

The Prophets and the Restoration of Integrity

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We live in most interesting times. Scandals in society and infamous episodes in the lives of respected leaders force us to ask hard questions about what matters in people's lives. We must explore the difficult issue of whether leaders' private morality is in any way related to their capacity to make responsible and moral judgments in our behalf.

The Loss of Integrity

I have chosen to title my remarks "The Prophets and the Restoration of Integrity." We will speak first of what has happened to our world and then comment briefly on the role of prophets in leading us through the mists of darkness back to personal and public integrity.

Few would question the assertion that there has been a significant loss of integrity over the last few decades, not only among those in

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high places but also among the common people of society. Let's define our terms. Generally when we speak of integrity, we tend to think of honesty, and that's not a bad place to start; one could certainly not be a person of integrity if he or she were dishonest. The concept of integrity is, however, larger than honesty. People have integrity, as Professor Stephen L. Carter has written, when they have the courage of their convictions. Further, "The word conveys not so much a single-mindedness as a completeness; not the frenzy of a fanatic who wants to remake all the world in a single mold but the serenity of a person who is confident in the knowledge that he or she is living rightly." In short, a person of integrity is one "we feel we can trust to do right, to play by the rules, to keep commitments."¹ As you know, the word *integrity* is related to such words as *integrate* or *integral*. A person of integrity is one who is whole, together, undivided. Men and women of integrity practice what they preach. No, that is not strong enough. They *are* what they preach.

Straying from Our Moorings

We live in the day of an information explosion, a time when raw knowledge is being processed and disseminated far faster than we can incorporate or inculcate. But we also live in a time of moral erosion, indicating clearly that our decency has not kept pace with our discoveries. As a world, and more particularly as a nation, we have drifted from our moral moorings, strayed from the faith of our forebears. That the loss of integrity is due to a moral decay is perhaps obvious to most of us. I desire, however, to take a step beyond that premise. I suggest that the lack of a religious base, an enduring foundation for integrity, is at the heart of our problem. What we believe and know affect what we do.

In the early 1960s a strange and, to some, frightful sound was heard throughout the academic world of religious studies—the cry that "God is dead." Protestant, Roman Catholic, and even Jewish theologians spoke often of Godless theologies, Christless christs, and Christian atheism, phrases that at first blush seem meaningless and absurd. The essence of their rhetorical requiem was that God had died in the

1. Stephen L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 7.

hearts of men and women, that “God [had] passed out of our existence and become a dead entity for us because we crowded him out of our consciousness in creating and worshipping idols of our own ethnic likenesses.”² How strikingly similar are the words of the Lord concerning the state of things at the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s call: “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:16).

The Death of God movement, though not necessarily characteristic of the common beliefs of the religious world (or even typical of the views of the average priest, minister, or rabbi), nevertheless symbolized a growing dis-ease in society, a loss of confidence in religious life, and a gradual distancing from religious values and time-honored traditions. Though the pendulum would yet swing to the religious right during the 1970s with the rise of the Charismatic movement and the resurgence of Christian fundamentalism, yet the age of existential anguish, of moral malaise, of cynicism and skepticism and doubt would take its terrible toll.

Certain problems arise whenever people either deny or ignore absolute truths. One Evangelical Christian has stated:

I believe that one of the prime reasons this generation is setting new records for dishonesty, disrespect, sexual promiscuity, violence, suicide, and other pathologies, is because they have lost their moral underpinnings; their foundational belief in morality and truth has been eroded. . . .

At one time, our society, by and large, explained the universe, humanity, and the purpose of life from the Judeo-Christian tradition: a belief that truth existed, and everyone could know and understand it. A clear understanding of what was right and wrong gave society a moral standard by which to measure crime

2. Jackson Lee Ice and John J. Carey, eds., *The Death of God Debate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 16.

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and punishment, business ethics, community values, character, and social conduct. . . .

