

The Sharing of Common Values

BARONESS EMMA NICHOLSON

Your excellencies, presidents and vice presidents, and graduates and your families, I stand humble to become one of the newest alumni of one of the most prestigious universities in the globe. I follow in the eminent steps of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf and Dick Cheney and other eminent people.

Our university—and I can call it that now—is widely known and internationally renowned for the breadth and depth of its study. It is globally respected, for it produces graduates, such as yourselves, who are tolerant yet critical in thinking, who respect and honor the other while respecting and honoring themselves. My own experience with this wonderful establishment stretches over five years now, and my pride at being accepted into its honored halls is probably even higher than yours.

How did I come to be one of your companions? Well, we share common values, you and I; we strive for common goals. But like all good things, my relationship with you started with one person, with making an acquaintance that just grew and grew.

Jim Olson was that man. We met in the Department of Defense when I was presenting the work of the AMAR Foundation in Baghdad

to a Pentagon conference on civilian health in conflict. We found that between us we had a common interest in the public good, a shared concern—a lifelong concern—for the outsider, for the other one in need of friendship, fellowship, and support. In other words, we found our common values; our common goals were shared.

On Jim's introduction I caught a flight from Washington to Salt Lake City, and all sorts of fascinating personalities emerged. And, vastly important for someone with my interests, I found that my new friend's work was similar but most probably considerably better than my own and that it was carried out for just the same purposes: conquering poverty, building local skills, giving people pride in their own work, bringing international standards of performance, delivering service with their own hands to the world's poorest and most desolate people, and implementing all aspects of the United Nations Convention for Human

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Rights—freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, including the all-important freedom to worship.

So we made friends. Sharon Eubank and her amazing colleagues led me to form a deep and powerful partnership between LDS Charities and the AMAR Society, which I chair. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland—the high academic, theologian, and man of compassion—brought me early to Brigham Young University and introduced me to your great thinker and powerful teacher President Worthen himself. I found BYU and our discussions here with both Elder Holland and President Worthen so fascinating and so important that I set up following meetings in my place of work: Britain’s upper chamber, the House of Lords. And in that ancient, royal palace—large parts of which date back to the eleventh century—Elder Holland became the first BYU eminence to address a formal British political meeting in Parliament.

And we did much, much more. Together—and with the backing of Sharon Eubank’s refugee knowledge and the professional teams of doctors, nurses, and teachers of AMAR—I set up a unique conference cycle on religious persecution and its inevitable outcome of forced migration. For our first conference, held September of last year, we brought together leading Mormons; academics; the Bishop of Derby; Canon Edmund Newell of Cumberland Lodge and other ordinands of our national church, the Church of England; a Jewish Ashkenazi rabbi from a Syrian refugee family; some Yazidis—all victims of IS, the notorious death cult in northern Iraq; Shia and Sunni Iraqis of the AMAR team; plus Native Americans. We met in another unique setting, St. George’s House in Windsor Castle, and were welcomed by the governor of the castle, who spoke on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen. Our findings were listened to and studied in the highest circles, and they have benefited some of the world’s most persecuted faiths internationally.

But we have just begun. Our next meeting in that historic setting is this September. Our theme will be integration after persecution, and at the base of our thinking will be the sharing of common values, thus the critical place of the rule of law. This way of thinking reminds us of the need to create the laws internationally and initially, whereby freedom to speak, to move, to earn, and to worship is not a matter of whim, nor is it one bound by personal rulers’ tastes. It is one which Parliament, or its national equivalent, has laid down as obligatory for all citizens to follow. I am a working politician, and I see the world’s populations in that light. I look at their sufferings, and I turn to find a mix of possible solutions to give them success, to free themselves.

One absolute essential in a modern functioning society is the university. All around the globe, major universities hold in their keeping science, technology, the arts, and cultures in their halls of learning and in their research establishments. And from high-quality universities, such as BYU, come our future leaders in all walks of life and all societies. Our professors and dons open up vistas of thought and imagination while ensuring that critical thinking is the foundation stone of learning. Even in societies in which public opinion’s expression is heavily constrained, universities are granted considerable license, since almost all societies recognize that human thoughts and values enshrined in learning are the futures of their own societies. But only when universities and other professional institutions are assaulted do we outsiders wake up and recognize that a civilization is ending, albeit temporally. For example, the burning of the libraries of Alexandria led directly to the destruction of ancient seats of learning and worship in the Nineveh Plains today.

But to have intellectual strength, it must be accompanied with action. In AMAR—now twinned with LDS Charities—we are the

deliverers of your love to millions of others. We think of healing in all its aspects. In working up the newest thinking for BYU and for myself in the House of Lords, and even using one of your professors, one of your academics, Paul Kerry—and I thank President Worthen so very much for allowing us the chance to work together—it is my view that building the professions is the key. Every dictatorship deliberately destroys its nation's academic and professional heritage. Doctors, academics, teachers—those are the men and women who are hunted down and destroyed by iconoclasts, by mob rule, and by dictators.

Today in London's famous Royal Academy of Arts—which is 300 years old—there are two wonderful exhibitions. One is about the onset of communism in Russia, the Soviet Union, in the early 1900s up to the 1930s. There is a list, a beginning-and-end list, of the men and women who were destroyed: the professors, the teachers, the doctors, the nurses—all of those who had the knowledge and who had the wish to give it to others. Just a floor upstairs there is an exhibition on the American fall, the economic collapse that also happened in the 1930s. Again you see people struggling to survive. In the Russian exhibition you see mob rule killing people; upstairs you see the hope of everything getting better.

I am so proud to be in your ranks; count me in as one of you, ready with all of the knowledge and experience that life has given me. I will be using that knowledge and experience—if you will allow me—to help you succeed. Call on me anytime, ask me your questions, visit me in the House of Lords, and make demands on me that will enhance your understanding of our common heritage, our shared values, and our pursuit of freedom for all of humanity.

And a final thought: it is just one person who counts. Some weeks ago I was on the Mosul front line with the deeply satisfying duty of fully and completely equipping a small front-line hospital—from beds right to all the surgical needs. The hospital was full of wounded people, full of people in despair, full of people who might not survive, with patients coming in from the front line of the Mosul battle. On one of the new beds that I had just delivered sat a miserable, tiny boy who, I thought, was around two to three years old. He was completely silent, and his face was motionless; he was not moving at all. He was with his mother, who was pregnant.

I asked her what had happened. "Why has he distanced himself so completely?"

She said, "Look at his hair." He had a shock of hair, but on his scalp were big blank patches—most extraordinary.

I said, "What happened?"

She said, "ISIL came into our house. They looked at him, they picked him up by the hair, and they just swung him around like a toy. And they came back, and they did that again and again. He hasn't spoken since."

I had one of my colleagues with me with his camera. He leaned forward and took a little picture of the boy. He turned the camera around, and he showed the boy his picture. Very surprised, the boy's eyes caught his own face, and he looked. And suddenly he smiled.

What a wonderful moment that was to remind us all that saving just one life—giving that little boy hope—is worth all of the effort that we can put in.

I congratulate you. I honor you for your achievements. I look forward to learning of your successes, and I thank you very much for allowing me to be a part of you. Thank you.