



**President Gordon B. Hinckley has asked Church members to "be more tolerant, more neighborly, more friendly" while sharing beliefs with those of other faiths.**

Courtesy of the Office of the President

# The Only True Church: Boldness without Overbearance

*Eric-Jon K. Marlowe*

*Eric-Jon K. Marlowe is the institute director and seminary coordinator in Raleigh, North Carolina.*

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When I asked a pastor how members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints might be better neighbors, he suggested, “Becoming friends really helps.” Then, grimacing slightly and shaking his head, he continued, “But you know, I have to be truthful with you. . . . Regardless of how much they may work on the friendly area, they have those teachings that are so exclusive, and they are so offensive.”<sup>1</sup> President Boyd K. Packer said: “One doctrine presents a particular challenge. It is our firm conviction that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, as the revelations state, ‘the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth’ (D&C 1:30).”<sup>2</sup>

## **The Reality of One True Church**

Heavenly Father loves all of His children and in His wisdom has always provided them truth as He sees fit (see Alma 29:8). Simple observation readily confirms a good deal of truth in other churches. Yet the Lord has declared The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually” (D&C 1:30). The Church of Jesus Christ is not true because its members try harder than those of other faiths to please God; rather, the Church is true because Christ Himself established, authorized, and acknowledges the continuing work therein as valid and eternal. The Church is true because it possesses the necessary authority, ordinances, and true doctrine, all of which are bestowed by God.

President Spencer W. Kimball explained: “This church of Jesus Christ (nicknamed Mormon) is the ‘only true and living church’ (D&C 1:30) that is fully recognized by God, the only one properly organized with the authority to perform for him, and the only one with a total and comprehensive and true program which will carry men to powers unbelievable and to realms incredible. This is absolute truth. . . . This is not another church. This is *the* Church. This is not another gospel or philosophy. This is the church and gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> President Packer further explains: “The position that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church upon the face of the earth is fundamental. Perhaps it would be more convenient and palatable and popular if we were to avoid it; nevertheless, we are under a sacred obligation and a sacred trust to hold to it. It is not merely an admission; it is a positive declaration. It is so fundamental that we cannot yield on this point.”<sup>4</sup> There is but “*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism” (Ephesians 4:5; emphasis added).

Through personal revelation and meaningful experiences, Latter-day Saints come to know in a profound and personal way that this is Christ’s only true church. And, similar to Lehi after partaking of the fruit or to Enos after his conversion, we want to share the benefits of its membership with others (see 1 Nephi 8; Enos 1). Therefore, it grieves us to learn that our doctrine of only one true church can be offensive and confusing to others.

This article will examine perspectives and principles intended to help religious educators prevent the misunderstandings that sometimes surround this doctrine. By understanding how those of other faiths may perceive our doctrine and by reviewing principles that can reduce offense and confusion, we will be better equipped to boldly proclaim without overbearance our commitment to the doctrine of one true church (see Alma 38:12).

### **How Those of Other Faiths May View Our Doctrine**

President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “Let us never act in a spirit of arrogance or with a holier-than-thou attitude. Rather, may we show love and respect and helpfulness toward them [not of our faith]. We are greatly misunderstood, and I fear that much of it is of our own making. We can be more tolerant, more neighborly, more friendly, more of an example than we have been in the past.”<sup>5</sup> I conducted a study seeking to better understand public treatment of religion, and many participant comments confirmed President Hinckley’s concern that we are misunderstood and that to some degree it is of our own making. In the study,

nearly half of the forty-eight participants, without direct solicitation, brought up the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church. Participants were Utah residents from seven different faiths other than Latter-day Saint (thirteen church leaders, seventeen parents, and eighteen youth).<sup>6</sup>

Before I report study participant comments regarding our doctrine of one true church, some clarification may be helpful. First, no attempt is made to support or refute the accuracy of participant statements. Accuracy of their perception is not the subject of this article. Yet it should be noted that in our associations and in our efforts to find ways to better communicate our message so as not to alienate those of other faiths, their perceptions matter. Second, most study participants were respectful of the Church. Their statements here are not necessarily a denunciation of the Church and its membership as a whole but instead pertain mainly to the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church and the actions of individual members therein. The perspectives are meant to provide us with greater awareness and sensitivity to the challenges this doctrine can present to those of other faiths. It is anticipated that greater awareness will assist us in our efforts to help those we teach avoid unnecessary offense and clarify misunderstandings.

