

Our Moral Environment

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I have been a General Authority for over thirty years, and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for twenty-two. During those years, I have interviewed I don't know how many, surely thousands, of members of the Church and have talked with them in intimate terms of their worthiness, their sorrow, and their happiness. I only mention that in the hope that the credential of experience may persuade you to consider matters which have us deeply worried.

Moral Environment

Today I speak to members of the Church as an environmentalist. My message is not on the *physical* but on the *moral and spiritual* environment in which we must raise our families. As we test the *moral* environment, we find the *pollution* index is spiraling upward.

The Book of Mormon depicts humanity struggling through a “mist of darkness” and defines the darkness as the “temptations of the devil.” (1 Ne. 8:23; 1 Ne. 12:17.) So dense was that *moral pollution* that many followed “strange roads” and “fell away into forbidden paths and were lost.” (See 1 Ne. 8:23–32.)

The deliberate pollution of the fountain of life now clouds our moral environment. The gift of mortal life and the capacity to kindle other lives is a supernal blessing. Its worth is *incalculable!*

The Spiritual Environment

The rapid, sweeping deterioration of values is characterized by a preoccupation—even an obsession—with the procreative act. Abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it are openly scoffed at—marriage and parenthood ridiculed as burdensome, unnecessary. Modesty, a virtue of a refined individual or society, is all but gone.

The Tempter

The adversary is jealous toward all who have the power to beget life. He cannot beget life; he is impotent. He and those who followed him were cast out and forfeited the right to a mortal body. His angels even begged to inhabit the bodies

of swine. (See Matt. 8:31.) And the revelations tell us that “he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.” (2 Ne. 2:27.)

With ever fewer exceptions, what we see and read and hear have the mating act as a central theme. Censorship is forced offstage as a violation of individual freedom.

That which should be absolutely private is disrobed and acted out center stage. In the shadows backstage are addiction, pornography, perversion, infidelity, abortion, and—the saddest of them all—incest and molestation. In company with them now is a plague of biblical proportion. And all of them are on the increase.

Society excuses itself from responsibility except for teaching the physical process of reproduction to children in school to prevent pregnancy and disease, and providing teenagers with devices which are supposed to protect them from both.

When any effort is made to include values in these courses, basic universal values, not just values of the Church, but of civilization, of society itself, the protest arises, “You are imposing religion upon us, infringing upon our freedom.”

Freedom to Choose

While we pass laws to reduce pollution of the earth, any proposal to protect the moral and spiritual environment is shouted down and marched against as infringing upon liberty, agency, freedom, the right to choose.

Interesting how one virtue, when given exaggerated or fanatical emphasis, can be used to batter down another, with freedom, a virtue, invoked to protect *vice*. Those determined to transgress see any regulation of their life-style as interfering with their agency and seek to have their actions condoned by making them legal.

People who are otherwise sensible say, “I do not intend to indulge, but I vote for freedom of choice for those who do.”

Flawed Argument

Regardless of how lofty and moral the “pro-choice” argument sounds, it is badly flawed. With that same logic one could argue that all traffic signs and barriers which keep the careless from danger should be pulled down on the theory that each individual must be free to choose how close to the edge he will go.

No *Free* Agency

The phrase “*free* agency” does not appear in scripture. The only agency spoken of there is *moral agency*, “which,” the Lord said, “I have given unto him, that every man may be *accountable* for his own sins in the day of judgment.” (D&C 101:78; italics added.)

Heeding the Warning

And the Lord warned members of his church, “Let not that which I have appointed be polluted by mine enemies, *by the consent of those who call themselves after my name*: For this is a very sore and grievous sin against me, and against my people.” (D&C 101:97–98; italics added.)

Because the laws of man, by and large, do not raise moral issues, we are taught to honor, sustain, and obey the law (see A of F 1:12), and that “he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land” (D&C 58:21).

The Right to Speak Out

When a moral issue does arise, it is the responsibility of the leaders of the Church to speak out. Gambling, for instance, certainly is a moral issue. Life is a moral issue. When morality is involved, we have both the *right* and the *obligation* to raise a warning voice. We do not as a church speak on political issues unless morality is involved. In thirty years and thousands of interviews, I have never once asked a member of the Church what political party they belonged to.

Physical and Moral Laws

There are both moral and physical laws “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world” (D&C 130:20) which man cannot overrule.

For instance, do you think a vote to repeal the law of gravity would do any good?

Unenforceable

Suppose a law decreed that all children would be taken from their parents and raised by the state. Such a law would be wicked but probably could be enforced. Such things have been done before.

