

The eleventh and twelfth articles profess our belief in religious liberty, tolerance, and agency. Agency is one of the great gifts of God to His children. It allows all men and women the right to choose for themselves and to earn their own individual salvation. Also declared is our belief in secular governments and “in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” of the land (Articles of Faith 1:12).

The thirteenth article provides a special insight into how we should conduct our lives and present ourselves before the peoples of the earth. It reads: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

Study the Articles of Faith

The Articles of Faith were not the work of a team of scholars but were au-

thored by a single, inspired man who declared comprehensively and concisely the essential doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They contain direct and simple statements of the principles of our religion, and they constitute strong evidence of the divine inspiration that rested upon the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I encourage each of you to study the Articles of Faith and the doctrines they teach. They are “one of the most important statements of inspiration, history, and doctrine for the Church. . . . Each article is a positive statement [explaining] the differences between Mormonism and the [beliefs of other peoples of the world]” (*Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 257). If you will use them as a guide to direct your studies of the Savior’s doctrine, you will find yourselves prepared to declare your witness of the restored, true Church of the Lord. You will be able to declare with conviction, “We believe these things.”

I add my testimony to the truthfulness of these special revealed truths, in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

“A teacher come from God”

When Nicodemus came to Jesus early in the Savior’s ministry, he spoke for all of us when he said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God.”¹

Christ was, of course, much more than a teacher. He was the very Son of God, the Holy One of the eternal gospel plan, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

But Nicodemus was starting about the way you and I started, the way any child or young student or new convert begins—by recognizing and responding to a thrilling teacher who touches the innermost feelings of our heart.

Inspired instruction nourishes members

In recent months President Gordon B. Hinckley has called on us to hold our people close to the Church, especially the newly converted member. In issuing this call President Hinckley has reminded that we all need at least three things to remain firmly in the faith—a friend, a responsibility, and “[nourishing] by the good word of God.”²

Inspired instruction in the home and in the Church helps provide this crucial element of nourishing by the good word of God. We are so grateful to all who teach. We love you and appreciate you

more than we can say. We have great confidence in you. To teach effectively and to feel you are succeeding is demanding work indeed. But it is worth it. We can receive “no greater call.”³ Surely the opportunity to magnify that call exists everywhere. The need for it is everlasting. Fathers, mothers, siblings, friends, missionaries, home and visiting teachers, priesthood and auxiliary leaders, classroom instructors—each is, in his or her own way, “come from God” for our schooling and our salvation. In this Church it is virtually impossible to find anyone who is *not* a guide of one kind or another to his or her fellow members of the flock. Little wonder that Paul would say in his writings, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers.”⁴

For each of us to “come unto Christ,”⁵ to keep His commandments and follow His example back to the Father is surely the highest and holiest purpose of human existence. To help others do that as well—to teach, persuade, and prayerfully lead them to walk that path of redemption also—surely that must be the second most significant task in our lives. Perhaps that is why President David O. McKay once said, “No greater responsibility can rest upon any man [or woman], than to be a teacher of God’s children.”⁶ We are, in fact, all somewhat like the man of Ethiopia to whom Philip was sent. Like him, we may know enough to reach out for religion. We may invest ourselves in the scriptures. We may even give up our earthly treasures, but without sufficient instruction we may miss the meaning of all this and the requirements that still lie before us. So we cry with this man of great authority, “How can [we understand], except some [teacher] should guide [us]?”⁷

The Apostle Paul taught:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

“[But] how then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and

how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? . . .

“ . . . *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”⁸

Revitalize superior teaching

Now, at a time when our prophet is calling for more faith through hearing the word of God, we must revitalize and reenthroned superior teaching in the Church—at home, from the pulpit, in our administrative meetings, and surely in the classroom. Inspired teaching must never become a lost art in the Church, and we must make certain our quest for it does not become a lost tradition.

