



4-1-1990

# Address

J. Elliot Cameron

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### Recommended Citation

Cameron, J. Elliot (1990) "Address," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*: Vol. 15 : No. 2 , Article 8.  
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol15/iss2/8>

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## Address

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J. Elliot Cameron  
31 March 1989

I always approach this group with apprehension. Perhaps it is because of my long association with some of you and the great respect I have for your professional work. Together we have “staffed” cases in the past and have unitedly found solutions as we have worked to save the souls of clients.

Sometime ago a member of our central office staff spoke of an experience he had in the seminary classroom. One of his students had recommended him to her father to fill in as a gospel doctrine teacher. Her father needed someone on very short notice and had mentioned it at the dinner table. When the father asked the girl if she thought the seminary teacher could handle it on short notice, she replied, “Sure, he can talk without thinking!”

I have prayed that what I would say today would be appropriate and would be stimulating. I can only hope that it will not be inappropriate.

Dr. Parker reminded me last month that you would be dealing with “Family Perspectives” at this conference, and that your public meeting would deal with building self esteem—ideas we all recognize are badly needed in our society. He specifically invited me to talk about counseling in a spiritual setting.

I would like to say a few words about the Church Educational System (CES) that I am now, in an administrative capacity, affiliated with, as a background and setting for my extended

remarks. This may help you know the perspective from which I come today. Some of you are employed by the Church Educational System and know something of its profile. Others of you may not.

The CES consists of a group of entities that operate together. It has about 24,000 full-time and part-time employees serving about 800,000 students in fifty states and ninety countries or territories. In addition to Brigham Young University (BYU), BYU–Hawaii, Ricks College, LDS Business College, seven elementary schools, thirteen middle schools, and nine high schools, the CES is also associated with 1,400 college and university campuses where, through the institutes of religion, we teach 125,000 college-related students. Our teachers meet 243,000 seminary students every week: they conduct literacy and health education workshops, teach adult religion classes, conduct seminars, conduct home study and professional development classes, and teach special education to the handicapped. They teach in the most modern of classroom buildings and laboratories, in local meetinghouses, in member's homes, in thatched huts, in land-rover buses, and even in shepherd's fields. They are a mature, highly motivated, well-educated group of brothers and sisters blessed with talents made available in a special age—for a special purpose.

Our mission is simple. It is the same as the mission of the Church even though we are not in the ecclesiastical line of reporting. The CES is governed by constituted boards of trustees, identified through articles of incorporation, whose officers happen to be the First Presidency of the Church. The Commissioner of Education is the executive officer of the various boards.

It is from this setting that I speak to you as I would speak to the Church Educational System teachers—because you, too, are teachers—trusted teachers and counselors—who, in your contacts with people, have a profound effect upon their lives. Your AMCAP affiliation states that your “common bond is membership in and adherence to the principles and standards of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, both in (your) personal lives and (in your) professional practice.” (Article 1, Section 2a, AMCAP by-laws). I am quick to recognize that you are not sponsored by,

nor do you speak for the Church nor its leaders. But together, all of us, labor in a common cause.

A couple of weeks ago I read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* (March 9, 1989) where the Pope had had a conference with 36 United States Roman Catholic Bishops, aimed toward easing tensions between American Catholics and Rome. He had urged them to proclaim church teachings, even if such a proclamation was unpopular. "But a leading bishop (American Catholic) said many Catholics saw moral doctrine as outmoded."

The present generation has been reared differently than the previous one. Parents have been permissive. There are more broken families. Families are increasingly nomadic. The increased freedom of expression in the public schools, and the pervasive intrusion of television have radically altered the experiences of young people. With their new found freedom, our youth have observed adults engaged in a chaotic and frustrating exploration for what is significant and what personal values are most meaningful. Our youth are more sophisticated, more traveled, more idealistic and vastly more interesting than students used to be. They demand more time from anyone who will listen.

This generation asks:

- Is truth in itself desirable?
- What is so wrong about lying if you will gain from the act?
- Is personal integrity really required of a creative individual?
- Can experience with a hallucinatory drug duplicate a religious experience?
- Then, what is religion?
- What is all the talk about responsibility?
- Why should the individual subordinate his personal wishes to the welfare of a society whose opinion is of no interest to him?
- Why is shoplifting, or disregard for property, so bad?

