

Church News

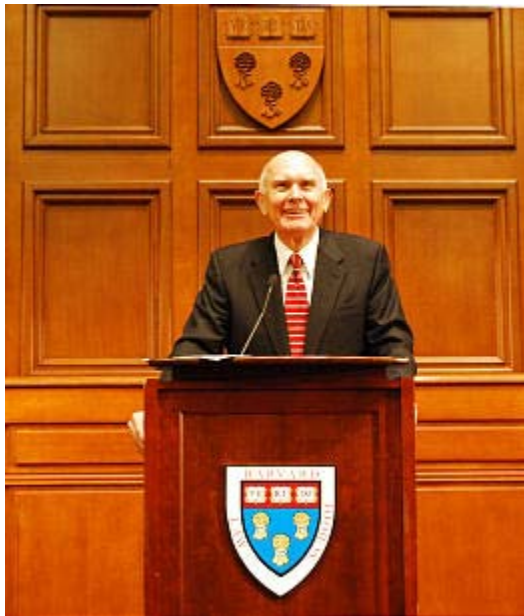
Elder Oaks addresses Harvard Law School's Latter-day Saints Student Association

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Colleges and universities have largely abandoned teaching religion and are actively pushing religious belief to the margins of society, Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said Feb. 26 during an address at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Mass. ([Click here for complete text of Elder Oaks' remarks.](#))



Whitney Cutler for the Deseret News

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve spoke at Harvard Law School on Feb. 26.

"Despite most colleges' and universities' founding purpose to produce clergymen and to educate in the truths taught in their chapels, most have now abandoned their role of teaching religion," he said. "With but few exceptions, colleges and universities have become value-free places where attitudes toward religion are neutral at best.

"Some faculty and administrators are powerful contributors to the forces that are driving religion to the margins of American society. Students and other religious people who believe in the living reality of God and moral absolutes are being marginalized."



Matt Hutchins/Harvard Law Record

Elder Oaks' Harvard speech in the was sponsored by the law school's Latter-day Saints Student Association. Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, the faculty adviser for the LDS student group as well as a devout Catholic and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, introduced him.

Fundamentals of faith

In addition to talking about how higher education is antagonizing faith, he spoke in plain terms about foundational pillars of LDS faith such as the nature of God, the purpose of life and personal revelation.



Whitney Cutler for the Deseret News

"My object," he said, "is to illuminate several premises and ways of thinking that are at the root of some misunderstandings about our doctrine and practice. …

"My first fundamental premise of our faith is that God is real and so are eternal truths and values not provable by current scientific methods. These ideas are inevitably linked. Like other

believers, we proclaim the existence of the ultimate lawgiver, God our Eternal Father, and the existence of moral absolutes. We reject the moral relativism that is becoming the unofficial creed of much of American culture."



Matt Hutchins/Harvard Law Record

Speaking in the 300-seat Ames Courtroom filled to capacity largely by students from Harvard's law and divinity schools, Elder Oaks articulated the foundational LDS belief that earthly existence is the second of three distinct phases all mankind will pass through.

"Our theology begins with the assurance that we lived as spirits before we came to this earth," he said. "It affirms that this mortal life has a purpose. And it teaches that our highest aspiration is to become like our Heavenly Parents, which will empower us to perpetuate our family relationships throughout eternity."



Whitney Cutler for the Deseret News

Furthering his philosophical foray into life's purpose, Elder Oaks enumerated that traditional marriage and gender are inherent in life's divinely designed purpose.

He said: "There are many political, legal, and social pressures for changes that de-emphasize the importance or change the definition of marriage, confuse gender, or homogenize the differences between men and women that are essential to accomplish God's great Plan of Happiness. Our eternal perspective sets us against such changes."



Whitney Cutler for the Deseret News

Near the end of his remarks, Elder Oaks explained why personal revelation is so important to all Church members.

"Some wonder how members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accept a modern prophet's teachings to guide their personal lives, something that is unusual in most religious traditions," he said. "Our answer to the charge that Latter-day Saints follow their leaders out of 'blind obedience' is personal revelation. We respect our leaders and presume inspiration in their leadership of the Church and in their teachings. But we are all privileged and encouraged to confirm their teachings by prayerfully seeking and receiving revelatory confirmation directly from God."

Questions and answers

After speaking for approximately 45 minutes, Elder Oaks answered questions from the audience on a wide range of topics including California's Proposition 8, the nature of adoptive families and how to gain a personal witness of the truthfulness of the restored gospel.



Matt Hutchins/Harvard Law Record

Students line up to ask Elder Oaks questions.

Ben DeVan, a student at the Harvard Divinity School, asked Elder Oaks what made Mormon revelation different from revelation received by Muslim founder Muhammad and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science movement.

"Why should we believe that what Joseph Smith said is true as opposed to these others?" said DeVan, a Christian from Atlanta.

"If you want to know, go to the ultimate source," Elder Oaks replied. "The answer to that question can only come from God Himself. That's what I encourage anyone who asks me about it. ... I can't promise when it will happen with anyone, but I can promise it will happen."

When asked by another student from Harvard Divinity School whether Mormons considered themselves to be evangelical Christians, Elder Oaks said, "In many organizational things that they do, we are not identified, and so it's a hard question to answer. We sympathize with some things, but if a person were describing the religious landscape, I don't think we'd want to be listed in the religious landscape as evangelical Christianity. ... And from what I read about some of the pronouncements from some of their leaders, I think that feeling would be mutual."

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Carrie Sheffield contributed to this article.

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