

### President Spencer W. Kimball

Elder Rex D. Pinegar of the First Quorum of the Seventy has just spoken

to us. Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will now address us.

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## Elder Howard W. Hunter

Not long ago I read a report of an interview with a man of some national importance. In giving his views on a question of present-day concern he made this comment: "I am not a religious man, but there was something about the circumstances of the proposed action that did not strike me as being right." His comment made me wonder why he associated religion with the social and political subject he was talking about, and it also made me wonder why he thought he was not a religious person. The answer to these queries, I suppose, lies in the definition of religion.

### Religion

The word *religion* has no one generally accepted definition. Sometimes it is used in reference to worship, whether it be public or private, and sometimes to distinguish between things sacred and those that are profane or worldly. Belief in the immortality of the soul is a concept that is looked upon by some as religious, and one of the most common uses of the term is the belief in deity or deities—a worship of God. The word *religion* is often associated with the pursuit of what is commonly called salvation, and sometimes with revelation from a divine source.

Not long after the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith published answers to a long list of questions that had been asked of him. One of the questions was this: "What are the fundamental principles of your religion?" To that question, Joseph Smith 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." (*History of the Church*, 3:30.)

### Spiritual references

On many subjects we are often able to find definitions in the scriptures, but it is interesting to note that even though we think of the Bible as a religious treatise, the word *religion* does not appear in the Old Testament, and in the writings of the New Testament it is used on three occasions only. I would like to make reference to these three.

The first use of the word *religion* is by Paul as he presented his defense before King Agrippa. He said to Agrippa: "After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). He was referring to the three sects of the Jews: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. He said he lived a Pharisee—the sect of the three that was the strictest in religious practices. Paul was not talking about a religious creed or a belief, but rather the form of worship, because the Jews placed great stress on practice rather than doctrine—on ritualistic worship rather than a creed of belief.

The second use of the word *religion* was also by Paul, in writing to the Galatians. He made this statement: "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church" (Gal. 1:13). We well know of the persecutions inflicted by Paul upon those who followed Christ and professed to be Christians and wonder why he

did these things. What caused him to take such a ruthless course? Paul answers these questions by stating that he had practiced the religion of his fathers—a religion of iron rules, laws, and traditions inherited from his Hebrew lineage. These iron rules of practice are what caused him to relentlessly persecute the followers of Christ. Thus, in writing to the Galatians he referred to religion in the same manner as he did before King Agrippa, as rules of practice rather than doctrine or a creed of belief.

Now we come to the third instance in the New Testament of the use of the word *religion*. It is in the Epistle of James, written "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1), probably meaning to all Israel, in which he said: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). James seems to be using the term *religion* in the manner used by Paul, as being ritualistic or ceremonial—that if a man is ritualistic in this manner, yet fails to be guarded in what he says, his rituals are in vain.

### True religion

James then very pointedly defines what he refers to as pure religion, as distinguished from forms of ritualistic worship and iron rules of practice as described by Paul. James said: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). The wording is simple and unpretentious, yet the meaning is profound and has deep significance. The words "visit the fatherless and widows" are a reminder that we should have compassion for our neighbor—our fellowmen. This is the teaching of the Master in his frequent reference to love. The Lord said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39). This is what James was expressing—a love

for, and devotion to, God, by compassionate service to fellowmen. He used as examples the fatherless and the widows.

The second element of the definition of religion stated by James is to keep "unspotted from the world." To be unspotted from the world simply means being unworldly and free from the pollution of sin and unrighteousness. Paul said something about this also in his writing to the Romans: "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2).

In short, James tells us that true religion is a devotion to God, demonstrated by love and compassion for fellowmen, coupled with unworldliness. Such a statement seems too simple to be sufficient, but in its simplicity it speaks an important truth. Restated it may be said that true religion consists not only in refraining from evil (that is, remaining unspotted), but in deliberately and purposefully doing acts of kindness and service to others.

King Benjamin recognized this principle as he spoke to his people from the tower. He reminded them that he had spent his days in their service and said: "I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

"And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." (Mosiah 2:16-17.)

Matthew puts it this way: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

### Joseph Smith

The life of the Prophet Joseph Smith portrays these same attributes—service to friends, to his fellowmen, to all mankind, and to his God. It was during the last two hours of his life, confined behind bars in Carthage, that his close friend, President John Taylor, sang a song to cheer him on that melancholy occasion. The song has a number of verses commencing with helping the

unfortunate and sharing a crust with one perishing for want of bread. These are some of the words:

*A poor wayfaring man of grief  
Had often crossed me on my way,  
Who sued so humbly for relief  
That I could never answer, Nay.*

*I had not power to ask his name;  
Whither he went or whence he came;  
Yet there was something in his eye  
That won my love, I knew not why.*

*Once, when my scanty meal was spread,  
He entered—not a word he spake.  
Just perishing for want of bread;  
I gave him all; he blessed it, brake.*

*And ate, but gave me part again;  
Mine was an angel's portion then,  
For while I fed with eager haste,  
The crust was manna to my taste.*

The verses continue to tell of a drink given to quench the thirst of a sufferer, clothing and rest for the naked and weary, caring for the injured and wounded, sharing the condemnation of a prisoner. Then the last verses recognize the appearance of the Master:

*Then in a moment to my view,  
The stranger started from disguise:  
The tokens in his hands I knew,  
The Savior stood before mine eyes.*

*He spake—and my poor name he named—  
“Of me thou hast not been ashamed;  
These deeds shall thy memorial be;  
Fear not thou didst them unto me.”  
(History of the Church, 6:614-15.)*

Poor, indeed, and destitute is the man who disclaims being religious because he does not have sufficient love for his fellowmen to be concerned and have compassion. The Lord will say: “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matt. 25:45-46.)

### Admonition to be truly religious

President Joseph F. Smith, a former president of the Church, wrote these words many years ago: “Do not say that you are not naturally religious, and so make that an excuse for evil deeds and forbidden acts. . . . Be rather religious both in appearance and in reality, remembering what true religion means. Even as the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, so is the possession of the knowledge that you love purity, righteousness, honesty, justice and well-doing, an indisputable evidence that you are naturally religious.”

President Smith continued: “Search your hearts, and you will find deep down that you possess this knowledge. Then encourage its growth and development, to the gaining of your own salvation.” (“Not Naturally Religious,” *Improvement Era*, Apr. 1906, p. 495.)

I pray we may serve our fellowmen and remain unspotted from worldly influences, so that we may be worthy to be considered truly religious and receive the approbation of the Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Without announcement, the Choir sang, “Choristers of Light,” and “Praise to the Man” following Elder Howard W. Hunter’s talk.

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### President Spencer W. Kimball

We have just heard from Elder Howard W. Hunter, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

The Tabernacle Choir has sung, “Choristers of Light” and “Praise to the Man.”

We welcome those who have just joined us on television or radio for this, the first session of the 148th Semi-Annual Conference of the Church.

President Marion G. Romney, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will now address us.