- If society does not make it possible for an individual to have what he wants, why does society deny him the right to take it when he can find it?
- If everyone else in a class cheats, why isn't it justifiable to protect yourself from the teacher's bell curve evaluation?
- Sex standards, which were once at least common knowledge though not uniformly adhered to, are constantly undergoing a change in emphasis, and conflicting systems of morality have surfaced.

The rise of youthful confidence and outspoken challenge has brought indignant, impatient, and in some cases not-too-respectful "creative thinkers," who associate truth with the new rather than the old and the traditional.

Learned men and women for generations have expressed the opinion that young people around them were sloppily educated, poorly motivated, bereft of social graces, and ill-equipped to take over running of the world.

In the mid-18th century, Dr. Samuel Johnson said: "The mental disease of the present generation is impatience of study, contempt of the great masters of ancient wisdom, and a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity."

As early as 1625, Francis Bacon referred to youth of his day in this way: "Young men, in the conduct and management of actions, embrace more than they can hold; stir more than they can quiet; fly to the end without consideration of the means and degrees." And speaking of the older generation, he said: "Men of age object too much, adventure too little, repent too soon, and seldom drive business home to its full period, but content themselves with a mediocrity of success." Someone has said, "The older you get, the better you get when you were young."

The conditions in the world require special coping. We live in an age of technological explosion, where as Daniel says, "many . . . run to and fro, and knowledge (is) increased" (Daniel 12:4).

Our technological progress gives an illusion of prosperity and well-being to our society. In spite of increased knowledge and communication skills, there is war, famine, bloodshed, vulgarity, unhappiness, murder, rape, and considerable emotional, mental and spiritual sickness. Divorce, broken families, murder, suicide, illicit drug use, teen-age pregnancy, and unwed mothers are common occurrences. The world has progressed in physical and intellectual things, but because the spirit is often anemic and undernourished, there are many social maladies.

The great concepts of right and wrong never change, but particular situations present themselves today that never arose in the days of our grandparents. "Situation ethics"—what is right and what is wrong in specific circumstances—challenges us. Some current issues such as organ transplants, surrogate mothers, abortions, birth control, do "the ends justify the means," does God take sides in politics, and a host of others require that individuals exercise agency in making decisions. Some also underscore the need for guidance of living prophets. But, as we all know, for various reasons, public pronouncements are not made by the Church on every issue. Individuals need to stand on their own feet and get inspiration, or risk being led astray.

The world rubs off on the Church membership and leaves its mark. All of the maladies mentioned are present among members of the Church. Hollywood and Madison Avenue are giving lessons in profanity, immorality, and worldliness in almost every magazine, movie, musical number, and television program. The people who we deal with today are molded by vastly different experiences than were their parents. They have lived only during prosperity. Their world has shrunk so rapidly that they find it easy to identify with people in far-off lands. And yet many of them become so wound up in their own little worlds that they can see only a drug culture, or a social set, or a neighborhood club.

Some wonder if our society has lost sight of the difference between right and wrong. As we read in the public press of various societal problems, there is comfort in the thought that the news media would not go to the trouble of reporting cases of moral and ethical dereliction if people did not see at least something wrong

with them. If morality were really dead, then *immorality* would not be shocking. It would not be news. It seems that what is missing—besides a sense of morality—is a sense of shame: the sense that once restrained people from doing things that were deemed disreputable. It was not all that long ago that a person caught committing an immoral or unethical act might find himself or herself ostracized in the community, snubbed by former friends, forsaken by family, or out of a job. But not so today.

The Victorian moral regime, as interpreted by some, may have been extreme. But if morality is not based on the word of God, and if there are no formal set of do's and don'ts, everyone assumes the right to do whatever he wants and society, as we know it, flies apart. One wonders how near we are to that condition today.

In his brilliant paraphrase of Plato in *The Story of Philosophy*, Will Durant states:

All moral conceptions revolve around the good of the whole. Morality begins with association and interdependence and organization; life in society requires the concession of some part of the individual's sovereignty to the common order; and ultimately the norm of conduct becomes the welfare of the group. Nature will have it so, and her judgment is always final; a group survives, in competition or conflict with another group, according to its unity and power, according to the ability of its members to cooperate for common ends.

