

want happiness, if you want that great joy that comes into the hearts of those who know the truth, if you want contentment, peace of mind, opportunity for service, live the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master.

God help us, my brethren and sisters, to appreciate what this great gift, the gospel, means to us. God help us to be worthy of the honorable names we bear: Latter-day Saints in the Church of Christ, I humbly ask, in his name. Amen.

ELDER JAMES E. TALMAGE

The meetings of our conference have been notable, as have been the meetings of earlier conferences. It is indeed an impressive fact that our people come up from the stakes and in from the missions at conference time in such large numbers, and assemble to receive instruction, admonition, advice, encouragement and such good gifts as the Lord holds in store for them. I have sometimes heard men try to describe great gatherings to which people have come for some definite purpose, and when all other comparisons seemed to be inadequate, they have said the movement was almost like the "Mormons" coming to conference. No matter what the weather may be, or the seasonal conditions, a very great number of the Latter-day Saints are willing to lay aside their material affairs to gather here in the appointed place, at the time selected and announced, for the conferences of the Church. In a measure this is comparable to the assembling of the tribes in ancient Israel at the time of the Passover, though we come not as distinct tribes but as members of one body, all upon one footing, everyone representing a unit in the great Church of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH A UNIQUE ORGANIZATION. NOT SECTARIAN.

In this respect we are unique, and in many other respects is the Church unique. How could it be otherwise when the conditions of its organization and the occurrences immediately preceding are considered? The Church of Jesus Christ stands, in a particular sense, alone. Not even a hostile commentator or an unfavorable critic has ever yet ventured to put forth the assertion that this Church has any relationship of origin and development with any other church or denomination on the face of the earth. We are not regarded as an offshoot of any mother church. * Churches generally treat us for what we are, a body of religionists standing alone in the world.

That does not mean that we shall refuse to lend our ready cooperation with other religionists or religious bodies in any movement for the general good, in any civic or patriotic duty; but it does mean that, so far as the essential characteristics of our organization are concerned, this Church has no counterpart amongst the sects and denominations of the day.

TOLERATION DOES NOT IMPLY ACCEPTANCE.

Toleration is a specified characteristic of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we have crystallized that principle into a terse expression embodied in our Articles of Faith. We affirm that we do not merely beg and ask, but that "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege; let them worship, how, where, or what they may." But while our toleration is thus practically boundless, for we respect as sacred the religious convictions of men, we do not carry it to the absurd extreme of saying that therefore we are under obligation to adopt what others believe. I am willing to tolerate my brother's belief, because it is his, not necessarily because I think it is true. He is welcome to it; I may have no use for it; but it is his and he may have it. I shall not ridicule it, and I shall not denounce him, provided, of course, his belief is not opposed to law and order; but I should be very glad to sit down with him and in a kind, friendly, neighborly and brotherly way, try to show him something better, if I know that my religion is true and his is not.

CENTENNIAL OF A GLORIOUS MANIFESTATION.

Practically a full century ago, in the year of which this is the glorious centennial, there occurred an epoch-making event in the history of the world. Reference was made to this yesterday. I venture to call your attention to the actual record. You know the story, I know; but it is well sometimes that we be reminded of what we know. You know the testimony of the young man Joseph Smith, to the effect that he was greatly wrought up in his mind as to which among the many contending sects of the day was in reality the Church of Christ, for he had common sense enough to know that they could not all be right, for they were opposed to one another. There was not only opposition but hatred among them, and one sect sometimes directed the batteries of its assault toward another particular sect, and in the year 1820 there was much confusion and much dissension. The young man afterward wrote:

"During this time of great excitement, my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit." In his study and thought he turned to the Scriptures and was particularly impressed by this wonderful precept and the marvelous promise associated therewith: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5.) Joseph felt that he lacked wisdom. He was in search of it, and he asked of God. He went into the woods in the early spring of 1820 to pray; he knelt down and poured out the desires of his heart to God.

THE ETERNAL FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST APPEARED IN BODILY PRESENCE.

"I had scarcely done so," he afterward wrote, "when immediately

I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction." But though the powers of evil were thus trying to stop his utterance and to crush his effort, he called all the more fervently upon his God, and he avowed that there appeared a pillar of light, as he says, "Exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, pointing to the other—*This is my beloved Son, hear Him!*"

THE CHURCHES OF THE DAY HAD GONE ASTRAY.

The Celestial Personage thus indicated answered the question the youthful seer had specified in his prayer, namely, which of the sects or denominations of the day he should join, and, as he averred, "I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that 'they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.'"

