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THE CHURCH IN A CROSS-CULTURAL WORLD

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S conference, "The Gospel, Professional Ethics, and Cross-Cultural Experience," is certainly an area of special concern for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its worldwide membership. It has special significance for Latter-day Saint professionals who are more and more involved in international affairs due to the ongoing process of globalization and the integration of markets, transportation, and communication systems as we have never witnessed before. In a way, this development enables countries, corporations, institutions, and individuals to reach around the world faster, farther, and deeper than ever before.

Many of us are crossing these borders of different cultures frequently. Elder Neal A. Maxwell would suggest that Latter-day Saint international professionals should have their citizenship first in the kingdom of God, but then carry their passport with all its consequences into the professional world and not the other way around. This also reminds me of a comment made by Elder Dallin H. Oaks after his call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that he wanted to be remembered as an Apostle who formerly was a judge and not as a judge serving as an Apostle.

The dictionary defines *culture* as the sum of ways of living, built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from generation to generation. *Cross-cultural* is defined as pertaining to or contrasting two or more such cultures, and the dictionary suggests that ethics is

the body of moral principles or values held by or governing a culture, group, or individual.

I commend all of you who are participating in the International Society. I have read several of your newsletters, published presentations, and papers from prior conferences. In my thinking, you are not only building links and bridges between nations and countries but also between cultures and traditions and, most important, between revealed truths and the world of your professional lives.

DIVISION VERSUS INTEGRATION

As I grew up in Europe following the Second World War, the political system then was symbolized by a single word—*division*—and by a name and a location—*the Berlin Wall*. It was the Cold War system. The globalization we are experiencing now is a different system. The world has become an increasingly interwoven place. Today, whether you are a country, institution, or a company, your opportunities come increasingly from who you are connected to and how you are connected. This system of globalization is also impressively characterized by a single word—*integration*—and by a name and a location—*www*, or the *World Wide Web*.

So in a broad sense, we have come from a world of division and walls to a system built increasingly around integration. This type of globalization is bringing the world closer together. Borders are coming down, and the rewards will be measured in better standards of living, less poverty around the world, more respect and deference for diversity of culture, and peace for all mankind. I believe we all agree that we still have a long way to go.

Globalization is facilitated by openness and trust. Yet openness is today considered as much a liability as a virtue. The tragic and traumatic impact of 9/11 and the Iraq War have brought increased focus on insecurity and uncertainty, which translates into extreme caution for anyone considering travel and investments. The emphasis is not so much on opportunities but on avoiding risks of any kind. We have also discovered in the past that some of the links and connections that made globalization work so effectively across cultures can also transmit

a crisis. The Asian currency crisis of the late 1990s was transmitted through a worldwide financial system that had become much more integrated than almost anyone understood. That made it possible for the crisis to spread quickly through Asia, triggering a huge economic collapse in Russia and coming close to bringing Wall Street to its knees.

In the recent past, a similar impact coming from Asia, this time not just financial, had huge worldwide ramifications for all walks of life. The SARS virus is easily transmitted through our open global travel network. The SARS virus can hitch an airplane ride and get anywhere in twenty-four hours.

We are also living in a cynical time. Trust in public institutions, corporations, and organized religion is declining. We read daily newspaper accounts and hear media reports that describe the decline of moral decency and the erosion of basic ethical conduct. They detail the corrupting influence of dishonesty, from small-time childish stealing or cheating to major embezzlement and fraud, child or spouse abuse, and misappropriation of money or goods.

A TIME OF GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

In this time of uncertainty, mistrust, fear, rumors of war, and political road rage, is there still hope for integration and openness across different cultures? Is there still room for virtues and divine principles?

Yes, there is, but we must understand that the axiomatic and eternal principle of agency demands that there be “an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) to ensure that meaningful choices can be made, not only between good and evil but also from among an array of righteous alternatives.

Moral agency refers not only to the capacity “to act for [ourselves]” (2 Nephi 2:26) but also to the accountability for those actions. Exercising agency is a spiritual matter (see D&C 29:35); it consists of either receiving the enlightenment and commandments that come from God or resisting and rejecting them by yielding to the devil’s temptations (see D&C 93:31). Without awareness of alternatives, an individual could not choose, and that is why being tempted by evil is as essential to agency as being enticed by the Spirit of God (see D&C 29:39).

