Unity in Humanity Interfaith Celebration 2022
Online Conference
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Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

Jill Van Haren: All right, so our last speaker, I'd like to welcome Denver.

Denver C. Snuffer, Jr. He lives in Sandy, Utah. He was admitted to practice law in 1980 in Utah and remains a practicing attorney. He was a convert to the LDS faith in 1973 when he was 19 years old, and he was excommunicated from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints exactly 40 years later for writing a book called *Passing the Heavenly Gift*. During those 40 years, he served on the Stake High Council [and] taught Gospel Doctrine and priesthood classes for 21 years. He's the author of many books, including *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord Through the Veil.* Welcome, Denver.

Denver Snuffer: How are you doing, Jill?

I've been listening to everyone's talk before now, and while I would use a different vocabulary, much of what got said would be something that could be said in *my* faith, just using a different vocabulary.

There are only a handful of predominant religions in the world. But to a believer, I don't think the numbers matter. The truth—if someone's got what they believe to be truth—is something that people like to hold on, even if there are "few who find it," to quote Christ. The numbers in various predominant religions run something like this:

- There's a total of 2.38 billion ~~Catholics~~ in the world, or excuse me, Christians in the world, of which 1.3 billion are Catholic, and 1 billion are Protestant.
- There are 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, but surprisingly, 1.5 billion out of that are Sunni, and only 270 million are estimated to be Shia.
- 1.2 billion Hindus,
- 506 million Buddhists,
- 26.4 million Sikhs,
- Mormons slightly outnumber the number of Jews in the world at 16.6 million Mormons (nominally Mormon) and 15.8 million Jews, and
- Daoists there are 8.7 million.

I belong to a small group of people that believe in Mormonism (and Mormonism is expansive in the sense that anyone that believes in the Book of Mormon is regarded as Mormon). But I don't belong to the largest sect of that, which is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (I did once; Jill mentioned I was excommunicated.) I'm part of a small group—maybe a few thousand people—trying to recapture the original, dramatic, living religion that Joseph Smith taught at the time that Joseph Smith was alive and restoring what's regarded as the "original religion that goes back to the time of Adam." Part of that religion is belief in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon has a verse in it that says this:

> *For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore, we see that the Lord doth counsel in his wisdom, according to that which is just and true.* (Alma 15:13 RE)

From that verse, I take it that no matter where you go, what nation you're involved with, what tongue is spoken, what vocabulary gets applied, that all the religions that there are in the world have some relation to God and that God intended for these diverse belief systems to be out there, and that if you, as part of your belief system, have something that is true and you have an opportunity to offer that to me, that I ought to be willing to accept it, that truth belongs in one aggregated whole and not splintered as it is, but it's up to us to undertake the effort to do that gathering.

There's pressure on every religion to change, and that pressure begins immediately. Before Mohammed was dead, the religion was under pressure to change; after he was dead, there was pressure to change it before it was reduced to writing. By the time it was reduced to writing, there were multiple forms of the Quran. The, umm… Wars were fought, and books were burned in order to bring Islam into a unified, single text. That mirrors what happened in Christianity with the fights that occurred in the second and third century of Christianity in trying to settle on what was the correct bundle of beliefs and warring factions, fighting one another, until finally there became one universal or Catholic Christian faith, and it predominated.

Forces and arguments that apply to religions today suggest that religious beliefs are outdated. There are arguments that they're harmful to the individual, or they're harmful to society, or they're an impediment to the progress of science or humanity. And in recent decades, there's been a precipitous decline in the West of biblical moral values, and that's been mirrored by similar declines in the East. This decline has paralleled the rapid escalation of culture shifts, such as relativism, and materialism, individualism, and secularism. These have caused all religions in general to become increasingly marginalized throughout the world.

Since the Industrial Revolution, social change has been initiated increasingly by the youth. Economic[s] changed the opportunities that children were afforded because of the Industrial Revolution, and that separated children from their parents' professions. Before then, a butcher's children grew up to be a butcher; a carpenter's children grew up to be carpenters; brick masons produced brick masons; and so on. But the revolution allowed new opportunities for the children. And they separated not only from their parents physically but also, increasingly, culturally and religiously.

But it's a biblical curse to be led by children, and since World War II, children have been at the leading edge of social change and religious change. And an observer of the upheaval wrote a song about what was underway in 1963. He wrote it because of what he perceived to be the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times that was then underway. It was written in September and October of 1963:

> Come gather 'round people

Wherever you roam,
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown,
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone,
For the times they are a-changin'.

