



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Transcript

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Talk by Truman G. Madsen

One of the things I admire about Jack is his candor, and as he spoke about the prudent (that's a strange word for being bankrupt) the prudent way they operate in F.A.R.M.S., I was reminded of a meeting where Bob Rees (who was then the editor of Dialogue) was trying to plead for support, and somebody stood up and said, "We hear that this year Dialogue is in serious financial trouble." He said, "That is a lie! Dialogue has always been in financial trouble."

I also want to answer probably the curious question you have which is why a) we were in Germany and why b) we are home, and that's a long story, but we were there in connection with a relative who is tied in with the N.C.O.O. (is that the proper title--the Non-Commissioned Officer organization) of the military in Germany and met several service men, and I can tell you that is not theoretical for them--what is happening in Kuwait. One other preamble, and that is that you are not going to be held here more than 25 minutes max, unless you want to ask a couple of questions at the end. But let me begin with an anecdote.

I don't want to embarrass John Sorenson, who is here tonight, but some years ago, a friend of ours who is in Arizona called and said "I'm bringing a fire-breathing non-Mormon up to campus, having promised him that he can talk to you." That's fine. So they came. This man, it turned out, had his own anti-Mormon bookstore. And it was massive, almost like a pornography factory, and as you came in, it was absolutely loaded with anti-Mormon literature. They also had booths where if a Mormon came in, they would take you in and debrief you. I've never known a more antagonistic personality, but one of the troubles was that he was also radically misinformed. As Josh Billings said, "It wasn't his ignorance, it was all the things he knew that weren't true." To be very candid, I got no where with him, we just did not communicate, but he had had some hearsay about one John Sorenson, and after a futile evening, he asked if he could meet him. That was arranged. Now I'll condense, but John took the trouble, later, after really a very favorable conversation, to answer a whole list of objections that this man had, not just to the Book of

Mormon, but to a whole variety of other things. John took the time to take them, one by one, and on a tape, responded in his careful, objective way. Well, the man will never be a Mormon, I predict, in the foreseeable future; but he closed down his anti-Mormon store, and said of John, "There is one guy I can talk to." What John did there, in part, is now in a book, and the book was published by F.A.R.M.S., and I cannot describe to you how important such things are.

And now a point about growth, Jack mentioned, and I wanted to say a little about that. I do travel a lot, and I am aware of statistics. There is a man at the University of Washington. I've been unable to get him to put his research down in a one-article version for our Encyclopedia, but here is the chart Jack has prepared based upon this research, and I want to put the question to you and let you take a shot at it. If you know the answer, then it's not fair to answer. This man did a demographic calculation. The church celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1980. What he said was, "Let's look ahead exactly 100 years. Assuming a continual, basic birthrate comparable to the past, and assuming growth through the missionary effort comparable to the past, how many Latter-day Saints will there be in 2080?" Does anybody want to take a shot, just off the wall? After giving the figure, which I'll give in a moment, he then wrote an article which in effect said, "This is the first religion since Islam to become a world religion." It will have become a world religion by 2080. The figure is 260 million.

Now we have a problem calling bishops. Anne and I have reason for a special feeling for Brother Dean Larson, who incidentally set her apart when she was put on the Correlation Committee. It's not called that, it is called something else. She really is one of those that has been responsible for the last eleven years for the Gospel Doctrine manuals. And he was sent, he told us, to a stake in Mexico. He was one of the organizers. Twenty-two hundred members, not one of whom had been in the church a full year. He did it (I don't know how you do that--how you get a Stake Presidency, a High Council, and so on)--he did it. Returned, and three months later they said, "We'd like you to go down and hold the first Stake Conference there." Fine. But before you do,

you must divide the Stake. It has doubled in three months.

Someone oversaw or overheard Brother Hunter shaking his finger at one of the Mission Presidents down there, recently, and later asked, a bit carefully, "What was that all about?" "I was telling him that the limit of converts per month is 1000, and if he goes over it, he is going to be released!" Because the branches are growing more rapidly than the roots, and we've got to keep some balance. At the moment, there are in the Mormon church about 270,000 students of college age. Exactly ten times more than BYU can accommodate. And what happens to them? Well, if they have some contact with the church on an educational level, they will be in Institute. Well who will teach the Institutes? Well, the Institute directors. Well, what will the Institute directors use for source material for what they teach college level students all over the world? Well, what ever there is.

