

The Obligation to Do Apologetics

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I am going to be talking about the obligation to do apologetics. Let me, first of all, define apologetics. I still run into people who are troubled by the word *apologetics*. They don't like it. They think that it's some sort of science of going around saying, "I'm sorry." They want to know why Latter-day Saints should feel the need to apologize for their beliefs. Well, of course, you know that's not what it's about. Apologetics goes back to the old Greek term *apologeō*, which means, "to defend." If you've ever read anything of Plato or Socrates, you know that there's a famous document called the Apology of Socrates. If you've read it, you know that he's **not** saying, "I'm sorry." This is his defense of himself before the tribunal in Athens, where he basically thumbed his nose at them, and said, "Go ahead, kill me, I'm not backing down." Well, he didn't, and they did. That is certainly not an apology in the modern sense. In fact, the word *apology* in the sense of defending something is older in English than the sense of apology as saying, "I'm sorry." So it has nothing to do with apologizing, in that sense, for the Church. Religious apologetics is defending a position.

There are some who turn up their noses at apologetics. I've encountered this a lot from critics of the Church, particularly. You expect it from them, I suppose. They say: apologetics is not concerned with truth; apologetics is intrinsically dishonest; apologetics is not real scholarship. But this is a fundamental misunderstanding. Apologetics, like any other form of reasoning from evidence, can be either good or bad. It can be well done or badly done. It can be honestly done or dishonestly done. The way that you evaluate it is by looking at the evidence, the quality of the reasoning that's used in it.

It ignores also the venerable tradition of apologetics. Some of the biggest names in the history of human thought have been involved, very deliberately, with what can be called, and what they often called, apologetics. Think of Socrates himself, whom I just mentioned, or Plato, who gave the Apology of Socrates its title. In Christian history, you have relatively small names, but important names, like Minucius Felix, at the very beginnings of Christianity in the Second Century. Origen of Alexandria, who defended the Christian faith against attacks. His famous book, *Contra Celsum* (Against Celsus), who had launched an attack against Christianity, now lost, preserved in Origen's writing. In the Islamic tradition, some of the biggest names ever, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd were involved in defenses of their positions, or of positions they wanted to advocate for Islam.

Again, back to the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas, the *Summa contra Gentiles* is one of the greatest apologetic works in the history of the world, a defense of Christian belief against non-Christians. John Locke, the great philosopher, was pivotal to the founding of the United States. John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, an apology for his life, it is called, his autobiography. C. S. Lewis, the great

Christian apologist. Peter Kreeft, William Lane Craig, still living Christian apologists, who are very good at what they do.

What troubles me, though, is that some faithful members profess to disdain apologetics, as well. This seems to me really misguided, and not well thought out. In fact, the title of my talk, the Obligation to Apologize, I think that it is a duty incumbent upon all of us to “apologize” in the original sense for our faith. It’s simply a human duty to apologize in that sense for positions that you hold. We all have an obligation. It’s an individual obligation, and it’s incumbent upon all of us.

The Muslims have a useful distinction in Arabic. They distinguish between what they call *Fard al-‘ayn* and *fard al-kifaya*. *Fard al-‘ayn* is an obligation incumbent upon the individual. *Fard al-kifaya* is something that’s obligatory for the community, but not every individual has to do it.

In Mormon terms, the Church is obliged to build temples, but I am not personally obliged to build one. I participate in a community that builds temples. But I am personally obliged to give a reason for the hope that is within me. You remember that statement from 1 Peter 3:15

“Be ready always to give an answer (*ἀπολογία*, *apologian*, an apology) to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

Or to give it a more modern translation:

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

There is a passage from Austin Farrer, in which he spoke about C. S. Lewis, which has become for some of us associated with the Maxwell Institute, a kind of unofficial mantra, or motto. I’ll repeat it for you. I think it’s worth hearing. I think it’s a profound statement.

“Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.” (Austin Farrer, “Grete Clerk,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, comp. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965), 26.)

I think that is a really important thing for people to understand.

“Argument [it’s true] does not create conviction.” You don’t give people testimonies by arguing them into the Church. I know very few people who have come into the Church because of arguments. Those who have haven’t always stayed. If people believe that there is no reason for belief, that you have no reason, that you have no evidence, then

there is no reason for them to take you seriously. There is no reason for them to take your position seriously. To say, "I like Mormonism, but I have no reasons for it," is the equivalent of saying, "I like broccoli." That doesn't convince anyone else to like broccoli. As a matter of fact, I don't like broccoli very much.

"What no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned." If you're under the constant onslaught of critics, and you see no reasons to maintain your belief, you're not likely to retain it.

"Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish." If the ground is so encumbered with the overgrowth of critical arguments that the seed cannot take root, it is the duty of apologists in that sense to clear the ground, to make it possible for the seed to grow. That is essential, and it is a duty. In fact, we all do it, unless we're catatonic or completely asocial.