Several participants felt the doctrine of one true church was demeaning to their beliefs and was a cause of Latter-day Saint arrogance, superiority, and exclusivity and a cause of confusion. The participant perspectives that follow are taken from my dissertational study, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools: Perspectives of the Religious Minority.”

A common sentiment among study participants was that our declaration of one true church is demeaning to their religion. One parent explained: “If a fundamental tenet of the [LDS] faith . . . is that this is the only . . . true church, then inherent in that is that everybody else who’s not part of that is on the wrong track. And that just inherently sends the message that your church is not good.” Participants also connected our doctrine to a sense of Latter-day Saint arrogance and superiority. An Episcopal leader explained: “If I have a complaint about the LDS religion, it is that sense that there is only one true church. I understand how ‘tenet’ that is to the LDS Church, but on the other hand, it unfortunately almost always bears out in a certain sense of arrogance and superiority. It almost can’t help [it].” Study participants indicated three general ways this demeaning attitude or arrogance can occur: negative assumptions, demeaning religious discussion, and disassociations.

A number of study participants link our doctrine of one true church to the behavior and attitudes of some Latter-day Saints, who occasion-

ally make negative assumptions and ignorantly adopt stereotypes about the character and moral standards of their non-LDS neighbors. A young woman described a periodic Latter-day Saint reaction to finding out she is not Mormon this way: “You get the nasty glares of, ‘Oh, you must do drugs and all this bad stuff because you’re not LDS.’” In a more subtle description of the occasional Latter-day Saint assumption of lower morals in others, a minister said, “I’ve heard the comment, ‘Well you’re nice enough that you could be LDS,’ which assumes that most people aren’t very nice or not as nice as the Mormons are. So it’s meant to be a compliment, but it hurts.” A pastor described the arrogance he sees “built into” the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the only true church this way: “They can’t help but look at us and see an apostate.”

Discussion of religious beliefs is another situation in which participants occasionally connect our doctrine of one true church to sentiments of Latter-day Saint arrogance and superiority. For example, after describing a scriptural discussion his children had with Latter-day Saint kids on a school band trip, a father stated, “There was always this air of superiority by the ones who were a part of ‘the’ Church. And the result has always been a sense of being intimidated or put down.” A youth, somewhat annoyed with what he described as one-sided discussions, said, “Most [Latter-day Saint] people in my school, they really don’t want to hear about my religion. They just want to tell me about theirs.” Another youth echoed the responses of several participants when he said, “You can believe what you believe in, just don’t try to put anyone down for believing what they believe in.”

Some participants detect arrogance in our doctrine of one true church as it relates to the attitudes of some Latter-day Saints who disassociate themselves from peers of other faiths. One young woman described the reaction some Latter-day Saint peers have upon finding out she is not a member the Church as “shock or they just avoid you after that.” A leader of another faith said, “Some of the [Latter-day Saint] kids always feel that they should not lower themselves to play with Methodists and that is a great sadness. . . . [Our] kids don’t stop to think about . . . belief patterns. . . . All they know is that suddenly I am not good enough to play with Suzie down the street.”

In addition to expressing perceptions that Latter-day Saints can be demeaning and arrogant, a few study participants indicated that our doctrine of one true church suggests exclusivity and elitism in God’s dealings with His children. As evidence, some participants pointed directly to our scriptural account of the First Vision, specifically to Joseph Smith—History 1:19. A leader who paraphrased from this

account said, “You’re the only true . . . church, and all these other churches can’t get along and their beliefs are an abomination.” To which he added, “That’s really part of the exclusive [Latter-day Saint] mind-set that sometimes you see . . . and not on purpose necessarily, but it happens.” The extreme of this assumption is that Latter-day Saints are the only ones who can please God or have real access to His love and concern. A personal experience may further illustrate this. While attending a conference, a woman, upon learning I was a Latter-day Saint, asked if I really believed that my religion was the only true church. Sensing her aversion, I explained my affirmative response with some care. She replied to the effect, “Do you really mean to tell me that God loves you more than He does me?” She misinterpreted our doctrine of one true church as an exclusion of all others from God’s love and approval. To her, our doctrine conveyed a God of prejudice.

