

## AN OLIVE LEAF

# “TO USE THE REASON AND GOOD JUDGMENT WITH WHICH GOD HAS BLESSED HIM”

By President George Albert Smith

George Albert Smith was ordained an Apostle on 8 October 1903. He served as President of the Church from 1945 to 1951. Early in his presidency, he received a letter from the Reverend J. Raymond Cope of the First Unitarian Society of Salt Lake City. Cope had read the Church's ward teacher message for June 1945 titled, "Sustaining the General Authorities of the Church." He had been greatly troubled over one statement in particular which has since become familiar throughout the Church: "When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done." Below is President Smith's response to Reverend Cope's concerns. Original spelling, punctuation, and emphases have been retained.

My dear Dr. Cope: I have read with interest and deep concern your letter of November 16, 1945, in which you make special comment on "a short religious editorial prepared by one of your (our) leaders entitled 'Sustaining the General Authorities of the Church'". You say that you read the message with amazement, and that you have since been disturbed because of its effect upon members of the Church.

I am gratified with the spirit of friendliness that pervades your letter, and thank you for having taken the time to write to me.

The leaflet to which you refer, and from which you quote in your letter, was not "prepared" by "one of our leaders." However, one or more of them inadvertently permitted the paragraph to pass uncensored. By their so doing, not a few members of the Church have been upset in their feelings, and General Authorities have been embarrassed.

I am pleased to assure you that you are right in your attitude that the passage quoted *does not express* the true position of the Church. Even to imply that members of the Church are not to do their own thinking is grossly to misrepresent the true ideal of the Church, which is that *every individual must obtain for himself a testimony of the truth of the Gospel*, must, through the redemption of Jesus Christ, *work out his own salvation*, and is *personally responsible to His Maker for his individual acts*. The Lord Himself does not attempt coercion in His desire and effort to give peace and salvation to His chil-

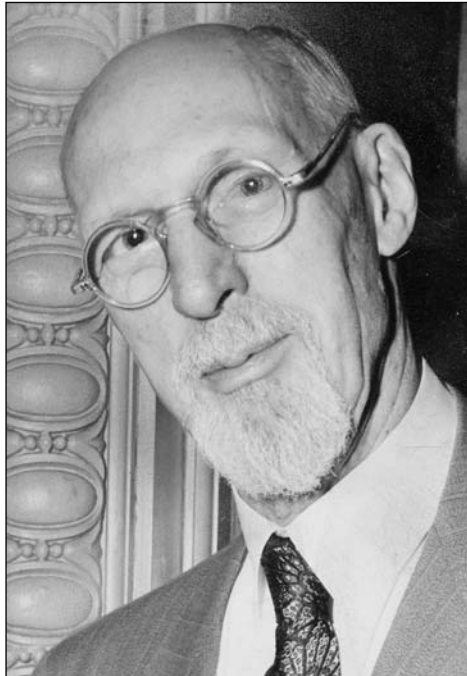


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dren. He gives the principles of life and true progress, but leaves every person free to choose or to reject His teachings. This plan the Authorities of the Church try to follow.

The Prophet Joseph Smith once said: "I want liberty of thinking and believing as I please." This liberty he and his successors in the leadership of the Church have granted to every other member thereof.

On one occasion in answer to the question by a prominent visitor how he governed his people, the Prophet answered: "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."

Again, as recorded in the History of the Church (Volume 5, page 498) Joseph Smith said further: "If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot

persuade them my way is better; and *I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning*, for truth will cut its own way."

I cite these few quotations, from many that might be given, merely to confirm your good and true opinion that the Church gives to every man his free agency, and admonishes him always to use the reason and good judgment with which God has blessed him.

In the advocacy of this principle leaders of the Church not only join congregations in singing but quote frequently the following:

"Know this, that every soul is free  
To choose his life and what he'll be,  
For this eternal truth is given  
That God will force no man to heaven."

Again I thank you for your manifest friendliness and for your expressed willingness to cooperate in every way to establish good will and harmony among the people with whom we are jointly laboring to bring brotherhood and tolerance.

Faithfully yours,  
[ Signed ] Geo. Albert Smith