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# STANDING TOGETHER

for the Cause of Christ

*This article is excerpted from an address delivered in Salt Lake City on March 10, 2011, to a group of national Christian leaders.*

**F**riends, you know what I know—that there is in the modern world so much sin and moral decay affecting everyone, especially the young, and it seems to be getting worse by the day. You and I share so many concerns about the spread of pornography and poverty, abuse and abortion, illicit sexual transgression (both heterosexual and homosexual), violence, crudity, cruelty, and temptation, all glaring as close as your daughter’s cell phone or your son’s iPad.

Surely there is a way for people of goodwill who love God and have taken upon themselves the name of Christ to stand together for the cause of Christ and against the forces of sin. In this we have every right to be bold and believing, for “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

You serve and preach, teach and labor in that confidence, and so do I. And in doing so, I believe we can trust in the next verse from Romans as well: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

## ANSWERING QUESTIONS

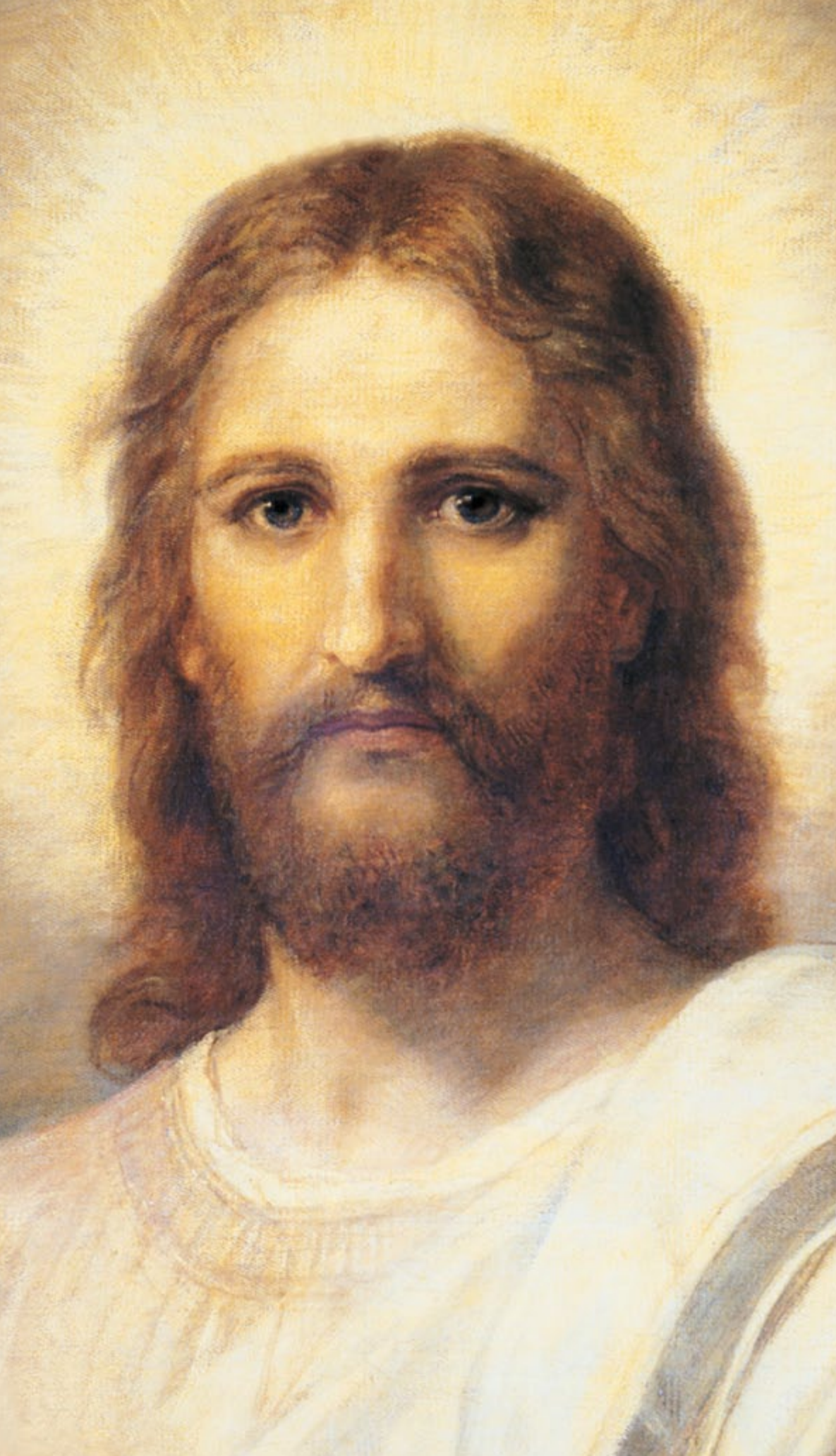
*Are Latter-day Saints Christians? Of course we are. As Elder Holland explains, “We believe in the historical Jesus who walked the dusty paths of the Holy Land and declare that He is one and the same God as the divine Jehovah of the Old Testament.”*

I truly believe that if across the world we can all try harder *not* to separate *each other* from the “love of Christ,” we will be “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:32, 35, 37).

