



All Are Alike Unto God: Opening Our Hearts to Those Who Are Different

Elder Gary E. Stevenson (USA)

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My distinguished colleagues and friends, it is an honor to address you. We gather from around the world as ecclesiastical leaders, spiritual guides, and scholars of various religious beliefs to share perspectives in this noble work of building peace. We face many challenges, but one of the tests of a successful society is to learn from the past and accept new light and knowledge that come into the world. Religion is no different. We can all learn from one another – from our past and from our present. May I begin by quoting Joseph Smith – founding prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who said that we should receive all truth, “let it come from whence it may.”¹

As an apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I represent a faith that has a singular purpose—the salvation of all God’s children. A book of scripture we follow teaches that God’s work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”² Accomplishing that vision takes time. Like a tree sprouting from a seed and growing into its potential, so religion progresses toward its full stature.

Every religion has a story and is established in a particular time and place. Religious institutions typically, initially focus inward as they lay the foundation of their own beliefs and organization. The unfolding Latter-day Saint story included the search for harmony among our neighbors. Persecuted by mobs and driven from our homes, we migrated from place to place seeking refuge to practice our religion in peace. We eventually settled in a corner of the American West. Similar to other religious faiths of that era, there existed among early Latter-day Saints fear of outside groups, unease about racial differences, and the apprehension of the influence of the prevailing culture.

Notwithstanding our past, Latter-day Saints rely on a foundational doctrine of continuing revelation wherein knowledge unfolds “line upon line, precept upon precept”³ as we strive to understand and live the will of the Lord. A significant essay on this topic explains that: “As the Church grew worldwide, its overarching mission to ‘go ye therefore, and teach all nations’ seemed increasingly incompatible with the priesthood and temple restrictions.”⁴ The fact that

¹ “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” p. 1666, The Joseph Smith Papers.

² Moses 1:39.

³ 2 Nephi 28:30

⁴ Gospel Topic: Race and the Priesthood <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.



full participation of Latter-day Saints of African descent was not possible became the focus of much prayer and fasting to understand the divine direction of the Lord. Through earnest petitioning over many years, the will of the Lord was revealed to the president of the Church in 1978, and all Church privileges were extended to every worthy man, woman and child. Members of the Church, as did I, wept and rejoiced at the coming of this long-awaited day. In 2018, to commemorate the 40-year anniversary of the revelation, President Dallin H. Oaks of our First Presidency described the significance of the change:

“Many Latter-day Saints felt joy at this news. The numbers of valiant and faithful members of African descent who had accepted the gospel despite the restrictions was then very small. Therefore, most of those who rejoiced were Anglo-Americans like me, who witnessed the pain of black brothers and sisters and longed for their relief...”

“The Church reacted swiftly to the revelation on the priesthood. Ordinations and temple recommends came immediately. The reasons that had been given to try to explain the prior restrictions on members of African ancestry—even those previously voiced by revered Church leaders—were promptly and publicly disavowed...”

“Changes in the hearts and practices of individual members did not come suddenly and universally. Some accepted the effects of the revelation immediately and gracefully. Some accepted gradually. But some, in their personal lives, continued the attitudes of racism that have been painful to so many throughout the world, including the past 40 years.”

“One of the most important effects of the revelation on the priesthood is its divine call to abandon attitudes of prejudice against any group of God’s children. Racism is probably the most familiar source of prejudice today, and we are all called to repent of that.”⁵

This revelation has been a great blessing to all Church members, and we have been lifted and strengthened by the full participation of all God’s children. We have strengthened our priorities towards serving others and celebrating unity in diversity. Our shared values with people of faith have compelled us to build bridges of interfaith understanding, foster relationships of racial harmony, and promote fairness for all throughout society, as well as to collaborate with global humanitarian organizations.

“Giving to those in need is a principle in all Abrahamic religions and in others as well.

“A few months ago, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reported for the first time the extent of our humanitarian work worldwide. Our 2021 expenditures for those in need in 188 countries worldwide totaled \$906 million—almost a billion dollars. In addition, our members volunteered over 6 million hours of labor in the same cause.”⁶

The effort to engage in meaningful dialogue fuels trust. We have participated in conferences, events, discussions, and private talks with members of many races, ethnicities, and cultures.

⁵ Dallin H. Oaks, “[President Oaks Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration](#),” Church Newsroom, June 1, 2018.

⁶ Dallin H. Oaks, “[Helping the Poor and Distressed](#),” October 2022.

Listening to the human experience of others and sharing one’s own journey leads to deeper understanding and respect. In this way we strive to move ever closer to the universal ideal that “all are alike unto God.”⁷ By collaborating with our African American friends and government and religious leaders across Africa, we work to build those bridges of understanding spoken of by President Oaks. As part of this broader effort, we have undertaken significant cultural exchanges, and granted educational scholarships. These are helping us create a brighter future together.

Overcoming ignorance starts by understanding. To that end, we recently collaborated with Muslim friends to publish a booklet that helps people understand the similarities, rather than the differences, between Muslims and Latter-day Saints.⁸ This shows how the common beliefs, values, and practices in both faiths extend beyond political, ethnic, or cultural boundaries.

Interestingly enough, our experience shows that religions can best provide solutions when they hold true to their core principles while also being guided by additional divine light and knowledge. When citizens learn to live together with respect and unity despite religious differences, we have the foundational stones to true peace.⁹

My fellow apostle, Quentin L. Cook has said: “Catholics, Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, Latter-day Saints, and other faiths must be part of a coalition of faiths that succor, act as a sanctuary, and promulgate religious freedom across the world.”¹⁰

The hard work of harmony is worth the effort it requires. Russell M. Nelson, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, expressed this goal: “Solutions will come as we open our hearts to those whose lives are different than our own, as we work to build bonds of genuine friendship, and as we see each other as the brothers and sisters we are — for we are all children of a loving God.”¹¹ The gospel of Jesus Christ calls on us to love people of all faiths, cultures, races, and nations for the common good – all are alike unto God.

As one called to be a witness of Jesus Christ and promote the peace and love He taught I testify of His divinity and invoke divine blessings on all who seek to serve.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen

⁷ 2 Nephi 26:33.

⁸ [Muslims and Latter-day Saints: Beliefs, Values, and Lifestyles](#), 2022.

⁹ See Dallin H. Oaks, “Religious Freedom in an International Context” December 14, 2021.

¹⁰ Quentin L. Cook, “[Tone Deaf to the Music of Faith](#),” June 28, 2021.

¹¹ Russell M. Nelson, Derrick Johnson, Leon Russell, Amos C. Brown, “Locking Arms for Racial Harmony in America,” Medium, June 8, 2020.