Now that leads me to the what is. I am going to do some table hopping: I don't want to embarrass either Noel or Jack, but Jack sort of understated, we had been in a nightmare for the last eight months, struggling, coping, probing, reading, as editors, for an encyclopedia that will have to have about 1.2 million words, and which covers the waterfront of history, biography, sacred texts, doctrine, organization, policy, culture; and every one of those articles, and there will be about 1200, is supposed to have along with it at least one good bibliographical reference--what is the best source for what you have just said in your article on a given topic. It won't be a surprise to some of you: we don't have such an article on many of the topics, there isn't one. But such as there are, many of them are from F.A.R.M.S., coming out of a decade, as Jack has explained, of some very thorough research. What if we don't have one? Well, we just leave it out. But if the need has suddenly become apparent to us, then it is time it became apparent to others.

Let me then say one other thing about growth. The problem of a new convert, and we've been in most of the states of the United States and certainly many foreign countries; the problem is of

course that they come in with elementary understanding and then, quickly, must be acculturated before a very long time. Often within a few months, they are already themselves teaching or fellowshiping or leading--that is the nature of the organization. Well, the elementary understanding isn't quite enough. And they are taking not only the jibes of anti-Mormonism which has quadrupled by my reading within the last ten years. Almost like a barometric map, it seems to follow our announcement of building temples. They not only are troubled by that kind of buffeting, but they are troubled by their own struggles to understand and their own doubts and their own desires to get below the surface. The Church officially has reduced what was an eight-year curriculum of gospel doctrine teaching: they wanted every member of the church to go over all of the standard works together every eight years. That's been cut, as some of you observed to four; and that's too fast. And that in a way superficializes in a measure what they study. But they have to get through all four standard works in four years. That's the theory. And some church history involved with the Doctrine and Covenants. Well, again, we have been in many places where people don't do well with English, or who are struggling with it, who are desperate for the kind of material which F.A.R.M.S. is committed to produce.

Now, I am asked quite often--have been over the years in my own assignment--what good does it do to have more interchange with the scholars and with others more or less informed public. And I go anecdotally; I suppose some studies can be done statistically, but let me give you a couple that are close to home. You are probably aware that most announcements about where we would build a temple in recent years have been attended by demonstrations against that place. In the case of Denver, they moved the site three times. Am I correct? Did you ever hear of any opposition to the temple about to be built in Stockholm, Sweden? There wasn't any. Have you ever wondered why? That is still a stronghold for the Lutheran church. The Lutheran church is the state church, in effect, even now. How is it that we can announce the building of a temple, right in Stockholm, and as a matter of fact only a stone's throw from the rectory where Lutheran ministers are trained, and not have opposition? Well, one main reason: the reason is that the

dean of the Harvard Divinity School, Kristep Stendahl, who formerly taught me in certain classes, was invited to come West. He admitted to me later that he came West only as a favor to me; that he had been convinced up to that point that Brigham Young University was an intellectual wasteland. But that he came as a favor. Well he came, and there had been prior contact, and he chose to do a paper on the book of Third Nephi, at our encouragement. He is an expert on the Sermon on the Mount, specifically Matthew. And he made a comparison: what does 3 Nephi say, what does Matthew say? Some very interesting observations. He even discovered a few things Nibley hadn't noticed. He discovered, for example, that there isn't one mention in 3 Nephi of the word Pharisee, and that is central in the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees say so and so, the law says so and so, but I say . . . not one mention of Pharisee. Would that have been a mistake for Joseph Smith? Pharisees didn't exist until after say the second century B.C. Book of Mormon colonies came out of Jerusalem six centuries before. There couldn't have been any knowledge in the Americas of the Pharisees per se. He picked that up. That is another story. The point is that doing that homework didn't convert him to the Book of Mormon, but lead him to republish the essay. We published it, but then he published it in a collection of his own, and in the introduction says, "I have discovered that we New Testament scholars have been very cavalier in our treatment of such books as the Book of Mormon. We'll walk a mile for a footnote for anything that bears on the environment of the New Testament, and totally ignore the after-history; let us change." Well, he was made Bishop of Stockholm about the same time the announcement came of the Mormon temple. He had meantime visited Temple Square. We had talked with him a little about the principle of baptism for the dead. So he gets letters of objection, "What are you going to say about this?" He says, "I'll tell you what we're going to say about it." He wrote an article. The article incidentally was quoted in extenso by Brother Wirthlin in the General Conference about a year later. In it he said, "What are we to do with people who come into our country, and build not a chapel, not a cathedral, but a temple, in order to fulfill 1 Corinthians 15:29? I say, pray for them." Now we've talked to the people who are there. Even the Lutherans in the area call it "our temple." The greatest way to prevent

opposition is to prevent it, before you have to reply to it.

