

LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM, MORMONISM

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Introduction

The conscientious student of the scriptures soon becomes aware of the fact that man-made systems--whether they be religious, social, economic, or political institutions--do not conform in every way to the principles of revealed truth. Of the opposing views of two major religious bodies on a particular issue, Joseph Smith therefore said: "They are both wrong. Truth takes a road between them both."¹

The same can be said of the views of men in the social, economic, and political spheres of life. Neither modern conservatism or liberalism conform in every way to the principles and ideals of the kingdom of God which were revealed through Joseph Smith and which Latter-day Saints desire to see established in the earth.

As a significant historical movement, liberalism emerged as a product of the humanism of the Renaissance. As a school of thought, it centered emphasis upon faith in human reason and in the essential goodness of man, with the freedom of the individual, under law as its major objective. Though it still endeavors to cling to this basic objective, twentieth century liberalism has altered its approach significantly. In an effort to make man truly free, it now champions the causes of economic equality and social justice. Liberals now argue that man must be free and equal socially and economically if he is to be free in other ways.

Conservatives, on the other hand, espouse the ideal of the open society, where man is free and unregenerated, and where it is argued that the release of human initiative creates an economy of abundance best designed to achieve the goals of social and economic well-being. In taking this position, modern conservatives stand on similar ground to that which liberals occupied until about the turn of the twentieth century.

But by the very nature of the system, men in the open society lack unity of purpose and of effort, a sense of belonging and of community, and the ability to give vigorous initiative and direction to social and economic programs which foster equal opportunity and justice for those within the system. Though modern conservatism seeks to foster human freedom and dignity, it has these and other deficiencies which make it susceptible to attack by those who seek to achieve the goals of economic stability, equality and justice.

Being essentially humanists, modern liberals propose to use human instruments--primarily the state--to achieve the goals of economic stability, equality and justice. This means that in reality, they favor the socialization of the state. In seeking to achieve the above goals, liberalism therefore would barter away man's freedom to the degree the state is socialized. In its effort to achieve economic stability, equality, and justice, liberalism fosters the cause of human servitude.

In the modern world, the individual is on the horns of a dilemma. If he truly espouses the cause of freedom and human dignity, he must deny to a great degree the ideals of social and economic justice. In this event, can he truly say that he is a person of dignity? But if he seeks to establish social justice, he must inevitably turn his back on the cause of freedom. And again the question can be asked, can he in this event truly say that he is a person of dignity? The choices which confront modern man are difficult ones. Even a middle-of-the-road course rests upon the same basic alternatives.

But there is a third alternative; namely that which is proposed in the ideal of the kingdom of God restored to the earth through Joseph Smith.² This divine plan of society is designed to sustain and enhance the vital principles of freedom and human dignity upon which the open society rests. By utilizing enlightening and regenerating spiritual powers made available through the Holy Priesthood, and through the use of the principle of free and open covenant, it also proposes to eliminate the deficiencies of the open society and enable man to achieve the great goals of economic stability, equality, and justice without bartering away his freedom and dignity as an individual.

Because the programs proposed by modern liberalism tend to destroy human freedom and dignity, and because a climate of freedom is indispensably necessary in which to build up the kingdom of God as the only means of giving ultimate solution to man's problems, the writer suggests that Latter-day Saints should be vitally interested in doing the following things:

First, they should vigorously sustain the cause of constitutional freedom for man, for, next to the gift of life, the gifts of freedom and virtue are man's most sacred possessions.

Second, they should foster and sustain programs which are designed to alleviate human distress and eliminate inequality independent of the state and within a climate of freedom and brotherhood. It is a historical fact that men in the United States of America, working within a climate of freedom, have built the most affluent and powerful nation in known history. To the degree that this climate of freedom can be maintained and to the degree that the problems of social and economic justice can be solved by programs

based upon genuine Christian concern for the interests of others, these achievements will be continued and projected into the future. There is no other way to achieve, simultaneously, freedom and social justice.

Third, Latter-day Saints should reemphasize in their midst the great objective of this dispensation to build up Zion to be a standard and an ensign to the world in the last days, as a free society in which men are of one mind and one heart and where they eliminate poverty and inequality from their midst by applying those divine social and economic principles which were revealed through the prophet Joseph Smith.

(I should note the fact that the following articles were not written originally with the intent of publishing them together in a single volume. For this reason they lack continuity in some respects, and they overlap in minor areas. I have also given more attention to the perversions within the liberal position than I have to the weaknesses and deficiencies within modern conservatism. Nevertheless I do feel that these articles identify some major issues about which Latter-day Saints should be concerned, and it is my sincere hope that they will provide food for thought on the subjects they treat. I take full responsibility for that which is herein contained as being an expression of my own personal conclusions.)

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¹ *History of the Church*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1950), VI, 252. This source is popularly referred to as the *Documentary History of the Church* hereafter it will be designated as DHC, followed by the appropriate volume and page.

² The full plan of the kingdom of God is set forth by the writer in volume three of his "Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ," to be released in 1973.

About the Author

This is the third book by Dr. Hyrum L. Andrus, whose special interest is the social, political, and economic aspects of Mormonism. By background and training he is well qualified to show readers the place of Mormonism and the Government of God, in the midst of today's political ideologies of liberalism and conservatism.

He is presently Professor of Modern Scriptures in the College of Religious Instruction of Brigham Young University. He specializes in the field of modern scriptures and foundations of Mormon thought and history.

His BS degree was obtained at Ricks College in the field of Political Science and he obtained a Master of Science degree at BYU in 1952. A Doctor of Social Science degree was received from Syracuse University in New York in 1955. His master's thesis and doctorate dissertation were on Joseph Smith's social, economic, and political thought. In this field he has performed the specialization which qualifies him to write so authoritatively on the subject of this newest book.