## Theological Dialogue

Evangelicals and Latter-day Saints have not always met on peaceful terms. From the time in the early 19th century when Joseph Smith came from his youthful revelatory epiphany and made his bold declaration regarding it, our exchanges have too often been anything but cordial.

And yet, strangely enough—and I cannot help but believe this to be a part of a divine orchestration of events in these troubled times—LDS and evangelical academics and church figures have been drawn together since the late 1990s in what I think has become a provocative and constructive theological dialogue. It has been an honest effort to understand and be understood, an endeavor to dispel myths and misrepresentations on *both* sides, a labor of love in which the participants have felt motivated by and moved upon with a quiet force deeper and



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more profound than a typical interfaith exchange.

The first of those formal dialogues took place in the spring of 2000 at Brigham Young University. As the dialogue began to take shape, it was apparent that the participants were searching for a paradigm of some sort, a model, a point of reference. Were these to be confrontations, arguments, debates? Were they to produce a winner and a loser? Just how candid and earnest were they expected to be? Some of the Latter-day Saints wondered: Do the “other guys” see these conversations as our “tryouts” for a place on the Christian team? Is it a grand effort to “fix” Mormonism, to make it more traditionally Christian, more acceptable to skeptical onlookers?

In turn, some of the evangelicals wondered: Are those “other guys” for real, or is this just another form of their missionary proselytizing? Can a person be a New Testament Christian and yet not subscribe to later creeds that most of traditional Christianity adopted? A question that continued to come up on both sides was just how much “bad theology” can the grace of God compensate for? Before too long, those kinds of issues became part of the dialogue itself, and in the process, the tension began to dissipate.

The initial feeling of formality has given way to a much more amiable informality, a true form of brotherhood and sisterhood, with a kindness in disagreement, a respect for opposing views, a feeling of responsibility to truly understand (if not necessarily agree with) those of other faiths—a responsibility to represent one’s doctrines and practices accurately and grasp that of others in the same way. The dialogues came to enjoy “convicted civility.”<sup>1</sup>



***We would be eager to join hands with our evangelical friends in a united Christian effort to strengthen families and marriages, to demand more morality in media, to provide humane relief effort in times of natural disasters, to address the ever-present plight of the poor, and to guarantee the freedom of religion that will allow all of us to speak out on matters of Christian conscience.***

Realizing that Latter-day Saints have quite a different hierarchal and organizational structure than the vast evangelical world, no official representative of the Church has participated in these talks, nor have there been any ecclesiastical overtones to them. Like you, we have no desire to compromise our doctrinal distinctiveness or forfeit the beliefs that make us who we are. We are eager, however, not to be misunderstood, not to be accused of beliefs we do not hold, and not to have our commitment to Christ and His gospel dismissed out of hand, to say nothing of being demonized in the process.

Furthermore, we are always looking for common ground and common partners in the “hands-on” work of the ministry. We would be eager to join hands with our evangelical friends in a united Christian effort to strengthen families and marriages, to demand more morality in media, to provide humane relief effort in times of natural disasters, to address the ever-present plight of the poor, and to guarantee the freedom of religion that will allow all of us to speak out on matters of Christian conscience regarding the social issues of our time. In this latter regard the day must never come that you or I or any other responsible cleric in this nation is forbidden to preach from his or her pulpit the doctrine one holds to be true. But in light of recent sociopolitical events and current legal challenges stemming from them, particularly regarding the sanctity of marriage, that day could come unless we act decisively in preventing it.<sup>2</sup>

The larger and more united the Christian voice, the more likely we are to carry the day in these matters. In that regard we should remember the Savior’s warning regarding “a



*For more information about Latter-day Saints being Christians, see "About Mormons" under Frequently Asked Questions at [Mormon.org](http://Mormon.org); "Christianity: Following Jesus in Word and Deed" under News Releases at [MormonNewsroom.org](http://MormonNewsroom.org); and Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Prophet's Testimony," *Ensign*, May 1993, 93.*

house divided against [itself]"—a house that finds it cannot stand against more united foes pursuing an often unholy agenda (see Luke 11:17).

### **The Christ We Revere**

Building on some of this history and desirous that we not disagree where we don't need to disagree, I wish to testify to you, our friends, of the Christ we revere and adore in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We believe in the historical Jesus who walked the dusty paths of the Holy Land and declare that He is one and the same God as the divine Jehovah of the Old Testament. We declare Him to be both fully God in His divinity and fully human in His mortal experience, the Son who was a God and the God who was a Son; that He is, in the language of the Book of Mormon, "the Eternal God" (title page of the Book of Mormon).

We testify that He is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the Three being One: one in spirit, one in strength, one in purpose, one in voice, one in glory, one in will, one in goodness, and one in grace—one in every conceivable form and facet of unity *except* that of Their separate physical embodiment (see 3 Nephi 11:36). We testify that Christ was born of His divine Father and a virgin mother, that from the age of 12 onward, He was about His true Father's business, that in doing so, He lived a perfect, sinless life and thus provided a pattern for all who come unto Him for salvation.