We believe that every man and woman, irrespective of race, culture, nationality, or political or economic circumstance, has the power to determine what is right and what is wrong. In the Book of Mormon we read, “For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God” (Moroni 7:16).

Church leaders have counseled wisely about how to handle temporal matters to produce rich spiritual revenue. President N. Eldon Tanner taught, “Material blessings are a part of the gospel if they are achieved in the proper way and for the right purpose.”¹ And President Spencer W. Kimball said that money is “compensation received for a full day’s honest work. It is . . . reasonable pay for faithful service. It is . . . fair profit from the sale of goods, commodities, or service. It is . . . income received from transactions where all parties profit.”²

One reason for today’s decline in moral values is that the world has invented a new, constantly changing, undependable standard of moral conduct, often referred to as “situational ethics.” Now individuals consider good and evil adjustable according to each situation. Some wrongly believe that there is no divine law, so there is no sin (see 2 Nephi 2:13). This is in direct contrast to the proclaimed, God-given, absolute standards which we find in the Ten Commandments and in other revealed sources that represent the commandments of God.

For Latter-day Saints, obedience to divine imperatives and the pursuit of ultimate happiness are correlated elements in the maturing of human beings. We believe that this ethical maturity derives from experience, including religious experience; from rational and practical deliberation; from the mandates, both general and specific, that recur in scriptures; and from the counsel given by living prophets.

Divine laws are instituted by God to govern His creations and kingdoms and to prescribe behavior for His offspring. The extent of the divine laws that He reveals to mankind may vary from dispensation to dispensation, according to the needs and conditions of mankind, as God decrees, and as they are given through and interpreted by His

prophets. These laws are important to the individual and for the social aspects of the human family eternally. The scriptures teach, “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there [in the eternal worlds], only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:2).

Modern revelation brings the human existence to a clear, divine, and eternal perspective. Latter-day Saints believe in an ethic of divine approbation; to discern the will of God and receive assurance that one is acting under God’s approval are the ultimate quest of discipleship. This may be called Spirit-guided morality.

CHILDREN OF A LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER

Latter-day Saints believe that all human beings are God’s children and that He loves all of us. He has inspired not only people of the Bible and the Book of Mormon but other people as well to carry out His purposes through all cultures and parts of the world. God inspires not only Latter-day Saints but also founders, teachers, philosophers, and reformers of other Christian and non-Christian religions. The restored gospel holds a positive relationship with other religions. Intolerance is always a sign of weakness. The Latter-day Saint perspective is that of the eleventh article of faith: “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” (Articles of Faith 1:11).

The Church teaches that members must not only be kind and loving toward others but also respect their right to believe and worship as they choose. George Albert Smith, the eighth President of the Church, publicly advocated the official Church policy of friendship and tolerance: “We have come not to take away from you the truth and virtue you possess. We have come not to find fault with you nor to criticize you. . . . We have come here as your brethren . . . to say to you: ‘Keep all the good that you have, and let us bring to you more good, in order that you may be happier and in order that you may be prepared to enter into the presence of our Heavenly Father.’”³

On February 15, 1978, the First Presidency of the Church issued the following declaration:

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals. . . . Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters because we are the sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.⁴

In the words of Orson F. Whitney, an Apostle, the gospel "embraces all truth, whether known or unknown. It incorporates all intelligence, both past and prospective. No righteous principle will ever be revealed, no truth can possibly be discovered, either in time or in eternity, that does not in some manner, directly or indirectly, pertain to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁵

President Spencer W. Kimball set the tone in relationships with other religions and cultures. In a major address to Church leaders, he said, "The pattern . . . has not been to demand rights but to merit them, not to clamor for friendship and goodwill but to manifest them and to give energy and time beyond rhetoric." Citing a statement by the First Presidency, he said: "With our wide ranging mission, so far as mankind is concerned, Church members cannot ignore the many practical problems that require solutions. . . . Where solutions to these practical problems require cooperative action with those not of our faith, members should not be reticent in doing their part in joining and leading in those efforts where they can make an individual contribution to those causes which are consistent with the standards of the Church."⁶

"GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS"

The Church has a history of reaching out to other nations and cultures beginning immediately after the Church was organized again in April 1830. Early missionaries fearlessly taught the gospel in Native American lands before the Church was fully organized. As early as

1837, the Twelve Apostles were in England; in 1844 they were in the Pacific Islands; by 1850 they had been to France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the Middle East. This was during a time when the Church was facing severe persecution and extreme financial difficulties.

