



PROPHETIC COUNSEL

We can help restore morality and preserve religious freedom by

- Being a righteous example.
- Being civil in our discourse.
- Being an advocate for morality and religious freedom.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY CODY BELL AND DAVID STOKER

Restoring Morality & Religious Freedom

In this so-called Mormon Moment, where there is more attention being paid to the Church and its members, we will need to be the best examples we can possibly be.

I challenge all of us to work with people of other faiths to improve the moral fabric of our communities, nations, and world and to protect religious freedom. To do this, we need to understand and comprehend “things which have been” (D&C 88:79), with particular emphasis on events that were precursors to the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that still need to be protected. These are the underpinnings of our Judeo-Christian heritage and bless people worldwide.¹

If we understand these events, we can help protect, defend, and enhance knowledge that will bless mankind, prepare us for the kingdom of God, and bring us happiness and

joy. Much of what we will do to improve the moral fabric of society and protect religious freedom will be accomplished in our families and communities.

I will review four major “things which have been” that were precursors to the Restoration, and then I will suggest three courses of action that will build on the great heritage bestowed upon us.

Tyndale and the King James Bible

1. A unique and profoundly important group of achievements occurred during the 1500s and early 1600s. William Tyndale, a man of strong religious beliefs and a gifted linguist, translated much of the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Bible into English. His translation contained “phraseology that we associate with the sacredness of the word of God.”² It was the language of religion, the language that captured the dramatic importance of the Old Testament and the Savior’s spiritual message, ministry, and mission set forth in the New Testament.

Tyndale’s vision was that the common laborer, the plowboy in England, could read and understand the Bible. His language became to religion what William Shakespeare’s writings became to the language of literature and social discourse in the English tongue.

With the enhancement of the English language by Tyndale and Shakespeare, wise

**By Elder
Quentin L. Cook**
Of the Quorum of the
Twelve Apostles





The magnificent King James Version of the Bible has endured and is as important to us today as it was 400 years ago.

and noble scholars produced the magnificent King James Version of the Bible in 1611. This great book of scripture has endured and is as important to us today as it was 400

years ago. We share with many people a love and appreciation for the Judeo-Christian values set forth in the King James Bible.

2. *English common law and the U.S. Constitution.* At about the same time as the events just described, Sir Edward Coke produced the consolidation of English law in written form. His work was to law what the King James Bible was to religion.³ His volumes covered every conceivable legal topic and stated what the common law was on each.

Many consider the provisions of the common law produced by Coke as a foundation for several provisions in the U.S. Constitution, which celebrates its 225th anniversary this year and is viewed by Latter-day Saints as both inspired and necessary to the Restoration. Five elements of the Constitution have been identified as being particularly inspired:

1. Separation of powers into three independent branches of government.
2. The Bill of Rights' guarantee of freedom of speech, press, and religion.
3. Equality of all men and women before the law.
4. The federal system, with a division of powers between the nation as a whole and the states.
5. The principle of popular sovereignty—the people are the source of government.⁴

These five basic fundamentals have been

a great blessing and were necessary to the Restoration of the gospel. We share with many others a love and appreciation for the Constitution and a concern about efforts to diminish the Bill of Rights' guarantee of freedom of religion.

3. *Scientific achievements, including the Industrial Revolution, the communications revolution, and advancements in medicine.* President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) acknowledged these achievements and the contribution they provide to the kingdom of God. He saw some of this body of scientific knowledge as a precursor to the Restoration and encouraged Latter-day Saints to participate in the acquisition of this knowledge.⁵

Daniel Walker Howe, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the transformation of America between 1815 and 1848, titled his book *What Hath God Wrought*. In his introduction he focuses on professor Samuel F. B. Morse, writing, “Morse, seated amidst a hushed gathering of distinguished national leaders in the chambers of the United States Supreme Court in Washington, tapped out a message” on a new device, the telegraph: “WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT.”⁶

“The message ‘baptized the American Telegraph with the name of its author’: God.”⁷ Morse shared a “religious sense of divine providence” and saw himself as “an instrument of providence.”⁸

Howe states, “During the thirty-three years that began in 1815, there would be greater strides in the improvement of communication than had taken place in all previous centuries.”⁹

A second communications revolution has occurred during our lifetime. The most significant part of this involves the Internet.