David Riesman has warned that Americans are approaching the point where the prevailing ethic is: "You're a fool to obey the rules." In a recent article on the decline of the American family, educationist Urie Bronfenbrenner observed: "We want so much to 'make it' for ourselves that we have almost stopped being a caring society that cares for others. We seem to be hesitant about making a commitment to anyone or anything, including our own flesh and blood." In the meantime some people discover

that decent and honourable treatment of others is returned in kind—that the moral course is not a hard and narrow road, but the way to broaden new emotional vistas. For in its unadulterated form, morality is compounded of understanding and generosity.

It is also a force in human progress, because it enjoins us to add value to our own lives and to those of others. It brings out the finest qualities in the human spirit. To consistently follow the moral course, you must be courageous, unselfish and thoughtful to others; to use an old-fashioned word, you must be a noble “human” being (*The Royal Bank Letter*, Vol. 65, No. 1 [Jan/Feb, 1984]).

It was about 25 years ago that a tidal wave of change swept the western world. All the tried and true social structures—marriage, the family, law and order, established religion, the work ethic, the democratic political system—came under attack by some disillusioned people. Suddenly, we were surrounded by revolutions—the youth revolution, the black revolution, the anti-imperialist revolution, the sexual revolution, and so on.

The dissenters of the sixties and early seventies were searching for something beyond material satisfaction, and they searched for it down some very strange avenues. Every code of behaviour that had been in force up to that time was smashed to pieces, or so it seemed. Faced with the drug cult, flower power, sit-ins, love-ins, campus revolts, and the burning of city blocks, the chief reaction of the older generation was one of pained bewilderment. It was as if the world had turned upside-down; white had become black, right had become wrong. . . . The unthinkable was thought, the unspeakable was spoken, the unacceptable was accepted. The outrageous was practiced as a matter of course (*The Royal Bank Letter*, Vol. 63, No. 4 [July/August 1982]).

One youth leader said that modern man, in his collective existence, lays claim to no god or ideal but the god of possession and enjoyment and the limitless satisfaction of material needs. Toffler, author of *Future Shock*, set the tone for many of the feelings that have developed when he wrote, “We are creating a new society. Not an extended, larger-than-life version of our present society. But a new society. Unless we understand this, we shall destroy ourselves in trying to cope with tomorrow.”

The idea that peace and prosperity can be made to reign on earth requires a spiritual dimension.

The one stability we have to cling to is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It contains the key to the solutions we seek. Even as I say this, we find that practice—legal, literary, and social—continually undermining gospel stability.

It has been many years since an article in the *Reader's Digest* ("Let's Have Justice for the Non-Criminals, Too," Eugene Methvin, December 1966) wrote of the "impossible farce the Supreme Court has made of American justice." Through interpretations of the Fifth Amendment, criminals who have freely confessed to murder, rape, and all manner of major crimes are walking out of courtrooms because of some triviality which was not observed in the method of their apprehension or trial. Those rulings continue to this day.

The carnal mind that feeds upon violence and wickedness does not find revelation and righteousness attractive. A master's thesis done at BYU in 1982 ("The Secularization of the Academic World View," A. LeGrand Richards) showed that the use of such terms as God, faith, sin, prayer, religion, moral responsibility, good, evil, etc., has progressively been used less and less in master theses and doctoral dissertations at BYU during the past 20 years in the College of Education, and that these terms are also used less in the literature of the academic discipline as published throughout the country.

Matt Hilton, a local practicing attorney, just completed (1988) an extensive study for a doctoral dissertation at BYU. In it he identifies that before the Civil War, the U.S. Supreme Court held that man's rights under the constitution were inalienable—granted by God to man. Between the Civil War and World War II, the Court modified its interpretation to maintain that man's rights were rooted in social tradition and natural law. Since World War II, the court has ruled that man's rights are defined by Judicial recognition—that man has whatever rights the court is willing to protect. No longer are man's inalienable rights recognized without court sanction. The *Christian Science Monitor* (June 2, 1986) reports that since the Civil War, college textbooks have failed to give attention to religion or give religion credit in the development of U. S. history. The idea is that in the past century, religion has not been a vital force in the American consciousness.

This gradual eroding and changing of our civilization comes in the wake of intellectual progress, and we fail to notice or become alarmed because we have unconsciously accepted it. Too often our

society merely avoids or ignores the matter of moral and ethical values because those who espouse such values are considered provincial and naive.