But suppose an article of that law stated, “Within fifteen days the mother will cease all emotional ties to her child.”

That provision is absolutely unenforceable. No matter how severe the penalty or the number of enforcers, it is absolutely unenforceable because it contravenes both natural and moral law.

No matter if fifteen weeks or months or fifteen years were allowed, it cannot be enforced! It may work with animals, but “all flesh,” the scriptures teach, “is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts.” (1 Cor. 15:39.) It cannot be made to work with human mothers. Never!

A man-made law against nature would be as impossible to defend as a law annulling love between mother and child would be impossible to enforce!

Children of God

No greater ideal has been revealed than the supernal truth that we are the children of God, and we differ, by virtue of our creation, from all other living things. (See Moses 6:8–10, 22, 59.)

The Evil Idea

No idea has been more *destructive* of happiness, no philosophy has produced more sorrow, more heartbreak and mischief; no idea has done more to destroy the family than the idea that we are not the offspring of God, only advanced animals, compelled to yield to every carnal urge.

Animals are not subject to moral law. Nevertheless, while by and large they are promiscuous in responding to their mating instincts, their mating rituals have set patterns and have rigid limitations. For instance, animals do not pair up with their own gender to satisfy their mating instincts. Nor are these instincts expressed in the molestation of their offspring.

The source of life is now relegated to the level of unwed pleasure, bought and sold and even defiled in satanic rituals. Children of God can willfully surrender to their carnal nature and, without remorse, defy the laws of morality and degrade themselves even below the beasts.

Most Abominable

If we pollute our fountains of life, there will be penalties “exquisite” and “hard to bear” (see D&C 19:15), more than all of the physical pleasure ever could be worth. Alma told his son Corianton, “Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?” (Alma 39:5.)

The code for moral law is found in the scriptures, stated as simply as, “Wickedness never was happiness.” (Alma 41:10.) The scriptures speak in general terms, leaving us free to apply the principles of the gospel to meet the infinite variety of life. But when they say “thou shalt not,” we had better pay attention.

The only legitimate employment of the power of procreation is between husband and wife, man and woman, who have been legally and lawfully married. Anything else violates the commandments of God. From Alma, “If ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled.” (Alma 5:58.)

The Measure of a Successful Parent

It is a great challenge to raise a family in the darkening mists of our moral environment.

We emphasize that the greatest work you will do will be within the walls of your home (see Harold B. Lee, *Ensign*, July 1973, p. 98), and that “no other success can compensate for failure in the home” (David O. McKay, *Improvement Era*, June 1964, p. 445).

The measure of our success as parents, however, will not rest solely on how our children turn out. That judgment would be just only if we could raise our families in a perfectly moral environment, and that now is not possible.

It is not uncommon for responsible parents to lose one of their children, for a time, to influences over which they have no control. They agonize over rebellious sons or daughters. They are puzzled over why they are so helpless when they have tried so hard to do what they should.

It is my conviction that those wicked influences one day will be overruled.

“The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught a more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.” (Orson F. Whitney, in Conference Report, Apr. 1929, p. 110.)

We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them. President Brigham Young said:

“Let the father and mother, who are members of this Church and Kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie, and no power of earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., 2:90–91.)

Repentance

In the battle of life, the adversary takes enormous numbers of prisoners, and many who know of no way to escape and are pressed into his service. Every soul confined to a concentration camp of sin and guilt has a key to the gate. The adversary cannot hold them if they know how to use it. The key is labeled *Repentance*. The twin principles of repentance and forgiveness exceed in strength the awesome power of the adversary.

I know of no sins connected with the moral standard for which we cannot be forgiven. I do not exempt abortion. The formula is stated in forty words:

“Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

“By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.” (D&C 58:42–43.)

I Will Remember Your Sins No More

However long and painful the process of repentance, the Lord has said, “This is the covenant ... I will make with them. ... I will put my *laws* into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

“And *their sins and iniquities* will I remember no more.” (Heb. 10:16–17; italics added.)

Civilizations, like Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed themselves by disobedience to the laws of morality. “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction.” (2 Ne. 26:11; see also Gen. 6:3; Ether 2:15; D&C 1:33; Moses 8:17.)

God grant that we will come to our senses and protect our moral environment from this mist of darkness which deepens day by day. The fate of all humanity hangs precariously in the balance.

And may we have the protection of Him who is our Father and our God, and may we merit the love and blessings of His Son, our Redeemer, in whose name, even the name of Jesus Christ, I bear witness, amen.