

If “moral agency” stands at the core of the doctrine of an inspired Constitution, then one might say that whereas LDS teaching in the nineteenth century emphasized the agency, Church leaders in the twentieth century have increasingly stressed the moral foundations of the Constitution, echoing the prophet Mosiah₂ in the Book of Mormon: “If the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you” (Mosiah 29:26–7; cf. Ether 2:8–12). Their praise of the Constitution has often been paired with warnings against the evils of Marxist communism, a system opposed to the Constitution and moral freedom.

LDS attachment to the Constitution has been further encouraged by an important oral tradition deriving from a statement attributed to Joseph Smith, according to which the Constitution would “hang by a thread” and be rescued, if at all, only with the help of the Saints. Church President John Taylor seemed to go further when he prophesied, “When the people shall have torn to shreds the Constitution of the United States the Elders of Israel will be found holding it up to the nations of the earth and proclaiming liberty and equal rights to all men” (*JD* 21:8). To defend the principles of the Constitution under circumstances where the “iniquity,” or moral decay, of the people has torn it to shreds might well require wisdom at least equal to that of the men raised up to found it. In particular, it would require great insight into the relationship between freedom and virtue in a political embodiment of moral agency.

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Mangrum, R. Collin. “Mormonism, Philosophical Liberalism, and the Constitution.” *BYU Studies* 27 (Summer 1987):119–37. Seeks a justification for Mormon celebration of the Constitution in a compatibility between Mormon theology and the liberal idea that “each individual is entitled to pursue whatever his or her individual *nomos* requires, subject to the equal right of others to do the same.”

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CONTENTION

Ranging from hostile words spoken at home to international conflicts, contention is so prevalent in the world that people tend to think of it as normal, inevitable, and perhaps even necessary. In the Book of Mormon, however, Jesus states, “He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Ne. 11:29). Whether at home, at church, in business, or in the community, “such things should be done away” (3 Ne. 11:30). This is fundamental to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Latter-day Saints place great value on directing their energy in positive ways: “Use boldness, but not overbearance; and also see that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12). Thus, scriptures admonish the faithful to “contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3; 1 Thes. 2:2), but not to the point of quarreling or arguing. Contention is especially detrimental at home (Mosiah 4:14) and over doctrine (1 Cor. 11:16; 3 Ne. 11:28).

Jesus taught not only that contention should cease, but anger too, along with derision, contempt, and scorn. Having such feelings place a person in danger of the judgments of the Church and of God (see Matt. 5:22; see also 3 Ne. 12:22, where the phrase “without a cause” is absent).

When people get into difficulties and disagreements with one another, the scriptures furnish wise counsel. If a person feels bad feelings, or discovers that someone has bad feelings against him or her, it is that person’s responsibility to go “quickly” and be reconciled (3 Ne. 12:23–25). Implicit in this injunction is the recognition that “we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). A troubled relationship is shared by all persons in-

volved and is not just the responsibility of the one who feels hurt or angry. The nature of the reconciliation depends upon the specifics of each situation. Rather than relying on human understanding or formulaic solutions, the Saints are taught to seek divine counsel and to trust the direction of the Lord, the reconciler of all (Prov. 3:5–6; D&C 112:10).

Standing in the way of most solutions to contention is pride: “Only by pride cometh contention” (Prov. 13:10). “The central feature of pride,” declared Ezra Taft BENSON, “is enmity—enmity toward God and . . . [toward] our fellowmen.” Underlying the solution to contention must be the desire for harmony between people which can come only as a person “yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit . . . and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). Atonement and reconciliation with God allow and evoke forgiveness and reconciliation among people.

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CONTRIBUTOR

Edited and published independently by Junius F. WELLS, the founder of the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA; renamed YOUNG MEN in 1977), the *Contributor* (1879–1896) proposed “to represent the Mutual Improvement Associations, and to furnish a publication of peculiar interest to their members and to the mature youth of our people” (“Salutation,” p. 12). One of its purposes was to encourage and foster the development of literary talents among the young men and young women in the Church. It contained articles on such subjects as travel, philosophy, history, biography, and gospel topics. There were also letters from the General Authorities, conference reports, lesson outlines for the youth weekly meetings, hymns, fiction, and a little poetry.

The Contributor Company was formed on January 11, 1886, and Wells continued as editor,

publisher, and business manager. But when it was purchased by the Cannon Publishing Company in 1892, Abraham H. Cannon became the editor and publisher. Cannon died suddenly in July 1896, and the *Contributor* ceased publication with the October issue.

In November 1897 the general board of the YMMIA launched an official magazine, the IMPROVEMENT ERA (1897–1970).

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CONVERSION

From its beginnings to the present day, the Church has had a strong missionary orientation. It teaches that conversion is essentially a process of REPENTANCE and personal spiritual experience (*see* TESTIMONY; RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE; JOINING THE CHURCH).

THE NATURE OF CONVERSION. A number of theories have been advanced by sociologists to explain why people are likely to convert to another religious denomination. Glenn M. Vernon indicated that conversion involves several subprocesses, which must be accounted for, including (1) the manner in which the convert becomes aware of the group possessing the ideology; (2) the acceptance of new religious definitions; and (3) the integration of the new convert into the group. John Lofland and Rodney Stark proposed that conversion is a problem-solving process in which the individual uses organizational facilities, programs, and ideologies to resolve various life problems. More recently, David A. Snow, Louis A. Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson have emphasized structural proximity, availability, and affective interaction with members of the new denomination as the most powerful influences in determining who will join. Roger A. Straus has proposed that religious conversion is an active accomplishment by the person who converts. Straus thinks that previous theories focus too heavily on the idea that conversion is something which happens to a person as a result of circumstances external to himself. Similarly, C.