Is the conservation of classical liberal thought inherent in the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

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Is the conservation of classical liberal thought inherent in the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Chapman, Thomas Godwin, M.A.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1992
IS THE CONSERVATION OF CLASSICAL LIBERAL THOUGHT
INHERENT IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS?

by

Thomas G. Chapman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Political Science

Department of Political Science
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
June, 1992

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper is that the conservation of classical liberal thought is inherent within the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This paper initially defines the political concepts of classical liberalism and conservatism to determine a standard by which to measure the thesis of this paper. The standards used are Roger Scruton’s seven key elements of classical liberalism and Russell Kirk’s six canons of conservative thought.

Next, this paper examines fundamental events that shaped both the religious and political foundations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These incidents include the discovery of the New World, the Revolutionary War, and inspired political documents, all of which were precursory to the culminating event: Joseph Smith’s First Vision, which led to the formation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Next, authoritative LDS scripture is examined to reveal classical liberal and conservative tenets inherent therein. Specifically, three relevant political concepts from the Book of Mormon are scrutinized: freedom and rights, equality and classism, and the nature of man. Also, Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants—which defines the proper role of government, the proper role of citizens, and the importance of religious freedom—is explored.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As a lifetime adherent of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I often have found it interesting and instructive to see how the Church and its policies are perceived by those who are not members of the Church. Obviously, members who are involved with the ongoing processes of the Church and who are familiar with its theological foundations have a different view of the Church's policies than do nonmembers who see things from a distance. My experience has shown me that the perceptions of the Church, as observed by outsiders, can be very helpful in obtaining an accurate overview of the Church. Sometimes if we are too close to something, we can't objectively look at all the angles.

One particular observation made by my nonmember friends concerning the Church has profoundly affected me. Simply stated, many of my nonmember friends see the Church and its doings in a very political light. This has been very eye-opening to me, because I rarely, if at all, view the Church in a political light. I see things principally in an ecclesiastical vein. Yet in almost all cases, my nonmember friends view the Church as an extremely conservative
religious organization that has some definite conservative political overtones.

One particular instance that I remember happened at the time when the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a hot topic on the political scene. I had a nonmember friend who was an interested, outside observer of the Church and its policies. Many people were waiting to see if the Church would take a stand on the issue of the ERA. My nonmember friend predicted that if the Church was to take a stand on the issue, it would be against it. His reasoning was that since the Church was conservative by nature, it would take the conservative stand, that of opposing the ERA. Sure enough, when the Church finally made its stand, it came out against the ERA. The Church made its defense on moral grounds, and because it is a religious organization one would expect that to be the case. However, in such circumstances, there certainly are political ramifications that come of such moral decisions.

A second incident involving a nonmember friend is worth mentioning. Sometime after the ERA struggle, another hot political topic surfaced, that of placing MX missiles in Utah, headquarters of the Church. My nonmember friend informed me that if the Church chose to take a stand on the issue, the Church would support the placement of MX missiles in Utah. His reasoning again was that since the Church was politically conservative, it would always take the
conservative stand on any given subject, and the conservative stand was to place the missiles in Utah. My friend was certainly right: the conservative stand was to place the missiles in Utah. Both Republican senators, Orin Hatch and Jake Garn, had vehemently supported MX missiles being brought to Utah. Interestingly enough, the Church did decide to take a stand on the subject of the placement of the MX missiles in Utah. Perhaps of even more interest is the position that the Church took: the Church opposed the placement of MX missiles in Utah. This seriously brought into question my friend’s prognosticating abilities and yet at the same time substantiated my belief that the Church’s posture on political matters grew out of moral roots.

Over the years, I have continued to ponder the political nature of the Church. I have also come to some conclusions. I have concluded that churches in general have political overtones that grow out of them, even if their policies and decisions are made on moral grounds. Even in the United States, where we profess the separation of church and state, we find our churches wield political power. A case in point would be the Moral Majority, of course the Moral Majority is Jerry Falwell’s organization. However, on these grounds, Pat Robertson made a respectable showing in the 1988 presidential election. Realistically, I suspect that separation of church and state means that no government
may interfere with matters of religion rather than no church may influence matters of state.

I have further concluded that the various churches approach their political side differently. Some are liberal and progressive in their approach, while others are conservative and staid. I suspect my own church falls to the conservative side (as my nonmember friends have maintained all along). After some thought, I decided that I would like to investigate this thesis.

It is my thesis for this paper that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is conservative in its political approach. It is my contention that the Church conserves a classical liberal political orientation and that this orientation is inherent within the doctrine of the Church. I propose to look at three appropriate features of the Church to determine this orientation: (1) the circumstances surrounding the origins of the Church, for example the First Vision, (2) some germane issues found in the Book of Mormon, and (3) Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants, "Governments and Laws in General." Although this should not be considered exhaustive in scope, it certainly is extensive and should prove to be conclusive. The measuring devices that will be used to measure these three features will be Roger Scruton's seven key elements of classical liberalism and Russell Kirk's six canons of conservative thought.
CHAPTER 2
IMPORTANT KEY TERMS

The purpose of this chapter is to define certain key terms as they pertain to this paper. This is a necessary step to ensure accurate communication. It is true that one word can have a variety of meanings; hence, there is a critical need to define key terms so that the reader may come as close as possible to understanding the arguments of the paper.

This paper centers upon the concept of political conservatism. This chapter will concentrate on defining political conservatism as it relates to the study undertaken in the paper. This chapter will also touch upon certain corollary political doctrines that also pertain to this study. In undertaking a task such as this, it is often best to approach it from a general direction and gradually refine. Such an approach lessens the chance of misunderstanding and also assists in pointing out the various shades and distinctions of the terms in question.

It is also best to view these crucial terms in a highlighted historical perspective to understand their development. It is from this perspective then that we will proceed. It should also be noted that the term political conservatism will hereafter be referred to as conservatism.
General Conservatism

Conservatism, used in a general sense, has been defined as "the political outlook which springs from a desire to conserve existing things, held to be good in themselves, or better than the likely alternatives, or at least safe, familiar, and the objects of trust and affection." Under this type of definition of conservatism, it seems that conservatism could be present in any form of political system. This apparently must be independent of ideology. One writer observed that "conservatism is not clearly embodied in a set of doctrines: it is a political attitude rather than a philosophy or a movement." Conservatism then, according to this particular view, would be a political attitude or disposition that would seek to preserve, or better yet, conserve an existing, familiar situation.

It should be noted at this point that conservatism is often confused with reactionism. Close analysis, however, reveals a fundamental difference. As was mentioned, conservatism deals with a present or existing situation or condition. Reactionism, on the other hand, deals with some real or imagined past. Reactionism is dedicated to

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restoring some former glory of the past in the present, while conservatism is dedicated to applying the tried and proven experiences of the past in maintaining a stable and ordered present.

It should also be noted that anyone on the right wing of the political scale is not necessarily conservative. One scholar has observed:

"The right wing" in a country may well consist of strongly conflicting elements—laisser-faire liberals, anti-Communists, authoritarians, monarchists, jingoes. Fascism is certainly a "right wing" political creed; but it has nothing to do with any brand of conservatism, involving as it does a sense of social and national grievance, devotion to state, an appetite for violence, the cult of a leader, and the subjection of politics, morality and the whole culture of a nation to the fascist party. It does not involve continuity with past institutions and relationships—as does conservatism—but a "new order."

Sometimes a profitable way of defining something is to explain what it is not. Assuming that conservatism is a political attitude, the opposite political attitude would naturally be liberalism. Keeping in mind that we are dealing only in general realms at this point, a suitable definition for one who advocates liberalism is "one who is open-minded or not strict in the observance of orthodox, traditional or established forms or ways." As can be seen, order and stability are the heart and soul of the

'Ibid., 67.

political attitude of conservatism, while progress and improvement are the backbone of the political attitude of liberalism. This type of liberalism seeks, through evolving change, to bring the greatest good to the greatest number. Note that this definition of liberalism similarly transcends any particular ideology. Both conservatism and liberalism, thus defined, illustrate an attitude or an approach toward politics.

Glenn Wilson has indicated that general conservatism stresses three major tenets as a political approach:

(1) preference for existing institutions i.e. resistance to change, (2) preference for traditional institutions, and (3) the disposition towards being moderate and cautious. By combining these three components, it can be deduced that the conservative will resist change except when the proposed change is perceived to be in a traditional direction or such as to increase the security of the individual or his society.*

Although a conservative of this ilk does not deny the possibility of the need for growth in a political system, to be too progressive could prove to be the undoing of all that is tried and true in the system. Hence, extreme caution must be used to first conserve the system before the system can improve. Noted conservative thinker Barry Goldwater stated what he considers to be the proper conservative approach with these words: "The Conservative approach is nothing more or less than an attempt to apply the wisdom and


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experience and the revealed truths of the past to the problems of today. The challenge is not to find new or different truths, but to learn how to apply established truths to the problems of the contemporary world." While it is true, as general conservatism suggests, that conservatism can be an approach to a political system, political conservatism has also been considered an ideology. This can be most simply illustrated by considering what shall be termed "traditional conservatism."

**Traditional Conservatism**

*The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* states that "by its critics, conservatism is frequently dismissed as a more or less obscurantist attempt by the 'haves' to defend their entrenched position of privilege against the 'have nots'." Here the point is aptly made that many of the detractors of conservative thought oversimplify what conservatism actually is. By committing this error, they miss the intricacies and viability of conservative thought, for conservatism runs much deeper than the mere desire to maintain power and position. However, as with many oversimplifications, there is a grain of truth contained in

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this one. This grain of truth is confirmed in the second classification of conservatism, traditional conservatism.

Traditional conservatism is a political heritage that has a long and rich legacy. Its roots are found in Biblical antiquity, then pass through classical antiquity, and finally rest with the medieval clergy. It is with medieval feudalism that traditional conservatism thoroughly developed its ideologies and came to full fruition. This medieval feudalism prevailed principally in Europe from about the ninth to the fifteenth centuries.

Feudalism was based on a class structure system that had a monarchy, an aristocracy, and vassalage. The monarchy and aristocracy primarily were those who controlled the land and offered protection and tenancy to the serfage. The serfage in turn offered homage, tribute, and fealty to the feudal lord.

It should also be mentioned that the medieval Christian church played a fundamental role in the feudal system. The church held a prominent position in overseeing not only the religious, but social, cultural, and oftentimes political lives of its adherents. The feudal lords found that they needed the church for its dominating power in order to maintain power, and the church found that it needed the feudal lords with their ownership of land to maintain its power base; this naturally made for an unholy alliance. The

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association was uneasy, but workable; its longevity speaks for that.

These basic elements of traditional conservatism bring to the fore a focus of what some argue is the core of not only traditional conservatism, but all varieties of conservatism: a class system. Scruton contends that "conservatism is usually criticized as the ideology of class domination, and as the political practice which ensures that those presently holding power will continue to do so, while extracting a spurious and deceived consent from the classes that are subject to, and victims of, their rule." This idea of conservatism and a class system will be considered later in this paper; however, for the purpose of clarity, let us isolate the basic concepts of the ideology of traditional conservatism.

Traditional conservatism is founded upon the precept of a class structure system, a ruling class and a subservient class. The ruling class usually controls the land and the means of livelihood, while the subservient class is dependent upon the ruling class for its survival. The ruling class sets the tone in many if not all facets of society. Naturally, there is a great desire among the ruling class to preserve, or conserve, the status quo of the system, as it is their base of power. Modern forms of ideological conservatism grow out of these basic concepts of

Before leaving traditional conservatism, a related corollary should be pursued as it is applicable to this study. That corollary is the question of whether there is a semblance of traditional conservatism in the American political experience. This is appropriate because one focus of this paper will be conservatism in the American political experience. M. A. Riff asserts,

In the United States a Conservative tradition has been closely bound up with the race question. America's foremost conservative philosopher, John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), was also her leading defender of slavery. He arrived at this position through concern to preserve the traditional way of life of the rural south against the domination of a growing northern industrial interest. He concluded that the rights of individual states and numerical minority interests must be defended against the tyranny of the majority in a democracy. This was a genuinely conservative view.\(^9\)

There are some scholars, however, who take exception to the contention that traditional conservatism has existed in the American political experience. Foremost among these critics is M. Morton Auerbach. Auerbach argues that because the United States has no medieval past, it could not truly have a viable form of conservatism. He contends:

America never had a medieval Conservative tradition, just as it never had a feudal history; and the dominant ideology of the colonists was puritan and Lockean Liberalism. The paradoxical result was to separate Conservatism from traditionalism. In Europe, where tradition meant medieval tradition, the Conservative could defend

"ancient" tradition, and Conservative values at the same time. But since the American tradition was Liberal from the beginning, tradition and Conservatism became contradictory terms here. It was a foregone conclusion that Conservatism in America would be liberal Conservatism; but while Burke's Conservatism was only tempered by Liberalism, American Conservatism was overwhelmed by it.¹⁰

Auerbach further argues that because of the abundant availability of land in the New World, a true political entity that would allow for this medieval type of conservatism was not possible. The closest that the United States would come to this style of conservatism was in the antebellum South. And even then there were several reasons why the antebellum South did not truly fit this medieval conservatism, not the least of which was that southern plantocracy originated and remained within the middle class, not an aristocracy.