The Church has become a great cosmopolitan church. It rejoices in the tremendous growth of the work across the world. We are thankful for the deep faith and faithfulness of members of the Church. We all look upon one another as brothers and sisters, regardless of the land we call home. We belong to what may be regarded as the greatest community of friends on the face of the earth.

Church members now live in nearly every country of the world. Church congregations around the world will increasingly reflect the diversity of the nations in which they are located. There are members in at least 150 of the 230 countries of the world. Church members speak approximately 170 different languages as their first language. Therefore, the Church as a whole, worldwide, is becoming more diverse in terms of national, racial, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of its members.

Across all the different nations, we are guided and united by the ethical principles of the thirteenth article of faith: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (Articles of Faith 1:13).

This article of our faith is one of the basic declarations of our theology. It is an all-encompassing statement of the ethics of our behavior. There would be less rationalizing over some elements of our personal conduct which we try to justify with one excuse or another if we would closely follow this declaration. The restored gospel offers the more excellent way; it suggests we seek answers to life’s crucial questions from God, who is the source of all true wisdom. “Fear not to do good. . . . Look unto me in every thought” (D&C 6:33, 36).

Diversity by its very nature implies differences. Not all differences are of equal value; some differences can be very positive, and some can

be destructive. For example, Latter-day Saints, though we are “required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10), cannot accept and tolerate the gross evils that are so prevalent in societies today. We hear often of the need for people to be tolerant of differences they observe in others. We agree insofar as tolerance implies genuine respect for another, but we disagree if tolerance means acceptance of sin, which God Himself rejects. “For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:31).

Ethical decline is accelerated when individuals and eventually societies become indifferent to divine values once widely shared. Now is the time to stand up and be counted and not to step aside or duck. We actually have an obligation to lift people out of endangering routine and help them face the challenges of the future. Leaders and followers are both accountable to Him who gave us life. In a democratic society much is required of leaders and followers, and individual character matters so much in both.

The ultimate, key source for Christian behavioral ethics, and therefore for Latter-day Saints, is found in Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, which sacred message He reemphasizes by providing us with a second witness in the Book of Mormon. Based on those principles, a world community could be established where we are “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness” (Moses 7:18).

There is no question about it; we cannot separate ourselves from others. Our common interests are too great. The English poet John Donne said, “No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.”⁷

By crossing boundaries, continents, and countries, we are establishing contact with different cultures, religions, and traditions. Naturally some challenges arise. In many countries, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is viewed as an American church. Church leaders strongly emphasize that it is a universal church for all people everywhere, with a responsibility to share the gospel with all of God’s children. There is an increased awareness of cultural differences as well as a willingness to work within those differences. The Apostle Paul pronounced that all men and women are God’s beloved children. To the

Athenians, Paul said, God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26).

Nephi expressed the same vision: “[Christ] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . and all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Sadly, however, deep divisions of race, ethnicity, politics, economic status, and cultures still separate people throughout the world. These divisions corrode, corrupt, and destroy relationships between neighbors and prevent the establishment of societies where there is “no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Nephi 1:15).

We can be a positive influence as we meet the people of the world. Often people of other cultures look up to us, and it is important that we are not looking down on them.



Roger Loveless, *Brotherhood*.

It takes great courage to put away old hatred, divisions, and tribal traditions that constrict and confine people into a blind succession of destructive behavior toward others. Jesus, who knew perfectly the corrosive effects of such behavior, gave us a higher law when He said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43–45).

Today the power of the restored gospel brings to pass the kind of miracle Paul described to the Saints at Ephesus: "Without Christ, [we are] aliens, . . . having no hope. . . . [But] through [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:12, 18–19).