It isn't considered proper response when someone says, "Why do you hold the view that you do?" to respond, "Because." "Why do you prefer this candidate over that one?" "I just do." That's not good interaction. That's not good reasoning. The minute you start to say, "I support candidate X over candidate Y because ..." you are engaging in a kind of apologetic. It doesn't matter which position you take, as long as you have a position, and you advance reasons for it, you are engaging in apologetics. To say, "I disdain apologetics" is to say, "I'm a blithering idiot," frankly, "I don't know what I'm saying." The person will then presumably begin to give you reasons for why he disdains apologetics. In doing so, he's engaging in apologetics for his position against apologetics. Do you see what I am saying? You cannot NOT do this, unless you simply refuse to communicate. That's also an option, I suppose – just shut up. The minute you are going to start stating positions, and saying why you hold them, you are engaged in apologetics, and to say that you don't believe in apologetics is wrong and self-contradictory.

It's like C. S. Lewis said at one point, "Look, everybody is doing philosophy. You can say, 'I don't believe in philosophy.' The only question is, are you going to do it well or ill? We are always, all the time reasoning about things, like: "What is good?" "What is bad?" "Is there a God?" "Is there not a God?" "What are the proper grounds for believing there is a God?" Things like that. We do it all the time. The only question is whether you are doing it well, or not doing it well. You can't NOT do it unless you don't think.

We give reasons. We always do. When the Church sends missionaries out, we are not sent out, mostly, to argue people into the church. We're not, but we are instructed to try to give reasons for what we believe. When someone asks, "What is the basis for your belief that God has a body?" it's not appropriate to say, "Cuz!" It's appropriate to say, "Well, look at this scripture, look at this passage, etc." We don't argue people into it. We do supply reasons, don't we? That's apologetics! It may not be very sophisticated apologetics, but it's apologetics of a kind. We do give reasons. The Church's missionary program gives reasons, instructs the missionaries on reasons to give, we do it all the time. You can't not do it.

I want to talk about positive apologetics. I've spoken about it before. Defense is necessary. It's necessary on a football team. It's necessary on a baseball team. A great hitter who can't catch a baseball isn't going to make it in the major leagues. People always look at infielders and want to know, "What's his batting average?" but also, "Can he field a ball?" You have to put a defense out on the field as well as an offense. It won't do to score points, and then basically abandon the field and let them score. You're not likely to win that way. We have to do both. It's necessary to do both. You see that in the Old Testament in a passage I love from the fourth chapter of Nehemiah, where the Israelites have gone back to the Holy Land to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian Captivity. There are people who oppose them there in Jerusalem. Nehemiah records this:

And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded.
(Nehemiah 4:16-18)

They are building the temple, but they are also having to defend themselves against attack. It is necessary to do both. It's necessary both to advocate the Gospel, and to defend it against attack. It is important, it seems to me, to do the positive work as well as the negative work, to do affirmative apologetics, if you will, to show how a worldview can satisfy, inspire, fulfill. I think of someone like C. S. Lewis, again, who not only argued for Christianity and countered criticisms, but to a large extent devoted his life to expressing, in his case often in fiction, what it was that he found attractive about Christianity, about the Christian worldview. He has had enormous impact because of that.

For many people, Mormonism isn't what William James would call a "live option." James talked about how, there are some things that, for most people, are just not live options. You just can't believe them. You can't muster even the interest in finding out if they're true. For me, for example, the idea that the Earth is flat is not a live option. I'm not going to pray about it. I'm not going to investigate the question. I'm reasonably confident the Earth is in the form of a globe.

There are other things out there that are live options, where you really wonder, "Is this true, or is this not?" We've got to make Mormonism a live option for more people than those for whom it is now. For a lot of people who just don't know much about us, we are not very interesting.

I remember once, years ago, I was in Graz, Austria, and I was there with a Rabbi – with a group of people, actually. They all took off and went home. We'd had a conference there. I couldn't get a flight back to Israel. I was living in Israel at the time. I had to stay there

for a couple of days to make my connection. I ended up spending time with this Rabbi from the United States, who was a professor at Emory University. We sat down one night, and he raised a question, something about the Church, I don't remember what. I said something about the problem with staffing new units, that we were having a really hard time dealing with growth in places like Latin America. He said, "Really? Are you kidding? You're growing?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, I don't mean to be insulting, but why? I've always thought of Mormonism as the quintessential boring Midwestern Protestantism." I said, "Man you really don't know anything about us, do you?"

