

DISCOURSE

By Elder John Taylor, Bowery, Sunday Afternoon, Aug. 30, 1857.

[REPORTED BY J. V. LONG.]

I did not expect to be called upon to address you this afternoon, but I always feel ready to speak of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God whenever I am called upon.

Br. Kimball said he would like to hear me say something about the RIGHTS of 'Mormonism.' The rights of 'Mormonism' are so varied and extensive that it would be very difficult to speak of them all in one discourse.

We have the right to live. That is 'Mormonism.'

We have the right to eat and drink and to pursue that course that we may think proper, so long as we do not interfere with other persons' rights.

We have a right to live free and unmolested, and there is no law, human or divine, that rightfully has a right, if you please, to interfere with us.

[Blest the bread.]

We have a right to think, and we have a right, after we have thought, to express our thoughts, and to write them and to publish them. We possess as many rights and as much liberty in relation to this as any other persons, and there is no law, human or divine, that can rightfully rob us of those liberties nor trample upon our rights.

We have a right to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and no man legally, in this land, has a right to interfere with us for so doing.

We have a right to believe in and practice as we please in relation to matrimony. We have a right to choose whether we will have one wife or twenty, and there is no law of the land that can legally interfere with us, neither is there a man that I have met with, that professed to be a man at all, that can say that we are acting illegally.

We have a right to secure the favor of God, and we have rights as the citizens of the Kingdom of God.

We have rights upon earth and we have rights in heaven; we have rights that affect us and our posterity and progenitors, worlds without end, and they are rights that no man can interfere with.

We have a right to our own Governor, as Br. Kimball says; we have a right to our own Judges, we have a right to make our own laws and to regulate our own affairs.

These are some of the rights that belong to us, but when you come to talk about rights, they are so various, complicated and extensive that it is difficult, without reflection, to enumerate them.—They exist with us here and all around us, and they are rights that affect us, our progenitors and posterity, worlds without end.

But in regard to some of the things with which we are more intimately connected, we have our individual, our social and political rights, so far as existing here as a people is concerned. I do not know but that you will think that I am for sticking to my text pretty well, however I will try as well as I can to do justice to it.

If we look at the very foundation of government we may inquire, how were governments formed? Who organized them and whence did they obtain their power? It is a subject for deep thought and reflection and one that very few have understood, nor is it very easy to define definitely the rights of man politically, socially and nationally.

Now I will suppose there was no government in the world, but that we were thrown right back into the primitive state, and that we had to form a government to regulate ourselves, what would be the position? Why, the strong man would intrude upon the weak, even as a strong animal intrudes upon a weaker, taking from it its rights, for that is a natural animal propensity that exists in all creatures as well as in man.

How was society organized? Upon natural principles. I am not now speaking about God and his government but upon the rights of man. If there were a few bullies in the land and we had to organize a government anew the people would combine to protect themselves against them, to protect themselves against those who had injured them, that would rob them of their labor, of their cattle, of their grain or of anything they might have.

What would be the result of this course? It would be that a combination would exist that would organize to protect themselves, that the weak might be protected in his rights, that the feeble might not be trampled under foot. This would be the natural construction and organization of society.

Very well, when society became large and extensive and could not convene in a general assembly to represent themselves, they would send their representatives, who would combine to represent their interests by delegation or proxy.

Who would those individuals represent? They would represent the parties of that neighborhood, of that state, of that county or district of country that sent them, would they not?

And what would you think of those men that were sent if they attempted to rule over those who sent them? Why, you would say, come back here, you rascals, and we will send others; we sent you to represent us, and now you are combining to put your feet upon our necks.

This has been the case ever since governments were organized, and hence have arisen governors, kings and emperors. They have generally contrived to get the reins of power into their own hands, and through the cunning of priest-craft and king-craft they have generally managed to bring the people under their feet and to trample upon their rights.

Such has been the case in the nations of Europe and Asia. It is in fact the history of the world.

By what right have any kings obtained their dominions? Has it been from God? No. Has

it been from the people? No. How did they get in possession of their kingdoms?