Auerbach's contentions are certainly interesting and seem to ring true. Because the United States had no medieval past, it would appear that most of the necessary elements of traditional conservatism are not to be found in the American experience. The plantocracy of the antebellum South was a far cry from the European medieval tradition.

The conservative ideology that is known as traditional conservatism and the modern manifestations of traditional conservatism are not the conservatism that will be employed

in this paper. That conservatism bears little or no resemblance to the conservatism we will employ in the course of this paper. Since we will ultimately study conservatism in the United States of America, and since, as Auerbach has properly pointed out, traditional conservatism never had a place in America, we will not use ideological or traditional conservatism in this paper. The conservatism that will be employed in this paper is a type of general conservatism. This type of attitudinal conservatism was part of the system that gradually replaced traditional conservatism in Great Britain. The political system of which we now speak is classical liberalism and the attitudinal conservatism of which we now speak is conservative liberalism.

Classical Liberalism

As has been shown, one of Auerbach’s arguments as to why traditional conservatism could never really take root in the American colonies was that the colonists subscribed to Lockean Liberalism as a political ideology. This certainly was the case. Although the colonies broke from Great Britain through the Revolutionary War, America’s political heritage was still tied to Great Britain. And even though the fledgling nation was influenced by many sources when forming its own political ideology, Great Britain was still the primary source of inspiration due to the fact that the American colonists had been Englishmen in theory and practice prior to the Revolution. Hence, the influence that
Great Britain exercised upon the colonists at that time was classical liberalism. Traditional conservatism in Great Britain had long been supplanted by classical liberalism by the time of the American Revolution.

In English political history, the move from feudalism to Lockean Liberalism or classical liberalism, as it is known, was a gradual one, literally taking centuries to complete. The piecemeal shift of political power from the monarchy and aristocracy to the citizenry was vehemently resisted all along its course. Documents such as the Magna Charta, the English Petition of Rights, and the English Bill of Rights were crucial in this protracted process of gaining rights and privileges for the English citizenry. Perhaps the most influential player in this process of establishing classical liberalism in Great Britain was John Locke, the noted philosopher.

John Locke has been called the father of the classic liberal tradition. The use of liberalism here is different from the general liberalism spoken of earlier in this chapter. By contrast, general liberalism is an approach or an attitude toward politics, whereas classical liberalism is an ideology. John Locke, then, is credited with developing the ideology that is known as classical liberalism.

Although volumes have been written about John Locke and classic liberalism, for the purposes of this paper only some fundamental doctrines will be discussed. Locke, who lived
from 1632 to 1704, was very much a product of his times. Forty years before Locke published his book entitled Second Treatise of Government, Thomas Hobbes had published his epochal work Leviathan. Locke's work seems to be in part a response to Leviathan. Scholar Russell Kirk made the following observation concerning Locke:

In most matters, Locke was not an original thinker, but rather a synthesizer or popularizer. In moral philosophy, he endeavored to harmonize the finding of seventeenth-century science with the Christian heritage. Similarly, in politics he sought to work the opinions of earlier philosophers into a system consonant with the historical experience and the new needs of his country.¹¹

Using reason as his guide, Locke sought to establish what fundamental human rights and liberties were and how these were obtained. He also sought to establish what legitimacy in government was and what loyalty government could legitimately exact from its constituency. Locke claimed that government was created by individuals through contract. He also claimed that those who administered the government were held accountable to the people who created the government. Locke further maintained that when tyranny developed within the government, and the government encroached upon the natural right of the people to life, liberty, and property, then the people were justified in righting the situation. All rights were grounded in the

right to property, which no government can or should tamper with. Property was the reason, Locke insisted, why men enter into society and contract one with another. Kirk sums up Locke's concept of property in the following fashion: "Locke intended, by his arguments, to restrain government to the smallest possible compass, lest government interfere with the right to estate (property), from which comes the common welfare."¹²

Roger Scruton, in his A Dictionary of Political Thought, writes a wonderful summation of seven key elements to classical liberal thought:

(i) Belief in the supreme value of the individual, his freedom and his rights. (ii) Individualism, in its metaphysical variant. (iii) Belief that the individual has natural rights, which exist independently of government, and which ought to be protected by and against government. (iv) Recognition of the supreme value of freedom, usually glossed as the ability to secure that to which one has a right, together with the view that government must be so limited as to grant freedom to every citizen; perhaps even that government is justifiable only to the extent that it maximizes freedom, or to the extent that it protects the free individual from invasions of his rights. (v) An anthropocentric, rather than theological, view of human affairs regarding human potential and achievement as the principal locus of value. (vi) Universalism: i.e. a belief that rights and duties are universal, and stem from a human condition that transcends place and time. People should learn to renounce their particular local attachments so as to view things from the standpoint of an impartial legislator. (vii) Advocacy of toleration in matters of morality and religion.¹³

¹²Ibid., 113.

As becomes evident with the advent of John Locke, liberalism finds a champion and a spokesman. Locke's arguments were what the citizens of Great Britain had waited for so long, so that the arduous task of seeking a balanced government could be accomplished.

Even in a brief synopsis of Locke's theories, one can see the appeal that such an ideology would hold one hundred years later for the frustrated English colonists living in America. The attraction seems to be twofold: first, Locke gave the colonists the philosophical grounds for revolution, and second, Locke's liberalism was the established English political tradition, the tradition which the colonists best understood.

Conservative Liberalism

It seems prudent to discuss one more Englishman while pursuing classical liberalism. That Englishman is Edmund Burke. If John Locke is considered the father of classical liberalism, then Edmund Burke must be considered the father of conservative classical liberalism, hereafter referred to as conservative liberalism. Russell Kirk remarked that "Locke was the first great Whig thinker, and Burke was the last."\(^{14}\) In this sense, "Whig" means one who supported government control in the hands of the popularly elected Parliament rather than the monarchy.

Burke, who lived from 1729 to 1797, was one of the great intellectuals of his day. Not only was he a great thinker, but he was a skilled statesman who served for many years in Parliament. His influence was keenly felt throughout the Western political world, from the European continent to colonial America. Burke laid the foundation for all modern conservative thinkers. He profoundly influenced such individuals as William Pitt, Alexis de Tocqueville, Prince Metternich, and Benjamin Disraeli.

Burke’s particular genius came in taking classical liberalism and applying a conservative bent to it. Burke saw that classical liberalism was a necessary step in the betterment of the English political tradition. Concerning Burke’s interpretation of classical liberalism, one writer observed:

It was the achievement of Edmund Burke, the father of modern conservatism, to recognize immediately that the pursuit of liberty by revolutionary methods would not extend and perfect limited politics, as the French revolutionary democrats hoped, but would, on the contrary, destroy the conditions necessary for its maintenance. The first and most vital of these conditions is the rule of law; the second is an independent judiciary; the third is a system of representative government; the fourth is the institution of private property; and the fifth is a foreign policy designed to preserve political independence by maintaining a balance of power which for conservatives, is the only stable and realistic principle by which to establish international peace.  

Miller, op. cit., 97.
Clearly, much of Burke’s role was that of expounding Locke’s liberal ideas in a wholly new light, a conservative light.

Of all the scholars who have sought to understand the mind of Edmund Burke, perhaps none has been more diligent and successful than Russell Kirk. Kirk has thoughtfully condensed Burke’s political thought into six inclusive canons of conservative thought:

1. Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience, forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead. Political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems. . . .

2. Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life, as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and equalitarianism and utilitarian aims of most radical systems. . . .

3. Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes. The only true equality is moral equality; all other attempts at leveling lead to despair, if enforced by positive legislation. Society longs for leadership, and if a people destroy natural distinctions among men, presently Bonaparte fills the vacuum.

4. Persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected, and that economic leveling is not economic progress. Separate property from private possession, and liberty is erased.

5. Faith in prescription and distrust of "sophisters and calculators." Man must put a control upon his will and his appetite, for conservatives know man to be governed by emotion rather than by reason. Tradition and sound prejudice provide checks upon man’s anarchic impulse.

6. Recognition that change and reform are not identical, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress.

With these six canons, Kirk seems to have accurately captured the spirit and the essence of Burke’s work. The importance of Burke’s philosophy, as the groundwork of

modern conservative thought, cannot be stressed enough. These canons of Burke's thought will be analyzed in greater depth at a later point in this work.

Early American Conservative Thinkers

Let us now consider some key American Founding Fathers who set the tone for conservative liberalism in the United States.

James Madison has been credited with the title of being the "Father of the Constitution." Indeed, Madison's genius is most profoundly demonstrated through the instrumentality of the Constitution. Clinton Rossiter states that "the Constitution was a triumph for Conservatism." Rossiter continues his praise by saying that "the excellence of their handiwork is a tribute not only to their genius for constructive statesmanship, but to their alert conservatism and sense of continuity with the past." Scholar Noel Reynolds has said that Madison's greatest achievement with the Constitution was his deft use of the conservative principle of rule of law. Madison's use of rule of law in the Constitution is a direct by-product of his conservative outlook on the nature of man, which seems to be grounded in Burke. Madison held a cautionary view of human nature. History had repeatedly shown that man was not to be trusted to deal with his fellow beings in an equitable way. In

"Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York: Knopf, 1955), 189."
constructing the Constitution, Madison used a variety of checks in order to hold at bay man's propensity towards the usurpation of power.

Clinton Rossiter ably expounds the conservative values employed in the framing of the Constitution. In part, Rossiter notes,

They were therefore determined to create a diffused, limited, balanced form of government in which gentlemen like themselves would fill the leading positions. . . . They produced a Constitution with these distinctive conservative features: the separation of powers, in fact and not just on paper; an imposing array of checks and balances, the most significant of which was the Presidential veto; a bicameral legislature; an unusually strong President, elected indirectly for a four-year term and indefinitely reeligible; an unusually strong Senate, elected indirectly, one third at a time, to six-year terms; an unusually strong judiciary, appointed for life by President and Senate; a staggered schedule of terms for President and Congress, aimed at preventing sudden reversals in public policy; a key clause forbidding the states to pass any law impairing the obligation of contracts; and severely limited process of amendment, requiring the approval of an extraordinary majority of Congress and the states. What the constitution omitted was even more irritating to progressive opinion: a specific bill of rights.  

Although Madison is seldom seen as a conservative in the complete sense, much of his constitutional work must be seen as conservative at least in its result.

Rossiter further contends that The Federalist is further proof of Madison's conservative bent. "The Federalist is conservatism—we may fairly say Conservatism--
at its finest and most constructive."\(^1\) Rossiter convincingly argues that Madison, the Constitution, and The Federalist are all significantly conservative liberalism.

Russell Kirk has stated that although Alexander Hamilton would seem to be the natural archetypical choice of the conservative Founding Father, in actuality John Adams better fills the bill. It was Adams who has had a realistic, long lasting impact on American conservatism. Kirk has credited Adams with saving "America from the worst consequences of two radical illusions: the perfectibility of man and the merit of the unitary state."\(^2\) Both of these "radical illusions" came as the result of the French Revolution. These two political concepts stem from the thinking of Jean Jacques Rousseau much of whose philosophy fueled the French Revolution. In short, Rousseau contended that proper government and its institutions and philosophies could be the means of eradicating the ills of mankind. Adams felt that man is weak and foolish and that "religious faith" and "stable institutions" were the best means of checking him. Rousseau felt that the state must be free to execute the "general will" of what was best for the people, unfettered by checks and balances. Adams saw the wisdom of securing freedom through rule of law. History had shown Adams that man was capable of usurpation, tyranny, and

\(^1\)Ibid., 192.

abuse. In America, John Adams held the light to conserve the Constitution and its conservative-liberal tradition. Adams role, historically as well as philosophically, was timely, to say the least. Adams preserved the dignity and spirit of conservatism for his age. In addition to preserving the settled tenets of conservatism, Adams also expanded the parameters of conservative thinking by expounding such doctrines as classism and aristocracy. In Russell Kirk’s interesting study of John Adams, he summarizes Adams’s opinions concerning an American aristocracy:

(1) An aristocrat, in Adams’ definition, is any person who can command two votes—his own, and another man’s. . . .
(2) Aristocracy is not simply a creation of society; it is in part natural, and in part artificial; but in no state can it be eradicated.
(3) The most common form of aristocracy is produced by differences in nature which positive legislation cannot alter substantially. . . .
(4) Even an hereditary aristocracy is not dependent upon positive law for its existence.
(5) Aristocracy is not destroyed by alienation of land, of confiscation of wealth. . . .
(6) Even the effort of the laws to establish equality results in a reinforcing of aristocracy.
(7) No people have abolished aristocracy. . . .
(8) Adams holds no brief for aristocracy: he simply points out that it is a phenomenon of nature, not to be rationally denied.  

