By Kristine L. Haglund

Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2021

*Reviewed by Steven C. Walker*

Kristine Haglund's compact biography, *Eugene England: A Mormon Liberal*, is an illuminating contribution to the new *Introduction to Mormon Thought* series. *Mormon Thought* provides "short and accessible introductions" to those who have "shaped" the many manifestations of "Mormonism" (vii). Haglund situates England historically, as a liberal influence on a developing faith. Born 1933—the year of the deaths of old-style expansive theologians B. H. Roberts and James E. Talmage, and the same year J. Reuben Clark introduced more conservative influence in the First Presidency—Gene was caught in the collision between Mormonism's original enthusiasm for innovative theology and the increasing rigidity of maturing orthodoxy. That kind of conflict at historical crossroads makes for ideological fender benders for any person of conscience in any institution. It is a train wreck for a Mormon who honors his faith traditions and simultaneously respects God-given intellectual capacities. It can be a *Titanic*-versus-iceberg confrontation for one who loved his church and also valued personal integrity as much as Gene England. Terryl Givens's *Crisis of Modern Mormonism* looks more closely at the trauma of that liberalizing life and views its personal costs more tragically.

Haglund considers her biography overshadowed by Givens's, describes her work as a kind of warmup for Terryl's. That may be appropriate in the sense that her version of England's life analyzes many of the same historical elements in less detail and arrives at surprisingly similar conclusions for coming by such a different route. But benefits from *A Mormon Liberal* in addition to *Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism* go beyond the obvious advantages of condensation



factors like overviewing the biography in a third the space of the Givens version. The books look at the life through lenses different enough that their purposes contribute complementarily to fuller biography. As the dueling titles suggest, Givens sees England less in ideological and more in cultural terms, concerned more with Gene's often frustrated and more often frustrating impact on Mormon history, whereas Haglund dwells more on the intellectual life—her editors applaud her portrayal of England as “the pinnacle of liberal Mormon thought” (viii).

Those synergistic purposes of the two volumes can be seen in the organization of Haglund's book—not the usual chronology of biography as with Givens, but rather analysis of the subject's intellectual life throughout the final three of four sections. “Toward Integrity” explores the impact of Eugene England's influential essays on Mormon culture. “The Possibilities of Dialogue” examines the exchange of ideas England counted on to expand understanding and extend progressive vision in the Mormon community. Haglund's climactic chapter, “Reconciliation and Atonement,” considers the “productive tension” (76) generated by England's untiring quest for integrity, his intellectual mode of dialogue, and a life committed to the integration of radically liberal social causes with thoroughly conservative church loyalties. Givens, in his conclusive chapter, describes that same fraught Gene England lifestyle in its historical context as “Dangerous Discipleship.”

Terryl Givens's tragic *Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism* might seem to contradict the happier-ending Haglund thesis of England as *A Mormon Liberal*. But both biographies concur on the factual details of his life. Both certify the big picture as well: how wild a ride Gene's life was for an academic life, his narrative more engaging than many action movies. Moreover, both biographers have researched widely, and both know the subject well, Haglund through professional associations as *Dialogue* editor, and Givens through access to England's personal papers and through interviews with those who knew him best—preeminently Gene's wife, Charlotte, whose intimate and candid inside information contributes invaluable to the biography.

For all their agreement on fact, the biographers look through lenses different enough to provide binocular perspective, assessing as they do the significance of Gene's life from complementary vantage points. Givens compounds Haglund's public life of a provocative progressive with the soul-searching, psyche-searing personal side of the England experience. The Givens biography adds poignant personal depth to Haglund's portrait of a *Mormon Liberal*, looking in depth at the personal struggle to

swim in the historical riptides that embroiled England's beloved church. Bottom line, the perspectives reinforce each other. The driving concern for both biographers is how a keen-intellect conscience navigates the ideological whirlpools fomented when the norms of a beloved culture cramp individual conviction.