That has changed drastically, however. Our children are being raised in a society that has largely rejected the notions of truth and morality, a society that has somewhere lost the ability to decide what is true and what is right. Truth has become a matter of taste; morality has been replaced by individual preference.³

“If modern man had taken seriously the main intellectual currents of the last century or so,” Professor James Wilson has written, “he would have found himself confronted by the need to make moral choices when the very possibility of making such choices had been denied. God is dead or silent, reason suspect or defective, nature meaningless or hostile. As a result, man is adrift on an uncharted sea, left to find his moral bearings with no compass and no pole star, and so able to do little more than utter personal preferences, bow to historical necessity, or accept social conventions.” Further, “If the moral sense is the result of nothing more significant than a cultural or historical throw of the dice, then it will occur to some people . . . that they are free to do whatever they can get away with by practicing indulgent self-absorption or embracing an angry ideology.”⁴

In the 1960s a second movement began to take shape—hand in hand with the Death of God movement—one that has had its flowering in our own time. It was known as situation ethics or ethical relativism. Inspired by the writings of Bishop John A. T. Robinson and Professor Joseph Fletcher, this movement proposed that any moral system is too shallow to provide answers to all situations and that every man and woman must decide what is right. It was a time when all were told to open themselves to the “new morality.” “The sanctions of Sinai have lost their terrors, and people no longer accept the authority of Jesus even as a great moral teacher. Robbed of its supranatural supports, men find it difficult to take seriously a code of living that confessedly depended on

3. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Right from Wrong* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 12–13.

4. James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 5, 8–9.

them.”⁵ In the 1960s it was quite common to hear young people spouting off, “It’s all relative” or the even more common dictum, “There are no absolutes” (a pretty absolute statement, it seems to me!). Though we hear fewer chants and may notice fewer crusades for ethical relativism at the end of this decade, the die is cast and what was once parlor conversation or even college colloquy is now applied theology.

Absolute Values

We cannot fully solve spiritual maladies through temporal solutions. Integrity cannot be restored to our families, our societies, or our nations by ignoring the fact that some things are right and some things are wrong. Our problem in the world today is a detachment from morality and integrity, and morality and integrity cannot, in the long run, be severed from religion. *Religion* is a most interesting word. It means literally “to tie back to.” It is related to the word *ligament*, that which ties the bone to the muscle. Religion is thus that which ties us back to God, to sacred things, to foundational truths, to integrity. To define morality in terms of utility (what works) or in terms of consensus (what most people believe) is to fall short of what was, is, and is to be (see D&C 93:24).

Some things just are. Neither congressional decisions nor popular opinion changes absolute truth. All the people in the world may decide that abortion is humane, homosexuality is merely an alternative lifestyle, and assisted suicide is compassionate, but that does not change the fact that these matters are sinful and wrong and contrary to the great plan of the Eternal God. They cannot bring happiness. They cannot result in peace. Every religious body on the globe may conclude that God is a spirit, that He is uninvolved in the daily doings of men and women, and that people will prosper according to their genius and not through the divine assistance of a Savior. But such sentiments do not matter a snap of the finger in the eternal scheme of things, for what God is, does,

5. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 109; see also Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), chapters 1 and 2.

and accomplishes among His children, through the mediation of His Beloved Son, is in the realm of absolute truth.

“We know instinctively,” someone has observed, “that some things are right and some things are wrong. Let [a young woman] discover, for example, that her soccer shoes were stolen from her school locker and she’ll feel wronged. She would not argue that the thief is entitled to his opinion of right and wrong; she would appeal to an objective sense of justice because she would claim that she had suffered an injustice. In so doing, of course, she would appeal to a moral law that she believes everyone—not just herself—ought to follow.”⁶ That is to say, while many who yearn to speak of ethical relativism or situational ethics do so from their philosophical perch above the real world, those same persons expect others to treat them according to a model of truth and morality that reflects a more objective and absolute way of knowing what is right or wrong. If it is true that “there are no atheists in foxholes,” then it is also true that “there are no relativists who expect to be treated relatively.”⁷

Too many people, as C. S. Lewis observed, seek to

invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.

The reason why it can never succeed is this. . . . God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.⁸

6. McDowell and Hostetler, *Right from Wrong*, 78.

7. McDowell and Hostetler, *Right from Wrong*, 78.

8. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 54.

Similarly, Elder Neal A. Maxwell pointed out, “Mankind has not had much success in keeping the second commandment by loving our neighbors as ourselves, without also keeping the first great commandment, loving God with all of our heart, might, mind, and strength. Try as mankind may to achieve the brotherhood of man without the Fatherhood of God, it is cosmetic and does not last!”⁹

Let me propose what might be a rather typical discussion between a parent and child:

Father: “Billy, is it wrong to steal?”