With Adams taking the role of defending conservative principles, conservatism was assured a place in the forefront of the American political scene. This instance of Adams’s redefining the concept of aristocracy is a prime

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21Ibid., 232.
example of his crucial role. He virtually made the conservative concept of aristocracy palatable for American tastes.

It is with the conservative political philosophy of John Adams that this highlighted, historical definition of political conservatism becomes complete. John Adams was a contemporary of Joseph Smith, who was the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It would have been John Adams who politically set the tone of the day for conservatism. And it would have been Adams's conservative approach that Joseph Smith would have been exposed to and influenced by.

**Summary**

First, it has been established that there is a political disposition or attitude, which transcends ideology, that we have identified as general conservatism. General conservatism is grounded in the tried and true experiential successes of the past, which is not the same as longing for the glories of the past. General conservatism is dedicated to conserving the status quo, and from there progressing cautiously and moderately—thus insuring balance, order, and stability. General conservatism is also deeply rooted in traditions, institutions and heritage. There is no fundamental system of government that is applicable to all nations; each is a unique entity developed by history and circumstance.
It has secondly been established that there is a political disposition or attitude which transcends ideology, which we have identified as general liberalism. General liberalism is the antithesis of general conservatism. This attitude does not necessarily concern itself with orthodoxy or tradition, but concerns itself instead with social progress and human betterment through change and reform. As with general conservatism, there is no fundamental system of government that is applicable to all nations with general liberalism.

Thirdly, it has been established that traditional conservatism, an original form of Western conservatism, was a political ideology that was predominant in medieval Europe. Traditional conservatism was based upon the feudal system of government, which eventually disintegrated through reform. The lasting effect of traditional conservatism upon subsequent conservative thought is the idea that, to a greater or lesser degree, there will always be classes in society. It was also established that the type of conservatism employed in the research of this paper was a type of general conservatism, namely conservative liberalism.

Fourthly, it has been established that classical liberalism, as advanced by John Locke, was an ideology that essentially shifted the right to govern from the monarchy and aristocracy to the people. Classical liberalism
signaled the end of feudalism in much of Europe and, hence, the end of traditional conservatism. Great Britain was the nation that was on the cutting edge of classical liberal thought, and it was from Great Britain that the American colonists extracted their own classical liberal tradition. The earmarks of classical liberalism that will be used in measuring adherence to this ideology will be the seven key elements of classical liberalism set forth by Roger Scruton.

Fifthly, it has been established that conservative liberalism, promoted by Edmund Burke, is, for the most part, a conservative attitude towards classical liberalism. The earmarks of conservative liberalism that will be used in measuring adherence to this attitude will be the six canons of conservative thought set forth by Russell Kirk.

Sixthly, it has been established that James Madison and John Adams set the prominent tone of conservative liberalism that was present in the United States when Joseph Smith, founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, came upon the scene.
CHAPTER 3
EVENTS THAT SHAPED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH
OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with the singular foundations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its unique approach to the body politic. This chapter will, in particular, consider a fundamental event, that being the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith, founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Also, this chapter will determine the effects of the First Vision upon the LDS approach to politics.

It is not the objective of this chapter, nor this paper, to determine the truthfulness or validity of the Church or its doctrines, but rather to examine the Church’s political approach. This does not necessarily show the political beliefs of the general membership of the Church, singly or collectively, but rather the political approach of the official church institution.

This chapter, then, will examine the beginnings of the Church, specifically the First Vision, and how these beginnings shaped the political outlook of the Church. Then, with this information, we will determine whether inherent within the doctrine of the Church is the political
philosophy of classical liberalism, and if it is, whether the Church seeks to conserve it. The tools used to measure classical liberalism and conservatism will be Roger Scruton's seven elements of classical liberalism and Russell Kirk's six canons of conservative thought. Hence, this paper will accept The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its doctrine at face value, withholding any judgment upon its substance.

Much of this analysis of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Mormon Church as it is nicknamed, will be done through a historical chronology in order to present an even and methodical flow of material.

The Nature of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, referred to as the LDS Church from here on, is a Christian church that does not easily lend itself to categorization because of its unusual beginnings. Most Christian churches can trace their origins to a reformation, such as the Protestant denominations, or directly back to the primitive church, for example the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Church. The LDS Church considers itself neither a protestant denomination nor an outgrowth of the primitive church. Instead, the LDS Church considers itself the "restored Church."

A fundamental tenet in LDS thought is that shortly
After the apostolic period of early Christianity, there came a great apostasy from the true, primitive church. This apostasy came as a result of the loss of the general leadership of the primitive church, the apostles, through heavy and bitter persecution, were destroyed. Furthering the apostasy was the fact that the Christian doctrine became synthesized with pagan dogma, mainly Hellenic philosophy. The consequence of the great apostasy was simply the loss of the pure gospel, the divine authority, and the correct organization of the primitive church. With the loss of true Christianity to the world, a murky period known as the Dark Ages emerged. So complete was the apostasy from the primitive church that a reformation of apostate Christian religions would not be enough to reestablish what had been lost through the apostasy. Instead, it would take a complete restoration of the primitive church. The LDS Church claims to be the complete restoration of the primitive church.

It was through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith, often referred to as the Prophet, that this restoration of the primitive church took place. Dr. James E. Talmage, an LDS Apostle and scholar, has written the following concerning the beginnings of Joseph Smith and his religious quandary:

Joseph Smith, the third son and fourth child in a family of ten, was born December 23, 1805, at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont. He was the son of Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith, a worthy couple,
who though in poverty lived happily amid their home scenes of industry and frugality. When the boy Joseph was ten years old, the family left Vermont and settled in the State of New York, first at Palmyra and later at Manchester. At the place last named, the future prophet spent most of his boyhood days. In common with his brothers and sisters he had but little schooling; and for the simple rudiments of an education, which by earnest application he was able to gain, he was mostly indebted to his parents, who followed the rule of devoting a portion of their limited leisure to the teaching of the younger members of the household.

In their religious inclinations the family favored the Presbyterian church; indeed the mother and some of the children joined that sect; but Joseph, while at one time favorably impressed by the Methodists, kept himself free from all sectarian membership, being greatly perplexed over the strife and dissensions manifest among the churches of the time. He had a right to expect that in the Church of Christ there would be unity and harmony; yet he saw among the wrangling sects only confusion.

In his own words, Joseph Smith further clarifies this great religious dilemma in which he found himself: "In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties is right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how should I know it?"1 Joseph finally found direction to this problem when reading in the Bible, the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be

1James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1899), 7-8.

2The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902), p. 48, v. 10.
given him." So in accordance with the admonition of said scripture, Joseph Smith resolved to ask God.

The First Vision

It was in the spring of 1820 that Joseph Smith went to a grove of trees to find seclusion and ask God which of the Christian churches was right. Joseph recounts that as he attempted to converse with God through prayer, he was initially seized by some unseen, dark power. In his own words he explains:

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who has such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, then I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all sects was right—and which I should join.

I was answered that I must join none of them.  

3Ibid.
This manifestation not only instructed Joseph Smith not to join any of the existent Christian sects, but it opened the way for the restoration of the primitive church in the latter days.

Precursory Events Leading to the First Vision

The First Vision obviously holds much for Mormondom in the ecclesiastical realm, but it also holds much for Mormondom in the political realm as well. Elder Mark E. Petersen, an LDS Apostle, has observed the following:

The restoration of the gospel should be viewed through a perspective of two thousand years. It was not a sudden thing. Neither was it "done in a corner," as the Apostle Paul would have said.

In its preparation it was a world movement requiring centuries of time. It involved the discovery of a new continent and its colonization by selected peoples.

It encompassed wars between world powers of two centuries ago. Even the renaissance of medieval Europe was a part of this mighty drama, for an awakening of mankind was stimulated in the Dark Ages.

The fundamental element of freedom in the world—the fight for both religious and political liberty—the firm establishment of human rights beginning with the Magna Charta—were all involved.

The heroic work of Luther, Calvin, and Knox in the Reformation period also was significant prelude to the great events in which the Prophet Joseph Smith was the primary figure.

The restoration of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in these latter days, together with the advance preparation of conditions which made it possible, was indeed a divine drama which had
many stages and many scenes, some of which were world shaking.4

Joseph F. Smith, sixth President of the Church, had this to say about the "divine drama" of the restoration:

This great American nation the Almighty raised up by the power of his omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth. If the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation, it would have been impossible (under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world) to have laid the foundations for the coming of his great kingdom. The Lord has done this. His hand has been over this nation, and it is his purpose and design to enlarge it, make it glorious above all others, and to give it domination and power over the earth, to the end that those who are kept in bondage and servitude may be brought to the enjoyment of the fullest freedom and liberty of conscience possible for intelligent men to exercise in the earth.5

Discovery of the New World

The Book of Mormon itself comments upon the discovery of the New World, which culminated in the restoration of the gospel. Keeping in mind that this narrative was written by the prophet Nephi approximately 600 to 592 B.C., notice how Nephi futuristically predicts some of the world-shaking events that shaped the restoration:

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he


5Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1919), 409.
went forth upon the many waters even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten.

And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance. . . .

And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord; and the power of the Lord was with them.®

Elder Mark E. Petersen in his most interesting book The Great Prologue interprets the above quoted Book of Mormon passage. He contends that the "man among the Gentiles" spoken of in Nephi's prophecy, was Christopher Columbus. He also says that the "seed of my brethren" refers to the aboriginal inhabitants that Columbus found possessing the New World. The "other Gentiles" who are mentioned were the Pilgrims and Puritans, or separatists, who were in religious captivity in the Old World and who came to the New World in hopes of finding religious freedom.

Note first that the "other Gentiles" are differentiated from the "multitudes of the Gentiles," who Elder Petersen contends represent the conquistadors and the like, who came to the New World to exploit it not to stay in it. And second, the "other Gentiles" are those who "humble

themselves before the Lord" so "the power of the Lord was with them." In other words the Lord blessed the Pilgrims and Puritans, the forefathers of the American colonists, that they inherited the promised land and prospered in it.

The Revolutionary War

Continuing with Nephi's prophecy and the important events it depicts, the Book of Mormon reads,

And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. And I beheld that the power of God was with them, and also that the wrath of God was upon all those that were gathered together against them to battle. And I, Nephi, beheld that the Gentiles that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations. And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld that they did prosper in the land."

Elder Mark E. Petersen argues that this passage prophesies the Revolutionary War. The "mother Gentiles" is Great Britain who fought against the colonists on the land and upon the sea. This passage mentions that God was on the side of the colonists and would sustain them. To a great degree, the colonists themselves acknowledged the sustaining hand of God in bringing a victory to the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Speaking of the resolve of George Washington to win the Revolutionary War, Elder Petersen states, "He was convinced that independence must come to

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. pp. 24,25, vv. 17-20.}\]

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America and that God would provide it, despite the refusal of so many colonists to sacrifice for the cause. He often expressed his gratitude to God for His providential and constant care."

President Brigham Young, second President of the Church, testified of the divine intervention of God during the Revolutionary War when he said,

"The King of Great Britain . . . might . . . have been led to . . . aggressive acts, for aught we know, to bring to pass the purposes of God, in thus establishing a new government upon a principle of greater freedom, a basis of self-government allowing the free exercise of religious worship."

There is an interesting sidenote in regards to this view that the colonists were sustained in the Revolution by the Almighty. Elder Petersen, in his narrative in The Great Prologue, makes mention of the father of conservative liberalism, Edmund Burke, and his role in this divine drama:

"Sentiment in England switched in favor of the colonists to a large degree, and powerful men such as Edmund Burke openly opposed the Crown in its effort to impose unfair conditions upon America. They decried war and demanded a peaceful settlement at all costs." More of the LDS sentiment towards Burke will be mentioned later in this chapter.