Haglund's brief introduction on Oxford's *Very Short Introduction* model is based on readily available, mostly published materials, whereas the Givens book is meticulously researched, both archivally and journalistically. Givens, working with a wider canvas and the rich palette of Gene's personal papers (plus superhuman research energies that generate nearly a thousand references in this concise study), takes the England history to deeper levels in another way as well. Reaching beyond the historical account of progressivism nipping at the heels of cultural foot-dragging, Givens ultimately discovers in Gene's personal story the dynamic story of us all, both as a church group transforming from ongoing historical influences and as loyal Latter-day Saints responding individually to the transformations of continuing revelation.

*The Crisis of Modern Mormonism* comes alive in its penetrating detail. Givens relives with us Gene's intriguing life—Idaho farming origins; marriage and mission to Samoa with his companion and new bride, Charlotte; Stanford political activism; the founding of *Dialogue*; and the genesis of those culturally compelling essays, a venue where Terry's thoughtful reading of the major essays can be as illuminating as Gene's own insightful writing. The rich biographical narrative probes the professional life—the St. Olaf's deanship, the Brigham Young University professorship, and the Utah Valley University Mormon Studies directorship—and surveys career challenges compounded for Gene by the demanding expectations of his father and of church-authority father-figures. The climactic crisis of *Crisis of Modern Mormonism* features Gene rising to condemn—"J'accuse!"—ecclesiastical secret policing, then dissolves into the tragic anticlimax of a perennially buoyant Gene soul-searching in his brain-tumor last days.

From Gene's straight A's in grade school (except the D in comportment) to terminal wonderings whether his God had forsaken him, Givens's portrait of Gene takes us so up-close-and-personal into the England experience that many readers may find themselves as I did moving beyond a tableau of life triumphs and tragedies to sharing personal elation and profound anguish. I knew Gene long and well, so I assumed this engaging biography was reminding me of moments we'd experienced together. But Givens's thoughtful penetration runs deeper than

a reprise of Gene's dramatic life. Gene England is a "to know him is to love him" kind of man, and Givens gives us the gift of introducing him to us personally. That illumination of the interior of this remarkable man could only be managed by one of the few minds in modern Mormonism capable of keeping pace with Gene's.

This is a remarkable biography. It is not only a carefully accurate and judiciously insightful account of a pivotal contribution to our cultural history. It is also a lens into our own souls. *The Life of Eugene England and the Crisis of Modern Mormonism* does for the Church what Sandburg's biography of Lincoln does for the nation—it not only shows who the man was but also shows us something of who we are because of him. Givens is as good as Sandburg is with Lincoln at making us feel how much Gene England affects our culture. Sometimes in profound narratives we can dive so deeply into a protagonist's immediate experience that we find ourselves swimming in cosmic significance.

Churches naturally tilt in hierarchical directions, and the Church of Jesus Christ is about as centralized as churches get. Yet the Church encourages individual responsibility with equal enthusiasm. The Latter-day Saint conviction that "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23) makes us so personally responsible for our own salvation that other Christians doubt we qualify as grace-based Christians. There is inherent tension in our faith between individual responsibility and institutional authority. Gene England made the most of that tension, committed as he was to a church in full charge of what most matters devotionally, yet committed unequivocally, too, to his own conscience. In the Church of Jesus Christ, we revere revelation. We believe prophets reveal the literal will of God to direct his Church. We believe with equal fervency that every individual in the Church has the right and responsibility to receive direct inspiration to direct personal life. Those divine and finite inspirations are so mutually confirming that when dissonance arises we can find ourselves in the whirlpool of truth-claims that Eugene England's life exemplified, in that "deep water" Joseph Smith was "wont to swim in" (D&C 127:2).

Both Givens and Haglund observe strong love-him-or-hate-him attitudes toward Eugene England. Some thought him saintly, generous to a fault and greathearted in his determination to urge us closer to the better angels of our nature. Others saw him as a self-serving academic secularist whose leftist tendencies and penchant for throwing theological cream pies in the faces of revered Church leaders made light of sacred matters. Perspectives among us on Gene as a person and as to the positivity of his impact on our culture come down almost to a

Dr.-Jekyll-versus-Mr.-Hyde Mexican standoff. The Mr. Hyde side of that seems to me mostly politicized, primarily because the Gene I knew was all goodhearted Jekyll. I thought him miscast as a Socratic gadfly and never knew him to provoke disagreement for disagreement's sake in any venue, least of all in the Church. He did not in fact seem to me much interested in politics, especially ecclesiastical politics. What I saw of his motivation was a dedication, so intense it could be myopic, to making the world, and the Church as its revered vanguard, better.

