

Neal Maxwell

# Irreligion becoming new faith

America is entering a new form of imperialism and paganism as efforts are made to establish irreligion as the state religion.

This was the observation of Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy of the LDS Church, speaking at a Devotional assembly at Brigham Young University.

"This new irreligious imperialism seeks to disallow certain of people's opinions simply because those opinions grow out of religious convictions," Elder Maxwell said. "Resistance to abortion will be seen as primitive. Concern over the institution of the family will be viewed as untrendy and unenlightened."

He told students that this new form of paganism uses the carefully preserved and cultivated freedoms of western civilization to shrink freedom while rejecting the value essence of the rich Judeo-Christian heritage.

Elder Maxwell quoted Clare Booth Luce who recently wrote that framers of the Constitution forbade the Congress to make any law "respecting" the establishment of religion or to abridge the "free exercise" of religion.

She wrote that there are those who insist that the First Amendment actually proscribes government partiality, not only to any single religion but also to religion as such, so that tax exemption for churches is now thought to be unconstitutional. A clause clearly protecting religion is now construed as requiring that it be denied a status routinely granted to educational and charitable enterprises which have no overt constitutional protections. Far from equalizing unbelief, secularism has succeeded in virtually establishing it.

Elder Maxwell said that irreligion as the state religion would be the worst of all combinations. "Its orthodoxy would be insistent, and its inquisitors inevitable. Its paid ministry would be numerous beyond belief. Its Caesars would be in-


sufferably condescending. Its majorities—when faced with clear alternatives—will make the Barabbas choice as did a mob centuries ago when Pilate confronted them with the need to decide."

He pointed out that the secular church will do what it can to nullify the opinions of those who still worry over standards such as contained in the Ten Commandments. "It is always such an easy step from dogmatism to unfair play—especially so when the dogmatists believe themselves to be dealing with primitive people who do not know what is best for them."

Elder Maxwell, a member of the BYU Board of Trustees and former Commissioner of Education for the LDS Church, noted that the new pagans are often so devoted to their beliefs that they are willing to fund their own programs. "They prefer to use the funds of believers but without having to take the latter's opinions. We have counted on America's sense of fair play to tame our majorities, and it has worked reasonably well. But the teachings of a secular church can mute this sense of fair play because it will preach of a 'higher' good which will be connected to the lowest appetites."

He asked, "If people are not permitted to advocate, to assert and to bring to bear, in every legitimate way, the opinions and views they hold which grow out of their religious convictions—what manner of men and women would we be? If we let come into being a secular church which is shorn of traditional and divine values, where shall we go for inspiration in the crises of tomorrow?"

He pointed out that before the ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness, some skirmishes will be lost. "Even in these, however, let us have a record so that the choices are clear, letting others do as they will in the face of prophetic counsel."





## ages of Mormonism

in all Mormon eyes; none of them can look you straight or steadily in the face."

Such preoccupation with eyes soon shifted to polygamy, as the accompanying illustrations and cartoons show.

One illustration on the cover of *The Daily Graphic* depicted Uncle Sam armed with a saber, and walking through a field of Mormon "serpents" to clean out the "Mormon Vermin Nest."

On the West Coast, the *San Francisco Wasp* published a double page color lithograph showing President Garfield, axe in hand, ready to fell the tree of Mormonism. In the background two other trees were labeled slavery and the "Chinese curse." Lincoln's name is inscribed on the axe lying next to the felled slavery tree and a question mark appears on the anti-Chinese axe.

Another illustrated weekly, *Judge*, mounted a relentless attack on Mormonism. Artist Thomas Worth satirized Mormon domestic bliss by portraying avaricious wives going through the pockets of their husbands' pants, an over-sized baby buggy, an enormous Mormon laundry basket, huge medicine containers for the Mormon family, a gigantic money pouch for tickets to the circus, Mormon wives greeting a delinquent husband with broomsticks, and the Mormon male favoring the younger over the older wife.

In 1877, *Puck* published one of its most popular cartoons, irreverently poking fun at Brigham Young's death. Other cartoons invidiously symbolized Mormons as snakes or black crows in Uncle Sam's eagle's nest.

"When these and other images were boiled down into their basic elements, the resulting picture of Mormonism was not pleasant," according to Dr. Bunker.

Does this legacy from the popular culture have anything to offer as a voice from the past?

"I, for one, think so," the social psychologist suggested. "Reviewing such images should remind us that substance is incomparably more important than image. Images change and pass, but substance remains, whatever the swirl or even hurricane of events. Institutions and individuals alike must be committed to the unvarying substance of life."

George Q. Cannon wisely observed:

"... like all the lies of the past, we shall outlive them. It would be amusing to read all the lies that have been used in days past and gone. But there is a new batch in process of incubation all the time, and when the old ones get stale the new ones come forth adapted to the change of the case. Yet, notwithstanding all this we continue to live."

Dr. Bunker said the recollection of the history of Mormon persecution, seemingly so far removed in time, ought to intensify an appreciation, as it did for Joseph Smith, of the values of tolerance and civil liberty. Having been strangers in the land of Egypt, God reminded ancient Israel that they ought to have special compassion for the stranger.

"That lesson reverberates from our own dispensation. What are the images held in our own heads of those who differ with us on religious, political, ethnic or other grounds? How would we fare if our images of others were published?"

The grating and unkind words about Brigham Young and the early Mormons have all but faded. New images, for better or worse, will undoubtedly appear.