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The Founding Fathers

Perhaps the most sublime players among all the events that are detailed in this preparation for the restoration of the gospel, were the men known to history as the Founding Fathers. It is a fundamental belief in LDS theology that the Founding Fathers were inspired and assembled by God to perform their work of revolution and institute a new, God-inspired form of government. This principle is boldly stated in a revelation that was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1833. In part it reads: "And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood."11 Concerning the Founding Fathers, President Ezra Taft Benson, thirteenth President of the Church, has remarked, "These were not ordinary men, but men chosen and held in reserve by the Lord for this very purpose."12 Elsewhere, President Benson has also remarked,

Nearly two hundred years ago some inspired men walked this land. Not perfect men—but men raised up by the perfect Man to perform great work. Foreordained were they to lay the foundation of the Republic. Blessed by the Almighty in their struggle for liberty and independence, the power of heaven rested on these Founders as they drafted that great document for


The sentiment that the Founding Fathers were inspired and guided by God in their efforts was and is not solely a Mormon phenomenon. To the contrary, this belief was common to most Americans of the nineteenth century. It was not until the turn of this century that this sentiment waned. President Ezra Taft Benson, addressing this subject, has written,

Shortly after the turn of this century, Charles Beard published his work *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. This book marked the beginning of a trend to defame the motives and integrity of the founders of the Constitution. It also grossly distorted the real intent of the founders by suggesting their motivation was determined by economics. . . . Before his death Beard recanted his own thesis, but the damage had been done. This began a new trend in educational and intellectual circles in the United States."

In another quote, President Benson explains why he considers Beard’s "humanistic" approach to the Founding Fathers dangerous: "Such a position removes the need for faith in God or belief in His interposition in the affairs of men. Events are only—and I purposely stress that word—explained

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from a humanistic frame of reference." Converse to the twentieth century trend to humanize the Founding Fathers, the LDS Church firmly maintains that the Founding Fathers were inspired in their work and true to their God-given charge. As a matter of fact, the LDS belief is that the Founding Fathers were so assiduous in fulfilling their foreordained mission, that they, along with other inspired and eminent figures in history, appeared to the Apostle, Wilford Woodruff, in the St. George Temple. To best understand the significance and nature of the appearance of the Founding Fathers in the St. George Temple, a rudimentary understanding of the function of temples in LDS theology is needed.

Temples play an integral role in LDS theology. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, noted theologian and Apostle of the Church, explains the purpose of temples to the LDS Church:

Certain gospel ordinances are of such a sacred and holy nature that the Lord authorizes their performance only in holy sanctuaries prepared and dedicated for that very purpose. Except in circumstances of great poverty and distress, these ordinances can be performed only in temples, and hence they are called temple ordinances. 

Baptism for the dead, an ordinance opening the door to the celestial kingdom to worthy persons not privileged to undergo gospel schooling while in mortality, is a temple ordinance, an ordinance of salvation. All other temple ordinances—washings, anointings, endowments, sealings—pertain to exaltation within the celestial kingdom. Celestial marriage is the gate which puts men on the path leading to the highest of three heavens within the celestial world.

"Ibid., 14.
All of these ordinances of exaltation are performed in the temples for both the living and the dead. Their essential portions have been the same in all dispensations when the fulness of the sealing power has been exercised by the Lord’s prophets. They were given in modern times to the Prophet Joseph Smith by revelation.¹⁶

Note that vicarious ordinance work can be done by the living, on behalf of the dead, when the dead have not had the opportunity to receive these things when alive upon the earth. This was the prevailing principle at work when the Founding Fathers appeared to Wilford Woodruff in the St. George Temple. It is important to remember that according to LDS theology individuals who appeared to President Woodruff lived upon earth during the time of apostasy when true Christianity was still not restored, or if the Church was restored, they had not had a chance to receive it.

It was during August of 1877 that the Founding Fathers, along with other eminent men from history, appeared to President Wilford Woodruff in the St. George Temple. President Ezra Taft Benson made the following comments concerning this appearance:

The temple work for the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence and other Founding Fathers has been done. All these appeared to Wilford Woodruff when he was president of the St. George Temple. President George Washington was ordained a high priest at that time. You will also be interested to know that, according to Wilford Woodruff’s journal, John Wesley, Benjamin Franklin, and Christopher Columbus were also ordained high priests at that time. When one

casts doubt about the character of these noble sons of God, I believe that he or she will have to answer to the God of heaven for it."

It is interesting to note that Washington, Wesley, Franklin and Columbus, in addition to receiving the temple ordinances, also were ordained as high priests. High Priests are holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood who are called to minister in spiritual things. Holding the office of high priest is a great honor and is predicated upon being called of God and being worthy to hold such an exalted position.

President Wilford Woodruff explained this unique experience in his own words:

Before I left St. George, the spirits of the dead gathered around me, wanting to know why we did not redeem them. Said they, "You have had the use of the Endowment House [a makeshift temple used because of poverty and distress] for a number of years, and yet nothing has ever been done for us. We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy, and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God." These were the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and they waited on me for two days and two nights. . . . I straightway went into the baptismal font and called upon Brother McAllister to baptize me for the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and fifty other eminent men, making one hundred in all, including John Wesley, Columbus, and others."

On another occasion, President Woodruff recounted this experience with some additional insights:

I am going to bear my testimony . . . that

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those men who laid the foundation of this American government . . . were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were choice spirits, not wicked men. General Washington and all the men that labored for the purpose were inspired of the Lord. . . .

Every one of those men that signed the Declaration of Independence, with General Washington, called upon me, as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Temple at St. George, two consecutive nights, and demanded at my hands that I should go forth and attend to the ordinances of the House of God for them. . . . Would those spirits have called upon me, as an Elder in Israel, to perform that work if they had not been noble spirits before God? They would not."

It is of interest to note that the spirits of the Founding Fathers demanded, at the hands of an apostle, that their temple work be performed.

It is no exaggeration to say that in LDS theology the Founding Fathers are highly revered and play an important and integral role. It is also no exaggeration to say that the handiwork of the Founding Fathers is greatly venerated and considered indispensable to LDS theology. This handiwork of the Founding Fathers will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter. President Ezra Taft Benson explains the role between the Founding Fathers and Joseph Smith:

"Once a man's rights became guaranteed by the political institutions that would serve him, the time became propitious for the Prophet Joseph Smith to be sent to the world scene, and for the kingdom of God to be restored by direct divine intervention in the year 1830. A light had burst forth among men again, and it was the fullness of

"Ezra Taft Benson, op. cit., 18.

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the gospel!"^{20}

The Fifty Eminent Men

Before progressing beyond this point, let us briefly look at the identities of some of the fifty eminent men whose temple work was also done concurrently with the work of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. It should be pointed out that these fifty men would be worthy, key players, who in the course of history played important, inspired roles.

Obviously, such notable men as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams were among the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and their temple work was done with that body of men. However, some of the Founding Fathers were included by way of being President of the United States. All the Presidents of the United States as a group, who were deceased, had their temple work done for them at that time, with the exception of Martin Van Buren and James Buchanan whose causes were determined not to be just because of the poor treatment that they had afforded the Saints (members of the Church) during their tenure of office. Another group making up part of the fifty men included a number of George Washington’s progenitors and relations. The last grouping of men seem to be random in their selection and interspersed throughout history. These

^{20}Ibid., 5.
men include Christopher Columbus, Americus Vespucius, John Wesley, Edmund Burke, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun.

It is interesting to note the great number of conservative political thinkers found among the names of the fifty men, especially when contrasted with the conspicuous absence of liberal thinkers. Men such as Edmund Burke, James Madison, John Adams, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Abraham Lincoln grace the list and are esteemed conservative thinkers. Even the so-called liberal thinkers of the "fifty eminent men," such as Thomas Jefferson (President Ronald Reagan's inspiration) and Andrew Jackson, are more closely aligned with modern conservatism than they are with modern liberalism.

Inspired Political Documents

The LDS Church considers two political documents and one political ideal, all drafted by the Founding Fathers, to be inspired: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Monroe Doctrine.

The Declaration of Independence, which was composed by Thomas Jefferson, is held in reverence by the LDS people. Ezra Taft Benson, current president of the Church, eloquently explains why:

This nation is unlike any other nation. It was uniquely born. It had its beginning when fifty-six men affixed their signatures to the Declaration of Independence. I realize there are some who view that declaration as only a political
document. It is much more than that. It constitutes a spiritual manifesto, declaring not for this nation alone, but for all nations, the source of man's rights.

The purpose of the declaration was to set forth the moral justifications of a rebellion against a long-recognized political tradition—the divine right of kings. At issue was the fundamental question of whether men's rights were God-given or whether these rights were to be dispensed by governments to their subjects. This document proclaimed that all men have certain inalienable rights; in other words, that those rights came from God. The colonists were therefore not rebels against political authority. Their contention was not with Parliament nor the British people; it was against a tyrannical monarch who had "conspired," "incited," and "plundered" them. They were thus morally justified to revolt, for as it was stated in the declaration, "when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."\(^1\)

As was previously mentioned, LDS theology holds that the American Revolution was sanctioned and blessed by the Almighty. It should also be mentioned that the document that proclaimed the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence was inspired by the Almighty.

Of the Constitution of the United States, Joseph Smith once said: "I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth. I am always ready to die for the protection of the weak and oppressed in their just rights."\(^2\) Joseph Smith further stated,

\(^1\)Ibid., 25-26.

"The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner; it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land. It is like a great tree under whose branches men from every clime can be shielded from the burning rays of the sun.""23

Concerning the Constitution, President Ezra Taft Benson has written,

May I urge every Latter-day Saint . . . to become familiar with every part of this document. We should understand the Constitution as the founders meant that it should be understood. We can do this by reading their words about it, such as those contained in the Federalist Papers. Such understanding is essential if we are to preserve what God has given us.

I reverence the Constitution of the United States as a sacred document. To me its words are akin to the revelations of God, for God has placed his stamp of approval on the Constitution. I testify that the God of heaven selected and sent some of His choicest spirits to lay the foundation of this government as a prologue to the restoration of the gospel and the second coming of our Savior.

May God bless us to protect this sacred instrument. In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, "May those principles, which were so honorably and nobly defended, namely, the Constitution of our land, by our fathers, be established forever." (Doctrines and Covenants, section 109, verse 54.)24

President Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth President of the Church, while still an Apostle, had this to say concerning the inspiration behind the Monroe Doctrine:

It is generally understood in the Church that the greatest and most significant principle by

23Ibid., 147.

which this land if fortified against the encroachments and invasions of European and Asiatic powers, is found in the Monroe Doctrine. This doctrine is not a law on the statute books of our country. It is not a resolution passed by the Congress of the United States, but is a definite statement of policy issued by President James Monroe in a message to the Congress of the United States, December 2, 1823. . . . It might appear to the casual observer that this doctrine came by chance, as many things, it seems have done, but this is not so. It was the inspiration of the Almighty which rested upon John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson and other statesmen, which finally found authoritative expression in the message of President James Monroe to Congress in the year 1823."

Although in practice the Monroe Doctrine seems to have been forsaken in twentieth-century American politics, key leading brethren in the LDS Church have called for its reapplication. Men the stature of President J. Reuben Clark, President Joseph Fielding Smith, and President Ezra Taft Benson have addressed the subject. President Ezra Taft Benson observed, "The Monroe Doctrine is right, it just needs to be applied. . . . What we need is a new application of the Monroe Doctrine--a declaration to the nations of the world to inform them that no longer are we going to tolerate . . . hostile regimes on or near our borders."26

In relation to the Constitution of the United States, there are three additional points that should be made. The

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26Ezra Taft Benson, An Enemy Hath Done This (Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1969), 244-245.

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first point is that the rights and privileges that were extended by God to the American citizenry through the Constitution were not to be held exclusively by the American citizenry. In the book the Doctrine and Covenants, a collection of the Lord’s revelations to Joseph Smith and other prophets, some fascinating precepts concerning the Constitution are revealed. One passage reads as follows: "And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me." Note that the text reads "law of the land which is constitutional . . . belongs to all mankind." In another passage in the Doctrine and Covenants, it reads,

And again I say unto you, those who have been scattered by their enemies, [in Missouri, mobs had heavily persecuted the Saints] it is my will that they should continue to importune for redress, and redemption, by the hands of those who are placed as rulers and are in authority over you—According to the laws and the constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles:

That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.

And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land . . . and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood.28


28Ibid., pp. 199-200, vv. 76-80.
Notice the wording of this revelation: "The laws and constitution . . . which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh." It also states that "every man may act . . . according to . . . moral agency." It becomes clear through these passages that the rights and privileges afforded to the American citizenry, by the Constitution, were intended to be extended to all mankind. Upon closer examination, it is apparent that this was to be done through successful example and by friendly persuasion, not by coercion or conquest. The "just and holy principles" would speak for themselves.

President George Q. Cannon, of the First Presidency, spoke of a "spirit of liberty," which permeated the earth as a result of the work of the Founding Fathers. He also said,

It was not America alone which felt the benign influences resulting from the efforts of the Revolutionary Fathers. Every nation in Christendom and upon the face of the earth has been benefitted to a greater or less extent by their struggles, sacrifices and victories... Nations afar have felt it; its leaven has entered into their political systems, and has had a tendency to relieve the oppressed; and so long as this Republic endures, so long will the love of liberty be cherished in the hearts of the down-trodden of every land, and they will be benefitted to an extent they would not realize were this government not in existence. In fighting, therefore, the battles of American Independence the Revolutionary Fathers fought the battles of mankind; they fought for liberty in every land,
and example which they gave to the nations never has nor never will be forgotten."