One of the things that sometimes occurs to me is that I want to stress how strange we are. I've spent a lot of my career trying to build bridges with other faiths, notably with Islam. There are times when I don't want to do that. I remember sitting once in the back of a session of the Society of Christian Philosophers. They were holding a regional meeting in Provo. (It's now against the rules for them to do that, because they've discovered we're not Christians.) Anyway, they were holding a meeting in the Provo Tabernacle, and there was a Reverend, an Episcopal Reverend, who was conducting an interfaith worship service. It was so ecumenical, that at a certain point, I was almost not able to stand it. I wanted to jump up on the back row and yell something like, "Adam is God!" I had about had it. I'm not a Protestant. I don't aspire to be one. But we do have to make the point to people sometimes that we are different – that we're not just Protestants with an extra book, and maybe an extra wife, or something like that. We are really very different. Mormonism is a radically different take on the world than conventional Theism is. We're really out in left field. You look at Classical Theism – we're not classical theists! A lot of the arguments for the existence of God just sort of pass us by; they have nothing to do with us. We don't see things the same way. I think it's important to make that point to people so that some people out there will at least begin to wonder, "Gosh! I'd like to know more about this!" As it is now, a lot of people don't care. They don't want to know. We're just a socially retrograde bunch of boring people. Patriarchs with, if not beards, at least attitudes from the 19th Century.

We've had a marvelous example of negative apologetics in this meeting here. You heard it earlier this afternoon. Will Schryver's presentation on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Now, I'm already hearing – I've got an iPhone; I'm an addict; I admit it – I'm sitting there looking at the responses of some of the critics. It's sort of like, "Eh, who ever said the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were important?" Well *they* did! We're going to have to get together some quotes. "It's beating a dead horse. Nobody cares about the Kirtland Egyptian Papers!" Well, that's a token of triumph on the part of our side, if you will, that suddenly, a very useful weapon against Joseph Smith has been taken away! It turns out the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are not the smoking gun that proves Joseph Smith a fraud. They have very little to do with anything! They're just a curious sort of relic of Mormon history, but they have nothing to do with the Book of Abraham, really. That's really interesting. That's a particularly effective example of negative apologetics, where you simply neutralize a negative argument against the Church.

I have to admit I've done a lot of negative apologetics in my lifetime. FARMS Review is partly born to do that. I sometimes think Jack Welch, who asked me to do it, twenty-two

years ago, must have occasionally wondered what kind of monster he'd created, because he had in mind just this little pamphlet that would be a guide to the literature on the Book of Mormon. Instead, it turned out to be this "thing" that takes on critics, and just smashes them sometimes. It's so nasty and mean, and so much fun for a few of us, anyway. I've enjoyed knocking down the critics. You've probably seen the Far Side cartoon with the two deer, and one is saying to the other, who has a big target on his back, "Gee, bummer of a birthmark!" Honestly, I look at some critics, and I think, "Oh man! Bummer of a birthmark!" I can't NOT take aim! It's like they walk around with a sign on their rear ends that says, "Kick me!" What can I do? As Lou Midgley puts it sometimes, I am sort of like the drunk who walks by the swinging doors of the tavern, and says, "Oh, one last time!" I just can't not do it.

I actually take more pleasure in what I might call positive apologetics, that is, arguing for the truthfulness of the Church. There are things out there that seem to me deeply suggestive of the truth of the Church. Not that there are things out there that will prove it. I don't think the Lord intends that. But there's plenty out there, and plenty to talk about, and it's great fun to talk about it. We've had great examples of that in this conference as well.

Stephen Ricks, "Proper Names in the Book of Mormon." They are a genuine pointer to something Middle Eastern in that book that goes beyond what Joseph Smith should have been able to come up with, this frontier yokel who was just making things up on the American frontier, supposedly.

Jeffrey Bradshaw, "The Apocalypse of Abraham." That's really interesting stuff! There's again more going on there than there, by rights, ought to be from Joseph Smith.

David Bokovoy, "Joseph Smith and the Biblical Council of Gods." That is really interesting material! Where did Joseph get this? It reminds me of Jordan Vajda, who is this former Catholic priest who wrote about the idea of human deification showing up in Mormonism. He wrote a master's thesis about it at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a former Catholic priest. He was a Dominican priest at the time he wrote his thesis. I loved telling about him until he joined the Church – that's kind of taken the fun out of it. "Mormon favors doctrine of deification." That's not as exciting as "Dominican Catholic priest endorses Mormonism." The question he raised was, "How do you explain it?" He said that the critics of the LDS Church (God Makers, Ed Decker, etc) have attacked the Mormons for teaching this doctrine of human deification, and yet, it turns out it's an ancient Christian doctrine! How do you account for the fact that Joseph Smith came up with that out in the middle of nowhere, with no great access to Patristic literature or anything like that? How did he do that? Some doctrine of human deification out of the blue, seemingly. It's hard to explain, and it seems to me you could make a great argument for that.

John Gee's, "Marginal Characters in the Book of Abraham Manuscripts," was a bit of negative apologetics, taking away a critical argument, it seems to me.