Finally, a few study participants expressed feelings of confusion in connection with our doctrine of the one true church. A Baptist leader posed the question, “Do you [Latter-day Saints] emphasize the unity, or do you realize the exclusivity?” The leader further explained it this way: “I have a presentation . . . called, *choose a hand*. It’s basically . . . that the LDS Church and community presents two hands and says, choose one. . . . Choose the right hand and they say, ‘Well, we’re Christians, you’re Christians, we’re all Christians, we believe in Jesus, we believe in God, we believe in family, and we believe in good values so won’t you accept us?’ And you say, ‘Okay, well what’s in the other hand?’ And they [Latter-day Saints] say, ‘We’re the only true church; all the churches are wrong.’ . . . And the issue is, which hand do we deal with? . . . That is confusing to us.”

Before proceeding, perhaps a caution and another clarification are worth noting. When information is gathered and placed in a concentrated format, such as has been done here, the issue may have a tendency to appear larger than it really is. This has simply been an attempt to provide a range of views that those of other faiths *may* have regarding our doctrine of one true church. It should also be noted that a couple of study participants suggested that the sporadic challenges they associate with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of one true church are more of an issue to those of other faiths living in communities containing a Latter-day Saint majority. Yet President Packer made no distinction between the percentage of Latter-day Saint members in a community when he said, “This doctrine often generates resistance and repels the casual investigator.”<sup>7</sup>

In summary, three general misunderstandings regarding our doctrine of one true church seem to emerge in the comments partici-

pants made. First, this doctrine may on occasion incorrectly suggest to Latter-day Saints and may convey to those of other faiths the idea that other churches have little or nothing of worth to offer. Second, some members of other faiths as well as some Latter-day Saints may mistakenly view this doctrine as ascribing exclusiveness to God's love and concern for His children. This may lead some Latter-day Saints to assume they are more righteous than others based solely on their membership in Christ's true church, while on the flip side it may engender a perception of Latter-day Saint arrogance, or even prejudice, toward those of other faiths. Third, membership in Christ's true church does not excuse or exclude Latter-day Saints from charitable feelings toward and meaningful associations with those of other faiths. Nor does it exclude Latter-day Saints from joining with our brothers and sisters of other faiths in efforts to promote shared values. It is wrong to limit association with those of other faiths based on this doctrine. With these perspectives and misunderstandings in mind, how can we as religious educators help curtail such misguided views and actions?

### **Principles That Help Prevent Misunderstanding**

Characteristically encouraging tolerance, President Hinckley said: "We can be a little more tolerant and friendly to those not of our faith, going out of our way to show our respect for them. We cannot afford to be arrogant or self-righteous. It is our obligation to reach out in helpfulness, not only to our own but to all others as well. Their interest in and respect for this Church will increase as we do so."<sup>8</sup> A number of principles, if understood and lived, will reduce the misunderstandings surrounding our doctrine of one true church. In accordance with the perspectives provided above and President Hinckley's direction, several antidotes to misunderstanding follow. These include understanding that God's plan is universal, acknowledging truth and goodness in other faiths, avoiding undue judgment, avoiding contention, and complying with the Golden Rule.

*God's plan is universal.* Often misunderstandings that surround our doctrine of one true church have their roots in an inaccurate view of God's dealings with *all* His children. We believe all people are children of Heavenly Father and have the potential to become like Him (see Acts 17:29; Ephesians 4:6; Hebrews 12:9). The Lord makes no exceptions when He says His work and glory is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). Each child of God on the earth is included in God's plan. Beyond obtaining a physical body, all are to some degree tested or proven in this probationary state

(see Abraham 3:35; Alma 12:24). The Lord esteems all flesh as one (see 1 Nephi 17:35), and every man should esteem his neighbor as himself (see Mosiah 27:4). We undoubtedly believe that all people are of great worth (see D&C 18:10, 15).