4. *A return to Judeo-Christian moral principles.* This was especially necessary for the Restoration of the gospel. A renewed emphasis on morality occurred in both England and the United States. It involved fervent religious awakenings, including those associated with the area of western New York State.

The practice of religious beliefs had been a “principal reason for the original settlements in New England, Pennsylvania, and Maryland.” On the eve of the Revolutionary War, religious pamphlets “topped *secular* pamphlets from all thirteen colonies by four to one.”¹⁰

A farmer who had fought at Concord Bridge on the first day of battle in the American Revolutionary War “declared that he had never heard of Locke or Sidney, his reading having been limited to the Bible, the Catechism, Watt’s Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanac.”¹¹ It was these principles that he was defending.

A recent op-ed in the *New York Times* noted that many people believe “that repairing the economic moral fabric is the essential national task right now. . . . America went through a similar values restoration in the 1820s. Then, too, people sensed that the country had grown soft and decadent. Then, too,

Americans rebalanced. They did it quietly and away from the cameras.”¹²

Be a Righteous Example

How can you help bring about this restoration of morality in our day and help preserve religious freedom? First, be a righteous exam-



ple. You must not be in camouflage as to who you are and what you believe.

Elder J. Devn Cornish, who prior to his call to the Seventy was a nationally recognized pediatrician, tells of his efforts to be admitted to Johns Hopkins Medical School. In an interview, distinguished professors at the medical school asked him why he wanted to be a doctor. He told them that he wanted to be a pediatrician. They interrupted him and asked how he could possibly know that when he hadn’t even been to medical school. He explained with great

The U.S. Constitution, which celebrates its 225th anniversary this year, is viewed by Latter-day Saints as both inspired and necessary to the Restoration.

passion that he had served an LDS mission in the Guatemala–El Salvador Mission. He had seen the enormous need the children there had for medical care. This, and the promptings of the Spirit, had inspired in him a desire to attend medical school and specialize in pediatrics.

He was surprised when these world-famous

our honesty, integrity, morality, and desire to serve our fellowmen.

Recently we met with a top government leader in a South American country. He also had been a physician. We did not expect a particularly good meeting because some of his views are not in accord with certain

principles that are important to us. We were surprised when we were received in a warm and gracious manner. He had known only one Latter-day Saint—a fellow student in medical school. He admired this student, knew about our beliefs, and was most respectful because of one example of a Church member whose life was based on honesty, integrity, and morality.



One of the reasons the attack on moral and religious principles has been so successful is the reluctance of people of faith to express their views. Be an active participant, not a silent observer.

physicians extended his interview. They were interested in what he did as a missionary, his ability to speak Spanish, and his interaction with and love for the people he had served.¹⁵

In this so-called Mormon Moment, where there is more attention being paid to the Church and its members, we will need to be the best examples we can possibly be. Collectively our example will be more important than what any single member or leader proposes. Research has shown that those who know faithful Latter-day Saints appreciate

Be Civil in Your Discourse

We need to be civil in our discourse and respectful in our interactions. We live in a world where there is much turmoil. Many people are both angry and afraid. The Savior taught us to love even our enemies (see Matthew 5:44). This is especially true when we disagree. The moral basis of civility is the Golden Rule. It is taught in most religions and particularly by the Savior. “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). Our

faith requires that we treat our neighbors with respect.

