

ELDER BRIGHAM H. ROBERTS

Of the First Council of Seventy

Frankly, I am a bit frightened. I might have used another word but I think that will express my feelings. I do not believe that anyone can face a presence such as this and not feel a little abnormal. One other thing troubles me, and that is I do not know just what I ought to say. I have but one idea in mind with which to begin. After that we will have to take our chances.

I recall that in our State Constitutional Convention, when the committee on personal rights made its report to that body (I think it was my friend, Franklin S. Richards who read the report) there was a clause in it which at the time did not strike me very favorably; and I remember I called up some question in regard to it. I had not previous to that time given it due consideration. It was this: "A frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the maintenance of liberty and the rights of the people." I thought such a clause unnecessary, and made some objection, as I say; but after consideration I concluded that I was mistaken, and that the paragraph announced a very profound principle, and a very necessary thing. I have thought much of it through the years since then, and am persuaded that it is a profitable thing, from time to time, to go to the consideration of fundamental principles. In the case of civil government, of course, reference to the consideration of fundamentals is needful to preserve liberties of the people. So, also, in Church affairs, in religion, I have discovered that when things get a bit confused, and in your feeling and thought you are about at the zero point, a good way to work out of the confusion is to consider first principles, fundamental things.

Now this morning the thought occurred to me that it might be well for me, on this occasion, to consider what to me personally are the fundamental things. Then if in an incidental way, the audience can get benefit from this consideration, there will be that much of gain.

Very well, then, let me say first of all: I believe in God; and in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the very Son of God; and the Holy Ghost, as that Spirit of intelligence that imparts the knowledge of the truth, and is the witness of the Father and Son unto the world. I believe that. I believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ as the means that divine wisdom has devised for the salvation of the world. I believe in all the ordinances of that gospel as the means through which the grace of God is imparted to the human soul, and salvation results through faith in and obedience to that gospel.

I believe in the Church of God, with God's holy priesthood as the inside framework of it; that gives it form and stability and power and authority.

I believe that there have been many dispensations of the gospel given to men. The dispensation between Adam and Noah, counted as the patriarchal dispensation; and the gospel, or part of it, not wholly,

but rather imperfectly expressed through the law that was given unto Israel in symbols, and signs of things yet to come and not the very things themselves, but stood as representatives of those things—the “school master” to bring men to Christ.

I believe in the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ—and in his atonement that he offered for the salvation of men; and I believe that atonement is essential to the salvation of men. I believe it was God’s means of expressing his love for the world, for as God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to become the Savior of the world, so the Lord Jesus Christ himself so loved his brethren that he was willing to make the sacrifice for their salvation, and thus gave evidence to men indeed of the love of God.

I was speaking a moment since of the successive dispensations. I believe that the great dispensation, introduced by the ministry of John the Baptist, and followed by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the dispensation of the meridian of times, for the development of those great things concerning the salvation of men and the expression of the love of God. I also believe that, in fulfillment of the inspired words of the servants of God in those days, men subsequently transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broke that glorious covenant, and left the world again in darkness. True, throughout that period from the Christ to our day, there were left fragments of the splendid truths and sublime teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, that have become the common heritage of the world. But the formal authority of the Church and the ordinances of salvation—these were departed from, and a period of dark apostasy hung over the world until, in the providences of God, the time came for the introduction of what is known to us as the dispensation of the fulness of times. God raised up a prophet in these latter days to introduce that bringing together of all the dispensations that have ever been, and welding them into one great final triumphant dispensation. That restoration was brought to pass through the work that God introduced by the Prophet Joseph Smith; by revealing himself and his Son Jesus Christ to this witness, who was to be God’s witness in the world in these last days, the witness par excellence; and hence the vision given to him was clearer and fuller than had ever been given in the world before. I believe that with all my soul.