As BYU professors Robert L. Millet and Lloyd D. Newell explain: “We need only become acquainted with individuals of other religious persuasions to recognize their goodness and the truths that they possess. It would be blatant arrogance to suppose that the Latter-day Saints are the only people on earth with whom our Heavenly Father is concerned or to whom he seeks to make known his mind and will. God loves all of his children on earth and seeks to teach all that people are prepared to receive (Alma 29:8).”<sup>9</sup>

The Light of Christ clearly illustrates God’s universal effort with the whole human family (see D&C 88:7; Moroni 7:16). President Packer explains: “Every man, woman, and child of every nation, creed, or color—everyone, no matter where they live or what they believe or what they do—has within them the imperishable Light of Christ. In this respect, all men are created equally. The Light of Christ in everyone is a testimony that God is no respecter of persons (see D&C 1:35). He treats everyone equally in that endowment with the Light of Christ.” He continues: “The Light of Christ is as universal as sunlight itself. Wherever there is human life, there is the Spirit of Christ. Every living soul is possessed of it. It is the sponsor of everything that is good. It is the inspirer of everything that will bless and benefit mankind. It nourishes goodness itself.” President Packer then adds, “It should not be difficult, therefore, to understand how revelation from God to His children on earth can come to all mankind through both the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Ghost.”<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, presently and throughout history, God has blessed many nations through those not of the Church who are given a portion of truth “that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8). In 1978 the First Presidency stated:

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. The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel. Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life

to come. We also declare that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to His Church in our day, provides the only way to a mortal life of happiness and a fullness of joy forever. . . . 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 sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.<sup>11</sup>

Teachings of other religious leaders past and present help many people become more righteous, civil, and ethical.<sup>12</sup> God also uses good people outside of the Church to further His work. President Ezra Taft Benson said, “God, the Father of us all, uses the men of the earth, especially good men, to accomplish his purposes. It has been true in the past, it is true today, it will be true in the future.”<sup>13</sup> President Benson then quoted Elder Orson F. Whitney, who said:

Perhaps the Lord needs such men on the outside of his Church, to help it along. They are among its auxiliaries, and can do more good for the cause where the Lord has placed them, than anywhere else. . . . Hence, some are drawn into the fold and receive a testimony of Truth; while others remain unconverted . . . the beauties and glories of the gospel being veiled temporarily from their view, for a wise purpose. The Lord will open their eyes in his own due time. . . . God is using more than one people for the accomplishment of his great and marvelous work. The Latter-day Saints cannot do it all. It is too vast, too arduous for any one people. . . . We have no quarrel with the Gentiles. They are our partners in a certain sense.<sup>14</sup>

God’s plan and infinite love clearly span the globe and the generations. While the Lord has and does choose from among His children specific persons and groups with whom He establishes a covenant relationship, such choosing does not suggest abandonment of His love for, and work with, others. On the contrary, God often chooses and sets apart particular persons or groups of people with the intent of blessing more of His children (for example, missionary work, priesthood authority, temple work).

No doubt many Latter-day Saints desire, like Alma, to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ “unto every soul” (Alma 29:1–2). Yet in our current inability to do so, truth revealed through the Light of Christ, as well as dispersed through sincere and inspired persons of many faiths and cultures, gives us reason to rejoice that all God’s children to some degree are able, if they choose, to live “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

*Acknowledge truth and goodness in other faiths.* While an accurate view of God’s universal dealings with His children is key to reducing misunderstandings surrounding the one true church doctrine, acknowl-

edging that others possess and adhere to valuable truth can help as well. Note that such acknowledgment should not come at the diminution of Christ's restored gospel with its authority, ordinances, and fulness of true doctrine. As President Hinckley has stated: "Let us acknowledge the diversity of our society, recognizing the good in all people. We need not make any surrender of our theology. But we can set aside any element of suspicion, of provincialism, of parochialism."<sup>15</sup>

We can acknowledge the good in other religions without demeaning our own. Ideally, our genuine acknowledgment that others possess and live by truth should be natural, since charity "rejoiceth in truth" (Moroni 7:45). Furthermore, acknowledging that others possess truth can establish common ground upon which to create an atmosphere of respect, which will limit contention. Two practical ways we can acknowledge that others possess truth and lead good lives are (1) by sharing the gospel, we add upon truth others already possess and (2) we can join others in the common good.