So negative is important, but positive is also important. It has two parts. One is to argue that the Gospel is true, but the other, and something I want to get at a little bit more today, is to argue that it's desirable. That it's good. That it's something that you ought to consider if you're a non-Latter-day Saint. Now, no expertise is required for that latter task. Some of you may be thinking, "I'm not a scholar; I can't make an argument for the truthfulness of the Church." Well, maybe you can, maybe you can't. I don't know. Sharing a testimony is an important part of that, but you can make an argument, because you're as much an expert as anyone, and there's no special expertise required for this. To say why I, personally, find the Gospel compelling, why I find it satisfying, what I find exciting about it, why I am willing to give lots and lots of hours to the service of the Church and the Kingdom, and to spread it, and to talk about it. Why is it that I feel that way about the Gospel? Everybody here can do that. If you have a testimony, if you love the Church, you can articulate in some way the reasons why you do. It's important, it seems to me, for us to begin to do that.

Here is my suggestion. This is the practical point that I am going to be trying to get at. When I was a missionary, I hated to tract, absolutely loathed it. I was in Switzerland, and everyone's home is his or her castle, right? Most of the people weren't home, and the ones who were home, like housewives, didn't want to let us in, and I frankly didn't blame them. A couple of strange guys show up at your door – would you let them in? You have these fanatics from the United States, and who knows what they're about? They speak German funny, and all that sort of thing.

One of my senior companions on my mission was Stephen Ricks, who spoke yesterday. It was fun, because he and I would get involved in discussions of Hugh Nibley, and we'd forget to knock on doors. I'm not sure we were a very effective pair. But the thing is, in retrospect, I'm not sure it made much difference. Nobody would let us in anyway. To me, my mission in Switzerland was an endless round of knocking on doors and having people say, "No." So, not very productive. I didn't like it.

We tried other things. We tried street contacting. I was just in Lucerne, Switzerland a couple of weeks ago, again. I've been there a lot of times, but I remember, I still can remember, we're right on the spot where I used to stand around the lake of the Vierwaldstättersee, the Lake of the Four Forest Cantons, where we would try to waylay people walking past, and give them pamphlets. I hated that even more than tracting! I thought, "How do you feel about some idiot coming up to you? You're just minding your own business, walking along the lake, and some lunatic from America comes up and tries to force religious literature on you." I wouldn't have liked that either! And yet, we didn't know what else to do.

It wasn't like the members were turning in thousands of referrals. Referrals were what we wanted. The funny thing was, the incentive structure in the mission was not at all geared toward referrals. At one point, I was brought in as a Zone Leader, and I found we had a whole box of referrals. Some of them were so good, they were from temples, and they'd say, "Please, I want to hear more!" Nobody had ever contacted them, because the rewards were all given in that mission for tracting hours. There was no incentive for following

through on referrals. I couldn't believe it! Here were people actually asking to hear about the Gospel, and nobody bothered to do it, because you didn't get any points in your weekly reports for that. I thought, "Now that's absolutely crazy!"

What I always dreamed of as a missionary was being in a visitor's center. I'll tell you why. Because in a visitor's center the people are coming to see you! You're not waylaying them, shanghaiing them on the street. They're coming to see you. They already know they're going to get a talk about religion. They wouldn't have walked in the door if they weren't interested in that. I thought that it would be great to talk to people, and only people who really want to know something. You're not harassing the people who don't want to know. You're talking to the people who do.

Every member is supposed to be a missionary. You all know that. And yet, we found it difficult. In my case, I teach at BYU. I live in Orem. There are no non-members! I'm exaggerating a little bit, but they're hard to find. The ones that are out there have been contacted ten trillion times. They have strong opinions about the Church, for the most part. I realize that the Utah missions are doing well, but where they're finding those people I don't know. They're not my neighbors. We had one couple that moved into our neighborhood, and announced right from the start that we were devil worshippers, and they wanted nothing to do with us. Then, after about a year, they moved away, and they let it be known that we were the most unfriendly neighborhood they had ever been in! So all their prejudices were confirmed.

But we're supposed to be missionaries, and I'm sitting there in Utah Valley thinking, "What on Earth can I do? I just don't see that many non-members." I go to academic conferences, but that's not a very good venue. They clearly know who you are, and sometimes they'll ask questions, but on the whole, you can't really buttonhole them about religion. It's just not really socially appropriate at venues like that.

But now it seems to me with the Internet that every one of us can now reach the whole world. It's absolutely amazing what we can do! From Provo? Even if you're at BYU? You can reach everybody all around the world at equal cost. It doesn't matter if they are in Nigeria. Heck, the Nigerians reach me all the time. Do you realize how many millions of dollars I have? FAIR's financial difficulties are about to be done away with, because I've got so much money coming my way from various widows of dictators in West Africa that I don't even know what to do with it all. I'm going to be giving it away! It appears that my sterling character qualities are known throughout the Caribbean, West Africa, Asia, and I win lotteries every week that I didn't even know I had entered! It's amazing. The thing that astonishes me about these people is they know all about my wonderful sterling character qualities, but they are always curious about my gender. They don't know that, and they don't know my full name, and oddly, they want my bank information. I don't get it.