Son: “Yeah, Dad, it’s wrong to steal.”

Father: “Why is it wrong?”

Son: “Because you taught us that it’s wrong.”

Father: “That’s right, son, we did. But why did we teach you that?”

Son: “Because the Church teaches us that it’s not right to steal.”

Father: “Right again. But why does the Church teach that?”

(Long pause)

Son: “I don’t know, Dad. Is it because Heavenly Father doesn’t want us to steal?”

Father: “You’re absolutely right, Billy. Heavenly Father does not want us to steal. Why doesn’t He want us to steal?”

(This time there is a longer and even more uncomfortable pause.)

Son: “I don’t really know, Dad.”

This fictional encounter highlights a problem we face in teaching one another (and especially our children) the principles of morality and decency. Notice that the *precept* of “Thou shalt not steal” is pretty clear in this young man’s mind. He has been taught the commandments and is able to articulate what he understands. A little less clear is that which underlies the precept, namely the *principle*, in this case the principle of honesty. Our young man knows what has been forbidden (stealing), and

9. Neal A. Maxwell, “This Is a Special Institution,” inaugural address at BYU–Hawaii; cited in *Profile Magazine*, December 1994, 9.

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he senses that the major reasons it is forbidden is because his parents, his Church, and his Heavenly Father have condemned it. Now, those are all fine sources for the precept and the principle, but are they the ultimate or absolute source? No, for beneath the principle is the *person* of God. A vital part of the great plan of happiness is the nature and kind of being we worship. Fundamental to the purpose of life and the hope for glory hereafter is the knowledge that has been revealed concerning God—His character, His perfections, His relationship to us, and, most important to this discussion, the knowledge that we can become as He is.

To complete our conversation,

Father: “Billy, we are commanded not to steal [the precept] because the Lord wants His people to be honest [the principle]. He wants us to be honest because He is a God of truth [the person]. We are sent to earth to strive as best we can to become as He is. Only as we become a people of truth can we ever hope to be like our Heavenly Father.”

It is one thing to teach that honesty is the best policy (utility) or to teach that it is best to be honest because most people in society expect us to deal respectfully and responsibly with one another (consensus). Both utility and consensus have done much in the past to maintain some semblance of order in our world. But with changing times and the erosion of time-honored values, many look about hopelessly for a more solid and enduring foundation, a substantive basis for integrity. That foundation is doctrinal; it is the foundation of faith and theology. Our children deserve answers to the hard question of *why*. And the only lasting and satisfying answer to why we do what we do and why we do not do other things is to be found in the great plan of happiness, in the understanding of God and man, in the clear statement of our eternal possibilities here and hereafter.

As a priesthood leader, I have had occasion over the years to listen as young people confess major moral transgressions. I have asked about why the violation of the law of chastity, for example, is so serious. I have been interested as they have spoken of disappointing their parents, postponing temple marriage or missions, bearing children out of

wedlock, and contracting deadly diseases—all of which, from the perspective of utility or consensus are deemed good reasons to stay morally clean. But there is more to it, much more, and it is that added light and added knowledge that come from our divinely given doctrine to which we turn for the greatest preventative medicine against serious sin. This is why President Boyd K. Packer explained that “true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior.”¹⁰

It was President Ezra Taft Benson who taught that “the Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold men by changing their environment. Christ changes men, who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature.”¹¹ That inner change is fundamental to the development of integrity within us, for it is the power of God that purifies our affections, refines our judgment, and educates our desires, that enables us to recognize and acknowledge truth, to perceive things as they really are (see D&C 93:24).

The Prophetic Call for Integrity

So where do we turn? How do we know what is right, absolutely right, eternally right, as far as the Almighty is concerned? We turn heavenward. We give strict heed to the Light of Christ within us. We search the scriptures and distill their precepts and values. And we cast our lot with the prophets. The word *prophet*, as taken from the Hebrew word *navi*, means a spokesperson, someone who speaks in behalf of Deity. “The main function of Old Testament prophets,” Wayne Grudem has written,

was to be *messengers from God*, sent to speak to men and women with words from God. . . .

Quite often the prophet is a special kind of messenger. He is a “messenger of the covenant”—sent to remind Israel of

10. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, October 1986, 20.

11. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1985, 5.

the terms of her covenant with the Lord, calling the disobedient to repentance and warning that the penalties of disobedience will soon be applied. . . .

Why is this important? It is important because official messengers do not just carry their own authority. They speak with the authority of the one who sent them.

So it was with the Old Testament prophets. They knew they were not speaking for themselves but for God who had sent them, and they spoke with his authority.”¹²

In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul. . . . Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet’s words.”¹³

As a simple analogy, there would be no need for policemen if everyone kept the law. Likewise, there would be no need for prophets if every person remained on the strait and narrow path, attended to the divine word, and was true to the voice of conscience; in short, prophets are called to speak when people refuse to hearken. In what the Prophet Joseph Smith described as the “grand rule of heaven,”¹⁴ Amos was instructed: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, until he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Joseph Smith Translation, Amos 3:7). Truly, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18).

Prophets are called to shake people from their lethargy, to awaken them from the deep sleep of indifference, to sober them as to the consequences that lay ahead if remorse and repentance are not forthcoming. “Prophetic utterance is rarely cryptic,” Heschel observed, “suspended between God and man; it is urging, alarming, forcing onward, as if the

12. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy: In the New Testament and Today*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 21–22; emphasis in original.

13. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2001), 5–6.

14. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 265; cited hereafter as *TPJS*.

words gushed forth from the heart of God, seeking entrance to the heart and mind of man, carrying a summons as well as an involvement. . . . The language is luminous and explosive, firm and contingent, harsh and compassionate, a fusion of contradictions.”¹⁵ As President Spencer W. Kimball stated in 1978: “Prophets have a way of jarring the carnal mind. Too often the holy prophets are wrongly perceived as harsh and as anxious to make a record in order to say, ‘I told you so.’ Those prophets I have known are the most loving of men. It is because of their love and integrity that they cannot modify the Lord’s message merely to make people feel comfortable. They are too kind to be so cruel. I am grateful that prophets do not crave popularity.”¹⁶

It was Francis Gibbon who stated that Christians are “animated by a contempt for present existence and by confidence in immortality.”¹⁷ I suppose from St. Augustine’s perspective, Christianity is all about the effort to establish the City of God over human beings’ callous counterpart—the City of Man. H. Richard Niebuhr considered this to be a “baffling attitude, because it mates what seems like contempt for present existence with great concern for existing men, because it is not frightened by the prospect of doom on all man’s works, because it is not despairing but confident. Christianity seems to threaten culture at this point not because it prophesies that of all human achievements not one stone will be left on another but because Christ enables men to regard this disaster with a certain equanimity, directs their hopes toward another world, and so seems to deprive them of motivation to engage in the ceaseless labor of conserving a massive but insecure social heritage.”¹⁸

In plain words, prophets—and Jesus was certainly a prophet—are called to serve in a unique role: they stand as a witness against waywardness, as a prosecutor of perversion in society, as a decrier of degradation in their day, as a guide who points up sin, puts down evil, and points

15. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 7–8.

16. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1978, 116.

17. Edward Gibbon, as quoted by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 5.

18. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 6.

toward a better way. “The task of prophetic ministry,” Walter Brueggemann has reminded us, “is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”¹⁹ In that sense, prophets are social revolutionaries. They strive to establish a counterculture. This characterization seems apt when one considers these words from Joseph Smith, spoken only a short time before his death: “I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the kingdom of [God foreseen by] Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.”²⁰

In Joseph’s mind, real religion was more than four walls and preaching, more than creeds and customs and ceremonialism. The gospel of Jesus Christ was intended not only to make bad men good and good men better, as vital as that is. Real religion also brought about a change from the inside out,²¹ an internal transformation of the individual soul that resulted eventually in the renovation and elevation of society. The goal of religion, in other words, was the establishment of a counterculture called Zion—the city of God, the holy commonwealth, the place where the pure in heart dwell (see D&C 97:21), where the people are of one mind and one heart, where there are no poor among them (see Moses 7:18). Zion is that ideal culture in which the irreconcilable are reconciled, where the municipals are able to blend social union and dynamic individualism, where the priestly and the prophetic functions operate side by side.