We do not want people to abandon any truths they now possess. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated, "We don't ask any people to throw away any good they have got; we only ask them to come and get more. What if all the world should embrace this Gospel? They would then see eye to eye, and the blessings of God would be poured out upon the people, which is the desire of my whole soul."<sup>16</sup> As Elder Brigham H. Roberts explained, "The purpose of God in the introduction of the Dispensation of the fullness of Times was not to destroy any truth that existed in the world, but to add to that truth, to increase it, and to draw together all truth and develop it into a beautiful system in which men may rest contented, knowing God and their relationship to Him, knowing of the future and their relation unto it."<sup>17</sup> When we refer to truth, blanket statements of "we are right and you are wrong" seldom portray reality. Though some possess less than a fulness of truth, that does not mean the truth they possess is wrong. Yet it is clearly our desire to share the entire gospel of Jesus Christ in an effort to make the full power of salvation available to each individual. Therefore, as Ammon did with King Lamoni, it is often helpful to acknowledge and build upon common truth (see Alma 18). As President Hinckley has said on multiple occasions: "We appreciate the truth in all churches and the good which they do. We say to the people, in effect, you bring with you all the good that you have, and then let us see if we can add to it. That is the spirit of this work."<sup>18</sup>

President Hinckley also stated: "We can and do work with those of other religions in various undertakings in the everlasting fight against

social evils which threaten the treasured values which are so important to all of us. These people are not of our faith, but they are our friends, neighbors, and co-workers in a variety of causes. We are pleased to lend our strength to theirs efforts.”<sup>19</sup> Elder M. Russell Ballard said, “Perhaps there has never been a more important time for neighbors all around the world to stand together for the common good of one another.”<sup>20</sup> Joining our brothers and sisters of other faiths in good causes acknowledges our commitment to common truths. Yet President Hinckley has cautioned that in such joint efforts, “there is no doctrinal compromise. There need not be and must not be on our part. But there is a degree of fellowship as we labor together.”<sup>21</sup> Joining in common causes must not preclude firmness in our faith. Still, as Elder Roberts broadly explained, “All that makes for truth, for righteousness, is of God; it constitutes the kingdom of righteousness,” and “we seek to enlarge this kingdom of righteousness both by recognizing such truths as it possesses and seeking the friendship and co-operation of the righteous men and women who constitute its membership.”<sup>22</sup>

*Avoid undue judgment.* Because we are members of Christ’s true church, our responsibility is to share, not to judge or demean. Because knowledge of truth does not always result in its application, we should refrain from assertions of righteousness based on the amount of truth an individual or group possesses. It has always been possible that those who possess less truth may live more righteously than those who possess more. President Packer has noted: “We know there are decent, respectable, humble people in many churches, Christian and otherwise. In turn, sadly enough, there are so-called Latter-day Saints who by comparison are not as worthy, for they do not keep their covenants. But it is not a matter of comparing individuals.”<sup>23</sup> As previously stated, the Church of Jesus Christ is not true because its members try harder than other people to please God. The Church is true because Christ Himself established, authorized, and recognized the work therein as true and eternal.

Furthermore, it would be unjust to judge or demean someone harshly for not readily accepting our declaration that this is Christ’s true church. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “I don’t blame you for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself.”<sup>24</sup>

Elder Ballard explained: “While it is true we declare to the world that the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored . . . and we urge our members to share their faith and testimonies with others, it has never been the policy of the Church that those who choose not to listen or accept our message should be shunned or ignored. Indeed,

the opposite is true.” Elder Ballard further explained, “Surely good neighbors should put forth every effort to understand each other and to be kind to one another regardless of religion, nationality, race, or culture.”<sup>25</sup> Rather than insisting that others readily accept that ours is the only true church, we should seek understanding, continue kind and joyful associations, and out of genuine love maintain hope that someday they will desire to plant and nourish the seed (see Alma 32).

*Avoid contention.* Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “It is important in our relationships with our fellowmen that we approach them as neighbors and as brothers and sisters rather than coming at them flinging theological thunderbolts.”<sup>26</sup> President Hinckley likewise explained: “We want to be good neighbors; we want to be good friends. We feel we can differ theologically with people without being disagreeable in any sense. We hope they feel the same way toward us. We have many friends and many associations with people who are not of our faith, with whom we deal constantly, and we have a wonderful relationship. It disturbs me when I hear about antagonisms. . . . I don’t think they are necessary. I hope that we can overcome them.”<sup>27</sup>