We have been severely criticized because of the declaration that the sects and denominations of that day were wrong. Remember, please, the declaration was not of Joseph. He had not before known that to be the case. Those words were the words of One greater than he, greater than you, greater than all of us here assembled, the words of the Son of God. Wherein were those churches wrong? Had they not much within them that was good? I venture to affirm that they had. I doubt not that there were amongst them men of God, who were trying to live according to the best light they had received; but as churches they were wrong because they were making false pretensions. They claimed to possess the power of the holy Priesthood, and they essayed to administer the ordinances thereof, all in compliance with what they understood to be the rule of the form of godliness. We can create many a variation of the form of godliness. We can make it intricate and enticing; but no man or body of men can gather together or work independently and originate the holy Priesthood upon the earth. To do so would be a greater miracle than for one to originate life in dead matter. There is a chasm between inanimate and organic matter, between the living and the dead, and man cannot bridge it. He may take living things, plants and animals, and rear and nurture and tend them, and by selective breeding he may produce new varieties, but the man never lived who, with all his science, and all his facilities of laboratory and other research, brought

into existence one microscopical living cell, except, indirectly, through the operation of the laws of life, which are not of man.

This Church, therefore, from its beginning, has been unique, for the organization of the Church was forecasted in this declaration that at the time of Joseph Smith's first vision there was no Church of Jesus Christ upon the earth; and I do not see why people should take issue with us for making that statement. A man of one political party professes to believe that the other political party is wrong; and he has a right to believe it, and if he can demonstrate that fact to his own satisfaction he has the right to promulgate his belief; but he should do it with regard to the rights of the other party and the members thereof. We are not assailing churches; we are not attacking sects; we have no war with any of the numerous denominations on the face of the earth. We are sending out our missionaries, we are using the columns of the press, not to attack Catholicism or Protestantism, or any form of religion, but to preach in a positive and constructive way the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ as that gospel has been restored to the earth in this dispensation, in strict accordance with the predictions of ancient prophets.

THE CURRENT MOVEMENT FOR CHURCH UNION.

We are aware that at the present time there is in progress a great world movement having for its object the federation of denominations and sects professing belief in Christianity. It is known as the Inter-Church World Movement. Already we find in the daily press many contributions explaining the purpose of the movement. Already the advertising pages of the great magazines are being used. Already plans have been made for a great assembly to take place, most probably though not certainly, in London, appointed for the coming summer; and sects and denominations are called together for the purpose of forming some kind of a merger or combination.

It is a very important question to ask: Just where does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stand in relation to that matter? I answer, it stands aloof and alone.

Intimations have been given out that this Church is trying to get in; that it is trying to curry favor with the sects in order that it may have a place in the great combination that has been planned. Why, to think such a thing would be sacrilege on our part. We have not derived our authority to administer in the ordinances of the gospel from any of them, nor from any common source. We are no offshoot of the Church of Rome. We are no outgrowth of any of the Protestant denominations. We constitute a Church that has been organized and named by the Lord Jesus Christ. So far as these combinations go we wish the participants well. They have been foolishly, as they profess and declare, spending vast sums of money for the erection of meetinghouses, chapels, churches that they could not use; and they say they can save money by what they are proposing to do, though they are trying to raise a great sum by a world-wide drive in order to bring about the saving.

THIS CHURCH CANNOT BE A PARTY TO IT.

If they can do anything better for the common good by joining together, let them join. Those churches were formed by men, and men have the right to do with them as they please; we shall not interfere with them. But this Church was not formed on man's initiative, it was not called into being because of some brilliant leader who stepped forward with a new plan; and therefore we cannot, we have not the power nor the authority, to make any kind of affiliation with any other church; and let me say with equal earnestness, no other denomination, no church, no sect can ever affiliate as such with this, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. There have been overtures made by some religious bodies to find out the terms under which they probably could come in with us; and the answer has been: Come in as every member of this Church has come in—through the door; and note that the door is just wide enough to admit you, one at a time, the door of baptism, that ye may receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

Students of human affairs, theologians and other thinking men have expressed their amazement at the vitality of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and they say we have some secret for our unprecedented development. Now let me tell you what that secret is. I take you all into confidence. But instead of saying to you, don't tell anybody else, I invite you to tell the world. This is the secret. Every member of this Church stands upon his own feet, upon his own testimony, upon his own conviction that this is the Church of Jesus Christ. He can not receive that testimony from any other man. No president, no apostle, no patriarch, no bishop, no officer in the Church has any testimonies to sell, nor any assurances of the divinity of this work to give as a personal possession to anybody else. There are some riches you cannot share. Now, in a great building such as this Tabernacle, one part depends upon the other parts. Knock out one of those columns and that part of the gallery would be endangered. Remove several of them and a section of the balcony would collapse. But suppose that every part of the building rested upon its own foundation. Then the destruction of one part would not affect the others. Now, that is the secret. Latter-day Saints are individually answerable to their God, for individually they receive that great gift of God, the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray that we may be individually true to it. Oh, my brethren, my sisters, this is the day of which the prophets have spoken, this is the day of trial and of test notwithstanding the many favorable conditions in which we rejoice. Beware of those who would try to lead you away from the foundation of your own testimony. Beware of those who would set up factions for themselves, for all such will follow the course of those that have gone before and come to grief. Stand ye in holy places and be not moved. I ask it for us all, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.