The American nation needed only to be true to the vision of the Founding Fathers, and be true to God, in righteousness, to set the successful example and demonstrate the friendly persuasion for the rest of the world.

The second point concerning the Constitution has to do with its futurity. Section 109 of the Doctrine and Covenants is the inspired dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, as offered by the Prophet Joseph Smith. In this dedicatory prayer, the Prophet uttered the following words concerning the principles of the Constitution: "Have mercy, O Lord, upon all the nations of the earth; have mercy upon the rulers of our land; may those principles, which were so honorably and nobly defended, namely, the Constitution of our land, by our fathers, be established forever."

Attention should be given to the last phrase of that quote, which states that the principles of the Constitution should "be established forever." LDS theology teaches that in the latter days, the Savior, Jesus Christ, will again return to dwell on earth; this return is called the Second Coming of Christ. At the time of the Second Coming, the Savior will not only personally govern His Church on earth, but He will set up His political kingdom, the Kingdom of God, and

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personally rule over it for a millennium. The government at this time, the Kingdom of God on earth, will take the form of a theocracy. Clarifying what a theocracy actually is, President Brigham Young had this to say,

But few, if any, understand what a theocratic government is. In every sense of the word, it is a republican government, and differs little in form from our National, State, and Territorial Governments; but its subjects will recognize the will and dictation of the Almighty. The Kingdom of God circumscribes and comprehends the municipal laws for the people in their outward government, to which pertain the Gospel covenants, by which the people can be saved; and those covenants pertain to fellowship and faithfulness. The Gospel covenants are for those who believe and obey; municipal laws are for both Saint and sinner.

The Constitution and laws of the United States resemble a theocracy more closely than any government now on the earth, or that ever has been so far as we know, except the government of the Children of Israel to the time when they elected a king.31

Because a theocracy is a republican form of government, it becomes plain that the "just and holy principles" embodied in the Constitution are intended to be established with the American Republic until the Second Coming of the Lord, when they will be further incorporated into the theocratic government of God. This is the tentative future of the Constitution and its principles in LDS theology.

The third point also deals with the future of the Constitution. The Prophet Joseph Smith prophesied of the time when the Constitution would stand in peril. Concerning

this prophecy, Elder Orson Hyde, an Apostle, said:
"Joseph . . . declared . . . that the time would come when
the Constitution . . . would be in danger of an overthrow;
and said he, If the Constitution be saved at all, it will be
by the Elders of this Church." * President George Q.
Cannon, further elaborated on this prophecy with this
statement:

The days are fast approaching concerning which
the Prophet Joseph Smith often spoke. He taught
the Elders that the time would come when the
Constitution of the United States would be treated
with contempt and trampled upon as of no value. He
said that the day would come when it should
devolve upon the people of this Church to uphold
the Constitution and the liberty guaranteed by it
upon this continent."

Brigham Young had this to say about Joseph Smith’s
prophecy:

Will the Constitution be destroyed? No; it
will be held inviolate by this people; and, as
Joseph Smith said, "the time will come when the
destiny of the nation will hang upon a single
thread. At this critical juncture, this people
will step forth and save it from the threatened
destruction." It will be so."

Thus, according to LDS theology, when the Constitution
stands in peril, the Elders (the lay priesthood of the
Church to which every worthy, mature male member belongs)
will step forth and save it. President Brigham Young
intimated that this would be done by the Elders of the

*"Ibid., vol. 6, p. 152.
Church preaching the virtues of the Constitution, along with the message of the restored gospel, to the American nation at this time of need.

Although it is a part of LDS theology that this prophecy will come to pass, the fulfillment will come as the result of choices that will have been made by the American nation. President Brigham Young clarified this principle when he said,

The signers of the Declaration of Independence and the framers of the Constitution were inspired from on high to do that work. But was that which was given to them perfect, not admitting of any addition whatever? No; for if men know anything, they must know that the Almighty has never yet found a man in mortality that was capable, at the first intimation, at the first impulse, to receive anything in a state of entire perfection. They laid the foundation, and it was for aftergenerations to rear the superstructure upon it. It is a progressive gradual work.\(^3^5\)

At another time President Young further clarified this point when he stated that "they [the Founding Fathers] laid its foundation; but when others came to build upon it, they reared a superstructure far short of their privileges, if they had walked uprightly as they should have done."\(^3^6\) President George Q. Cannon, expounds on President Young's thought of those who have not "walked uprightly":

But the views of its [the Constitution's] framers have not been carried out. The love of place and power has risen paramount to the love of country;

\(^3^5\)Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954), 359.

\(^3^6\)Ibid., 359.
and those who should have been the most faithful defenders of the Constitution have been its most deadly foes.

While the Constitution was properly respected, and the wise admonitions of its framers were attended to, the nation became great, prosperous and happy without parallel in history. But to have people truly great and permanently prosperous, there is something more needed than a good constitution, a perfect form of government and liberal laws . . . [namely,] virtue and honesty in people, and a disposition to strictly obey and comply with the laws."

According to LDS theology, it is because of the lack of virtue and honesty in the American citizenry and its elected officials that the day will come when the Constitution will stand in peril and hang, as it were, "by a thread." It is this same weakness that has prevented this nation from performing the gradual "perfecting" work on the Constitution. Instead, in the words of Brigham Young, "they reared a superstructure far short of their privileges."

Summary

This chapter has shown that the LDS Church teaches that because of a "great apostasy" from the original Christian church, a restoration of this Church was needed to again establish true Christianity. Joseph Smith was the instrument that God chose to restore this Church. However, before the restoration could take place, there were many crucial events that needed to take place in order to

properly prepare the setting for the restoration of the gospel. Events such as the discovery of the New World, the establishment of political freedoms in the Old World, the Renaissance, the protestant reformation, the Pilgrims and Puritans coming to the New World in search of religious freedoms, and many other events led to the restoration of the gospel in the latter days.

It has further been shown in this chapter that the Founding Fathers were particularly inspired of God. They were inspired to fight the Revolutionary War and to draft such political documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Monroe Doctrine. LDS theology holds that because these documents are inspired, they are based upon timeless, true principles and they are to be extended to all mankind through example and persuasion. LDS theology also holds that the subsequent generations after the Founding Fathers were to perfect the Constitution, but have not because of the lack of virtue. LDS theology also teaches that the inspired principles embodied in the Constitution are to be eventually incorporated in the theocracy of God during the millennium. However, before that time, the Constitution will stand in peril and it will be the Elders of the Church who will organize and save the Constitution.

Now that an understanding of the First Vision and the inspired historical events that led up to the First Vision
is in place, and now that the LDS interpretation of those events is in place, let us measure how these events and their interpretation square with Roger Scruton’s seven key elements of classical liberal thought. Again, here are Scruton’s seven key elements of classical liberal thought:

(i) Belief in the supreme value of the individual, his freedom and rights. (ii) Individualism, in its metaphysical variant. (iii) Belief that the individual has natural rights, which exist independently of government, and which ought to be protected by and against government. (iv) Recognition of the supreme value of freedom, usually glossed as the ability to secure that to which one has a right, together with the view that government must be so limited as to grant freedom to every citizen; perhaps even that government is justifiable only to the extent that it maximizes freedom, or to the extent that it protects the free individual from invasions of his rights. (v) An anthropocentric, rather than theological, view of human affairs regarding human potential and achievement as the principal locus of value. (vi) Universalism: i.e. a belief that rights and duties are universal, and stem from a human condition that transcends place and time. (vii) Advocacy of toleration in matters of morality and religion.3

Because LDS theology accepts the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States as inspired, it only stands to reason that classical liberalism is embraced as the preferred political philosophy. The political philosophy that fuels both documents is classical liberalism. To call both of these documents inspired is to call classical liberalism inspired. This chapter directly addressed and found support for Scruton’s key elements one,

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three, four, and seven as a matter of course because of the support for both documents mentioned among other things.

Key elements two and six were alluded to and supported indirectly, but not in a direct fashion. This chapter did not directly cover that terrain.

The one key element that LDS theology does not square with in this chapter is element five: "An anthropocentric, rather than theological, view of human affairs regarding human potential and achievement as the principal locus of value." Clearly, the LDS view is theological when it comes to human affairs. In LDS theology, God is supreme and the center of human affairs. This is not to say that man is predestined or without his agency, but that God’s influence is felt in the course of human events, while still vouchsafing man’s agency. In this one area, LDS thought radically diverges with classical liberal thought. Other than that one point, it must be concluded that politically LDS thought must be considered, in part, classical liberalism.

Again, with the understanding of the First Vision and the inspired historical events that led to the First Vision in place, and with the LDS interpretation of those events in place, let us measure how these events and their interpretation synchronize with Russell Kirk’s six canons of conservative thought. Again, here are Kirk’s six canons of conservative thought:
(1) Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience, forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead. Political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems. . . . (2) Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life, as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and equalitarianism and utilitarian aims of most radical systems. (3) Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes. The only true equality is moral equality; all other attempts at leveling lead to despair, if enforced by positive legislation. Society longs for leadership, and if a people destroy natural distinctions among men, presently Bonaparte fills the vacuum. (4) Persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected, and that economic leveling is not economic progress. Separate property from private possession, and liberty is erased. (5) Faith in prescription and distrust of "sophisters and calculators." Man must put a control upon his will and his appetite, for conservatives know man to be governed by emotion than by reason. Tradition and sound prejudice provide checks upon man's anarchic impulse. (6) Recognition that change and reform are not identical, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is the torch of progress.3

Of the six canons of conservative thought, two were addressed directly in this chapter, the other four were, at best, peripherally discussed. The two canons that were directly addressed were canons one and two. These two will be presently addressed.

The first canon seems to capture the focus and spirit of this chapter. In direct opposition to Scruton's key element five of classical liberalism, the anthropocentric view of human affairs, it has become clear that LDS thought

3Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind, from Burke to Eliot (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1953)
obtrusively holds for a theological view of human affairs, or as Kirk put it, "belief that a divine intent rules society." LDS thought holds that God is involved in human affairs, and what is more, God is needed in human affairs. Man’s ability to reason is not enough to bring his own perfectibility, hence man has a paramount need for God to guide and direct man in his earthly sojourn, that he might maximize his happiness. It is the classic conflict of reason versus revelation, Athens versus Jerusalem. LDS thought has epitomized Kirk’s assertion that "political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems."

This chapter has demonstrated that LDS theology conforms wholly to the first canon.

This chapter has also shown that LDS thought holds in reverence the inspired work of the Founding Fathers. Because this work is held in reverence, it establishes a hallowed tradition for Latter-day Saints. A tradition that they will obviously desire to conserve.

The principles and truths that surfaced as a result of the work of the Founding Fathers are principles and truths that transcend time, they are grounded in the nature of man, not in temporal existence. Hence, the great political truths that have appeared create an "affection for . . . traditional life," which needs be conserved. This chapter has also demonstrated that LDS thought conforms to the second canon of conservative thought. The remaining canons
of conservative thought were not directly addressed in this chapter.
CHAPTER 4
THREE POLITICAL CONCEPTS FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

This chapter will look at the Book of Mormon, a fundamental keystone of LDS theology, and determine its influence upon LDS political thought. Although there are several teachings in the Book of Mormon that support conservative thought, I have chosen three tenets to focus upon: freedom and rights, equality and classism, and the nature of man.

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon

To properly understand the place that the Book of Mormon holds in LDS theology, it would be helpful to review the circumstances under which the Book of Mormon came forth. Elder James E. Talmage, scholar and Apostle, has written the following concerning the coming forth of The Book of Mormon:

On the night of September 21, 1823, while praying for forgiveness of sins and for guidance as to his future course, he [Joseph Smith] was blessed with another heavenly manifestation. There appeared in his room a brilliant light, in the midst of which stood a personage clothed in white, and with a countenance of radiant purity. The heavenly visitant announced himself as Moroni, a messenger sent from the presence of God; and he proceeded to instruct the youth as to some of the divine purposes in which his instrumentality would be of great import. The angel said that God had a work for Joseph to do, and that his name "should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said
there was a book deposited, written upon golden plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants; also, that there were two stones in silver bows—and the stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book."1

Joseph Smith was directed by Moroni to the place where the plates and Urim and Thummim [a divine device used to translate records] were deposited, a nearby hill that the angel designated as Cumorah. Joseph Smith learned that he must undergo a somewhat lengthy tutelage with the angel before he would be entrusted with the plates and the Urim and Thummim for the process of translation. Joseph Smith eventually proved himself worthy of obtaining the plates of gold and the Urim and Thummim, and through the gift and power of God, Joseph Smith translated the plates from their original reformed Egyptian into the English language. The translation took approximately sixty days to accomplish, and the manuscript was over five hundred printed pages. Upon completion of the translation of the plates, Joseph Smith returned the record to Moroni; however, there were eleven men who were eyewitnesses to the existence of the plates of gold besides Joseph Smith. The book was first published in

1James E. Talmage, Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Company, 1890), 11.
1830 under the title of the Book of Mormon. The book received its name after an ancient American prophet, Mormon, who served as the abridger/compiler/editor of the sacred record.