They can reach us from Nigeria, right? So we can reach them! It's painless. It's absolutely easy. You can do it in your pajamas, in your basement. You don't even have to

get dressed up to do this. You don't have to put on a white shirt and tie. It's really easy to do this sort of thing.

There is a passage in the Doctrine and Covenants that was alluded to earlier today by Gary Lawrence.

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. (D&C 58:26-28)

Now, what I want to suggest is that the Internet has given us more of that power than we have ever had before. You can sit absolutely anywhere and reach anybody anywhere. Let me give you some examples of that. I may have mentioned this before; I don't recall. I have only three stories that I circulate mercilessly. This is one of them.

A number of years ago, I was invited to go over to the Islamic Republic of Iran as a guest of the regime there. It was a really interesting experience, in a whole lot of ways. But one of the people I was with was a former Baha'i, now Catholic. He had established a Baha'i web site before he had left the Baha'i faith. The Baha'is are persecuted in Iran. We had been given an Internet café that we could kind of work at to maintain contact with our families back home. They treated us very well on this little expedition. We went in one day, and he said, "I want to check something. I want to know if my Baha'i web site is accessible here in the Islamic Republic of Iran on an official, government-owned Islamic Republic of Iran computer." We had it up and running within five seconds, I think. That, to me, showed that even a regime like the Islamic Republic of Iran can't keep out web sites that it really hates. The fact is, he set that web site up from the United States, and there it was reaching people, presumably, in Iran, which says something about the power of the Internet to penetrate barriers, and to reach people in difficult-to-reach locations. That's an amazing thing, and every one of us here who has access to the Internet can do that if we take the time to do something via the Internet – set up a web site or something like that.

Fear used to prevent us, and quite often does prevent us from opening our mouths. The Lord constantly says, "Don't fear men. You ought to fear God rather than men." But the fact is, it doesn't work that way. We're still scared about saying things to people about our faith, and Latter-day Saints become sort of tongue-tied about this. But a lot of us are really willing to battle endlessly on the Internet. In fact, the Internet lets us be our worst selves. (Illustrations not needed, I think it would be redundant.) Why not be our best selves on the Internet? Why not use the Internet to reach people around the world?

The Church will always be a minority, Rodney Stark notwithstanding, no matter the really ambitious or exciting projections of the potential growth of the Church. We are not

going to be the majority on the faith of the planet ever. First Nephi Chapter 14 makes that really clear.

And it came to pass that he said unto me: Look, and behold that great and abominable church, which is the mother of abominations, whose founder is the devil.

And he said unto me: Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.

And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few, because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters; nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions upon the face of the earth were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw. (1 Nephi 14:9-12)

I suspect that is the way it is going to remain. We are not going to become the majority faith. It's just not going to happen. I would be delighted to be surprised otherwise, but I don't think that's the way it's going to be. But the fact is, there are probably millions, if not tens of millions of people out there still whom we have not reached, who would accept the Gospel. Think of Gary Lawrence's statistics today. Twenty five percent, he said, according to his polling data, are interested in the Gospel. They would be interested if we could reach them. Sixty five million Americans, he said.

I think, for example, about the fallout over Proposition 8 – there are a lot of people who say, “Look at the damage the Mormons brought upon themselves, the public relations nightmare they have created for themselves with their advocacy of Proposition 8.” It seems to me, that whether it makes us popular or not is irrelevant to the decision as to what stand we ought to take on that issue. It doesn't matter if it costs us every friend in the world. We didn't do it for PR reasons. But the fact is, yes, I'm sure it lost us potential friends in some circles, but it probably gained us potential friends elsewhere, and those are being ignored. With Catholics, with certain Protestants, and others, the Mormons stepped up to the plate, more in some cases, than their own churches did. That has got to have a positive impact on some people. So we should not count this as a total loss. The question is to find those people. Does everyone like us? No. Will they ever all like us? No. If they ever all liked us, I would be deeply, deeply worried. That has never been the heritage of the Saints. But that there are people out there to whom we could speak I have every confidence, and there are lots of them, but we're not reaching them.

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it.
(Doctrine and Covenants 123:12)

The question is: How to reach these people efficiently? I am delighted to hear that the Church is now trying Internet ways to contacting people. I saw a line in the Church News I think it was, or the Mormon Times the other day, where someone described the Internet as the new public square, in a way. I think that's absolutely true. I think it's much better than going out by Lake Lucerne and trying to harass people walking by. Because what you can do is you can find people who are actually interested. They will come to your web site. They will want to talk. They may want to argue with you, and you have to distinguish between the people who just want to fight and the people who are genuinely interested. But even the ones who want to fight with you are interested; they're not the indifferent ones.