How was France organized? How England? How Germany? And how were other states and nations organized?

They have been organized because men usurped power, brought into subjection other men, trampled underfoot their rights and made slaves of them and made them carry out their laws, do their pleasure without any peculiar interest in the things that were done.

And those men, instead of governing the people according to the principles of righteousness and truth, have generally made yokes and put upon their necks and trampled them into the dust, so much so that in many of the countries of Europe you cannot travel but you must have a passport, and every little upstart has a right to examine it and to stop you if he likes.

You have to ask a right to stop in cities, and they will prevent you when they please, and not only strangers but their own citizens, and there are many European cities now, where, if a father was to receive his own son into his house, if he had been absent, without the permission of the police, he would be subject to a heavy fine.

It is the governors of the people that bring them into subjection in this manner, until the people think that kings and priests have rights, and they have no rights; until they think that presidents, governors and kings are the persons who possess certain inalienable rights, and that no one has a right to interfere with them.

Kings, presidents and priests combined govern men, body and soul. The first fetter them in their bodies and liberties and the latter in their minds and consciences, and the human family, instead of being free, are literally and almost universally in a state of vassalage.

At the time of the reformation men began to break off their political fetters and to claim their rights both politically and religiously. Many people talk of that event as a church concern alone, it was as much a political matter as anything else.

The causes that prompted them to take the steps they did were both religious and political; the benefits accruing only very limited and partial; still it was a resistance to tyranny and oppression.

The kings that sustained the reformers did so merely upon political grounds, and not that they cared for their religion.

What made people come from the old countries to this land? It was because they were oppressed in England, in Germany and in other states, and they fled from that power which sought to bind chains upon their necks.

And why were they determined to flee from that government into this country? Because the mother country tried to make them subject to institutions and laws that they were unwilling to submit to, and because she wanted to put yokes upon their necks.

Then the mother country sent armed men over here and sought to enforce their armed minions upon the people, but they would not submit to it, for it was on that very account that they had fled from their mother country.

Such were the feelings of your fathers, and these were the things they talked about a few years ago, and on account of the encroachments of the parent government they took up the sword and declared that they would live or die free men.

What was that freedom for which they contended? Just what I said a few minutes ago; it was the right to think, the right to speak, the right to act, the right to legislate and the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and the right to do their own business without being interfered with.

We have come here to this land as citizens of the United States, and why have we come?—Because there were men who sought to rob us of our rights and because there was not sufficient purity and justice in the government to protect us in our rights; because magistrates, constables, judges, governors, presidents and officers of state either directly or indirectly drove us or suffered us to be driven, suffered us to be dispossessed of that which legally belonged to us.

Who are we? We are men made in the image of God, possessing the rights of other men. We have turned this desert into a flourishing field, and the desert has blossomed as the rose and God has blessed our labors.

And who have we interfered with?

Have we gone over to the States and interfered with them?

Have we gone over to California and interfered with them?

Have we gone to Oregon?

Have we gone to New Mexico?

Have we gone to any State and interfered with their rights, their laws, their immunities or their privileges?

I say we have not.

Well, then, what right has anybody to interfere with us? O, because they have got the power!—That is, there is no right to it, there is no legal authority to it; there is no more right to it than there is in a bully and a blackguard insulting a little, weak man because he has the power to do so. They have just the same authority that a large ox has to goad a small one because he has the power.

They dare not interfere with some nations as they are doing with us; they dare not interfere with England or France for fear of the consequences, and it is nothing but a principle of nasty, little meanness that would try to interfere with us and try to make you believe that they are the lords of creation. Great God! who are they? Poor pusillanimous cursers, that have not manhood nor gentility enough about them to be gentlemen. They have just the same right that the highwayman has to put his hands into your pockets and take out your money.

Who led us here? Not the Christians of the United States, nor their governors, legislators nor presidents. Who provided for us? Did the

government of the United States? Verily, no. Who built the houses in this city? Who made the improvements around it and through this Territory? Did the inhabitants of the United States? No; but they have done all that lay in their power to discourage us in every possible way.

