

Elder John H. Vandenberg

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

“Observe with a learning eye”

In a small hall in the city of Liverpool, England, during the winter of 1925-26, a group of missionaries destined to various parts of Great Britain and the European continent were gathered to receive counsel and instruction from Elder James E. Talmage, the European Mission president. Part of the counsel given included this cautionary advice: “Since you have come from modest-size western communities in America you will, no doubt, observe some customs and methods which differ from those you are used to, which may cause you to want to criticize them. Be careful that you do not. Remember, you are the foreigner in a foreign land. You are their guests. You will soon find that such customs and methods are good. They are the results of proven experiences. It is better to observe with a learning eye.”

Having been one of those missionaries, assigned to the Netherlands, during my time spent there I found that the counsel given was wise. From my arrival till my departure, I learned much from my observations. I visited many of its cities, observed their clean surroundings, the picturesque buildings, the many well-maintained waterways and canals. Above all, I experienced an association with a happy people. I observed many people proceeding to the large and beautiful churches on the Sabbath day. The people were cheerful and prosperous, living under a parliamentary system of government. I learned of their history. We, as missionaries, were permitted to freely move about in our proselyting efforts. Here was a nation which had fought eighty long years, with much sacrifice, to gain religious freedom. Here was a nation which had close ties with America, for had they not given

refuge to the Pilgrims who came to avoid religious persecution in England and after a few years moved on to the shores of America? There is no doubt that many people from the Netherlands emigrated to America, and with their love of liberty and their faith in God contributed much to some of the American colonies which were established so that their citizens could worship God according to their consciences.

Bigotry

The thought has occurred to me that the Father of our Country, George Washington, was not unaware of the struggle of the European nations, the Netherlands included, in breaking the bonds of bigotry. Certainly, as well tutored as he was, it would be unlikely for him not to have been informed of a nation which had fought eighty years in the effort. He had very strong feelings about the subject of religion. In rereading a required assignment of my high school days, which was a study of his farewell address delivered to Congress in 1796, I am impressed with his forthrightness. May I call attention to some of his thoughts on the subject? He said:

Religion and virtue

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labour to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. . . . Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation

desert the oaths which are the instrument of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

"It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?" (See *Documents of American History*, New York: Meredith Corporation, 1968, p. 173.)

Surely the happiness and felicity of the people of the Netherlands was commensurate to their application of the powers of religion and virtue. Associated with this nature of the people, I observed their sensitivity to cleanliness. As we proselyted from door to door, we became aware of the areas where the people lived. They took extreme care to keep their dwellings and their surroundings in excellent condition. Never did they allow debris to accumulate in their streets. Never did they allow their refuse receptacles to remain standing in the streets; their laws prohibited it. That was fifty years ago. I was pleased to learn that this sensitivity still prevails, according to a recent newspaper article which reads in part:

"The first thing any American notices in Holland is what's missing. . . .

"As usual, of course, the dirt is missing, and the tin cans and the pages of old newspapers blowing in the gutters. The drunks are missing also, and the wine bottles in alleyways, the half-starved dogs, the odors that ought to emanate from so much slow-running water.

"The Dutch have always known what to do about pollution, waste and ugliness. They forbid it." (Tom Broden,

"Holland: Taking the Tension Out of Life," *Washington Post*, June 7, 1975, p. A-11.)

Cleanliness

Though their dwellings might have been modest, extreme care was taken to keep them clean. Frequently, on our morning tours, we would find the women polishing the brass on the doors, scrubbing the entrances to their homes, and in most instances extending the scrubbing to the sidewalks. One need not ask why, as it was obvious that the custom was prompted by the knowledge that if you walk a clean street you will not collect dirt and impurities to carry into the home. Perhaps the same idea might as well be applied to the mind—a continuous scrubbing to wipe out the impurities that might enter into it so that the soul might not be contaminated.

As I observed this custom of cleanliness, I was quick to remember the "why" of the admonition given to me in my boyhood days as I sought to neglect the daily routine of washing the hands and face. "Cleanliness is next to godliness," came the gentle reminder from my parents. I heard that so often I thought it was scripture, and it was not until later in life that I found it to be a statement in a sermon of John Wesley. And I'd like to inject in your minds here—there is indeed an alliance between physical cleanliness and spiritual cleanliness, just as the clean body, clean home, and clean surroundings stay the spread of disease, so the clean mind, clean thoughts and acts stay the spread of evil. A progressive statement from the Hebrew Fathers reads, "The doctrines of religion are resolved into carefulness; carefulness into vigorousness; vigorousness into guiltlessness; guiltlessness into abstemiousness; abstemiousness into cleanliness; cleanliness into Godliness." (Burton Stevenson, ed., *The Home Book of Quotations*, New York: Dodd, Mead, 1956, p. 279.)