Certainly we are to avoid the spirit of contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29). The Lord commanded Oliver Cowdery to “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” (D&C 18:20). Elder Roberts described the church of the devil as “the kingdom of evil, a federation of unrighteousness; and the servants of God have a right to contend against [it].” However, Elder Roberts cautioned: “But, let it be understood, we are not brought necessarily into antagonism with the various sects of Christianity as such. So far as they have retained fragments of Christian truth—and each of them has some measure of truth—that far they are acceptable unto the Lord: and it would be poor-policy for us to contend against them without discrimination. Wherever we find truth, whether it exists in complete form or only in fragments, we recognize that truth as part of that sacred whole of which the Church of Jesus Christ is the custodian; and I repeat that our relationship to the religious world is not one that calls for the denunciation of sectarian churches as composing the church of the devil.”<sup>28</sup>

Rather than attack other religions, we are to teach the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a positive and constructive way. Elder James E. Talmage stated: “We are not assailing churches; we are not attacking sects; we have no war with any of the numerous denominations on the face of the earth. We are sending out our missionaries, we are using the columns of the press, not to attack Catholicism or Protestantism, or any form of religion, but to preach in a positive and

constructive way the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ as that gospel has been restored to the earth in this dispensation.”<sup>29</sup>

*Follow the Golden Rule.* Few forces work more powerfully on people’s lives than religion. Furthermore, religion frequently plays a prevailing role in the definition of one’s personal identity. When we proclaim that ours is the only true church, it is important to remember the Lord’s injunction, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (3 Nephi 14:12). Let us not be cavalier regarding another’s religion and devotion to his or her faith.

After referring to a letter in which a man who is not a member of the Church described how his daughter had been ostracized by her Latter-day Saint schoolmates, President Hinckley said: “Let us rise above all such conduct and teach our children to do likewise. Let us be true disciples of the Christ, observing the Golden Rule, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us strengthen our own faith and that of our children while being gracious to those who are not of our faith. Love and respect will overcome every element of animosity. Our kindness may be the most persuasive argument for that which we believe.”<sup>30</sup>

We need to treat others with the dignity and respect we desire. The Golden Rule should produce empathy and allow us to be more understanding in our associations and in sharing the gospel. We do not need to embrace everything that other churches teach; we can disagree respectfully. As we avoid a spirit of disrespect and as we treat others with dignity, they will be more likely to respond in a positive manner.

### **Boldness but Not Overbearance**

Certainly we cannot avoid all the offenses those of other faiths may associate with this doctrine, nor does it appear that God expects us to do so. As previously indicated, however, President Hinckley and other Church leaders have expressed room for improvement. It is possible to be bold and not overbearing (see Alma 38:12). Regarding our doctrine of one true church, a Baptist pastor shared contrasting experiences he had with Latter-day Saint acquaintances. On one occasion, after the pastor explained why such a doctrine was offensive to him, a Latter-day Saint man replied, “I still believe it, but I know that it is [offensive].” The pastor commented, “That’s integrity to me.” Then, referring to another occasion when he similarly explained his offense to this doctrine, the pastor said, “I’ve had two [Latter-day Saint] guys say, ‘Truth hurts—tough.’” The pastor felt that response was arrogant.<sup>31</sup> In both instances the Latter-day Saints held to the doctrine of one true church, yet to the pastor one attitude was acceptable (even revered as integral) and the other attitude was arrogant.

We cannot let our fear of offending others hinder our efforts to present the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in its full light. “Yield on this doctrine,” President Packer has said, “and you cannot justify the Restoration.” He added, “We did not invent the doctrine of the only true church. It came from the Lord. Whatever perception others have of us, however presumptuous we appear to be, whatever criticism is directed to us, we must teach it to all who will listen.”<sup>32</sup> We need not apologize for, and certainly need not hide, the priesthood authority, ordinances, and fulness of truth afforded us. We must boldly proclaim to the world that Christ’s true church is again upon the face of the earth, but we must do so in a manner that avoids undue challenges to its acceptance.

Our boldness comes from a personal conviction that this is Christ’s true church and from a genuine love for all mankind. It is for these same reasons that we want to avoid overbearance. Like so many principles of the gospel, the doctrine of one true church is best conveyed in a spirit of charity, “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). This pure love naturally motivates us to boldly share with others “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8). And it is this same love that leads us to do so in a manner that “suffereth long, and is kind, . . . and is not puffed up, . . . is not easily provoked, . . . rejoiceth in the truth, . . . believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (Moroni 7:45). As we share the gospel, we should declare that this is “the only true and living church” in a spirit of charity, reverence, and humility. In the proper spirit, this doctrine need not be divisive. In the proper spirit, we can be bold in our assertion that this is the only true church without being overbearing.

