

# “Where the Spirit of the Lord Is, There Is Liberty”

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I think that my biography would not be complete if I didn't share the following with you. “One American, who was called to work with European organizations, was asked to define ‘a European.’ After some thought, the light came, and he gave this portrait: A European is someone who has the capacity of an Englishman, the sobriety of an Irishman, the modesty of a Frenchman, the liberality of a Luxembourgian, the prudery of a Dane, the humor of a German, the generosity of a Dutchman—briefly, it is a Belgian!” Never deny your origin!

It is always quite a challenge to address such a demanding audience as this; therefore, I will speak about a demanding subject that requires all of our attention these days: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

## **In the Name of Liberty**

Since the beginning of the world, many have talked, written, suffered, cried, and died for liberty. Artists paint it, sculptors sculpt it, philosophers describe it, dictators and tyrants suppress it, and prophets teach it. It is used to defend good as well as evil, and, in the name of liberty, people are condemned or saved. Let's listen to a short extract from a dialogue between a philosopher and an empress.

When the philosopher Diderot proposed his ideas for governmental reform, the Empress Catherine of Russia responded: “Ah, my dear friend, you write upon paper, the smooth surface of which presents no obstacle to your pen. But I, poor Empress that I am, must write on the skins of my subjects, which are sensitive and ticklish to an extraordinary degree” (quoted in R. H. Murray, *Studies in English and Political Thinkers of the 19th Century*, 1:157).

You, as students, are the heirs of a nation where, thanks to an inspired constitution, you can enjoy this freedom of learning true education. One of the first private colleges established in Iowa in 1843 defined the objectives of teaching: “True education is the level reached by the man who raises his spiritual as well as his intellectual faculties; it is not the abundance of facts with which he is filling his mind” (Daniel Boorstin, *Histoire des Américains*).

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### Be Agents unto Yourselves

BYU is the very emblem of this liberty. Here you are taught that

*All things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men, neither Adam, your father, whom I created.*

*Behold, I gave unto him that he should be an agent unto himself; and I gave unto him commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual. [D&C 29:34–35]*

A few days ago—6 June to be precise—many free men celebrated the anniversary of D day, 6 June 1944, on the beaches of Normandy. This was the beginning of deliverance for those who didn't enjoy freedom for many years and who could not be agents unto themselves. You are heirs. Your fathers or grandfathers fought for you. I was on the other side of the ocean in occupied Belgium, and I am an heir also of the sacrifice of their lives. I was waiting for that freedom to come closer and closer every day, until 3 September 1944, in the city of Audenaerde, when we saw our liberators for the first time. My purpose today is to testify to the importance for you, the future generation, to prepare and continue to be agents unto yourselves and to act with the Spirit of the Lord to defend your liberties. May I quote from some of those who believed in freedom and liberty.

Descartes, a seventeenth-century French philosopher, said, "Divine grace and natural knowledge, far from diminishing my liberty, increase it and fortify it."

Charles Péguy, who was killed on the battle field in France in 1914, said, "Liberty is the daughter of God, consubstantial to God. It is the mystery of mysteries, the keystone of the universe, the first of the eternal forces in which

man is participating in the essence of a creating God."

Silone Ignazio, a twentieth-century Italian writer, said, "The man who is thinking with his mind is a free man. The man who is fighting for what he believes is just, is a free man. One does not beg his liberty to the others. Liberty must be taken."

Henri Bergson, a twentieth-century French philosopher, said, "Liberty is a fact and among the facts that we verify, there is none as obvious."

And from a prophet we read:

*Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of many people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake.*

*And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.*

*And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole.*

*And he fastened on his head-plate, and his breastplate, and his shields, and girded on his armor about his loins; and he took the pole, which had on the end thereof his rent coat, (and he called it the title of liberty) and he bowed himself to the earth, and he prayed mightily unto his God for the blessings of liberty to rest upon his brethren, so long as there should be a band of Christians remain to possess the land—*

*For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.*

*And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, and all those who were true believers*

*in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come.*

*And therefore, at this time, Moroni prayed that the cause of the Christians, and the freedom of the land might be favored. [Alma 46:10–16]*

Did Moroni try to define liberty? No, it was not necessary. He knew that liberty is a result of being a follower of Christ, a disciple. That is true liberty. And he knew that to defend it, you need to act, to be an agent unto yourself.

### **It Is a State of Mind**

Listen now to the voice of a modern defender of liberty who describes how your ideals can be preserved and how to be your own defender of your faith.

Paraphrasing General Douglas MacArthur: Youth is not a certain time of life—it is a state of mind, a result of the will, a quality of the imagination, and emotional intensity, a victory of courage against shyness and of the taste of adventure against comfort. One does not become old because he lived a certain number of years; one becomes old because one has deserted his ideal. Years wrinkle the skin; to renounce ideals wrinkles the soul. The preoccupations, the doubts, the fears, and the despairs are the enemies that slowly bend us toward the earth and have us become dust before death. You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt, as young as your trust in yourself, as young as your hope, as old as your lowness of spirit. You will stay young as long as you will be receptive, receptive to what is nice, good, and great—receptive to the message of nature, man, and the infinite. If one day your heart is bitten by pessimism and tormented by cynicism, may God have pity on your soul, and the soul of an old man. (See Douglas MacArthur, *A Soldier Speaks; Public Papers and Speeches of General of the Army*, ed. Vorin E. Whan [New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965], p. 313.)

Do we hear the message? Do we understand it?

