



Intersection of Faith, Media and Wellness

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Good evening. It's a treat to be with you. I'm a little overwhelmed, because there are so many people in the room for whom I have profound respect. Starting with Elder Gilbert, we used to have offices side by side. I pretty much drove him crazy. Learned a lot from him before he became Elder Gilbert. And asked him what in the world he was doing here on conference weekend, but grateful that he and Christine would be here. President Reese, I have now a new standard I just try to live up to. Thank you. I also have a lot of respect for the Wheatley Institute and for the way it's expanding and trying to absolutely have profound influence. Paul Edwards, I had the chance to work with Paul some years ago as well and know how talented and skilled he is. And then Governor, I'm a fan, Governor and Mrs. Herbert, for sure. And to all of you here, thank you so much for coming.

So let's dive in. They've asked me to spend a few minutes talking about faith and media, and then I think we're going to have a conversation that Paul and I will have and take some of your questions, but let me set the stage for this and give you a little background to start with before we start looking at a few slides and maybe a few statistics.

It was mentioned that I work for Deseret Management Corporation, which in essence operates many of the for-profit businesses that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints owns. DMC operates all of the for-profit media businesses that the Church owns. It's Bonneville International as radio and TV, it's Deseret News, Deseret Magazines, and Deseret Book and all that it entails. It's a number of other companies. It also operates the Radiant Foundation. And about two and a half years ago, through the Radiant Foundation, we started exploring the issue of faith and how it's treated by the media. How our faith, people of faith, and religion itself are represented in the media. And we started by saying, well, we have suppositions about this. We think we're not treated very well, but let's go do some research.

So what I'm going to show you is what we have uncovered through various bodies of research that we have done about faith and its treatment by news media, and also faith in its treatment by entertainment media. Now, surely you're going through your mind already images of the kinds of

things in headlines that you've seen, or the kinds of movies you've seen and how they represent people of faith or religion itself. I want to show you what some of these global studies show. But before I do that, if I could tell a quick story to begin in June of 2020.

My mother passed away. Now the pandemic was just really in full on, you know, it had captured all of us. We were doing social distancing. We weren't yet going back to church, all kinds of things were happening. And my mom passed away. I was raised in Kansas and my mother and father had lived there for 60 years. She was living out here with us at the time, but we managed to get her home to Kansas, and were able to have a very small memorial. Again, we were lucky that the stake president in our little Kansas town even allowed us to use the building, because church wasn't back in session yet in person. The stake president allowed us to use the building just for our family and a few friends. We probably had 70 people there, 55 of whom were family members. We held a little memorial for Mother. Now the little town I'm from has a roaring population of 4500. So we come out of the little chapel and there is a policeman waiting to give us an escort to the little country cemetery four or five miles away, like we need an escort in a four-stoplight town. But there he was. We went over to talk to him and thank him, and he said, "Oh, we would never think of your mother being laid to rest without having an escort." So the cortege got behind the policeman and we started making our way out to the cemetery.

Partway there, we look over at a side street, and there is a woman who's gotten out of her pickup in Kansas farm country. She's gotten out of a pickup. She has this hand on the hood of the pickup, and her head is bowed like this. And I'm telling you, there was something about the sight of that woman with her head bowed as we drove by. I just burst into tears. It touched all of us so deeply. I'm sure that woman has no idea who was in the hearse. I have no idea who she was. I don't know if she's religious. I don't know anything about her. But in that little moment, I saw profound reverence and respect demonstrated by this unknown woman. I have had her image emblazoned in my mind and heart ever since. Because it was a tender day. Here's a woman paying respect to my mother, even though I'm sure she didn't know who it was. But I also have said to myself, how often when you read the paper, not a paper anymore, how often when you read news online, or how often when you go and sample any kind of media, do you see that kind of a depiction of that kind of person in the country? I'll bet you there are way more of that woman in this country than we think. But that's probably not what we see a lot in people, and I would assume she's a person of faith because of her bowed head. I'm not sure we always see them represented and given their full due. Now, with that in mind, let's just look at a few things that may put this in context.

For decades now, I have collected files of cover stories and articles, and it's going to look like I'm

picking on Time magazine, which I'm not really picking on Time magazine, but it was just easier to make them all from Time. I've got files and files of articles where the national press has tried to talk about some facet about God or religion or faith or something, and it has always felt distorted to me. With that as a background, let me show you a short video to kind of cue up what we tried to do when we set out to try to say, could we make a difference? Could our little company make a difference in how faith and people of faith and religion are treated by various forms of media?

Now what this next slide says is basically that, the Faith and Media Initiative, which is the initiative that we launched that has been trying to improve collaboration and an understanding between faith and media. So Pew several years ago released this statistic that 84% of humankind is affiliated with a religion. Is that what you would have guessed based upon what you see in the press and elsewhere? Would you believe 84% is still affiliated with a religion? I didn't believe it, but when I saw that, I said, "Where's the source?" It's Pew, a pretty great source. So why then does a preponderance of today's stories about faith in news, media, and entertainment lack accuracy? Truth? You lack the proof, the profundity, the profound nature of faith? And why does it lack hope? That's one of the questions we've asked ourselves.