Who have fed you and clothed you? Your own right hands, your own energy and industry, by the blessing of the Almighty.

Then by what right and by what authority, in the name of God and in the name of every principle of right, honor and integrity, have they a right to interfere with us?

'O,' say they, 'the land belongs to us'. Ah! indeed, and I wonder where you got it from? 'O,' we got it by right of treaty with Mexico.' And whence did the Mexicans obtain it? Who treated with those Indians? Did they pay them for it? 'No, but they are good Christians and the Indians are poor savages, and what right have savages to land?'

Where are their deeds and their right of possession? Will anybody tell me? 'O, we took it because we had the power, and the United States took it from Mexico because they had the power.'

It is just like a lot of boys playing together, and one of them steals the other's marbles because he has the power, and then another steals them and calls them his because he is a little more powerful than the other; or when one man meets another and robs him of what he has, then two more go and take from him what he has stolen from the first one.

The simple fact in the case is they say, "you are left upon our land and therefore you must be in subjection to us, and we must rule over you. But even on this principle they are at fault; for we, if there is any glory in the conquest, sent five hundred men, and possess equal rights with them as American citizens.

In speaking upon this subject once before, I showed you that by the Constitution and the very genius of our government that they had no right to interfere with us.

Again, on the common principle of justice, where did they get their rights to interfere with us? They did not bring us here, nor cultivate our farms; they did not send us either school-masters or priests to teach us, and we are not indebted to them for anything else.

I would like to know what right they had to interfere with us.

They have not a right upon religious grounds, for they kicked us out because of our religion, and consequently they have nothing to do with that.

It is not because we have learned any morals of them, for we got our morals from a superior source, we have not learned either our religion or morality from them.

We have not had them to cultivate our farms nor to build our houses; they have not done anything for us.

In relation to the land, I will suppose they did steal it, which they did; they obtained it because they had the power, and Mexico obtained it upon the same principle; the United States made a quarrel with the latter nation because they knew they could bring them into subjection, and they intended to capitulate for California before they began the quarrel, and they took it upon those grounds.

But that is righteousness—that is purity—truth and holiness—in the eyes of a corrupt and mighty nation.

We have got a little place that nobody else would live upon, and I will warrant that if any other people had been here, half of them would have died, the last two years, of starvation; but they cannot let us alone.

This is the greatness, this their magnanimity, and this is the compassion manifested by the fathers of our great country. Of course we must feel patriotic; we cannot but feel strongly attached to such a kind, such a benevolent, such a merciful government as we have got! How can we feel otherwise?

They would take from us the right to live, and then it would be in their hearts to sweep us from the face of the earth, but they cannot do it.

There is no right associated with this matter; there is no justice about it. There are old rights and privileges the people used to have, and we have our rights. In the first place, we have a God that lives and he will help us to take care of them, to maintain and to preserve them.

Then look at this in whichever light you please, you cannot change it, we are citizens of the United States and have a right to the soil, if they did steal it.

I am ashamed of being associated with such things, but we cannot help ourselves; we are a part of the people and we had to partake of their evil deeds.

When we came here we came as America citizens and we had just as much right to be here as any other American citizens in the United States.

They have made a religious pretext to rob us of the right of pre-emption; that is because we have more wives than one.

This is the course they have pursued towards us.

Have they a right to force upon us judges and send officers under a military escort? The very act says they are afraid of something.

Have they a right to send those men to rule over us without us having a voice in the matter? I say they have not, according to the laws which exist among men; they have not according to the principles of justice and truth; they have not according to the principles upon which this government is established; but they want to rule over us contrary to the principles of the government, and as you have expressed it, you have a right to withstand it.

God be thanked, there are not as many sneaks here as there are in the old country; men here dare think and speak.

Well, these are our feelings and some of our

rights; but I will speak to you of other rights, for we have greater rights that I have not yet touched upon.

[Blest the sacramental cup.]

I speak of those other things because they are inalienable rights that belong to men, to us as American citizens, to us as citizens of the world, but there are other rights, other grounds upon which we claim these rights.