### **Defend Your Freedom**

A democracy, a country of freedom, a free university—they are institutions requiring men and women to be agents unto themselves to defend their freedom. As Martin Luther King said, “History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.”

When a democracy, a state, or a university collapses, it is because the individuals and families are dropping their arms. What are the usual symptoms? First, there is a feeling of fear, then resignation, then we get used to the worst. “To get used to” is a horrible phrase, to say the least—to get used to violence, to degradation, to mediocrity, to oppressions, to humiliation. Too often today, when people are confronted with these threatening situations, they begin to ask themselves if they should try to “understand” the enemy and its representations. We see that as soon as they do, they are condemned to death themselves. You don’t try to understand dictatorship, terrorism, abortion, homosexuality, crime, or cancer. You need to fight it. History is a great teacher if we are willing to learn. Anarchy and false freedom to believe that permissiveness is a right are always leading directly to the dictation of sin, to the submissiveness of our spirits, to the slavery of our bodies.

President N. Eldon Tanner said the following concerning the defense of the freedom of families:

*If there is pornography or obscenity in bookstores, on television or radio, or in places of entertainment, if there are those who would make more easily available to the young and inexperienced alcohol and its attendant evils, including drunken driving, highway fatalities, broken homes, and if we are threatened with the passage of laws which violate the commandments of God, it is our duty and*

responsibility as individuals to speak out, to organize, and to protect ourselves and our community against such encroachments. We have seen how people react to the high price of food. It is far more important that we react effectively against the immorality and evil in our communities which threaten the morals and the very lives of our children. . . .

People who argue that they have constitutional rights and want to use what they call their free agency to accomplish unrighteous ends abuse the idea of free agency and deprive others of their constitutional rights. While many of our problems are caused by those who are deliberately trying to further their own selfish and devilish interests, there is also a vocal, misled minority which is responsible for other problems as they exist in our country and in our communities. We must be equally vocal and firm in our efforts to maintain the quality of our surroundings, where we can enjoy family solidarity, which is the strength of any nation. We must take a firm stand against the concerted efforts in many areas to destroy the family unit. [Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God, comp. LaRue Sneff (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1973), pp. 88–89]

And now the teachings from the scriptures: “Abide ye in the liberty wherewith ye are made free; entangle not yourselves in sin, but let your hands be clean, until the Lord comes” (D&C 88:86).

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Our responsibility as youth and as students is to stand firm for what we believe and to live according to our faith in the Lord, the light of the world.

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the seroant of sin.

And the seroant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. [John 8:12, 31–36]

#### **A Follower of Righteousness Remains Free**

What was the strength of Jesus? He was a teacher, he was a leader, he was the Son of God and taught “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29).

What could be our strength? “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27). We need to be teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of his Father, to be examples, leaders of righteousness, to be called because of our covenant to serve him. “Children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name” (Mosiah 5:7).

A teacher or leader who is a follower of righteousness remains free. What is righteousness? First, to know the difference between right and wrong. Second, once you know it, to do what is right. The mind must analyze before the will decides. To be righteous, then, is to act. However, before you act, there must be a decision. Before a decision—a choice between right and wrong, between God or Satan, light or

darkness, freedom or slavery—knowledge is necessary, and that is why we are here.

And, once again, the process refers to Jesus Christ:

*For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. [Moroni 7:16]*

*Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.*

*Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation. [D&C 8:2–3]*

### **The Responsibility of Freedom**

The beginning of freedom or righteousness starts with the first article of faith: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”

Declaration of principle or declaration of faith—what is your declaration? The attributes and responsibilities follow.

*He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.*

*Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.*

*The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth*

*Light and truth forsake that evil one. [D&C 93:28, 31, 36–37]*

To know how to be free, which is the control of one’s life, is to be an agent unto ourselves, unto righteousness.

You are the future leaders of your families, your church, and your nation. You will be the

leading generation and your heirs will follow your steps if you will preserve your great heritage of liberty.

*If there is righteousness in the heart*

*There will be beauty in the character.*

*If there is beauty in the character*

*There will be harmony in the home.*

*If there is harmony in the home*

*There will be order in the nation.*

*If there is order in the nation*

*There will be peace in the world.*

[Chinese proverb quoted in *Ensign*, June 1976]

*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. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. [D&C 58:27–28]*

We have the teachings of the Lord and his prophets. We have the vision of our responsibilities. Shall we defend our liberties or wait until it is too late? May this little story help you to remember that *mañana* may be too late.

*Will D. Lae was grossly overweight but was fascinated by the idea of becoming a mountain climber. Determined to master the skill, he was able through hard work and continuous practice to develop his arm muscles so that they would support his obese body. He practiced on local slopes and then decided to try his skill on a mountain worthy of his ambitions. He picked the granite face of El Capitan. Halfway up the sheer rock he looked up and was startled to discover that his rope was fraying and in a second or two would break. He looked down and saw that there was no ledge or bush to break his fall. He made a quick decision—he decided to use a heavier rope. [Laurence J. Peter, *The Peter Prescription* (New York: Wm. F. Morrow & Co., Bantam Books, 1973), pp. 164–65]*

William's decision was right, but his timing was wrong. He had practiced and provided for the climb but had overlooked his most important need.

Our most important need as members of an institution of liberty, like this university and this Church, is to know what true liberty is, to teach it, to profess it, and to testify of it. This is your responsibility. As I said, you are the

future leaders, and as future parents you will lead this nation. We are an emblem to the world, an emblem of liberty.

I know of it because of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. I've learned it in my life and I've learned to defend it. I know this because we are in the restored Church and I ask that the Lord's choicest blessings be with you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.