What the Book of Mormon Purports To Be

The Book of Mormon purports to be a volume of holy writ that deals with three ancient civilizations which flourished in the Western hemisphere. These peoples were guided to this hemisphere from the eastern continent by divine direction. The first people, the Jaredites, were led to this hemisphere from the eastern world shortly after the incident of the Tower of Babel, around 2247 B.C. The second and third migrations occurred almost concurrently, approximately 600 years B.C. The second and third peoples were remnants of the House of Israel and were known respectively as the Nephites/Lamanites and the Mulekites. The zenith event of the Book of Mormon is the recorded appearance of the Lord, Jesus Christ, to the Nephites/Lamanites immediately after His resurrection and His teachings to that people. The Book of Mormon, then, is written by ancient American prophets. It is a scriptural account that records the dealings of God with these three ancient peoples. In LDS theology the Book of Mormon is a second volume of scripture to the Bible; it is another witness of the divine mission of Jesus Christ.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, an Apostle of the LDS Faith,
has stated the following purposes of the Book of Mormon:

Purposes of The Book of Mormon are: 1. To bear record of Christ, certifying in plainness and with clarity of his Divine Sonship and mission, proving irrefutably that he is the Redeemer and Savior; 2. To teach the doctrines of the gospel in such a pure and perfect way that the plan of salvation will be clearly revealed; and 3. To stand as a witness to all the world that Joseph Smith was the Lord's anointed through whom the foundation was laid for the great latter-day work of restoration.

The eighth Article of Faith of the LDS Church states:

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe The Book of Mormon to be the word of God." Note that in this statement there is a disclaimer for incorrect translations of the Bible, but not for the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith once clarified what he considered to be the translation problems with the Bible. He said, "I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors." Nephi, an ancient American prophet, saw in vision that many "plain and precious" truths would be deleted from the Bible record, and yet in spite of such flaws, the Bible is still revered by


"The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902), 60.

"Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 327."
the LDS Faith as the word of God, "as far as it is translated correctly." However, in contrast, the Book of Mormon has escaped the translation and deletion problems of the Bible because it was translated by "the gift [the Urim and Thummim or seer stones] and power of God." The Prophet Joseph once wrote in his journal the following statement concerning the Book of Mormon: "I told the brethren that The Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book." Elsewhere, the Prophet wrote, "Take away The Book of Mormon and the revelations [principally, the collection of revelations known as Doctrine and Covenants], and where is our religion? We have none." Speaking about the place that the Book of Mormon occupies in LDS theology, Elder Bruce R. McConkie writes,

Almost all of the doctrines of the gospel are taught in the Book of Mormon with much greater clarity and perfection than those same doctrines are revealed in the Bible. Anyone who will place in parallel columns the teachings of these two great books on such subjects as the atonement, plan of salvation, gathering of Israel, baptism, gifts of the Spirit, miracles, revelation, faith, charity, (or any of a hundred other subjects), will find conclusive proof of Book of Mormon teachings.

*Ibid., 194.
"Ibid., 71.
It is now understandable why the Book of Mormon plays such a prominent role in LDS theology. Of all Christian churches in the world today, only the LDS Church and its offshoots recognize the Book of Mormon as scripture and accept its teachings as inspired. In LDS theology, scripture is defined as this: "And whatsoever they [the priesthood leadership] shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation."* When something is scripture to the Saints, it is authoritative and binding upon the whole church. When it is canonized, as is the Book of Mormon, it becomes the standard against which all things can be measured to determine their correctness.

Because of this additional volume of scripture, LDS doctrine cannot help but be exceptional and peculiar in its approach to religion as well as politics. Hence, we shall examine the Book of Mormon to determine its influence upon the LDS approach to the body politic. The manner in which the Book of Mormon will be examined will be to identify applicable political passages and measure them against the seven key elements of classical liberalism and the six canons of conservative thought to determine their support or

lack of support for these political tenets.

Because the Book of Mormon is primarily a religious treatment and not a political treatment, it should be remembered that this examination of the Book of Mormon will consider a few topics that are religious in nature but have political ramifications.

The Principle of Freedom

Let us first examine the principle of freedom as treated in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon teaches that there are two fundamental influences in the universe: good and evil. God is the source of all good, and conversely, Satan is the source of all evil. Because of these two influences, there is opposition in all things in this life. God has endowed men with their freedom, or moral agency, to choose between these two influences and God has also enabled men to discern the difference between good and evil. Hence, men must accept responsibility for their choices, whether they be good or evil. The prophet Lehi explained this principle in these words in the Book of Mormon:

. . . they [men] have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life through the great Mediator [Jesus Christ] of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity
and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself."

LDS theology vehemently denies the doctrine of determinism, which is a prevalent conviction among many modern Christian sects. LDS theology teaches that God is omniscient and knows all things, even the eventual outcome of the lives of all of mankind. However, He does not determine the fate of anyone, for they are free to choose for themselves. And although it is true that God seeks to influence mankind towards the good, He only influences, for He will not encroach upon the right of the individual to choose for himself. The prophet Jacob also taught this principle: "Therefore, cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves—to choose the way of everlasting death or the way of eternal life." Note that inherent in this doctrine of freedom, or moral agency, is also a doctrine of accountability. In LDS theology, each individual must make an accounting to his Creator for the way in which he chose to use his moral agency.

In the Book of Mormon, it is clearly taught that a political atmosphere of freedom must exist before individuals can work out their religious salvation. So, in keeping in accordance with that, God gives mankind the necessary political freedoms so that if they choose to do

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"Ibid., p. 80, v. 23."
so, they may work out their religious salvation. These rights are extended from God to all mankind; however, there are tyrants who usurp these rights from the people and prohibit them from exercising these God-given rights. For this usurpation the tyrants are accountable before God. The Book of Mormon teaches that there is a necessity to either defend or claim these essential rights. The example of the American Revolution is one where the Lord justified the colonists in claiming their God-given rights in these matters.

The rights and privileges enjoyed by the Nephites appear to be very similar to the rights enjoyed by modern Americans. Life, liberty, and property seem to be fundamental rights held common by the Nephites. In the following Book of Mormon passage, these rights are alluded to:

... and now the law could have no power on any man for his belief.
And they durst not steal, for fear of the law, for such were punished; neither durst they rob, nor murder, for he that murdered was punished to death.¹¹

Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon it further elaborates upon this point:

Now there was no law against a man’s belief; for it was strictly contrary to the commands of God that there should be a law which should bring men on to unequal grounds.
For thus saith the scripture: Choose ye this day, whom ye will serve.

Now if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege; or rather, if he believed in God it was his privilege to serve him; but if he did not believe in him there was no law to punish him. But if he murdered he was punished to death; and if he robbed he was also punished; and if he stole he was also punished; and if he committed adultery he was also punished; yea, for all this wickedness they were punished. For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes. Nevertheless, there was no law against a man's belief; therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes which he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds.\footnote{Ibid., p.281, vv. 7-11.}

Not only were elementary political freedoms alluded to, but also religious freedoms. The parallels between the Nephite system of government and modern American government are somewhat stark in these matters.

As was previously mentioned, the Book of Mormon deals with three ancient American societies. The majority of the text deals with the Nephite/Lamanite civilization. As was also mentioned, the Nephite/Lamanite society were remnants of the House of Israel and were very much influenced by their Israelite roots. After the arrival of this colony to the New World, about 590 B.C., a kingdom was set up that was basically patterned after the Kingdom of Israel. This kingdom lasted approximately five centuries and then was conscientiously discarded. After 500 years of monarchy, king Mosiah II proposed what he considered to be a system of government that was superior to a monarchy. The structure of government that Mosiah II proposed to the Nephites was a
system of elected judges. This arrangement of government was patterned after the ancient system of judges that originally had ruled Israel.

In Old Testament times, after the prophet Joshua and all the elders who were with him had died, the Lord established a system of judges to govern the children of Israel. The history of the reign of judges is chronicled in the Book of Judges in the Old Testament. After a lengthy period of time in which judges served, the children of Israel approached the prophet Samuel and requested that Israel have a king like the other Gentile nations did. This request displeased both Samuel and the Lord. Chapter Eight in the Book of Samuel contains the lengthy monologue of Samuel trying to dissuade the children of Israel from making this monumental mistake. In spite of Samuel's words, the children of Israel were firm in their resolve, as the following passages show:

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;
That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go before us, and fight our battles. And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king."

The Lord made an interesting observation to Samuel concerning the children of Israel's request for a king: "And

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1The Holy Bible (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), p. 392, vv. 19-22.
the Lord said unto Samuel, *Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.*" Apparently, the preferable type of government to the Lord would be to have a system with Himself as Heavenly King and with wise men on earth, appointed by the people, to act as judges or representatives of the people. This, evidently, was the pattern to which King Mosiah II looked while establishing his system of judges in ancient America. The following is the counsel of Mosiah II on the subject:

And now let us be wise and look forward to these things, and do that which will make for the peace of this people.

Therefore I will be your king the remainder of my days; nevertheless, let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law; and we will newly arrange the affairs of this people, for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God.

Now it is better that a man should be judged of God than of man, for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of man are not always just.

Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this would always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you. . . .

Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked

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1"Ibid., p. 391, v. 7.
king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction! . . .
And now behold I say unto you, it is not expedient that such abominations should come upon you.
Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges, that ye may be judged according to the laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord.¹⁵

In other words, it was proposed that the Nephites accept God as their Heavenly King, that they accept and conserve His laws (or the laws of their fathers, which were given by God) and choose representatives, or judges, to enforce these laws that became constitutionalized. This proposal was heartily accepted of the Nephites, and they instituted a constitutional republic. Because the laws were deemed inspired and of God, they would naturally also seek to conserve them. The following verse in the narrative of Mosiah II seems to demonstrate this predilection towards republicanism and conservatism:

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law— to do your business by the voice of the people.¹⁶

Before leaving this notion of a constitutional republic being preferred to an earthly monarchy, let us look at one more scriptural account that addresses the undesirability of

¹⁵The Book of Mormon, op. cit., pp. 204, 205, vv. 10-13, 16, 17, 24, 25.
a monarchy. This account deals with the earliest people who are chronicled in the Book of Mormon, the Jaredites. Evidently, this society initially employed a successful patriarchal form of government. At an early point in the Jaredite account, two inspired, aging patriarchs approached their people to inquire of them if they had any last desires to ask for before the patriarchs died. The response of the people was as follows:

And it came to pass that the people desired of them that they should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them.

And now behold, this was grievous unto them. And the brother of Jared said unto them: Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.1

The brother of Jared’s caution proved to be prophetic, for much of the tale of the Jaredites is one of constant struggle between captivity and freedom, between usurpation and liberty. As a matter of fact, much of the political scenario of the Book of Mormon deals with the ongoing conflict between conserving a free republic and instituting an autocratic monarchy. (It should be pointed out that the previous monarchs of the Nephite civilization had bound themselves to God’s laws and cannot be considered autocratic by nature, hence, attempts at establishing an autocratic monarchy could not be considered conservative). Among the Nephite civilization, there were thirteen attempts made to overthrow the system of judges that was established by

1Ibid., p. 498, vv. 22,23.
Mosiah II and to reinstate an autocratic monarchy. Again, a major theme of the Book of Mormon is that an atmosphere of political freedom must exist before religious freedom can be realized and individual salvation be worked out.

A classic example of Nephite dissenters attempting to establish an autocratic monarchy to replace the system of judges is found in the Book of Alma, Chapter 51. This attempt took place about 25 years after Mosiah II established the organization of judges. There were some Nephite dissenters, they called themselves the "kingmen," who were desirous that an autocratic monarchy replace the order of judges. These kingmen sought to have the law changed in order to install the desired monarchy:

And it came to pass that those who were desirous that Pahoran should be dethroned from the judgment-seat were called kingmen, for they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government and to establish a king over the land.

And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain chief judge over the land took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them, for the freemen had sworn or covenanted to maintain their rights and the privileges of their religion by a free government.

And it came to pass that this manner of their contention was settled by the voice of the people. And it came to pass that the voice of the people came in favor of the freemen, and Pahoran retained the judgment-seat.

Now those who were in favor of kings were those of high birth, and they sought to be kings; and they were supported by those who sought power and authority over the people."