Not again to embarrass Jack, I was in a meeting where Brothers Maxwell and Dallin Oaks came and plead with everyone in our general group to say, "Hey, we want you people to anticipate the kinds of problems that are going to be coming. We want you to work with them before the bear-traps are set." And the way it was summed up was in a basketball analogy; Dallin Oaks said, "No more unopposed layups." Well, F.A.R.M.S. is in the business of anticipating layups and preventing them--if necessary--by a deliberate foul! I got a little carried away there Jack--you know how it is with metaphors! So those are simply glimpses of the kind of change that can happen.

Now on a more broad level; here sitting is my wife. She is about to undertake an honors course here at B.Y.U. in the Old Testament roots of the Book of Mormon. An exciting idea which turned on the honors program. She'll be into it in about a week. What is she going to use as ballast and background for this? Well, she went and bought the catalog--I suspect about half of her curriculum will be based on material you people know about.

And that leads me to a word about Hugh Nibley. Speaking again of differences. Here at the table is Brother Gunther--I want to call him President Gunther--he is my temple President. Some time ago the whole stake organization at BYU asked a simple question: "What are we going to give young people who are about to go to the temple? What could we do legitimately to prepare them? Yes, it is the bishop's responsibility, but what can he hand them? What's available?" Well, one answer is to have them read a little bit of Hugh Nibley. Hugh Nibley would talk about the temple? Yes, occasionally. Four people whom I have come to know professionally in the academic community are stunned at Nibley. They don't agree, altogether, but they acknowledge that he really opens their eyes to things they had neglected or ignored. So for example, George McRay, a man at Harvard since deceased; we were on Temple Square showing him the model

font that is there. You know the one--south-east corner. Twelve life-size oxen, and they have on a little pavilion there an exact replica of the quotation of baptism for the dead. And being the devil's advocate for the moment I said, "You know the standard reply to this verse, and that is that obviously Paul was talking about a non-Christian practice, and was simply saying even those people would look ridiculous if they didn't believe in the resurrection." And McRay said, "Nope." And I said, "Why so great a no?" He said, "Number one: there is no evidence for non-Christian baptism for the dead. Number two: there is a great deal of evidence for Christian baptism for the dead. Look at Nibley." And then I talked a little bit about Nibley, and he said, "It is obscene for a man to know so much." [James] Charlesworth said to me one day, "The guy is a genius." He tried to get him to do some translating for him. Nibley said yes, and then as usual after he [found] other things to do, said no. There are many more. And this project of bringing his entire corpus into that readable form, and doing the anguishing task of checking the footnotes--do you know how much that involves? Checking Nibley's footnotes? In the article, the simple article, "Treasures in the Heavens," there were over 1000 footnotes; but some of the footnotes had up to a hundred sources. My son spent a whole summer on one footnote. He had to check them in thirteen languages. But to do that and to have that in permanent form is one of the greatest achievements that Brigham Young University can take pride in. Of course they'll take pride in it even though it was done by F.A.R.M.S. They at least initiated it and support the idea. Nibley is a phenomenon. I don't know when people say to me, "Who is going to replace him?" I can name about twelve people that might start to fill his shoes, but no one. In the meantime, to have pulled him into this and gotten his material into readable form is a great contribution.