We were warned of these events when we were told that the devil “pacifieth many to believe that all is well, and he cheateth their souls,” therefore, “Wo unto him that is at ease in Zion, and who says Zion prospers, all is well” (II Nephi 28:21-24).

You know, as I do, that many of the people within the Church, are different from those we dealt with a few years ago. Many of them are new converts and come from homes where there has not been a strong priesthood leader. They have less of an LDS family or LDS cultural heritage and attachment to the Church. In many ways they are better trained in scholastic things, are good hearted, but inexperienced in the gospel. I would suspect you may find your own ecclesiastical training being brought more and more into your professional work. You remember the scripture “. . . the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians. 1:25). There is none who does not need the spiritual uplift of the gospel—especially the doctrines of the gospel, with emphasis upon faith, testimony, prayer, repentance, and humility.

We all confront people who have the attitude of being bored. People become bored with daily routine, with what they feel are repetitious and unchallenging tasks. Everyone is involved in repetition and routine. It is present in all assignments, in all activities, in all occupations. Teachers have thousands of lessons to teach, day-after-day and year-after-year. Artists practice over and over again before performing. Athletic teams work on plays time after time. Doctors see patients and listen to similar symptoms countless, repetitious times. Every job requires repetition. Whether one is making things or directing things, they do them over and over again. Wives and mothers cook meals, wash dishes, clean clothes, make beds, and do unnumbered other chores over and over again.

But drudgery and boredom are relieved by love and appreciation, and by a sense of service. Satisfaction can come from the

simplest assignment: it all depends upon attitude. Phillips Brooks wrote, "Life is always opening new and unexpected things for us. There is no monotony in living to him who walks . . . with open and perceptive eyes. The monotony of life, if life is monotonous to you, is in you, not in the world."

God's work is also repetitious. Life is renewed, commandments are repeated, truth is revealed time-to-time and time-after-time.

We know that salvation or behavior change is not basically an intellectual thing, but is a miraculous experience, a change of the heart and spirit. The progress your patients make reflect that it is wrought by the power of God. They who make progress make it because of a change of heart, not just a change of mind, or of the head.

In the Church Educational System we do not want to leave students with the notion that somehow salvation comes because of a vague network of ideas, philosophies, beliefs, occasional prayers, going to meetings, and just being a good person. Salvation comes through the power of God. Dean Robert J. Matthews, addressing the Religion faculty at BYU, said:

How do we succeed in the academic milieu without losing the spiritual dimension? I think it is a matter of priority, a sense of values and of conversion. What is it that carries the gospel beyond the merely intellectual category? What does the gospel of Jesus Christ have that other systems cannot have? What makes the gospel more than just a philosophically correct system of principles? It is the element of divine miracles. It is testimony, priesthood, revelation, and conversion. These things are the *power* of God that Paul speaks of and the *power* of God which the sons of Mosiah and Alma taught. Each of these—testimony, priesthood, revelation, and conversion—is miraculous in nature and not of man's making . . . They are of God, and they make all the difference. They separate the gospel from all systems of human knowledge. Can man by searching find out God? (Job 11:7) . . . God must be revealed or remain forever unknown (Jacob 4:8). When a person learns by the Holy Ghost, he sees things differently than if he were purely an academician. . . . Truth alone is not sufficient in a gospel setting; it must be accompanied by the power of God, which is through the Spirit. This miraculous accompaniment is very conspicuous, if it is absent. (Address to Religion Faculty, August 27, 1986.)

There is a tendency, in this empirically-oriented society that always demands tangible proof, to adopt an “objective” approach and become aloof from emotion, conviction, and conversion. Such an environment is not compatible to faith, nor does it promote faith and the attitude of mind necessary to receive spiritual enlightenment. These words from John 7:14–17 help us to receive the message.

Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? [That is, never having pursued a formal educational degree.] Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

There is a difference between the secular and the spiritual—between the earthly and the heavenly. The secular deals with knowledge or facts alone (some call it truth). The spiritual deals with knowledge coupled with something else, such as truth *and* righteousness, or truth *and* light. Elder Russell M. Nelson called it “truth *and* more” when addressing the BYU faculty, August 27, 1985. Secular truth can be obtained by study and experience. Spiritual truth can be obtained only by revelation after one has faith; and it takes spiritual truth to save a soul.