One of the things we did, we've done several global studies, and one of the studies that we did was basically a third-party expert AI research study that we gathered from over 30 million sources. Basically it went out and scraped 30 million sources that represent the thoughts and attitudes from across the sociopolitical spectrum, including clergy, journalists, consumers, and others. This was the first study we did. We also hired HarrisX, globally renowned, to survey about 10,000 people across 18 countries in various languages. We try to include all the world's major religions. We did 30 in-depth media interviews with senior media executives. Now, let me show you what we learned from these studies.

HarrisX just finished a major study on how faith and people of faith are treated by the entertainment media. We just released those results, in a partnership with a variety magazine in Hollywood a few weeks ago. Probably won't have time to go into that. But the results are very similar to these studies, which really scraped the news media.

So what we learned is this. 59% of those surveyed said that it's important for news to cover diversity in faith and religion, and it should be covered. 63% said that too much faith-related content is rooted in controversy. Happy to report on when there's some trauma that happens, when there's something really unfortunate happening in a religion or with religious figures, but not willing to tell the real stories of regular people. They said 61% believe the media perpetuates faith-based

stereotypes rather than protecting against them. 63% said that high quality content on faith in religion is in fact needed. 53% say the media actively ignores religion as an aspect of society and culture. 78% believe faith stereotypes need to be addressed as much or more than stereotypes regarding race and gender. 43% say they feel the media's current approach to religious coverage creates unease and anxiety. 56% said they would be more likely to engage with media that offers high quality faith and religious reporting. 56% say the media should provide more coverage on complex religious issues. 84% say faith and religious groups need to provide. This is an interesting one, the media with spokespeople, particularly people with lived religious experience.

So the question we've asked ourselves is, how can we help? How can we elevate people of faith? People of faith and religion? Because we're dealing with a vicious cycle where if faith is muted, it means that we don't become literate about faith, which means that faith practice diminishes, which causes us to mutate further. And so forth. Could we instead shift to a virtuous cycle where we champion faith? Where we model faith? Where faith is practiced? What if we could shift into a mode of educating, modeling, and even activating? These are some of the questions we have asked ourselves now. Another quick video.

One of the things that we've learned in the last two and a half years is that it's surprising how many individuals there are working for major brands or people of influence who resonate with the message of saying, we've got to do better, we can do better. We can use our voices to be more fair and more believable and more honest about what faith doesn't fit in the lives of people, and what religion can do for individuals.

Now, there are challenges. One of the challenges is that religion tends to be marginalized in the newsroom. And there are different reasons. First of all, newsroom economics today has taken away a lot of specialists, including religion specialists. There's a fear of getting it wrong, and religion has become politicized in many settings. And so that causes people concern, especially the journalists and reporters in other ways. Newsrooms tend to lack diverse religious perspectives. And in Hollywood, they're producing different kinds of movies and other kinds of programs. And in newsrooms, those jobs tend to appeal to a more secular audience. And so you can go into a newsroom and have a hard time finding someone who's a person of faith. So when a person who doesn't believe in faith tries to write about faith, that's just foreign territory to them. There are clicks for controversy. Editors don't believe religion drives engagement unless you're talking about the latest trauma involving some religious figure. And I think this is a crucial one for all of us to pay attention to. There is a lack of really credible spokespeople inside of religions or from people of faith who are willing to speak up and say, "Let me tell you the difference it makes in my life because I believe in God. Let me tell you the difference it makes because I pray," and so forth.

The bottom line is that when faith and media misunderstand each other, faith is muted, and literacy, understanding, and knowledge about faith diminish. Those considering the importance of faith may be dissuaded. And then, here's a big one, those looking for hope or peace or guidance may not even consider that religion, faith, or God can make a difference in their lives because they're not seeing it anywhere. They don't see it in what they read. They don't see it online. They don't see it in the theater.

So just as a recap, over the last 30 months or so, the Faith and Media Initiative has conducted these studies, which I've mentioned. And then we've said, what can we do? We've trained more than 1300 journalists about faith at the Columbia School of Journalism and at the USC School of Journalism, also at the Harvard Divinity School, at the National Press Club, at the Google News Lab in Mexico City, at the National Association of Black and Hispanic Journalists, and more. We started to try to train journalists, but that's like a drop in the ocean, and it's really slow going because it's a few journalists at a time. A few other things that we've done, we've participated in some major gatherings of business and media executives at the Vatican, at the Shard in London, at the Louvre Abu Dhabi and at Concordia in New York City. We built a coalition of about 75 organizations and people of influence to champion a more accurate treatment of faith in all media sectors. And we've entered into an agreement with Forbes, which you'll see forthcoming. Before long, they're going to do their first-ever list of faith-centric organizations and influencers who incorporate faith in their business. And that's the first, an interesting experience. We hosted Seth Cohen, who is the chief impact officer at Forbes. He runs the Forbes Impact Lab, and he was here in Salt Lake City with us last fall. We hosted a luncheon for him, and were able to ask him some questions during this luncheon for all to hear.