We want to reach the people who are interested, who can be impacted. What is the most effective way of reaching them? The problem is they don't live in concentrated, major towns. One of the problems we had in Switzerland (I speak from my own missionary experience) is that there were only a few of us missionaries there. Even in a small country like Switzerland, we were not covering the whole country. We weren't covering all the major towns. We weren't covering all of the major towns we were in. You'd have two missionaries, or four missionaries, in Zurich, two missionaries or four missionaries in Bern. You just couldn't possibly reach everybody. There were whole towns, major suburban areas that we had never touched, and we would never touch. The question is how to reach them. The Internet, again, offers a way of finding the people out there – one of a town, two of a village, who might be interested, who might be willing to accept the Gospel, or at least consider it. We're short-handed, but we can have a multiplier effect with the Internet, with that sort of thing. The nice thing is that distance is virtually irrelevant. It doesn't matter where they live. If we can reach them, the missionaries can go out and find them. If there is someone really, really golden out there who expresses interest, the missionaries will go. But we can't afford to simply send missionaries out to distant little towns on the off chance that somebody is out there. We just can't cover the world that way.

Examples again, and I may have used these before. I had the experience, I've traveled a bit, three or four times to Australia and New Zealand. The people out in Perth, western Australia like to boast that they are not at the ends of the Earth, but they can see the ends of the Earth from Perth. There's truth to that. It's a long way out there. They are as far as you can get from Church headquarters, I think, and still stay on the planet. But the fact is, with the Internet, with the Web, they are as close as anybody. They can participate in discussions on the Internet as if they were sitting right adjacent to BYU, or sitting right in Church headquarters or something like that. Likewise, non-members out there can be reached that way. Let me give you an example. It also has a Perth connection.

I met a couple in Perth my last time there who had converted in the Middle East. It was young man who was working in an office building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and he came across the Church's web site, and he began to read it, and he was converted by what he read on the Church's web site. He began, unwisely, to talk about this with his office mates. He soon had a court date with the religious police in Saudi Arabia, which is not something to be taken lightly. So he fled the country. He ended up meeting a young woman from Syria, and he converted her to the Church. They were baptized by a colleague of mine who teaches at BYU now, but who was serving then as the District President in Jordan. This is a story where almost all of the heavy lifting was done by the Internet, reaching people who could not be reached.

We would never, worlds without end, send missionaries into Riyadh – not to proselyte, I can guarantee you that. I used to laugh about, people who have told me, “Oh, you'll be the first Mission President of the new Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Mission!” Yeah, right! How about the Mecca, Saudi Arabia Mission? Why not go for the gold? At least it would be a short mission: you arrive; you are beheaded on the tarmac; instant martyrdom; entry into Paradise!

But the fact is, the Internet can reach people like that, and it doesn't risk anything. I mean, if somebody wants to read, they can read. Then they make up their minds what they are going to do with it. But these people eventually found (I mentioned there was a Perth connection) they eventually found their way to Perth, western Australia, where they gained religious refugee status, and they are thoroughly active in the ward there. They were converted by the Internet, by this incredibly powerful simply tool that can reach around the world at no cost. You can communicate with people in China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Ghana from your downstairs basement computer. It's easy.

Are the media hostile? Do an end-run around them! Learn from bloggers, and alternate media. People have learned, for example, that the media are not always friendly to certain political viewpoints. (I won't get partisan here.) They're not always friendly to certain moral viewpoints and social stances. It doesn't matter! Now, we're not dependent upon the big three network news programs. There are lots of news programs, and web sites, and all sorts of things. You can get your information, for good or ill, from all sorts of sources. We have a much greater range of sources that are available. We can use that.

Truman G. Madsen used to use the phrase, “Every member a birddogger.” I liked that, because the worst thing for missionaries was finding people to teach. If they once found them, they could teach them. That's what missionaries are really called to do. There's nothing sacred about tracting. Missionaries are supposed to teach. If we could supply enough people for them, so they didn't have to tract, they could teach all day long. That would be a much more effective use of their time. Of course, we always dream of the members finding these investigators for the missionaries, but the members haven't stepped up to the plate very much. We can do better than we have done. We can do it with the Internet, it seems to me.

In the old days, one of the things that helped the Church to grow was what was called the Pax Romana. The Pax Romana established basic stability. We have this image now from a lot of movies of the Roman Empire as being a sort of former day Nazi, you know, the Second Reich, or the First Reich, or something like that. That's not really fair, because the Romans did a lot of good. They were an empire of laws, and for the most part, or to a large extent anyway, they really did obey the laws. You could appeal, you could go to court, there were codified laws that you could go by, and they did other things. They built roads. They established peace. So Paul could travel all around the Mediterranean world. Other missionaries could travel on those roads, they could travel by boat and be more or less safe from pirates, and that sort of thing, because the Romans had established the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace.