On to perfection

The purpose of scripture or the doctrines of religion is to keep people from dwindling in unbelief and to ultimately help bring their souls into a state of cleanliness, that they may dwell with their Father in heaven in the eternities. It is a step-by-step process. Paul refers to the doctrines in his epistle to the Hebrew saints in that specific manner:

"Therefore not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.

"Of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement.

"And we will go on to perfection." (Heb. 6:1-3, Inspired Version.)

Repentance

But a more specific presentation of the doctrine was set forth in the beginning, when God spoke to Adam. This is the scripture:

"Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence. . . .

"Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

"That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

"For by the water ye keep the com-

mandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified." (Moses 6:57-60.)

A religious doctrine, to mean something to anyone, must have the solid foundation of being true. If it is built on myth, superstition, supposition, imagination, or on the commandments of men, it will not have substance. We may be concerned today with the decline of morality and integrity in our modern society, but when the ideas of faith become principles without works instead of a living fountain, when religion is only membership in a church for status purposes, what else can be expected? It is time for all mankind to ask of God, since he is our Creator, "What do you require of us?" The answer to that question has been given. Jesus taught what his Father taught—that "all men . . . must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there." (Moses 6:57.) He taught the plan of salvation and encouraged mankind to "Come, follow me." (Luke 18:22.) He said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:16-17.) The doctrine taught by the Savior has never faltered.

Study the scriptures

The gospel is the governing principle of the individual; it was designed for him, to give certainty to his life and to explain the purpose of his existence and the eternal nature of it. Through adherence to its laws and ordinances he may become a citizen of the kingdom of God.

The principles of the progressive steps to be taken were alluded to in Paul's words previously presented. The progressive process to be followed might well be as outlined in the words of the Hebrew Fathers. They can be put to the test. They will, in fact, when applied, bring a person to that state of

cleanliness demanded by our Heavenly Father.

Using the doctrine heretofore recited from the scripture of God's presentation to Adam, it behooves all to carefully study the doctrine as admonished by the ancient prophet, Moroni. He presents a formula which can be recommended for all scripture study:

"Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, . . . that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down unto the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts. . . .

"I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the

name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost." (Moro. 10:3-4.) I so witness and testify, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

Elder John H. Vandenberg, Assistant to the Twelve, has just addressed us.

Elder William H. Bennett, Assistant to the Twelve, will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Delbert L. Stapley of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder William H. Bennett

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My brothers and sisters, from earliest times to the present our Father in heaven has entered into covenants with his children, and has promised to bless his children if they will be true and faithful in keeping those covenants. My message today will deal with some of those covenants and blessings.

We first existed as spirits

From the scriptures we learn that all of us existed as spirits, literally spirit children of our Father in heaven, before we were born in the flesh. All were not of equal intelligence; some were more obedient and faithful than others, and as a result they merited special blessings and were chosen for very special missions here on earth. (See Abr. 3:11-12, 14, 16-19, 22-23.)

From the scriptures we can identify some of these chosen individuals, starting with Michael who was referred to as the Archangel, one of high rank in the spirit world. He was chosen to be

Adam, the first man, to stand forever under the Father and the Son at the head of the human family. Others of the chosen were Seth, the most faithful of Adam's sons after the death of the righteous Abel, and Enoch, through whose lineage the Lord promised would come Noah and the Messiah, and that his posterity should remain while the earth should stand. Another one was Noah, who was chosen to be the second father of the human race here on earth, after the flood. Another was Shem, the chosen son of Noah; and also Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (See Abr. 1:3; Moses 1:34; 6:8, 22, 45-46; Luke 3:8; D&C 29:26; 88:112-115; 78:16; 107:53-56; 116; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 157.)

In the midst of idolatry, Abraham continued to worship the true God and proved true in every test the Lord gave him; therefore, the Lord made a sacred covenant to bless Abraham and his faithful posterity to the latest generation. Abraham "became a rightful heir,