The Lord God has spoken in these last days, he has revealed the fulness of the everlasting gospel, he has restored that gospel in all its fulness, blessings, richness, power and glory; he has put us in possession of the principles of eternal life and he has established his kingdom upon the earth, and we are the legitimate heirs and inheritors of this kingdom. He has established his priesthood, revealed his authority, his government and his laws, and the grand reason why there is union and power here, and nowhere else, is because it emanated from God.

When we talk over those other things, we are under a lesser law that we can any of us keep, and that we have kept. We are not rebelling against the United States, neither are we resisting the Constitution of the United States, but it is wicked and corrupt usurpers that are oppressing us and that would take our rights from us.

To speak of our rights as citizens of the kingdom of God we then speak of another law, we then move in a more exalted sphere, and it is of these things we have a right to speak.

God has established his kingdom, he has rolled back that cloud that has overspread the moral horizon of the world; he has opened the heavens, revealed the fulness of the everlasting gospel, organized his kingdom according to the pattern that exists in the heavens, and he has placed certain keys, powers and oracles in our midst, and we are the people of God, we are his government; the priesthood upon the earth is the legitimate government of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth.

Some people ask, 'what is priesthood?' I answer, it is the legitimate rule of God whether in the heavens or on the earth, and it is the only legitimate power that has a right to rule upon the earth, and when the will of God is done on earth as it is in the heavens no other power will bear rule.

Then, if we look at it in this point of view, we are standing in a peculiar position, we are standing here as the representatives of God and the only true representatives he has upon the earth, for there is not another power nor government upon the earth that acknowledges God for their ruler or head but this; there is not another.

Why did we come here? We came here because the people drove us and because the Lord would have us come here, for it was necessary we should come into our secret places and hide ourselves till the indignation of the Lord be overpast, until the Lord has shaken our enemies by the nape of the neck, as it were, until nations and empires are overthrown.

We came to serve our God, to a place where we could more fully keep his commandments, where we could fulfil his behests upon the earth. This is the reason why we came here.

Well then, if we are the only people that God acknowledges as a nation, have not we a right to the privileges which we enjoy? Who owns the gold, the silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills? God. Who, then, has a right to appoint rulers? None but him, or the man that he appoints.

Who has ruled the earth? Who has borne sway? Man, who by the power of the sword has got possession of thrones, powers and dominions, and has waded through scenes of blood.

You read history and what is it? A history of the depopulation of the nations, brought on by the overthrow of empires, and through the tyranny and ambition of wicked men, who have waded through seas of blood in order to possess themselves of that power which they now enjoy.

If we go to the United States and inquire into their rights, we may ask, have they a right to drive back the Indians from time to time and dispossess them of their rights? So long as they purchased of them it was well enough, but when they forced them into a swap, just as the Indians did with some of the traders back here, and made them trade on their own terms, that is something which they have no right to do, and to use the language of one of the Indian chiefs, 'they have not left room for us to spread our blanket.'

Have they purchased this Territory of them? No, nor made no arrangements to do so, but they have taken possession of it.

What authority has the President of the United States or the Representatives of the several States? They have no authority but what the people give them, according to the institutions of the United States.

What authority had England over this land before they came here and took possession? None.

By what right, then, do nations and governments rule generally? Do they rule by the grace of God? I will tell you. They rule by the power of the sword.

Read the history of England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and other nations and you will find they obtain their authority by their swords, and then when they have obtained, they go to work and sanctify it; they appoint and anoint kings by the grace of God and through the agency of their priests. That is the way they get their authority, and that is all the authority they have.

When the Pope was going to put the crown upon the head of Napoleon he said, here, let me put that on, I won it myself. But they generally want the priest's to put it on.

You may go into any court in the world and say, 'thus saith the Lord', and they will kick you out; try it and see.

[Voices, 'you have tried it!']

No man can go and say, 'thus saith the Lord' amongst them, for they would put a straight jacket on him, if he was a respectable man, if he was not, they would kick him out. Such is the feeling of the people and the condition of the