In a general conference address I pointed out that “there are some who feel that venting their personal anger or deeply held opinions is more important than conducting themselves as Jesus Christ lived and taught. . . . How we disagree is a real measure of who we are and whether we truly follow the Savior. It is appropriate to disagree, but it is not appropriate to be disagreeable. . . . If we show love and respect even in adverse circumstances, we become more like Christ.”¹⁴

Be an Advocate for Religious Freedom and Morality

This is a time when those who feel accountable to God for their conduct feel under siege by a secular world. You understand the moral principles that are under attack and the need to defend morality. Religious freedom all over the world is also under attack. It is important for us to become well educated on this issue and assume responsibility for ensuring that the religious freedom we have inherited is passed on to future generations. We must work together to both protect religious freedom and restore morality.

Presidents of the Church, including President Thomas S. Monson, have made it clear that all religions hold truths and that we should work together for the common good. In his inaugural press conference, President Monson emphasized this cooperation. He stated, “We have a responsibility to be active in the communities where we live . . . and to work cooperatively with other churches. . . . It’s important that we eliminate the weakness of one standing alone and substitute for it the strength of people working together.”¹⁵

Our joint effort should be to protect important civic values like honesty, morality, self-restraint, respect for law, and basic human rights. An important study established, “The associations between religious freedoms and other civil liberties, press freedoms, and political freedoms are especially striking.”¹⁶ If we fail to diligently protect religious freedom, we risk diminishing other important freedoms that are important both to society and to us.

Our challenge is to help people without religious faith understand that the protection of moral principles grounded in religion is a great benefit to society and that religious devotion is critical to public virtue.

Many U.S. founding fathers, including George Washington and James Madison, pointed out that shared moral values espoused by different religions with competing doctrines allow societies to be bound together.¹⁷ Unfortunately, religious influence has often been replaced by so-called secular religions. “For instance, humanism and atheism function as secular religions binding their adherents through common belief and ideology.”¹⁸

Many philosophers have been at the forefront in promoting secularism and rejecting a moral view of the world based on Judeo-Christian values. In their view there is no “objective moral order” and no reason “to choose one goal over another.”¹⁹ They believe no preference should be given to moral goals.²⁰ A British high court recently denied a Christian family the right to foster children because the children could be “‘infected’ by Christian moral beliefs.”²¹ The ruling demonstrates just how radically things have shifted.

One of the reasons the attack on moral and religious principles has been so successful is



Religious conscience is grounded in one’s belief in being accountable to God for conduct.

the reluctance of people of faith to express their views.²² Extraordinary effort will be required to protect religious liberty. Our doctrine confirms what the U.S. founding fathers and political philosophers have advocated.

“No government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as

of religion is to inspire . . . principles. There is no religion which does not place the object of man’s desires above and beyond the treasure of earth, and which does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of the senses. Nor is there any which does not impose on man some duties toward his kind,

and thus draw him at times from the contemplation of himself.”²⁴

My challenge is that we join with people of all faiths who feel accountable to God in defending religious freedom so it can be a beacon for morality. We caution you to be civil and responsible as you defend religious liberty and moral values. We ask that you do this on the Internet and in your personal interactions in the neighborhoods

and communities where you live. Be an active participant, not a silent observer.

In conclusion, our reason for undertaking the objectives *to be an example, to be civil in our discourse, and to be an advocate for religious freedom* is to serve mankind and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. In doing so, our efforts will be blessed by heaven and will further the purposes of this life established by a loving Father in Heaven. ■

From a commencement address delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on December 16, 2011. For the full text, visit <http://web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches/speeches.aspx>.



Research has shown that those who know faithful Latter-day Saints appreciate our honesty, integrity, morality, and desire to serve our fellowmen.

will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience” (D&C 134:2). Religious conscience is grounded in one’s belief in being accountable to God for conduct. The effort of secularists and governments to coerce conduct in conflict with religious conscience leads to social disunity and is a primary reason that religious liberty is essential for civil peace.²³

The role of religion in blessing a secular society was set forth succinctly by Alexis De Tocqueville in his classic *Democracy in America*. He stated, “The greatest advantage