Not that he didn't do, as both biographers attest, some obtuse things from a political perspective. Most of us learn as early as first grade that it's not a good idea to encourage the powers that be to be better. But Gene didn't think in such political terms. Gene thought more in terms of making goodness prevail in the world—*Dialogue* to provide an ear and a voice for the disaffected among us, Food for Poland because even communists get hungry, the home he and Charlotte provided as a haven for outcasts that some in the community considered better cast out. I saw his persistent tilting at our cultural windmills, however futilely, as certification of his unfailing determination to make the world a better place. Gene was not a political man. He was not even a politic man. Gene was a genuinely good man.

A few decades back, I confronted some serious professional pressures, compounded by financial difficulties. When I alluded to my career-threatening challenges during one of our Friday tennis games, Gene offered on the spot to loan me enough money to see me through the problems. I couldn't accept the loan—way too generous, and I was not sure he could afford it any more than I could. But that largehearted gesture, sincere as everything I saw him do, was a huge help to me. Not just more than my net worth, it was more at the time than I thought my soul might be worth. A miracle to me, it was everyday commonplace for Gene England, characteristic of the find-a-way-to-make-things-better, faded-jeans idealism he lived so comfortably in.

Givens and Haglund demonstrate in virtually every line how well their subject is worth knowing. Deep in the heart of many a Latter-day Saint is an England-like all-in love of the gospel and, as Gene loved to say, of "The Church [That] Is as True as the Gospel." I doubt I am the only devotee to the Church of Jesus Christ besides Gene England with a passion to make Christ's church all it can be, true to the expansive legacy of the Prophet Joseph, true to the infinite promise of the Lord Jesus himself. I have not known a person better at trying to make that ideal real, at figuring out what is right and actually doing it, than Gene

England. Gene is the most authentic embodiment I know of both our down-to-earth practical pioneer realism and our high-risk skydiving toward divine ideals. I know it's impossible for a man that smart to be entirely without guile, but I never saw any in him. It's a testament to the thoroughgoing goodness of the man that he assumed all of us were as largehearted as he.

Whether you knew Gene as well as I thought I did, or whether you would just like to know what all the furor is about, these fine biographies are a happy chance to know Eugene England better—to clarify the legend, and even more illuminatingly, to know the man. Kristine Haglund's condensed biography vividly delivers the compelling details of his life and the central elements of his expansive life of the mind. Terryl Givens's perspective brings us close to one of the most unique personalities of the twentieth century—in Mormonism, in some ways the most unique. His biography may even persuade you, as it did me, that *The Life of Eugene England* stands, with all the dynamically faithful, at the crux of *The Crisis of Modern Mormonism*.

Whether we think his influence was for the better or for the worse, Gene changed what it means to be Mormon. Few of us have taken to his example for blessing our sputtering cars as faithfully as pioneers blessed their oxen. But I hope many among us will come to share the pragmatic spiritual cure Gene proposed for the challenges of a faith that in the information age for the first time since Kirtland is threatened with loss of American membership—the clarifying and cleansing cure of dangerous discipleship. Personally, I come away from these fine reflections on this fine life more dedicated to honesty in what I say, more selfless in what I try to do, more determined to try to tell the truth and enact it. Gene's greathearted life, and Terryl's and Kristine's vivid revelations of it, make me less anxious to defend the faith, more resolved to *be* faithful.

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Steven C. Walker, Professor Emeritus of English at BYU, distinguished himself at Harvard as the only MA candidate in history to have to write a second master's thesis because he lost the first one. His twelve published books include *Humor in the Bible*, *The Magical Prose of Middle-Earth*, and *A Book of Mormons*. Though others are eager to claim the coveted title, he's pretty sure he was Eugene England's favorite tennis partner.

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COVER

**GOOD GOVERNMENT (2021)**

LINDA HOFFMAN KIMBALL

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