Missionary work, our missionary work, benefitted to a large degree after World War II from the Pax Americana. We could get into places we hadn't previously entered: Japan, for example, Germany, and so on. There was more or less peace, and America had a certain amount of prestige. We could do a lot based on that. The American way of life attracted people. I think that may have run its course. America is not so "in" as it once was. Go to Europe and tell that people you are an American. It does not always receive gushes of approval. Still, there are good things about this.

The new Roman road, it seems to me, is the Internet, which makes it painless to travel all around the world, virtually. So we need to use it. We need to use it as the early Christians used the Pax Romana and the Roman roads. Everybody can contribute to this: personal statements, personal creativity. Every one of you is capable of reaching somebody out there that no one else could reach. There are people out there who want to hear the Gospel in their language, in their terms, in their own way. It may be that I can't reach them, but you can. So what we need is as many people as we can get out there. I have this vision of thousands of people out there looking on the Internet, setting up web sites, doing things to direct people to the Church.

Here is a story I love to tell. (One of my other two stories.) There was a lady that I met on my mission. I was working in the mission home at the end of my mission, and I think she lived out in Biel or someplace like that out in the northwest of Switzerland. I had never worked in that area. I went out, and for some reason, I can't remember what, I ended up talking with her for a few minutes. I don't think it was more than ten minutes. We shot the breeze. I remember nothing about it, except literally the weather came up at one point. She had been an investigator of the Church for seven years. She was baptized the following week. She said that it was the conversation with me that did it. Now I would love to take credit for that one, but for the life of me, when I heard about it I thought, "What? We hadn't said anything!" I don't know what it was.

There were lots of people on my mission that I talked with where I thought, "I am so eloquent. I am so persuasive. How can they possibly not accept the Gospel?" None of those people, not one of them, ever accepted the Gospel. This lady I shoot the breeze with for a few minutes falls into the font after seven years. I have no idea what went on, but the point of this, what I like to always tell people, what I would tell missionaries when I

was sending them out from our ward, was you don't know what it is that's going to reach somebody. Your job is just to work. You may touch somebody that absolutely nobody else could, and you may not be able to know why, or how it worked. It's the Spirit. You have to do the work to be able to make that possible. So we need to have as many people out there as we can trying to convey their sense of their love of the Gospel, not just arguing for it, but why they love it.

Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;

That faith also might increase in the earth;

That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

(Doctrine and Covenants 1:17-24)

There is so much we can do, and I don't presume to have all the ideas, or even many of them. I don't know that I have many good ideas, but I know lots of people who do. There are online films; there's YouTube; there are these Mormon Messages. You just link and get people to watch those. Church materials – you've seen these things, like "Why Mormons Build Temples," a wonderful little video the Church did a while back. Or Elder Holland's "None Were with Him," a powerful testimony of the Atonement. That's available. The Church is doing wonderful things with the media, putting these messages up online, and they are being watched by a lot of people, but not yet by enough. If we can provide the hooks to get people to watch those things, we don't have to be eloquent ourselves; we just need to get people and direct them to the Church. We can link them to Mormon.org, and the wonderful testimonies that are available there.

We have to make the Gospel beautiful and attractive, not to talk ourselves into it, or to convince others to buy into it as wishful thinking, but because those who don't find it attractive won't ever give it serious consideration. They have to know why a Latter-day Saint can love the Gospel, love the Church. It might be a different thing for you than for somebody else. It might be like, I was talking with Craig Foster the other day, his passionate love for the work for the dead, the Spirit of Elijah. This is wonderful stuff, and it will speak to a lot of people. It might be the idea of salvation for the dead; it might be the idea of eternal progression; any number of things that I could point to as things I love about the Gospel and wish other people understood.

We're not just boring Protestants. We've got a different Gospel. Oh, that will play well with the Anti-Mormons. I shouldn't have said it. I take it back. "Peterson confesses everything!" We have a different take on the Gospel; it's a different way of looking at the Faith. It's rich and it's profound and it's wonderful.

"Mormon Scholars Testify" is an attempt to get to people to do that, to say, "Why do you as a scholar find the Gospel compelling?" Some critics have complained there are no arguments there. Well look, I'm willing to do arguments elsewhere. I didn't ask for arguments there. I haven't *asked* for arguments at all. I want them to say why they love the Gospel, what is it that speaks to you, as a geologist, or just as a person. Whatever it is. Emphasize the distinctives. What is it, that in particular, gets you?

Don't assume that they understand. They may know something about Proposition 8, or think they do. They may know about Big Love. I had so many people in Australia, government ministers, come to me and say, "Oh, I know a lot about your church; I watch Big Love!" Great. They may know polygamy, but they don't know the Plan of Salvation, probably, or they don't know the idea of the Restoration. Thanks, Gary Lawrence! Good point!

