

Senator Edward W. Brooke at BYU

“A few heads turned on campus,” noted the BYU Daily Universe recently, “as a familiar figure—President Oaks—strolled through Wilkinson Center with . . . the nation’s only black senator, Edward Brooke, who came to speak at a Forum assembly, to tell BYU students of living conditions in South Africa and to bridge a gap between his race and the Mormons.” Senator Brooke has provided Dialogue with the text of his remarks, delivered January 12, 1978, from which these concluding remarks have been extracted.

WE IN THIS GREAT FIELDHOUSE can and should be united in our hope that a sense of justice and of equity for all peoples can come to characterize the situation in South Africa. Yet, I fully recognize that there are special circumstances that perhaps would create an obstacle in the minds of many in this fieldhouse regarding a sense of mission for bringing about equal rights for all South Africans. You and I know that the relationship between black Americans and Mormons in general is not all that it could or should be. This is distressing to me personally, for I find that the two groups have much in common. Black Americans and Mormons have a common heritage of persecution at various points in their history in this country. Black Americans have been told, as was Joseph Smith by Martin Van Buren, that “Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you.” We know what these words meant to Mormons, and I fervently hope that Mormons understand what words similar to these have meant to us.

There is also a great similarity in the depth of spiritual sensitivity shown by both groups. Black Americans and the Mormons have sought solace, comfort and strength from their spiritual and ancestral roots. Both groups have been sustained in times of adversity by their seeking to know the will of God and to carry it out. And both groups have found in their religious moorings the guides to social and political action.

Yet, even though these affinities exist, we know that Black Americans and Mormons have only begun the process of understanding that can result in greater empathy for each other. And realistically, we must admit that the road ahead for the two groups will be long and, at times, a rough one.

In the microcosm, one can say that we have some similar paths to tread, as do the whites and blacks of South Africa. Fortunately, we live in a society, and both groups have contributed to making it a society where political freedom and social equality are goals that are generally agreed upon, if not at all times honored. Thus the environment within which a continuing reconciliation between Black Americans and the Mormons can take place is much more conducive to that process than is the case in South Africa.

It would be presumptuous and inappropriate for me to insist that the

practices of the Mormon Church be altered to fit my preferences. That is a decision for you and your church leaders to make by the well-accepted principles through which change has been initiated in your church. Yet, it is important to understand that this obstacle to better understanding, to greater appreciation of the decent qualities of both groups, places a special burden upon you and me. For the temptation is great to let this obstacle be the justification for alienation or indifference between the two groups. It should not be. Only if we overcome that temptation and actively seek to join hands in causes in which both groups find merit, will we come to understand and appreciate each other more.

One such cause, I believe, is that of opposition to the practice of apartheid in South Africa. That system of discrimination is anathema to all we hold dear as Americans. It is contrary to the belief we hold in common today of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. It is wrong in both concept and design. It lacks an ethical or moral base. And all Americans, regardless of race or religious persuasion, should be united in opposition to that practice in that country, or similar practices in any country or even in our own country.

I have tried to be candid today in my discussion of Africa, especially the situation in South Africa, and the special relevance it has for us in attendance today. I have done so not to be controversial, but out of a belief that there are times for simple, straightforward talk and this is one of those times.

It has been my privilege over the years of my political life to be associated with many members of your faith in good causes. I have come to love and respect men and women such as George and Lenore Romney, Wallace Bennett, Jake Garn, Orrin Hatch and Frank Moss, with whom I have been so engaged. And, in developing that love and respect, I have come to wish fervently for a closer association between the Mormons and my people. I hope and pray that what I have said here today will be conducive to helping bring that about. We have so much to offer each other and by the will of God, we will overcome whatever obstacles are in our way to doing this. At this annual time of new resolve, the establishing and strengthening of the bonds of brotherhood between us is an undertaking worthy of our constant attention and effort. Thank you.

He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill.
Our antagonist is our helper.

-EDMUND BURKE