And more directly, a verse later:

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout all the land,
And don't criticize
What you can't understand.
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command,
For your old road is rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand,
For the times they are a-changin'.

…As the present now
Will later be passed,
The order is rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now will later be last,
For the times they are a-changin'.
(The Times They Are A-Changin' by Bob Dylan)

That was true in the post-World War II baby-boom generation. But modern social media and modern communications and social networks have increasingly skewed the development of social change into the hands of the youth. And not to be left on the side, there are a lot of deliberate forces who have studied social change who interject themselves directly into the process of leading that social change from behind nameless, faceless walls where they interject into the stream ideas that are increasingly amoral, increasingly selfish, self-centered, sexually deviant, destructive of the family, destructive of religious traditions and religious histories that we want to hold on to. As Kevin talked about his return to an earlier form of religion because of his discouragement from what he saw in Christianity, so likewise, the social media change is encouraging everyone to abandon the mores and the anchor that the religious values they were raised with provided to them.

John Lennon wrote a song that was based upon a book that was written by Timothy Leary who paraphrased from the Tibet[an] *Book of the Dead*. And so, ideas from Buddhism crept into the social change underway in the 1960s in the form of the Buddhist ideas that infected the lyrics of John Lennon. Later, all of the Beatles attended a lecture in August of 1967 by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at the Hilton Hotel in London. Afterwards, they met with him privately; they were favorably impressed, and they went up to Bangor in north Wales for a weekend seminar. While the Beatles were in Wales at the seminar of the Maharaja, Brian

Epstein (the one who had managed the Beatles) died, and the death of the Beatles' manager (coinciding with the transcendental meditation instruction) no doubt had a great deal to do with the Beatles' decision to move to India in February of ~~1987~~ [1968] for several months of training. While there, it was one of the most productive songwriting periods of the band, but it ended badly when the Maharishi was accused of inappropriate sexual misconduct. Cultural currents of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism (and in John Lennon's case, Atheism) all merged into the music of the Beatles. And an onslaught of cultural drift from social media giants today is also spreading a new wave of innovation, confusion, irreligion, mixed religion, and we find ourselves in the midst of materialism, hedonism, sexual confusion, and intolerance predominating in the new values that are attempting to replace the old ones that are based on the traditional religions.

Well, this conference is supposed to be comparing notes, so to speak, across religious faiths. All lives are temporary; we learn from the past what the dead leave us in writing, song, architecture, and social structure. But we will soon be joining our dead ancestors. And the question arises: What are we gonna leave to benefit our posterity who will have arrived after us when we've departed from this temporary place? Why would we choose to leave something? What could possibly be the most important thing we can bequeath? I'd suggest that words of truth resonate across every culture, across every religion, across every language. They're not only the most valuable thing that we can leave behind, but they're also the most enduring. Truth outlasts brick and mortar. It endures beyond empires, it moves nations, it gives meaning to life, and it raises our eyesight above the ground and lets us peer into eternity.

Kevin mentioned the star theology of the Blackfeet. Star theology is very much a part of a *true religion*. Ultimately, we hope to build a temple, and in the temple, I expect there will be a great deal that memorializes in architecture a **true** star theology.

I want to thank everyone who's participated from their vantage point in giving us what they have given us. I believe that God is knowable. I believe that it's part of the quest of meaning in this life for us to seek to know God and to obtain understanding directly from Him and not derivatively simply from books or from the past—but to let a religion live in us, in which God's presence through us is manifest in the earth by the things we say, the things we do, the things we think.

Now, I was told to leave time for questions. And so I want to do that. But I also want to point out that there's a point in the Old Testament where the patriarchal father over the twelve tribes of Israel is in the process of giving blessings to prophesy what is going to befall his posterity on to the end of time. And his oldest son, Reuben, was given a blessing, which says, *Reuben, you, my first born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity, and the excellence of power. Unstable as water, you shall not [prosper]* (Genesis 12:20 RE). Now, the way I have read that most often in the past is that he's telling him that Reuben and his posterity is gonna be too unstable in their convictions and their way of life to prosper. But recently, I've had a change of mind. And I think what he's saying is, if you are unstable as water, you will not prosper. And I think that admonition/that warning/that counsel to the son, Reuben, is applicable to all of us. And that when we allow our religious convictions to become unstable, unanchored in the solidity of what is enduring and eternal,

then we become incapable of prospering. And so I would end by saying, be true and believing to your faiths, to the traditions you've held that are true; be solid as a rock in resisting the winds of compromise and doubt, because they surely are upon us.