“The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age,” Joseph Smith observed. “It is a theme upon which prophets, priests and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we live.” The building of Zion is “a work that God and angels have contemplated with delight for generations past; that fired the souls of ancient patriarchs and prophets; a work that is destined to bring about the destruc-

19. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

20. *TPJS*, 366.

21. See Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1985, 5–6.

tion of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family.”²² Therefore, “We ought to have the building up of Zion as our greatest object.”²³

The Prophet as Mentor

I would like to point out three ways in which the prophet serves as a model, an example, and a mentor, to the people who follow him. First, the prophet receives his errand from God and is then endowed with power beyond his own to accomplish divine purposes. Joseph Smith recorded Enoch’s response to a prophetic call: “And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant? And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance. . . . Behold my Spirit is upon you, wherefore all thy words will I justify” (Moses 6:31–32, 34).

Second, the prophets are not possessive, not prone to hoard or keep to themselves the things of eternity; rather, they are eager to share, to make available the mysteries of Deity whenever the people are prepared to receive them. The object, in other words, is not to create a commonwealth where everyone worships or defers on all matters to the prophet, but instead the object is to create a group of people who seek to purify themselves and live in a manner whereby God can make known His mind and will to the people. For example, on one occasion the Spirit of God was poured out upon the seventy elders of Israel in an unusual manner. Members of the seventy began to prophesy. “And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.” And now note these timeless words: “And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his

22. *TPJS*, 231–32.

23. *TPJS*, 160.

spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:28–29). It’s as if Moses had replied to Joshua’s concern: “What’s the problem? Are you worried about my job or something? If I had my way, we would have a kingdom of priests and priestesses, of prophets and prophetesses, a society in which every man and woman spoke in the name of the Lord God.”

Joseph Smith was asked in 1838: “Do you believe Joseph Smith, Jun., to be a Prophet?” His response: “Yes, and every other man who has the testimony of Jesus. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (see Revelation 19:10; compare D&C 42:61; 63:23; 67:10; 93:1).²⁴ As he taught the principle, “God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them.”²⁵ Or, as he stated in 1843, “The Lord deals with this people as a tender parent with a child, communicating light and intelligence and the knowledge of his ways as they can bear it.”²⁶

Third, despite the fact that prophets are often remembered for their thundering testimonies, their sobering voice of warning, and their incessant call to a higher righteousness, they are also chosen servants of God who have been granted a portion of God’s grand perspective, including a portion of God’s love for all His children. Thus, the prophet’s principal duty is not to condemn but to bless, not to consign to perdition but to prepare people for heaven. “If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a ‘Mormon,’” Joseph Smith taught, “I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.”²⁷ “If I esteem mankind to be in error,” Joseph explained, “shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is bet-

24. *TPJS*, 119; see also 160, 265, 269, 300, 312, 315.

25. *TPJS*, 149.

26. *TPJS*, 305.

27. *TPJS*, 313.

ter; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way. Do you believe in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation which he revealed? So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst.”²⁸

Finally, Brother Joseph observed: “While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men, causes ‘His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ He holds the reins of judgment in His hands; He is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, [but] not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men.”²⁹

Several years ago I read the autobiography of Billy Graham, entitled *Just As I Am*. It was a life-changing experience for me. I had grown up in the South watching Billy Graham crusades and thus was not completely ignorant of his prominence in the religious world. But I was not prepared for what I learned. His influence for good among rich and poor, black and white, high and low—including serving as spiritual adviser to several presidents of the United States—was almost overwhelming to me. The more I read the more I became acquainted with a good man, a God-fearing man, a person who had felt called to take the message of Christ to the far parts of the earth. I remember sitting in my chair in the living room finishing the last page of the book. No one else was in the house except for my wife, Shauna, who was also reading. As I laid the book down, I let out a rather loud “Wow!” Shauna responded with “What did you say?” I replied: “Wow! What a life!” I remember being very emotional at the time, sensing deep down that God had worked wonders through this simple but submissive North Carolina preacher.

28. *TPJS*, 313–14.

29. *TPJS*, 218.