### **A City Set on a Hill—One True Church**

In our effort to be bold but not overbearing, we should remember that this doctrine clearly sets the Church apart. President Hinckley said:

As members of the Church, we have become as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid (see 3 Nephi 12:14). Whether we like it or not, each of us is set apart from the world. We are partakers of the truth, and with that comes a responsibility. Our responsibilities are personal because testimony is a personal thing.

In this dispensation, when the Lord declared this to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30), we were immediately put in a position from which we cannot shrink and which we must face with humility and courage.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the Lord’s declaration that this is the only true church signals to the rest of the world that this church has something more to offer. A sister missionary explained, “When I share with people that I know that this is the only true church, I am letting them know

that religion is not just a matter of preference—it is a matter of truth.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, President Packer testified, “The position that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true church upon the face of the earth is fundamental. . . . It is not merely an admission; it is a positive declaration.”<sup>35</sup> The declaration itself can invite investigation. In sharing this doctrine, we boldly affirm our testimony that herein rests the authority, the fulness of truth, and the most correct path to happiness. It is a bold assertion; the Church is either true or it is not—there is no in-between.

Finally, declaration that this is the only true church should be accompanied by an invitation to “come and see” (John 1:38–39). There is a quiet confidence and comfort knowing that in our efforts to share the doctrine of one true church, the Lord will confirm its truth to all those who in humility and sincerity seek to know (see Moroni 10:3–5). President Packer said that each “soul has the right, indeed the obligation, to make an appeal through prayer for the answer to this question: Is there a true church? That is how it all began, you know, with a fourteen-year-old boy who went into a grove.”<sup>36</sup> **RE**

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## Notes

1. Eric-Jon K. Marlowe, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools: Perspectives of the Religious Minority” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2005).

2. Boyd K. Packer, “The Only True Church,” *Ensign*, November 1985, 80.

3. Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” *Tambuli*, July 1979, 1; emphasis added.

4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Only True and Living Church,” *Ensign*, December 1971, 40.

5. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Time of New Beginnings,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 87.

6. See Marlowe, “Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools.”

7. Packer, “The Only True Church,” 80.

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, April 1999, 116.

9. Robert L. Millet and Lloyd D. Newell, *Draw Near unto Me* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 9.

10. Boyd K. Packer, “The Light of Christ,” *Ensign*, April 2005, 8.

11. Statement of the First Presidency regarding God’s Love for All Mankind, February 15, 1978.

12. See *Preach My Gospel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 46.

13. See Ezra Taft Benson, “Civic Standard for the Faithful Saints,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 59.

14. Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1928, 59–60.

15. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Our Testimony to the World,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 83.

16. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1932), 5:259.
17. B. H. Roberts, in Conference Report, April 1906, 16.
18. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley," *Church News*, July 4, 1998.
19. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, April 1998, 3.
20. M. Russell Ballard, "Doctrine of Inclusion," *Ensign*, November 2001, 35.
21. Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Bear Witness of Him," *Ensign*, May 1998, 4.
22. Brigham H. Roberts, in Conference Report, April 1906, 15.
23. Packer, "The Only True Church," 80.
24. Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 208.
25. Ballard, "Doctrine of Inclusion," 35.
26. Neal A. Maxwell, *Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 127.
27. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 576.
28. Brigham H. Roberts, in Conference Report, April 1906, 15.
29. James E. Talmage, Conference Report, April 1920, 103.
30. Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Bear Witness of Him," *Ensign*, May 1998, 4.
31. See Marlowe, "Treatment of Religious Expression and Belief in Utah Public Schools," 94.
32. Packer, "The Only True Church," 80.
33. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Living with Our Convictions," *Liabona*, September 2001, 2.
34. Kristine Joy Iwamoto, quoted in "Q&A: Questions and Answers," *New Era*, May 2005, 16.
35. Packer, "The Only True and Living Church," 40.
36. Packer, "The Only True and Living Church," 40.