President Spencer W. Kimball once pled: “Stake presidents, bishops, and branch presidents, please take a particular interest in improving the quality of teaching in the Church. . . . I fear,” he said, “that all too often many of our members come to church, sit through a class or a meeting, and . . . then return home having been largely [uninspired]. It is especially unfortunate when this happens at a time . . . of stress, temptation, or crisis [in their life]. We all need to be touched and nurtured by the Spirit,” he said, “and *effective teaching* is one of the most important ways this can happen. We often do vigorous . . . work,” President Kimball concluded, “to get members to come to Church but then do not adequately watch over what they receive when they do come.”⁹ On this subject President Hinckley himself has said, “*Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church.*” May I repeat that: “Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church. Eternal life,” President Hinckley continued, “will come only as men and women are *taught with such effectiveness* that they change and discipline their lives. They cannot be coerced into righteousness or into heaven. They must be led, and that means teaching.”¹⁰

Among the last words the Savior said to His disciples and among the first words He says to us today are: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . . [Teach] them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you [always], even unto the end of the world."¹¹ To Peter, the apostolic leader of the Church, the resurrected and ascending Christ said, "Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep. . . . Follow [thou] me."¹²

Teach the gospel by the Spirit

In all of this we must remember that the Lord has never given more emphatic counsel to the Church than that we are to teach the gospel "by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth."

Do we teach the gospel "by the Spirit of truth"? He has inquired. Or do we teach it "some other way? And if it be by some other way," He warns, "it is not of God."¹³ In language echoing other commandments, He has said, "If ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach."¹⁴

No eternal learning can take place without that quickening of the Spirit from heaven. So, parents, teachers, and leaders, we must face our tasks the way Moses faced the promised land. Knowing he could not succeed any other way, Moses said to Jehovah, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."¹⁵

That is what our members really want when they gather in a meeting or come into a classroom anyway. Most people don't come to church looking merely for a few new gospel facts or to see old friends, though all of that is important. They come seeking a spiritual experience. They want peace. They want their faith fortified and their hope renewed. They want, in short, to be nourished by the good word of God, to be strengthened by the powers of heaven. Those of us who are called upon to speak or teach or lead have an obliga-

tion to help provide that, as best we possibly can. We can only do that if we ourselves are striving to know God, if we ourselves are continually seeking the light of His Only Begotten Son. Then, if our hearts are right, if we are as clean as we can be, if we have prayed and wept and prepared and worried until we don't know what more we can do, God can say to us as He did to Alma and the sons of Mosiah: "Lift up thy head and rejoice. . . . I will give unto you success."¹⁶

Nurturing with the powerful word of God

We do have a legitimate worry about the new member, wanting each one to stay with us and enjoy the full blessings of the Church. I am just simple enough to think that if we continue to *teach them*—with the same Christlike spirit, conviction, doctrine, and personal interest the missionaries have shown them—new converts will not only stay with us but, quite literally, could not be kept away. The need for continuing such solid teaching is obvious. In times like ours we *all* need what Mormon called "the virtue of the word of God" because, he said, it "had [a] more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them."¹⁷ When crises come in our lives—and they will—the philosophies of men interlaced with a few scriptures and poems just won't do. Are we really nurturing our youth and our new members in a way that will sustain them when the stresses of life appear? Or are we giving them a kind of theological Twinkie—spiritually empty calories? President John Taylor once called such teaching "fried froth," the kind of thing you could eat all day and yet finish feeling totally unsatisfied.¹⁸ During a severe winter several years ago, President Boyd K. Packer noted that a goodly number of deer had died of starvation while their stomachs were full of hay. In an honest effort to assist, agencies had supplied

the superficial when the substantial was what had been needed. Regrettably they had *fed* the deer, but they had not *nourished* them.

I love what President J. Reuben Clark said of our youth well over a half century ago. The same thing can be said of new members. “[They] are hungry for the things of the spirit,” he said; “they are eager to learn the Gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted. . . .

“ . . . You do not have to sneak up behind [them] and whisper religion in [their] ears; . . . you can bring these truths [out] openly.”¹⁹

Satan is certainly not subtle in his teachings; why should we be? Whether we are instructing our children at home or standing before an audience in church, let us *never* make our faith difficult to detect. Remember, we are to be teachers “come from God.” Never sow seeds of doubt. Avoid self-serving performance and vanity. Prepare lessons well. Give scripturally based sermons. Teach the revealed doctrine. Bear heartfelt testimony. Pray and practice and try to improve. In our administrative meetings let us both “instruct and edify” as the revelations say, that even in these our teaching may ultimately be “from on high.”²⁰ The Church will be the better for it, and so will you, for as Paul said to the Romans, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?”²¹

Jeremiah's example

A memorable account of the power of such teaching comes from the life of the prophet Jeremiah. This great man felt the way most teachers or speakers or Church officers feel when called—inexperienced, inadequate, frightened. “Ah, Lord,” he cried, “behold, I cannot speak: for I am [but] a child.”