If what we do is not coupled with a conviction and a power of the Spirit, it may inform the mind, but it will not do much for the *spirit* and *soul* of the recipient. We must inspire and not just treat. We must touch the heart and not only the head. The value system of the counselor or therapist will come through in his or her work.

We not only have to be aware of the conditions of the world, but we are often confronted by strange ideologies espoused by members and teachers in the Church. Not all the false teachers lived at another time and place. There are false teachers who profess membership in the Church today, and every now and then we hear from them. They are religious in their demeanor; they use the scriptures, but they place the wrong interpretations on the scriptures. They undermine the doctrines of the Restoration. They have a sort of sophisticated unbelief, that masquerades as faith, but by clever use of words they actually deny the plain meaning of the

revelations. Some try to reconcile what they think are conflicts between the scriptures and the teachings of science, history, philosophy, and so forth. They try to accommodate to both sides, but only bring about reconciliation by a compromise that often is at the expense of the scriptures and the prophets and leaders of the Church. These “accommodators” have a way of interpreting scripture, attempting to say that it is good if it is spoken by the right people. To paraphrase Robert Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol. 1, p. 345) “[These false teachers] have their residence in Zion, but they visit Babylon periodically.” They have not learned the truth of the admonition of the Lord regarding gospel truths when He said “whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants, it is the same” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 1:38).

A teacher of false doctrine within the Church is often more difficult to detect than one outside because there is a natural tendency for a person to trust one’s teacher or counselor, especially if that person has a pleasing personality and clever ways. The Lord has said that if possible even the very elect would be deceived (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22, 37).

It is my opinion that the doctrines of the gospel are superior to the philosophies of the world. While we may study much secular material, we have to sort out those things which are essential for us, and cherish the revealed word over all other things.

To that degree which we deviate from or fail to accept any doctrine and to incorporate any principle that comes from God, and treat it lightly, we will be found deficient and will have lost some blessing.

Elder John A. Widtsoe said:

The man whose mind only has been trained may be likened to the ship with great engines and a huge propeller, ready to drive the ship forward, but without rudder, chart, compass, or definite destination. When we add to the man, so trained, spiritual training, then it is as if we add to the ship, with its wonderful machinery—a compass, a chart, a rudder, and a dependable intelligence which controls the whole machinery, above and below deck, so that the vessel may reach a safe haven,

according to a definite purpose. (John A. Widtsoe, *Conference Report*, October 1922, pp. 44–48.)

On a later occasion he said:

It is a paradox that men will gladly devote time every day for many years to learn a science or art; yet will expect to win a knowledge of the gospel, which comprehends all sciences and arts, through perfunctory glances at books or occasional listening to sermons. The gospel should be studied more intensively than any school or college subject. They who pass opinion on the gospel without having given it intimate and careful study are not lovers of the truth. (John A. Widtsoe, *Improvement Era*, September 1969).

I have great respect for the repetitious warnings of the prophets.

We have long recognized that, of necessity, teachers do some counseling. The basic premise of biological and clinical traditions is that a man with proper understanding and skill can help his fellowmen meet and cope with life and its problems. We try to make our people aware that there are major theories that have been developed concerning the counseling process that have originated independent of the gospel of Jesus Christ that are not always consistent and harmonious with the teachings and operations of the Church. We try to make them understand at least some of the limitations of these theories and the claims that are made for them. While no best way of counseling may be identified we ask that our people refrain from attacking or ridiculing the field of counseling and that they maintain an open mind to the honest research that is being conducted. No one knows better than those of you who are here the need for that open-mindedness.

While our teachers are responsible to lend supportive help to those with whom they work, they need to recognize their limitations in training, preparation, and authorization as counselors. They also need to know that counseling is more than just listening.

I suppose there must always come the time in any relationship when we instruct, encourage and inspire with wisdom and understanding, as we influence the individual to strive for the peace and potential that is rightfully his. This is perhaps not unique to the Latter-day Saint who counsels. The Spirit of God, however,

should be an integral part of our counseling performance. Through prayer and adherence to the commandments, we increase our ability to effectively counsel. Nothing can ever take the place of testimony and the learning that comes through the Spirit. That spiritual preparation and attainment you get, coupled with secular training, should make you the world's most proficient group of practitioners who address the problems of God's children who require the help of counselors. May you be so blessed to be.

*J. Elliot Cameron, formerly Church Commissioner of Education, is President of the Provo Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*