THE WORLD A GLOBAL VILLAGE

The world is becoming, to some degree, a global village with a diverse population. Even in the United States it is expected that by the year 2050 the so-called racial minorities will have taken over and will surpass in numbers the Anglo majority. The children and grandchildren of today's Americans will live in a society where everyone is a member of a minority group. Therefore, we must look beyond superficial stereotyping, which influences too much of our thinking about the worth of those who seem on the surface to be different than we are and sometimes leads us to judge them prematurely. We must learn to look at others through the eyes of love, not as strangers and foreigners but as individuals, fellow children of God, of one blood with us. The Apostle Paul taught, "By love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Becoming a worldwide religion in spirit as well as in organizational matters is much more than building chapels and translating documents. As we embark to experience the universal brotherhood we seek, all of us must be prepared to make some alterations in our views of one another.

We will need to increase our empathy and cross-cultural sensitivity and progressively discard prejudices incompatible with brotherhood. The different cultural and ethnical backgrounds bring challenges into members' lives.

We also need to make a clear distinction between our cultural and other preferences and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel has flourished and has been blessed and sanctioned by God under numerous kinds of governments and economic and cultural systems. There must be some accountability, of course, between these preferences and systems and the gospel. In political terms, one key is freedom: freedom unfettered by practices that limit the exercise of religious conscience or that relegate classes of citizens to servitude, bondage, oppression, or exploitation—freedom that is compatible with the gospel. Governments that actively foster freedom of conscience and opportunity and protect it for all of its citizens are our implicit friends. This is true whether they happen to agree with the political policy of the United States or not. This is not an American church. The Church is beyond the nation-state because no state is an official representative of God. So why is it to our advantage to make a distinction between the gospel we possess and our own political, economic, and cultural preferences?

A GLOBAL CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

To become a worldwide Church in various cultures and nations, the doctrinal truths of the restored gospel will be the guiding star, not our political background, not even some of the present Church programs. It is the Spirit that counts.

A diverse Latter-day Saint people cannot have brotherhood if one of its segments insists on being always right, all the time, on everything. The gospel is transcendent truth—man-made political and social institutions are not. In social, cultural, and political areas, we cannot expect that widely divergent people should adhere to the same specific perspectives. It is certain that some aspects of culture, ideology, and political practices are more compatible with gospel principles than others, and from that point they are temporally preferable, but only the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ constitute eternal truth.

Jesus Christ is the central figure in the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Complete salvation is possible only through the life, death, Resurrection, doctrines, and ordinances of Jesus Christ, and in no other way. “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26). Jesus is the model and exemplar of all who seek to acquire the divine nature. Thus, the Messiah’s mission to “preach good tidings unto the meek,” to “bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1; see also Luke 4:18–19) extends into our days and into the life beyond.⁸

Jesus Christ is the God of the whole earth and invites all nations and people to come unto Him. To worship Christ, the Son of God, and to acknowledge Him as the source of truth and redemption, as the light and life of the world, is the only way and the answer to all the challenges of our time (see John 14:6; 2 Nephi 25:29; 3 Nephi 11:11).

The charge and commandment given by the Savior Himself to His Apostles in the meridian of time applies equally to us today: “Go ye therefore, and teach *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: . . . I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20; emphasis added).

Did the early Apostles, then, live up to this charge? Their real test came when God answered the prayers of a Roman centurion from Caesarea called Cornelius, a just man who feared God and was of good report, and instructed him to send for Peter to teach and to baptize him. After initial doubt and resistance, followed by fervent prayer and willingness to embrace divine revelation, “then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34–35).

The people of the earth are all our Father’s children. They are of great diversity and many varied religious persuasions. They are our brothers and sisters. May we cultivate tolerance, respect, and love for

one another and stand up for the truth with sweet boldness to magnify the charge given to us by the Lord today is my humble prayer.

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NOTES

1. N. Eldon Tanner, in Conference Report, October 1979, 117–18.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, October 1953, 52.
3. George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others*, comp. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 12–13.
4. Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), frontispiece.
5. Spencer J. Palmer, “World Religions (Non-Christian) and Mormonism,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1589.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, “Living the Gospel in the Home,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 100; see also Richard P. Lindsay, “Interfaith Relationships: Christian,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:694.
7. Angela Partington, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 4th ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253.
8. See Topical Guide, “Salvation for the Dead” and “Spirits in Prison.”