We bear witness of every sermon He ever gave, every prayer He ever uttered, every miracle He ever called down from heaven, and every redeeming act He ever performed. In this latter regard we testify that in fulfilling the divine plan for our salvation, He took upon Himself all the sins, sorrows, and sicknesses of the world, bleeding at every pore in the anguish of it all, beginning in Gethsemane and dying upon the cross of Calvary as a vicarious offering for those sins and sinners, including each of us.

Early in the Book of Mormon a Nephite prophet "saw that [Jesus] was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:33). Later that same Lord affirmed: "Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross" (3 Nephi 27:13–14; see also D&C 76:40–42). Indeed, it is a gift of the Spirit "to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world" (D&C 46:13).

We declare that three days after the Crucifixion, He rose from the tomb in glorious immortality, the firstfruits of the Resurrection, thereby breaking the physical bands of death and the spiritual bonds of hell, providing an immortal future for both the body and the spirit, a future that can be realized in its full glory and grandeur only by accepting Him and His name as the only "name under heaven given

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among men, whereby we must be saved.” Neither is there, nor can there ever be, “salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12).

We declare that He will come again to earth, this time in might, majesty, and glory, to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the Christ, whom we praise, in whose grace we trust implicitly and explicitly, and who is “the Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

Joseph Smith was once asked the question, “What are the fundamental principles of your religion?” He replied, “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”<sup>3</sup>

As a rule, Latter-day Saints are known as an industrious people, a works-conscious people. For us, the works of righteousness, what we might call “dedicated discipleship,” are an unerring measure of the reality of our faith. We believe with James, the brother of Jesus, that true faith always manifests itself in faithfulness (see James 2). We teach that those Puritans were closer to the truth than they realized when they expected a “godly walk” (D&C 20:69) from those under covenant.

Salvation and eternal life are free (see 2 Nephi 2:4); indeed, they are the greatest of all the gifts of God (see D&C 6:13; 14:7). Nevertheless, we teach that one must prepare to receive those gifts by declaring and demonstrating

“faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Articles of Faith 1:4)—by trusting in and relying upon “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8; see also 2 Nephi 31:19; Moroni 6:4). For us, the fruits of that faith include repentance, the receipt of gospel covenants and ordinances (including baptism), and a heart of gratitude that motivates us to deny ourselves of all ungodliness, to “take up [our] cross daily” (Luke 9:23), and to keep His commandments—*all* of His commandments (see John 14:15). We rejoice with the Apostle Paul: “Thanks be to God, [who] giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). In that spirit, as one Book of Mormon prophet wrote, “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins . . . [and] may look forward unto that life which is in Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26, 27).

I hope this witness I bear to you and to the world helps you understand something of the inexpressible love we feel for the Savior of the world in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### **A Call to Christian Conscience**

Given our shared devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and given the challenges we face in our society, surely we can find a way to unite in a national—or international—call to Christian conscience. Some years ago Tim LaHaye wrote:

“If religious Americans work together in the name of our mutually shared moral concerns, we just might succeed in re-establishing the civic moral standards that our forefathers thought were guaranteed by the [United States] Constitution. . . .

“ . . . All of our nation’s religious citizens need to develop a respect for other religious people and their beliefs. We need not accept their beliefs, but we can respect the people and realize that we have more in common with each other than we ever will with the secularizers of this country. It is time for all religiously committed citizens to unite against our common enemy.”<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, there is a risk associated with learning something new about someone else. New insights always affect old perspectives, and thus some rethinking, rearranging, and restructuring of our worldviews is inevitable. When we look beyond people’s color, ethnic group, social circle, church, synagogue, mosque, creed, and statement of belief, and when we try our best to see them for who and what they are—children of the same God—something good and worthwhile happens within us, and we are thereby drawn into a closer union with that God who is the Father of us all.

Few things are more needed in this tense and confused world than Christian conviction, Christian compassion, and Christian understanding. Joseph Smith observed in 1843, less than a year before his death: “If I esteem mankind to be in error, 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 better; 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



***“Do you believe in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation which He revealed?” asked the Prophet Joseph Smith. “So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst; and they will do it before the millennium can be ushered in and Christ takes possession of His kingdom.”***

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I close with the love for you expressed by two valedictories in our scripture. First this from the New Testament author of Hebrews:

“[May] the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

“Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20–21).

And this from the Book of Mormon, a father writing to his son:

“Be faithful in Christ . . . [and] may [He] lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death . . . and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.

“And may the grace of God the Father, whose throne is high in the heavens, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who sitteth on the right hand of his power, until all things shall become subject unto him, be, and abide with you forever. Amen” (Moroni 9:25–26). ■

#### NOTES

1. A term introduced in Richard J. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (1992).
2. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Preserving Religious Freedom” (speech, Chapman University School of Law, Feb. 4, 2011), [newsroom.lds.org/article/elder-oaks-religious-freedom-Chapman-University](http://newsroom.lds.org/article/elder-oaks-religious-freedom-Chapman-University).
3. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 49.
4. Tim LaHaye, *The Race for the 21st Century* (1986), 109.
5. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 5:499.