But the Lord reassured him: “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee. . . . Therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them.”²²

So speak unto them he did, but initially not with much success. Things went from bad to worse until finally he was imprisoned and made a laughing-stock among the people. Angry that he had been so mistreated and maligned, Jeremiah vowed, in effect, never to teach another lesson, whether that be to an investigator, Primary child, new convert, or—heaven forbid—the 15-year-olds. “I will not make mention of [the Lord], nor speak any more in his name,” the discouraged prophet said. But then came the turning point of Jeremiah's life. Something had been happening with every testimony he had borne, every scripture he had read, every truth he had taught. Something had been happening that he hadn't counted on. Even as he vowed to close his mouth and walk away from the Lord's work, he found that he could not. Why? Because “his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”²³

All can be teachers “come from God”

That is what happens in the gospel to both the teacher and the taught. It is what happened to Nephi and Lehi when, the book of Helaman says, “the Holy Spirit of God did come down from heaven, and did enter into their hearts, and they were filled as if with fire, and they could speak forth marvelous words.”²⁴ Surely it must have been that kind of heavenly joy Mary Magdalene experienced when near the Garden Tomb she unexpectedly beheld her beloved resurrected Lord and said to him simply, “Rabboni,”²⁵ which is to say, literally, “Teacher.”

From all of us who have been taught to all of you who teach—we say thank you, from the bottom of our hearts. May we exalt the teaching experience within the home and within the Church and improve our every effort to edify and instruct. In all of our meetings and all of

our messages may we nourish by the good word of God. And may our children and new converts, our neighbors and new friends, say of our honest efforts, "Thou art a teacher come from God." In the sacred name of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. John 3:2.
2. Moroni 6:4; see also Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 47.
3. *Teaching—No Greater Call* (resource materials for teacher improvement, 1995); see also Spencer W. Kimball, "No Greater Call," Sunday School Conference, 1 Oct. 1967.
4. 1 Corinthians 12:28.
5. D&C 20:59.
6. In Conference Report, Oct. 1916, 57.
7. See Acts 8:26–31.
8. Romans 10:13–14, 17; italics added.
9. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 524; italics added.
10. "How to Be a Teacher When Your Role as a Leader Requires You to Teach," General Authority Priesthood Board Meeting, 5 Feb. 1969; italics added.
11. Matthew 28:19–20.
12. John 21:15–19.
13. D&C 50:14, 17–18.
14. D&C 42:14.
15. Exodus 33:15.
16. Alma 8:15; 26:27.
17. Alma 31:5.
18. See John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham (1943), 78.
19. "The Charted Course of the Church in Education" (address given at Brigham Young University Summer School in Aspen Grove, Utah, 8 Aug. 1938), 4, 9.
20. D&C 43:8, 16.
21. Romans 2:21.
22. Jeremiah 1:6, 8, 17.
23. See Jeremiah 20:7–9.
24. Helaman 5:45.
25. John 20:16; see footnote *a* to Greek.

President Monson

We have just listened to Elders L. Tom Perry and Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "I Need Thee Every Hour," a favorite hymn of President Spencer W. Kimball.

Elder Richard E. Cook, followed by Elder Dale E. Miller, both of the Seventy, will then speak to us.

The choir and congregation sang "I Need Thee Every Hour."

Elder Richard E. Cook

Blessings from missionary work

Sister Cook and I were called to Mongolia as missionaries roughly one year before it was formally organized as a mission. We look back on that time as one of the most memorable, satisfying, and blessed periods of our lives. That time is still rewarding us with rich experiences and blessings.

The Lord has said to missionaries, "And if it so be that you should labor all

your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!" (D&C 18:15).

This promise stands like a beacon to every missionary, but as if that weren't enough, there are other blessings from missionary work, and they are many and varied. Some are immediate; others come only with time.