One of the things we said to him is, "Why does Forbes care about faith and how it's treated by the media?" And he said, "Well, you've made us care." I can't take a lick of credit, but some of our team had spent enough time with him and some others at Forbes to convince them that this ought to be one of the things they build lists around. They're famous for their lists. This ought to be something they should include. Now, I want to show you just a couple more slides and then make a conclusion. The Radiant Foundation also teamed up with Gallup at an event in London last fall. And here are just a few other findings. So think about the news or other forms of media that are saying faith is for blind sheep, faith will do you no good, or faith and religion is dangerous.

In contrast to that, Gallup has done some studies that say that globally, those with a greater commitment to spirituality or religion have higher community engagement. So this says that religion is more important to them. Those who say religion is important to them, have significantly higher scores on Gallup Civic Engagement Index. Globally, the difference is 4.8, and in North America the difference is 10.3 points. That's a pretty big difference, statistically. In their study globally, those with a greater commitment to spirituality or religion have better social connections. So approximately 100 million more people who identify as religious have others they can turn to in times of need than do those who are not religious. So think of it. Think of having no one to turn to in a time of need. Globally, studies have found links between spirituality and lower rates of depression, suicide, addiction and isolation. Now look at this second bullet. At least 444 studies have now examined relationships between religion and spirituality and depression. Dating back to the early 1960s. Of those, 61% reported significant inverse relationships with depression. So let me conclude this portion by saying a couple of things.

One more experience and then maybe a concluding thought. A couple summers ago, we were at the Vatican, meeting some of the individuals there who have responsibility for for-profit businesses that the Vatican owns. And so they were willing to meet with us because we represent for-profit businesses that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints owns. As part of that whole trip, I had a chance to sit at a dinner, one of those 87 course Italian dinners that never ends. But I had the chance to sit next to a woman by the name of Patricia Murray. Everybody in the Catholic Church calls her sister Pat. Some say that she's the most influential woman in the Catholic Church because she has the ear of Pope Francis, and she is the head Mother Superior. So she's the mother Superior over all mother superiors, which means that the well-being of their nuns, their millions of nuns, falls under her direction. She was absolutely adorable. An Irish woman, in her 70s, probably. And as this dinner went on, we just had an absolutely delightful conversation. We talked about all kinds of things, our families and our interests, and what she was finding as she went around the world trying to help those under her care. It was a fabulous conversation.

Toward the end of our dinner, she turned to me and she said, who would have thought we would have so much in common? She said, why do you think that is? Because we're not alike at all. And I thought about that for a minute and I said, well, sister Pat, I said, I'm kind of guessing that you're probably not going to be baptized as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints. And I'm pretty sure I'm not going to convert to Catholicism. So we kind of see religion a little bit differently. And I said, but there's something we have in common that's really, really bigger than that. And that is we both feel accountable to God and we believe God and and for both of us, we

believe that Jesus Christ makes all the difference in our lives. That's a huge point we have in common. And we just kind of hugged each other and got to see each other again last summer, and looking forward to more opportunities to do that.

Don't we sort of wish that when we went online, we went to our favorite news source or our favorite our favorite spot, where we go when we went to the theater or when we went anywhere and consumed media, don't we wish that were depicted, number one, respect for each other and what we believe, but also a profound willingness to talk about what really matters, which is something greater than ourselves.

I think that one of the great challenges we have as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, or as students here at BYU, is to try to learn to speak bilingual. President Reese talked about speaking bilingual. Yes, we need to learn to tell the story of the restoration and do it compellingly. But we also need to learn to talk about what really makes a difference in our lives and do it in a way that we can do it with anybody. The person in the seat next to us on the plane, sister Pat at dinner, or whomever it is to just talk about what a difference it makes to be a believer, how profound that difference is, what a source of comfort it is. When we get on our knees and pray and know that there's help for us, because we pray. What a comfort our beliefs bring to us in a world that has some chaos in it. And whether it's our little organization trying to influence Forbes or any of us trying to influence others by what we post online and how we talk about it, or by what we do in our circle of influence. It seems to me that it behooves all of us. In the time in which we're living with the covenants which many of us have made, that it behooves us to figure out how to talk about this in a way that is natural and inviting.

My invitation is that BYU, as far as I'm concerned, should lead the charge in developing journalists and broadcasters and communicators and storytellers and script writers who can speak in a way about faith that invites everybody to sample faith, religion and everything that goes with it. And I think each of us, having made covenants, can do more than we could ever believe we can do if we just learn how to talk about it and are open about talking about it in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. I feel deeply that this is a commitment that each of us probably made pre-mortally and can make now to do better in expressing what we believe. I hope some of this has been interesting to you, giving you food for thought, and particularly food for thought to say, what can I do? What can I do in my sphere of influence, however big it is, and wherever it goes, to make a difference in championing the fact that we know we have a Heavenly Father, we believe in Jesus Christ, and we believe following them makes all the difference.

Thank you.