If you speak a language, maybe you can use it. If you served in a special mission area that still means a lot to you, maybe you should do something designed to help out the work in that area. Whatever hooks will work.

Don't waste your time, though. Stop fighting the hostile, testosterone-driven (the "pearls before swine" syndrome).

Personal attacks. It's really hard not to defend yourself, not to want to respond. Believe me, I know. I know something about being attacked on the Internet. I've found whole new realms of unethical behavior just this morning that I've been engaged in! But it's not about you or me. It's about the Gospel. Millions are waiting, and we don't have time for these sorts of people.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded,

lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. . . . [They are] ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Timothy 3:1-5, 7

Don't waste time on those who resist. Why? Not because their souls aren't precious, or because it's hopeless, but because our numbers are few, and our time is limited. Perhaps they are not ready yet. Maybe they will be sometime, but they are not now. We have to apply the principle of Triage. Triage is the process of determining the priority of patient treatment in medicine. Some can't be helped. Some aren't that serious. Some need to be addressed right now. We have to apply that to the people we speak with about the Gospel – people we address on the Internet.

You can do something. You can all do something. All of us can. If you can't do something, support those who do. Financially? FAIR needs financial help. Offer to help. Volunteer. This whole thing (FAIR) was built up by volunteers.

This is much more effective, it seems to me, than the old Book of Mormon testimony program. We can now reach many more people.

You've heard the story, maybe, about the kid who is on the beach, throwing beached star fish into the sea. Someone walks along and says, "It's hopeless. There are thousands of these. What good does it do?" Well, it does a lot of good for the ones I throw back into the sea. We may not be able to do everything, but we can do something.

Don't just leave this conference *edified*. Resolve to *do* something.

Conclusion

O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!

Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth.

But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me.

I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction.

Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience.

Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called?

Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth?

For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.

Alma 29:1-8

In this language of wanting to be an angel who can speak with a voice that shakes the earth, do you know what he's remembering? This just dawned on me a few weeks ago. I don't know why. Maybe I'm slow. Maybe everybody else has noticed this. It's his own experience with an angel that spoke with the voice of thunder and shook the earth. He wants to bring that experience to everybody else. "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor." (D. & C. 88: 81) That's what Alma wanted to do. He said look, I can't reach everybody.

Thankfully, we have greater capacities, technically, than Alma did. We can reach more people. This passage begins to speak to me more than it ever did, "O that I were an angel." I wish I could speak to the whole world with a voice of thunder that could shake the earth. I can't quite do that, but I can reach a lot of people out there through the Internet, and through other techniques. That, it seems to me, is something well worth doing.

Now, "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor." Who is our neighbor? The Lord taught us that everybody is our neighbor! We are responsible to take the Gospel to all those people out there. In the Internet Age, your neighbor can be anybody. It doesn't matter. Next door, or 10,000 miles away, distance means nothing! I have a vision of tens of thousands, maybe more, taking the message of the Gospel out this way.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Matthew 9:36-38

I pray that he will. When Heber C. Kimball arrived in Preston, they saw a big banner hanging over the road that said, "Truth Will Prevail." I believe it will, and I believe that we've been given great tools with which to make that happen. The point, to cite a philosopher whom I do not normally cite as an authority, Karl Marx, "The point is not to understand the world; the point is to change it." I think that Karl Marx would have done some good if he had tried a little harder to understand it accurately. Nevertheless, I see his point. It's not enough to have a theoretical knowledge; we've got to go out and do something. "Faith without works is dead," as we often say.

What I hope people take from this conference after they've heard a lot of wonderful talks, is not just, "Well, that was a lot of fun. I enjoyed that. I learned a few things," but the resolution to go out and do something, or to help in doing something. To help with the work of FAIR. To help wherever we can. To set up our own web sites. To bear our testimonies on the Internet. To express our belief in the Gospel, the passion that we have for it, and the faith we have in it, in any way we can, and to try to get that around the world.

It's not a secret that missionary numbers have actually been down lately, that our missionary success is lower than it once was. I don't believe that's a permanent thing. It doesn't have to be. It means the members have to get more involved than they have been, and this tool has been handed to us to do it. We can help the missionaries take the Gospel to the world. If they can be spending more time teaching and less time trying to find those isolated people seeking the truth – if we can do some of that for them – if we can find those people, have them contact our web sites, direct them to Mormon.org, so they can make contact with the Church and get the missionaries sent to them, that is all to the good.

I bear you my testimony the Gospel is true, and that we may be standing, in my view, not on the threshold, as the critics like to say, of the beginning of the decline, with the Church fading away, but the beginning of an explosion of conversions to the Church as people out there whom we've never been able to reach before will begin to hear the message of the Gospel in their own language, in their own tongue, in their own way. From individual members of the Church who now have voices that can reach the entire earth, and shake the earth, in a sense. I bear you that testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.