Not long after I read the autobiography, one of our faculty drew my attention to a general conference address by Elder Ezra Taft Benson given in April 1972: “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.” Elder Benson then quoted the following from a conference address delivered by Elder Orson F. Whitney in 1928: “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 the 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.” Now note this particularly poignant message: “*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.*”³⁰

In June of 1829, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer were instructed to “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” (D&C 18:20). Elder B. H. Roberts offered this insightful commentary upon this passage:

I understand the injunction to Oliver Cowdery to “contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil” to mean that he shall contend against evil, against untruth, against all combinations of wicked men. They constitute the church of the devil, the kingdom of evil, a federation of unrighteousness; and the servants of God have a right to contend against that which is evil, let it appear where it will, in Catholic or Protestant Christendom, among the philosophical societies of deists and atheists, and even within the Church of Christ, if, unhappily, it should make its appearance there. But, let it be understood, we are not brought necessarily into antagonism with the various

30. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1972, 49; citing Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, April 1928, 59.

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.

The following remarks from Elder Roberts demonstrates the kind of breadth necessary in reaching out and understanding our brothers and sisters of other faiths: “All that makes for untruth, for unrighteousness constitutes the kingdom of evil—the church of the devil. All that makes for truth, for righteousness, is of God; it constitutes the kingdom of righteousness—the empire of Jehovah; and, in a certain sense at least, constitutes the Church of Christ. With the latter—the kingdom of righteousness—we have no warfare. On the contrary both the spirit of the Lord’s commandments to His servants and the dictates of right reason would suggest that 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.”³¹

Perhaps no prophet in our dispensation has beckoned us to reach out, build bridges with men and women of goodwill, establish friendships, and work with others to restore integrity to our world than President Gordon B. Hinckley. Relatively speaking, the Latter-day Saints are few in number, but if we will prepare ourselves properly, rivet ourselves tightly to the task ahead, God will raise up men and women with like passions for purity, similar dispositions for decency, to stand side by side with us in the fight for right.

In a world of growing chaos and uncertainty, the prophetic voice is a voice of sanity, a voice of reason, a voice of hope, a voice of assurance that God knows and loves the people of the earth and that no one

31. B. H. Roberts, in Conference Report, April 1906, 15.

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of us is bright enough or powerful enough to handle life's challenges and traumas alone. The call of the prophets—to hearken, to listen, to remember, to abstain, to care for the poor, to turn, to look to God and live—that call is as current as this morning's news and is thus everlastingly relevant.

Conclusion

There is a crying need in our day for men and women of integrity, for persons of substance and spiritual strength to stand up and be counted. There are many things for which each one of us might be known when our work here is finished. Perhaps above and beyond all that might be said in praise of us, it would be a marvelous thing to be known as people of integrity. “One of the greatest accomplishments of our lives,” President Howard W. Hunter observed, “is to promote an honest, earnest integrity within ourselves. This means that we become spiritually sound, intellectually sincere, morally honest, and always personally responsible to God. Integrity is that golden key which will unlock the door to almost any success.”³²

All people who are true to the light within them will act according to conscience, according to that moral monitor that attests to eternal truth and affirms the need for decency and integrity. We acknowledge the marvelous scientific discoveries and technological developments that are taking place everyday, in some cases by men and women who claim no allegiance to God or divine truth. I testify, however, that the enduring contribution to this world, indeed the only thing that will preserve us from drowning in our own blood and thus crumbling beneath our own corruption, is a return to time-honored values, a restoration of integrity. Such a restoration will not necessarily be championed by those who are the most learned, the most charismatic, or the most talented. Rather, this contribution will be made by men and women of faith who are striving with all their hearts to be true to what they believe, to live

32. Clyde J. Williams, ed., *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 92.

a life that is consistent with God-ordained values and everlasting principles. It will be made by persons of integrity.

To have integrity is to be a person like the two thousand stripping warriors, who were “exceedingly valiant for courage, and also for strength and activity; . . . they were men who were true at all times in whatsoever thing they were entrusted” (Alma 53:20). A man or woman of integrity is neither dissuaded nor displaced from their eternal values by changing times or by the vicissitudes of life. Jehovah spoke of Job as “a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil.” Job was one who held “fast his integrity” (Job 2:3). Job declared: “My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.” He then added that “till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me” (Job 27:4–5). Truly, “the just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him” (Proverbs 20:7; see also 11:3).

It is my hope the Lord may be able to say of us, as he said of Hyrum Smith: “And again, verily I say unto you, blessed is my servant Hyrum Smith; for I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart, and because he loveth that which is right before me, saith the Lord” (D&C 124:15; see also v. 20).