"Ibid., p. 336, vv. 5-8.
Even though the dispute was legally settled, the kingmen did not accept the verdict and a civil war ensued in which the freemen eventually overcame the kingmen. As was mentioned, this was one of thirteen major attempts by thirteen different factions to establish an autocratic monarchy within the space of 121 years of Nephite history.

Another example of a threat to the political and religious freedoms of the Nephites and to their system of government came approximately 20 years after Mosiah II had set up the new republican form of government. Amalickiah, a Nephite dissenter, sought to establish himself as king of the Nephite society. The Book of Mormon narrative is as follows on the subject:

And Amalickiah was desirous to be a king; and those people who were wroth were also desirous that he should be their king; and they were the greater part of them the lower judges of the land, and they were seeking for power.

And they had been led by the flatteries of Amalickiah, that if they would support him and establish him to be their king that he would make them rulers over the people. . . .

Yea, we see that Amalickiah, because he was a man of cunning device and a man of many flattering words, that he led away the hearts of the people to do wickedly; yea, and to seek to destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them, or which blessing God had sent upon the face of the land for the righteous' sake."

The ensuing scripture records the response of those Nephites who sought to conserve the system of judges established by Mosiah II:

1"Ibid., pp. 322-23, vv. 4-5, 10.
And now it came to pass that when Moroni, who was the chief commander of the armies of the Nephites, had heard of these dissensions, he was angry with Amalickiah.

And it came to pass that he rent his coat; and he took a piece thereof, and wrote upon it—In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children—and he fastened it upon the end of a pole [called the title of liberty].

And he said . . . Behold, whosoever will maintain this title upon the land, let them come forth in the strength of the Lord, and enter into a covenant that they will maintain their rights, and their religion, that the Lord may bless them.\(^{30}\)

Moroni and his armies eventually subdued Amalickiah and his converts and maintained the republican government of judges.

As has been demonstrated, the Book of Mormon teaches that God has endowed mankind with several freedoms, political and religious. This was true in ancient Book of Mormon times as well as in modern American times. These freedoms correlate closely with the freedoms of classical liberalism: life, liberty, and property. The Nephites considered these fundamental freedoms necessary in order to work out their religious salvation, and hence, they sought to conserve their republican government, which provided for these freedoms. The Book of Mormon obviously seems to teach political conservatism of free republican government. It is no wonder that the LDS Church considers the constitutional government of the United States to be inspired; it incorporates many of the fundamental principles which are

\(^{30}\text{Ibid., p. 323, vv. 11-12, 18, 20.}\)
advocated in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon serves as a pattern.

Equality and Classism

Let us now consider the Book of Mormon treatment of equality and classism. The clarity of the Book of Mormon on this tenet is very straightforward. The prophet Nephi taught that "the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one." The prophet Alma declared that "ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another." King Mosiah II also proclaimed "that every man should esteem his neighbor as himself" and "that there should be an equality among all men." Mosiah II's republican system of government insured "that every man should have an equal chance throughout the land." The Book of Mormon also instructs, "For there was a law that men should be judged according to their crimes, . . . therefore, a man was punished only for the crimes he had done; therefore all men were on equal grounds." And finally, "He [God] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of

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21Ibid., p. 39, v. 35.
22Ibid., p. 191, v. 7.
23Ibid., p. 199, v. 4.
24Ibid., p. 199, v. 3.
26Ibid., p. 281, v. 11.
his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female: and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile." It is apparent from these quotes found in the Book of Mormon that in LDS theology, all men stand equal before both the law and God. The only favoritism demonstrated by God is towards those who use their moral agency to follow God, as is illustrated by this scripture, "He that is righteous is favored of God." That favoritism is manifested by temporal and spiritual blessings and could be curried by all mankind if they so desire it. There is no inequality in its distribution.

The Book of Mormon shows that social class divisions come as a result of human pride. In the Book of Mormon, pride is considered a most grievous sin. The prophet Mormon attributed pride to the destruction of the entire Nephite nation, "Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction." Simply defined, pride is when one relies upon "the arm of the flesh" rather than acknowledging the "hand of God in all things." Pride manifests itself through selfishness and sin. Mormon, in his III Nephi commentary, notes the emergence of classes in Nephite society. He also observes

"Ibid., pp. 103-104, v. 33.
"Ibid., p. 39, v. 35.
"Ibid., p. 527, v. 27.
what caused this division:

In the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceeding great riches, yea, even unto great persecutions;

For there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers.

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches.

Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble. . . .

And thus there became a great inequality in all the land. . . .

Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this—Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity, and to the puffing them up with pride, tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world.30

A second instance of Nephite society dividing itself into a system of classes is mentioned in the book of IV Nephi. After the resurrected Lord appeared to the Nephite/Lamanite civilization, a period of peace and harmony prevailed for the space of approximately two hundred years. The two-hundred-year peace ultimately ended when pride again surfaced among the people. Concerning this period of time, Mormon wrote,

And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world. . . .

And they began to be divided into classes.31


31Ibid., p. 467, vv. 24, 26.
As has been established, pride typically reveals itself through the means of economics and education.

The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that all men stand on equal footing before God. Though some may be more affluent and educated, still all are alike before God. The Book of Mormon further teaches that those who are more blessed have an obligation to assist those who are not so abundantly blessed, "where much is given, much is expected." King Benjamin taught his people that none may be proud for all are dependent upon God: "For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have, for both food and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?" The prophet Jacob gave instruction against pride, elitism, and classism when he penned the following passages:

And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they.

And now, my brethren, do ye suppose that God justifieth you in this thing? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. But he condemneth you...

Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you."

"Ibid., p. 156, v. 19.

"Ibid., p. 120, vv. 13-14, 17.
As is evident, the Book of Mormon approves the principle of equality before God and the law, or as Kirk refers to it, moral equality. However, The Book of Mormon does not countenance classism. It is true and recognized that, as Russell Kirk points out, there are natural disparities among mankind such as intelligence, strength, and skills; however, attempts by society to create artificial distinctions or classes due to riches or educational opportunities certainly are not in harmony with Book of Mormon teachings. The Book of Mormon teaches that through the gospel, men are to seek an acceptance, a harmony and equality with one another, to "esteem all flesh in one." This voluntary compliance with gospel law seems to bring consonance to the natural distinctions between men, more so than any attempt to legislate such matters. John Adams was against any attempt to legislate equality because he believed that one couldn't use coercion to eliminate classism, or aristocracy as he called it. Russell Kirk's third canon of conservative thought seems to regard the natural distinctions between mankind and not the artificial ones. John Adams's points on aristocracy are also in this same vein and spirit. The Book of Mormon seems to accord with this concept.

The Nature of Man

Let us now consider the approach that the Book of Mormon takes to the subject of the nature of man. In his
six canons of conservative thought, Russell Kirk speaks of the need to control man’s "will," his "appetite," and his "anarchic impulse." Traditional conservative thought has maintained that man was suspect by nature. Being subject to appetites, passions, and whims, man could not always be counted on to yield to his rational side. Hence, experience demonstrated the need for "tradition" and "sound prejudice" to keep in check the appetites, passions, and whims of man. Thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Burke, and Madison have spoken of this phenomenon. Madison, in The Federalist Papers, No. 51, spoke of the need for checks against human nature:

> It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."

In contrast to this conservative approach to the nature of man, traditional liberal thought postulates that man is naturally both rational and good. This is nowhere more profoundly manifested than in the opinions of Jean Jacques

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Rousseau. Rousseau purported to have received a vision from God that instructed him that man was naturally good. He was further instructed that any deviation from that natural goodness of man came as a result of the corrupting influences of society and its institutions.

Let us now look at the Book of Mormon to understand its approach to the dilemma of man's nature. The Book of Mormon teaches a literal belief in Adam and in the doctrine of the fall of Adam. The results of the fall of Adam include pain, death, and moral agency. Another result of the fall is that man's nature becomes "natural," "fallen," and "carnal, sensual, and devilish." Until man turns to God, he remains in this "fallen" state. The prophet Alma II taught that "all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state . . . are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God." 35 The reason that natural man has "gone contrary to the nature of God," is because of his tendency towards sinning, which puts him in a state that is alien to God. King Benjamin taught his people that "the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord." 36 The prophet Abinadi

35 The Book of Mormon, op. cit., p. 310, v. 11.
added,

For they are carnal and devilish, and the devil has power over them; yea, even that old serpent that did beguile our first parents, which was the cause of their fall; which was the cause of all mankind becoming carnal, sensual, devilish, knowing evil from good, subjecting themselves to the devil.

Thus all mankind were lost; and behold, they would have been endlessly lost were it not that God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state.

But remember that he that persists in his own carnal nature, and goes on in the ways of sin and rebellion against God, remaineth in his fallen state and the devil hath all power over him. Therefore he is as though there was no redemption made, being an enemy to God; and also is the devil an enemy to God."

The LDS doctrine of "fallen man" should not be confused with the doctrine of the "depravity of man," which has been taught by some Christian sects. The doctrine of depravity sets forth that there is nothing good or redemptive in or about man. The LDS doctrine of fallen man does not deny that natural man may have some good in him, however, as natural man becomes accountable for himself, to some degree or another, he chooses to sin. The sins of the natural man put him in a state that is foreign to a sinless God. Hence, "the natural man is an enemy to God." However, as man yields to the enticings of God through His Holy Spirit and learns to become righteous, he eventually becomes "born again." Being born again changes man's fallen nature to a redeemed state where he is again acceptable before God, his

"Ibid., p. 178, vv. 3-5."
inclination is towards righteousness, and a reconciliation has been achieved between man and Deity.

As a result of the teachings of the Book of Mormon, LDS theology views man, in his natural state, quite skeptically because of his preoccupation with self and his propensity toward sinning. Also as a result of the teachings of the Book of Mormon, LDS theology views many men as "natural" and not yet "redeemed," as they have not met the criteria set forth in the Book of Mormon for redemption. Because of this, as with conservative political philosophy, LDS theology maintains that the natural man is held as suspect and not to be trusted. And as Madison contended, certain measures need be taken to keep his appetites, passions, and whims in check. This is evidenced in several passages of the Book of Mormon where checks were placed in the constitutional republic of the Nephites, to keep the natural man tendencies at bay. Again, this is another instance where LDS doctrine parallels conservative political thought.

Summary

This chapter has examined the Book of Mormon to understand its treatment of three political principles: freedom and rights, equality and classism, and the nature of man. The reason that the Book of Mormon has been examined is because it is the keystone of LDS thought. It is this canon of scripture that separates the LDS Church from the
rest of Christian society and accounts for much of the
Church’s unique beliefs.

The Book of Mormon teaches that there are two
fundamental influences that seek to have an affect on man:
good and evil. Hence, there is opposition in all things.
God has given man his moral agency that he may choose of his
own volition between right and wrong. This clearly
correlates with Scruton’s classical liberal ideas of
individualism, freedom, and natural rights.

The Book of Mormon also teaches the need for religious
freedom in society. This relates directly to Scruton’s
seventh key principle of classical liberalism, the necessity
of religious and moral freedom, as well as Kirk’s first
canon of conservative thought, that all political issues are
basically religious and moral by nature.

The Book of Mormon teaches the equality of man before
God and the law. Book of Mormon doctrine on the equality of
man harmonizes completely with Scruton’s principles of
classical liberalism. The same is true of conservative
values. Though Russell Kirk and John Adams argue that there
are natural distinctions between mankind, they clearly do
not condone the artificial or man-made ones. This seems to
correspond with the doctrine of the Book of Mormon. By the
same token, the Book of Mormon condemns artificial classism,
and this squares with the values of both Scruton and Kirk.

The Book of Mormon is very straightforward in its
teachings concerning the nature of man. Since the fall of Adam, mankind as a race, has been fallen, or in other words prone to sinning. The natural man looks out primarily for self and cannot be counted upon to be philanthropic. He is driven by appetites, whims, and desires and is not rational. Hence, the natural man needs to be held in check. In terms of government this translates into checks and balances. In this instance, the Book of Mormon links closely to conservative thought, perhaps a bit further away to classical liberal thought, which is based upon an anthropocentric view of human events.
CHAPTER 5
SECTION 124 OF THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

This chapter will consider a critical section of the Doctrine and Covenants, Section 134, "Governments and Laws in General," and it will determine if these scriptural passages influence LDS thought towards conserving classical liberalism.

As has been the case thus far, the standard that will be used to measure whether classical liberalism is manifest in Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants will be Scruton's seven key elements of classical liberalism. As has also been the case thus far, the standard that will be used to measure whether classical liberalism is conserved in Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants will be Kirk's six canons of conservative thought.