I only have five more minutes to say what I want to say. So let me turn to just one other answer to the question, "What difference does it all make in the long run?" Now there is a John Taylor prediction more than 100 years old now which has haunted me; I'll see if I can quote it exactly. "You will see the day," he said, "when Zion...." (I must interrupt. It is a great paradox that the book which is toughest on sheer grasping for money, namely Approaching Zion, should have been

the best money-maker [for F.A.R.M.S.!]) "You will see the day when Zion is as far ahead of the world in all matters pertaining to human learning of every kind as we are now ahead in matters religious." When the former U.N. Secretary Malik, Charles Malik, came and gave a lecture in our Forum [lecture series at B.Y.U.] on leadership, we had him in our home. Somebody asked me what I do in the Evans chair: I say "hosting and ghosting." We had Charles Malik in our home and he said, in effect, "Where are your Nobel prize winners? This is a great university." He said, "I've always wanted to look at a university where Christ would be comfortable, and maybe this is it. But where are your Nobel prize winners?" Well, he had a point. He said something else though. We were for the moment talking about the nature of man, and he comes out of the Greek Orthodox tradition, and he takes seriously the notion of an absolute ex nihilo creation, and therefore wants to say, as most traditional theologians do, that man, not to mention the cosmos, man is totally contingent for his existence upon God. That is, the only being in the universe that has to exist is God. God could not, not be. But as for man--man is utterly contingent. Well, I introduced, apparently the first time it entered his head the idea that man himself is self-existent, that "intelligence was not created or made, neither indeed can be." And I never forget he pounded at his own [head], he said, "Utterly unthinkable." And I said, "You wouldn't be pounding your head if it were unthinkable. You are thinking it, you just reject it." "Well, yes, it is utterly. . . unacceptable." But from then on, he went around saying, "The Mormons are not just a people off in the backwater; the Mormons have ideas." And at two conferences I attended, and he didn't know I was present, he said some very favorable things about his experience here and then was sent some materials that he approved in the spirit of his own religion. I might say in passing (I didn't think he would ever put this in print) that he said, "The Greek Orthodox church is utterly corrupt." And I said, "You mean the doctrine? Do you mean the leadership? Or do you mean the laity?" He said, "Yes." And he wrote it in a paragraph in which he said, in the last sentence,

"This is what happens when rottenness utterly supervenes." Describing his own church. And he loved what he saw here. Well, the point is, that message is not getting out quite yet.

So I have one other footnote. We were in Israel, as you heard. Maybe the most prominent expert in comparative religion, a man named R.J.Svee Verblaski [???] (there's one for you to pronounce), he himself by the way [is] the closest associate of the world's greatest and maybe in all history the greatest historian of Jewish mysticism (a man named Gershim Scholem)[??]-- we invited him over to the Center, had a pleasant chat. He said to me, "You know, I'm the guy responsible for your having a genealogical program in Israel." Is that so? He said, "Your people came over and they proposed to do microfilm on Jewish records, and the committee appointed to entertain them turned them down cold, but then invited me to an after-meeting to tell them what I thought about it. They figured that I had had a little experience with comparative lit." (So he said.) "I sat them down and said, 'Well tell me, why did you reject this?'" "Well, these people go into their own sanctuary and they proceed to do proxy work for Jews." Verblaski said, "No, No: let's start over. Let's separate two questions. I think that two things are at stake here. One, what they want to do; and two, why they do it. Let's talk about the first one. What they want to do is to come and microfilm our records, give us a copy, and take a copy back to their superb archives in Utah; I say, let them! Can anybody who is Jewish turn down an offer like that? But now the question of why. I'm surprised that everybody in this room has become a Mormon. Do you really believe that their performing a ceremony in their temple on behalf of, say, your grand father is going to make any difference whatever to your grand father? NO! Well, then, just what is the objection?" Well, they went ahead. Verblaski has read a good deal of material that has come out of BYU, including the book, Reflections on Mormonism, which is a symposium held some years ago (in 1978) involving many scholars. Incidentally, that has been a door-opener for my work. "Can we have Truman Madsen come and speak at such and such an university? Not interested." Send them a copy of Reflections of Mormonism, "Can we have Truman Madsen. . . very interested." And his desire is that the Center (which he has defended through all of this ultra-Orthodox opposition) succeed, and he has offered his own services in any way to help us. He is only one of hundreds--but we need thousands. And that's the bottom line, if I may say so: the bottom line is that we need all of the friends we can get. The cause of truth, and the cause of

righteousness needs all the friends it can get. We're usually intent on getting converts--fair enough. But lacking that, and until the entire world is qualified for conversion, there needs to be understanding. F.A.R.M.S. is devoted to that project, and I say let's support Jack, and support the program. Thank you very much.