Oh, there's one question I see here (I've called up the questions), asking about what song it was. It's "Tomorrow Never Knows," a song that got its title not from the book but from one of Ringo Starr's malapropisms: "a hard day's night," "eight days a week"... These are just things that Ringo Starr would say. And the title of John Lennon's song was "Tomorrow Never Knows," 'cuz Ringo would utter that. And it's one of the most innovative songs that The Beatles introduced—the last song on the Revolver album—and it would point the way to where that band was headed.

Okay, so here's a question that says, "If Joseph Smith was oriented to the religion of Adam, will it not require us to grow in understanding of what Adam understood?" Yes, absolutely. Without any doubt, it will take a great deal to make the leap across from where we are now into a religion that is far more comprehensive and far more oriented towards nature and eternity. The stars… When you look at the stars, for example, you're literally looking back billions of years (just to the naked eye). And so, being quiet and going out at night and looking up at the star fields is one way to project yourself back into eternity—billions and billions of years—visually, because they are… What you're seeing now is something from the long-distant past. And it's right there available for you to behold and for you to meditate upon. And it's a way to connect you up by being still with a much greater consciousness that fills the immensity of space and originates from God Himself.

So, another question: "How do you suggest someone moves from connecting with God through Scripture to connecting with God directly through experience or spirit?" Every bit of Scripture that you read, every profound idea that you encounter has an affect on you. And if you slow down and you allow it to sink deeply into your heart and your mind, and if you consider it carefully, the idea will eventually occur to you that you're not separated in time and space from that which is timeless and eternal, but that you, too, are part of that.

There's a sermon given by King Benjamin (in the book of Mosiah of the Book of Mormon) in which he points out that God is sustaining you by His power, from moment to moment, by lending you breath so that you might live and move and do according to your own will. What that statement by King Benjamin tells you is that the very breath that you breathe connects you to God because He's *lending* it to you. Without that connection directly and immediately with God, you wouldn't be able to breathe. Therefore, there's an immediacy and a *familiarity* between you and God that exists innately. How you connect is to begin to pay attention to that.

And then there's this question, "What is one of the most important truths you ponder throughout the day? Where do you spend your time thinking and pondering?" Well, there's a lot of things that have to be done. There's a lot of things that are currently underway or that will shortly be underway that require careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts. I contemplate about the potential for failure. I contemplate the potential for my own weakness and my own inability. I contemplate about how odd the responses are by those who are both opposed to and those that are over-eager with what God is up to and doing

today—and about how hard it is to cut the middle line and to keep everything in balance so that it proceeds in an orderly and steady and careful fashion. I worry about my own inadequacies and inabilities, and I worry about the people around me. I've pondered about all the illnesses that I have seen, the deaths of friends, the temporary nature of our existence here, and about how we really do need to take carefully and use the time carefully because it is extraordinarily valuable, the time we have here in mortality.

Thank you.

Jill Van Haren: Thank you so much, Denver. Along those same lines, I had a question. Thinking about mortality—and with Gayle referencing, you know, in terms of her understanding of reincarnation and then taking upon a body until we get it right, and then she expounded on what that meant—but I just wonder if you can tell us what your thoughts are on the purpose of coming here *into* these physical bodies and what we're to be doing with our time that you were just mentioning that's so precious.

Denver Snuffer: Everyone here is to be added upon as a result of what happens to us in mortality. And it doesn't matter if your life is short and brutal or if your life is long. Everyone who comes into a mortal body in this sphere gets added upon. We will depart here, and we will go to a place where there aren't *bodies* in *this* form, where we'll be given a chance to think back upon what we experienced. And if it was harsh and brutal and short and mean, that will give us a chance to meditate upon the meaning of those things and why they are negative and why there ought to be something better. If your life is long and successful, you'll have a chance to reflect back upon what good you did, if any. And what more good you could have done, but you failed to do, if you were self-indulgent. We are in the process of gaining understanding, light and truth, and sometimes that comes at the expense of hurting others. And sometimes that comes at the value of helping others. But everything that goes on here will not be forfeited; it will be kept. And we will move from—as the Scriptures put it, "worlds without end"—from sphere to sphere, experience to experience, over whatever time it takes, however many lives it may take, in order to be added on so that we can become like what our Scriptures define as "the prototype of the saved man." That prototype of the saved man is Jesus Christ because death could not hold Him in the grave. The grave took Him, and He reclaimed His body, and He ascended into Heaven because He is the prototype of the saved man. And eventually, we are to arrive at that same end—but it may take worlds without end. We're here along a long, long path—an eternal path—to gain experience while we are here temporarily and to learn.

Thank you.

Jill Van Haren: Thank you so much for that last question, Denver. Thank you so much for coming.