The Doctrine and Covenants

To properly understand the role that the Doctrine and Covenants plays in LDS theology, it will be necessary to briefly explain what the Doctrine and Covenants is. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has succinctly described the Doctrine and Covenants as "that volume of latter-day scripture which contains selections from the revelations given to Joseph
Smith and his successors in the Presidency of the Church." Besides "selections from the revelations," the Doctrine and Covenants also contains inspired epistles, inspired instructions, articles of church beliefs, the announcement of the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, the Manifesto on plural marriage, and the Official Declaration that the priesthood is to be extended to all worthy male members. As Elder McConkie mentioned, the Doctrine and Covenants is considered canonized scripture and therefore binding upon the Church.

**Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants**

Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants is known as a "Declaration of Belief Regarding Governments and Laws in General." The declaration was prepared by President Oliver Cowdery, Assistant President of the Church. On August 17th, 1835, it was read to the general assembly of the Church and accepted as the official position of the Church in regards to earthly governments.

President Joseph Smith recorded the following in regards to Section 134:

> A general assembly of the Church of Latter-day Saints was held at Kirtland [Ohio] on the 17th of August, 1835, to take into consideration the labors of a committee appointed by a general assembly of the Church on the 24th of September, 1834, for the purpose of arranging the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of

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the Church. The names of the committee were: Joseph Smith Jun., Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, and Frederick G. Williams, who, having finished said book [the Doctrine and Covenants] according to the instructions given them, deem it necessary to call a general assembly of the Church to see whether the book be approved or not by the authorities of the Church: that it may, if approved, become a law and a rule of faith and practice to the Church.

President Oliver Cowdery then read the following article on "Governments and Laws in General," which was accepted and adopted and ordered to be printed in said book, by a unanimous vote: [Beginning of article] "That our belief with regard to earthly governments and laws in general may not be misinterpreted nor misunderstood, we have thought proper to present, at the close of this volume [the Doctrine and Covenants] our opinion concerning the same."²

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr. explained why the leadership of the Church felt the need to express the views of the Church in regards to these matters:

They [Section 134] were given after the mobbings, plunderings, the assassinations of and part of our experiences in Missouri. They were uttered by a people, who, judged by human standards, had every reason to feel that their government had failed, and that they might not hopefully and successfully look thereto for their protection.³

President Joseph Fielding Smith made this commentary, "The reason for the article on 'Government and Laws in General,' is explained in the fact that the Latter-day Saints had been accused by their bitter enemies, both in Missouri and in other places, as being opposed to law and order. They had

³Ibid., 681.
been portrayed as setting up laws in conflict with the laws of the country."

Now that a sufficient background of the Doctrine and Covenants and Section 134 has been given, let us now examine Section 134 for the purposes of this paper. Section 134 is merely 12 verses in length; therefore, the verses have been grouped into three general groupings: the proper role of government, the proper role of the citizen, and religious freedom.

The Proper Role of Government

Concerning the proper role of government, verses 1, 3, 6, and 8 of Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants reads as follows:

We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good of society. . . . We believe that all governments necessarily require civil officers and magistrates to enforce the laws of the same; and that such as will administer the law in equity and justice should be sought for and upheld by the voice of the people if a republic, or the will of the sovereign. . . . We believe that every man should be honored in his station, rulers and magistrates as such, being placed for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty; and that to the laws all men show respect and deference, as without them peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror; human laws being instituted for the express purpose of regulating our interests as individuals and nations, between man and man; and divine laws given of heaven, prescribing rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, both to

'Ibid., 681.
be answered by man to his Maker. . . .

We believe that the commission of a crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense; that murder, treason, robbery, theft, and the breach of the general peace, in all respects, should be punished according to their criminality and their tendency to evil among men, by the laws of that government in which the offense is committed; and for the public peace and tranquility all men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment.®

These verses obviously reaffirm the LDS belief in a theological rather than an anthropocentric view of human affairs. Of the seven key elements of classical liberal thought, the anthropocentric view of human affairs is the sole tenet that LDS political thought repeatedly rejects. As verse 1 of Section 134 attests, LDS thought attunes with Kirk’s first canon of conservative thought, "Belief that a divine intent rules society."

It should be noted that in the first verse the word "governments" refers to the privilege of having order and society instead of chaos and anarchy. Because the principle of government was instituted of God, it must be presupposed that governments should be good and just even as God is; hence, they are also accountable to Him. It cannot be taken that all governments are countenanced by God.

President Stephen L. Richards has written, "You can’t have a good government without good people, and goodness is

®The Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), pp. 279-80, vv. 1, 3, 6, 8.
a religious term. Much as many of our philosophers would contend that it is to be defined in terms only of ethics, and of social convention and understanding, I maintain that all true morality is supported by and finds its basis in religion." This implication of President Richards that is found in the first verse of Section 134, supports the phrase in Kirk's first canon of conservative thought that "political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems. . . . "

The third verse of Section 134 stresses the need to properly enforce appropriate laws. This verse certainly implies the principles that are advocated in the first four key elements and the sixth key element of classical liberalism, which basically emphasize the individual and his worth, natural rights, and human freedom. The third verse also hints at the fifth canon of conservative thought, in that those who are called upon to lead and serve the people must do so in equity and justice and not give in to their "will, appetites, and emotions."

The sixth verse focuses upon the principle that the governed should be supportive of those who govern inasmuch as they seek to do that which is right and just before God and the people. The sixth verse also seems to imply the great need to conserve those laws that are right and just,

"as without them peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror." This touches upon Kirk’s fifth and sixth canons of conservative thought, which emphasize the need for tradition and cautious reform.

The eighth verse of Section 134 addresses the need to punish crimes perpetrated against the rights and freedoms of others. This principle is undeniably tied to Scruton’s classical liberal key elements, which deal with the individual, freedom, and natural rights, key elements one through four, as well as key element six.

The Proper Role of the Citizen

Let us now turn to verses 2, 5, and 11 in Section 134. These verses address the subject of the role of the citizen:

We believe that no government can exist in peace except, such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life.

We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments; and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected, and should be punished accordingly; and that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience.

We believe that men should appeal to the civil law for redress of all wrongs and grievances, where personal abuse is inflicted or the right of property or character infringed, where such laws exist as will protect the same; but we believe that all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property, and the government, from all the unlawful assaults and encroachments of all persons in times of exigency.
where immediate appeal cannot be made to the laws, and relief afforded."

These three verses (2, 5, 11) read as if they came out of a classical liberal handbook. There certainly are obvious overtones of the principles of John Locke in these verses, not the least of which are the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property. These verses correlate with the first four key elements and the sixth element of classical liberalism, which basically emphasize the individual, human freedom, and natural rights.

These related verses also emphasize the principle that free exercise of conscience should rule society. This principle is embodied in the first canon of conservative thought. The precept of the right and control of property is also stated in these verses. This is a major theme of conservative thought and is emphasized in the fourth canon of conservative thought: "Persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected."

Finally, let us look at what Section 134, verses 4, 7, 9, 10, and 12 have to say about 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

"The Doctrine and Covenants, op. cit., pp. 279-80, vv. 2, 5, 11."
should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul.

We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy.

We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.

We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing; but we do not believe that any religious society has authority to try men on the right of property or life, to take from them this world’s goods, or to put them in jeopardy of either life or limb, or to inflict any physical punishment upon them. They can only excommunicate them from their society, and withdraw from them their fellowship.

We believe it just to preach the gospel to the nations of the earth, and warn the righteous to save themselves from the corruption of the world; but we do not believe it right to interfere with the bondservants, neither preach the gospel to, nor baptize them contrary to the will and wish of their masters, nor to meddle with or influence them in the least to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life, thereby jeopardizing the lives of men; such interference we believe to be unlawful and unjust, and dangerous to the peace of every government allowing human beings to be held in servitude.*

These cited verses plainly display the elemental LDS view of religious freedom. This is conclusively a classical liberal

*The Doctrine and Covenants, op. cit., pp. 279-80, vv. 4, 7, 9, 10, 12.
tendency. The seventh element of classical liberalism is "Advocacy of toleration in matters of morality and religion." Not only do these verses demonstrate a proclivity towards classical liberalism, but it also reveals an inclination towards conservatism. The first canon of conservative thought definitely states, "Political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems." These verses amply show that LDS thought, as far as religious freedom goes, is conservative classical liberalism.

Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants certainly shows a preference for classical liberalism, and by virtue of seeing that many of these classical liberal principles are embodied in LDS scripture, it insures that these principles will be conserved.

It is interesting to note that Section 134 promotes the principles of classical liberalism as the ideal to strive towards, yet it gives the latitude for other types of government to be honored and sustained as long as they promote the inalienable freedoms espoused in Section 134. This has been a very crucial approach for the LDS Church as it has become an international church.

Summary

This chapter has initially defined the role of the Doctrine and Covenants as holy writ in the LDS Church. This volume of scripture is singular in the LDS collection of
scripture because it deals with revelation received since the inception of the Church.

Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants is so important to this study because while other scripture may discuss religious doctrine, these scriptural passages set forth the Church’s belief regarding government and laws in general. These strong beliefs in support of government came at a time in history when the LDS people were faced with grave persecutions, yet the hierarchy of the Church made it clear that the Saints were to support the government and the laws in general.

Although only 12 verses in length, Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants ably covers three pertinent political tenets: the proper role of government, the proper role of the citizen, and religious freedom.

From study of Section 134, a direct link was found to Kirk’s first canon of conservative thought. This is a belief that God rules society. Support was also found for Kirk’s belief that political problems are fundamentally religious and moral problems.

These scriptural passages also reinforce Scruton’s concepts of the individual, natural rights, and human freedom. It also augments Kirk’s conviction of just and equitable administration of the law.

The eighth verse of Section 134 addresses the need to punish those who abuse the classical liberal elements of the
individual, human freedom and property rights. This supports Scruton’s key elements one, two, three, and four, as well as key element six.

Scruton’s key elements were further substantiated when we looked at what Section 134 had to say about the proper role of the citizen. The teachings about freedom of conscience and the rights of life, liberty, and property directly correlate with Scruton’s key elements one, four, and six.

These verses of scripture additionally correlate conclusively with the seventh key element of classical liberalism: freedom of religion. Much of Section 134 addresses this timely subject, which holds so much meaning in LDS thought. This also validates to a greater degree Kirk’s first canon of conservative thought: political problems are essentially religious problems.

In conclusion, Section 134 shows a marked preference for the principals of classical liberalism, yet there is leeway for any government that promotes the inalienable freedoms mentioned in Section 134.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

In approaching this thesis, I have attempted to be as objective as possible in comparing LDS political thought to conservative classical liberalism. The areas that have been researched are authoritative and give a fair representation of the position of the Church. These three areas are (1) the First Vision and the preparatory events that brought about its culmination, (2) three conservative tenets as taught in the Book of Mormon, and (3) analysis of Section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants, scriptural verses that pinpoint the LDS attitude toward government and laws. The research in these three areas has clearly shown that the Church holds classical liberalism as the political philosophical ideal and seeks to conserve it. The standard against which these three areas were measured—namely, Scruton's seven key elements of classical liberalism and Kirk's six canons of conservative thought—conclusively bear this out, as was manifested at the end of each chapter.

The Church's only deviation of any consequence from the classical liberal standard was the exception to the anthropocentric view of human affairs. Instead, LDS thought embraces a theological view of human affairs.
Pertaining to the conservative standard, the only deviation in LDS thought was the exception to the belief in classism. Instead, LDS thought incorporates the belief in the equality of men before God and the law. However, these exceptions are relatively minor when considering the whole.

Perhaps no quotation found during my research better illustrates the Church’s propensity towards conserving classical liberal thought than does the following statement by Ezra Taft Benson, current president of the Church:

I am a libertarian. I want to be known as a libertarian and as a constitutionalist in the tradition of the early James Madison—father of the Constitution. Labels change and perhaps in the old tradition I would be considered one of the original whigs. The new title I would wear today is that of conservative—though in its original British connotation the term liberal fits me better than the original meaning of the word, conservative.

To show how labels can change or be stolen, a liberal today believes in greater government intervention and less personal freedom for the people, which is practically the opposite of what the old liberals believed years ago.

It is practically impossible to group American political beliefs today under two or three labels because there are so many shades. Yet, if necessity demanded you would probably end up with the modern labels of "conservative, middle-of-the-roader and liberal," with the liberal sympathetic with much if not most of the goals of the socialist—government ownership and operation of the essential means of production and distribution of goods. Under this breakdown, as a lover of liberty, I would have to be at the opposite end of the modern day liberal. In other words I would be a conservative—yes even a conservative, conservative.

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President Benson’s statement is indicative of the philosophy that is inherent in LDS doctrine. After diligent research and because LDS political attitude falls so closely to my standard of measurement as set forth by Roger Scruton and Russell Kirk, I am convinced the thesis of this paper—that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints conserves classical liberal thought in its political approach—is valid.
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