NOTES

1. I recognize that the study of Western civilization has been under attack. “Some criticize its study as narrow, limiting, arrogant and discriminatory, asserting that it has little or no value for those of non-European origins” (Donald Kagan, “A Good Run,” *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 2011, BR27).
2. David Rolph Seely, “William Tyndale and the Language of the At-one-ment,” in Kent P. Jackson, *The King James Bible and the Restoration* (2011), 29.
3. See Roy Strong, “Soul of England: English Law,” *Country Life*, Feb. 23, 2011, 32.
4. See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1992, 71–73.
5. See Spencer W. Kimball, “When the World Will Be Converted,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1974, 10–11.
6. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (2007), 1.
7. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 3.
8. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 2.
9. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 5.
10. Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins’ Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (1999), 94. See also Gordon Smith, “Protecting the Weak: Religious Liberty in the Twenty-First Century,” *Brigham Young University Law Review*, vol. 1999, no. 2 (1999), 487–88.
11. Phillips, *The Cousins’ Wars*, 95.
12. David Brooks, “The Great Restoration,” *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 2011, A22.
13. Personal conversation with J. Devn Cornish, June 11, 2011.
14. Quentin L. Cook, “We Follow Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 84–85.
15. Thomas S. Monson, in “Who Are the Mormons?” <http://mormonnewsroom.org/article/who-are-the-mormons>.
16. Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (2011), 205.
17. See Brian W. Walsh, “George Washington Thanked God for America,” *USA Today*, Nov. 23, 2011, available at usatoday.com. See also *Federalist Papers*, no. 51.
18. Margaret Somerville, “Should Religion Influence Policy?” *The Mark*, May 19, 2010, themarknews.com. Secularists espouse a mistaken interpretation of the principle of separation of church and state. They do this to attack moral values based on religion. See also Dallin H. Oaks, “Preserving Religious Freedom,” Chapman University School of Law, Feb. 4, 2011, <http://mormonnewsroom.org/article/elder-oaks-religious-freedom-Chapman-University>.
19. David D. Kirkpatrick, “The Right Hand of the Fathers,” *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 20, 2009, 27. (Story on and quoting from Robert P. George, professor of jurisprudence at Princeton University.)
20. Kirkpatrick, “The Right Hand,” 27. Robert P. George teaches that either we have moral reason and free choice or we have amorality and determinism.
21. “UK Court Rules Christianity Harmful to Children,” *Charisma*, Mar. 1, 2011, <http://charismamag.com/index.php/news-old/30325-uk-court-rules-christianity-harmful-to-children>.
22. See “Onwards and Upwards—Why Is the Modern View of Progress So Impoverished?” *The Economist*, Dec. 17, 2009, economist.com. See also Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002). They fear that they will be charged with being intolerant or judgmental and shamed by those in the “great and spacious building” (1 Nephi 8:26; see also 11:35–36), often the academics who mock them.
23. See A. Keith Thompson, *Religious Confession Privilege and the Common Law* (2011), 352.
24. Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (1862), 2:25.



ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Do Latter-day Saints believe the U.S. Constitution is a divinely inspired document? The Lord Himself answered that question when He declared, “I established the Constitution . . . by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose” (D&C 101:80).

Since the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who called the U.S. Constitution “a heavenly banner” (in *History of the Church*, 3:304), latter-day prophets have said the Constitution is divinely inspired, declaring that America by divine design was prepared as the place for the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ. The freedoms and protections enumerated in the Constitution—including freedom of speech, assembly, and religion—made the Restoration possible.

The Church respects the rule of law and constitutional government in every nation and expects Latter-day Saints to adhere to the law, to use their influence to promote and preserve their God-given rights, and “to make popular that which is sound and good, and unpopular that which is unsound” (Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:286).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has observed: “After two centuries, every nation in the world except six have adopted written constitutions, and the U.S. Constitution was a model for all of them. No wonder modern revelation says that God established the U.S. Constitution and that it ‘should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles’ (D&C 101:77)” (“The Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1992, 68).

For more information on preserving religious liberty, go to mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/religious-freedom and mormonnewsroom.org/article/introduction-religious-freedom.