Why Religious Freedom?

Key Issues in Their Practical Context

Matthew K. Richards
Kirton | McConkie
July 6, 2015
What is most important to you?

Who are you?

How do you define yourself?

How do you interact with others around you?
Why Religious Freedom?

Your Beliefs, Core Identity

What you say
Your friends
How you behave
What you like

Free Press
Free Assoc.
Non-discr.
Other Regs

Free Speech
Why Religious Freedom?

Religious freedom protects our ability to define ourselves—individually and collectively with others—and then speak and act out what we believe.
Why Religious Freedom?

75% of the world’s population lives in countries where Freedom of Conscience is severely limited.

86% of 143 largest countries had incidents of violence (2000-2007)
Like love, beliefs can’t be forced to be authentic.
“[I]n its religious dimension, [religious liberty is] one of the most vital elements that go to make up the identity of believers and their conception of life, but it is also a precious asset for atheists, agnostics, sceptics and the unconcerned. The pluralism indissociable from a democratic society, which has been dearly won over the centuries, depends on it.”

European Court of Human Rights
Kokkinakis v. Greece (App no 14307/88) 1993, para. 31
Nolan and K. v. Russia (App no 2512/04) 2009, para. 61
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Your Beliefs, Core Identity

Marketplace of Ideas

What you say
Your friends
How you behave
What you like
Religious freedom is the architecture that gives diverse beliefs space to coexist—the essence of democracy.
Key Points

• Without religious freedom, all rights suffer.
• Applies to religious and nonreligious views.
• Fairness for All: It can’t be selfish. To claim it for ourselves, we need to afford it to others.
The Brethren Speak


Elder Cook, *Let There Be Light!* (October 2010)
“[Religious Freedom] is essential to our spiritual life and our very salvation. ... Brothers and sisters, we are responsible to safeguard these sacred freedoms and rights for ourselves and our posterity.”
“Next to the bestowal of life itself, the right to direct that life is God’s greatest gift to man.”

Pres. Monson (Oct. 2010)
Church Holds News Conference

Mormon Leaders Call for Laws That Protect Religious Freedom
“We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.”

Doctrine & Covenants 134:4
[Video omitted pending copyright approval from the Church. For a longer version of the same video, see http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/official-statement/religious-freedom]
Top Religious Freedom Threats in North America
• Comparatively high degree of freedom in America

“In many countries, including the United States, religious freedom is slowly and dangerously eroding.”

- Elder L. Tom Perry
For Individuals...

• **FREE EXPRESSION:** Will religious viewpoints be suppressed in the public square and other places where people live out their lives?

• **PARENTS TEACHING CHILDREN:** Will parents of school children be able to ensure that their religious values aren’t undermined through classroom instruction or intimidation?

• **THE WORKPLACE:** Will employees be able to maintain their religious identity in the workplace and be reasonably accommodated when work and religious duties conflict?
For Individuals ...

• **PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS:** Will professionals lose or be denied licensing for expressing religious views or declining to provide services that are available elsewhere but that are at odds with their beliefs?

• **SMALL BUSINESSES:** Will family and religiously oriented businesses be able to maintain their values in the face of anti-discrimination laws?

• **COLLEGE CAMPUSES:** Will campus student groups be able to select their own leaders or express a religious message?

• **FREEDOM FROM RETALIATION:** Will those who voice beliefs be retaliated against?
For Churches ...

• **RELIGIOUS EMPLOYMENT:** Will churches continue to have the right to employ people that affirm and live the church’s beliefs? Will they be forced to provide employment benefits that contradict their beliefs?

• **PRIVATE PROPERTY:** Will churches be able to build and maintain houses of worship and other facilities? Will they be able to preserve their religiously important properties for activities that are consistent with their religious beliefs?

• **TAX EXEMPT STATUS:** Will churches and schools that affirm the traditional definition of marriage lose their tax-exempt status? Will donors’ contributions be tax deductible?
For Churches ...

- **ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT RESOURCES:** Will religious organizations be able to participate on equal terms with other non-profit organizations in government programs and the use of government facilities and properties?

- **RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS:** Will religious schools be able to maintain their religious values and standards while also retaining their accreditation and the ability to participate in federal educational and research programs?
“Don’t walk! Run! Run to receive the blessings of agency by following the Holy Ghost and exercising the freedoms God has given us to do His will.”

- “become informed,”
- “join with others,”
- “work side by side to protect religious freedom,” and
- be examples.
"I expect to see the day when the elders in Israel will protect and sustain civil and religious liberty and every constitutional right bequeathed to us by our fathers, and spread these rights abroad in connection with the gospel for the salvation of all nations. I shall see this whether I live or die."

— President Brigham Young

“There is a battle over the meaning of [religious] freedom. The contest is of eternal importance, and it is your generation that must understand the issues and make the efforts to prevail.”

— Elder Dallin H. Oaks (Oct. 2009, BYU Idaho)
Questions?