In the course of time this new witness sealed his testimony with his blood. I doubt not but what the wisdom of heaven concluded it was essential, because where a testament is, as Paul argues, there must needs be the death of the testator, in order that the final evidence that man can put upon his life and his work might be given to his fellowmen. He gives his life in attestation of it. Hence the broad seal of Joseph Smith’s martyrdom is affixed to the Book of Mormon and to the volume of revelations that he gave to the world.

Necessarily there had to be successors to him. There have been six: Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, and our present President, Heber J. Grant.

There must be, after the introduction of this dispensation, no recession from the position that had been taken by the introduction of this work. Hence, believing in God's holy priesthood, I must needs believe in the perpetuation of that priesthood in its fullness; in its glory, in its power, and in the success of it. The first prophet must arrange for a perpetuity of that which had been given to him. I believe that he did.

It would not matter to me if all the forms and ceremonies might not have been followed. Substance is more than shadow; and I believe that Brigham Young inherited, by the fact of his succession to Joseph Smith, all that Joseph Smith had received from God through the ministration of holy angels with their several keys of authority and power. And that, succeeding Brigham Young, the next man in position came to the same heritage, power and authority. The one following him in like manner received the same heritage of power and authority; and so all down the line until the present time. I now proclaim my faith absolutely that Heber J. Grant possesses all that these other men possessed; that he is God's servant; that he is the mouthpiece of God to this people and likewise to this generation of men so long as he shall live. I believe that, and that there has been no diminution of authority and power between him and his predecessors. I may say in the way of my testimony concerning him, that I have known him for a good many years. We have had some experiences together, not always, I was going to say, of a pleasant kind, but I think I ought not to say that, for when the outcome of things has been reached the fulfillment has been good, but the way has not always been smooth.

There is no man that I know of anywhere who by the texture of his nature and character, who by the purity and the uprightness of his life, can be more loved of God than President Heber J. Grant. I have absolute faith in his honesty, and if God has a word to impart to the Church or to the world, I could not select in my mind, or from my experience among my friends fix upon a man whom I would believe could hold the confidence and favor of God more than he. So that not only by the ordinations that he has received, and calls to authority and place, I believe absolutely in his fitness for his position. And when God has a word to give His Church or to the world, this man, as long as he lives, will be the man through whom it will come. That is my faith in regard to Heber J. Grant.

I have been fortunate enough to know all the Presidents of the Church since the Prophet Joseph Smith. Of course I only knew Brigham Young as a boy may know a great man from a distance. But I sat under the sound of his voice, and heard his teaching, felt the influence of his spirit, and noted the evidence of inspiration in his face when he taught the people, and in his bearing as he stood before them—he was God's mouthpiece unto the people. John Taylor I knew more intimately. When I went on my first mission there was no mission organized in that particular state where I was laboring. I was the

only elder in it, and my reports were made directly to President John Taylor, and my instructions were received directly from his office. Later, when presiding in the Southern States Mission, I found it necessary to submit problems and questions to him directly, and to sit with him in council in relation to the affairs of that mission. Later, of course, as some of you know, I became his biographer; so that all his letters in existence, personal and official—his official communications, his journals, and everything that had been written to or by him, passed through my hands; and I wrote the story of his life. That made me intimately acquainted with him.

With Wilford Woodruff I had the good fortune to have most personal and confidential relations, and to me, of the dearest kind. I may say the same thing, though not to the same extent, with reference to Lorenzo Snow. Joseph F. Smith I knew more intimately. I came in contact with his mind, and sometimes it was flash against flash. But I must say for Joseph F. Smith that I saw him on numerous occasions respond to the spirit of inspiration from God, and rise above himself and give decisions and draw conclusions; though some times contrary to his natural inclinations, yet he followed the light as God gave him to see it—I am sure of that.

I have already said concerning Heber J. Grant that I have known him a long time. He has been my friend on various occasions. I appreciate those manifestations of his good will for me.

I believe then that this line of six succeeding presidents of the Church have been men inspired of God; that God has been with them; and as I stated recently from this stand, the occasions of observing inspiration in these men have been too positive and frequent for me to doubt for a moment that the Church of the Latter-day Saints has been organized on God's plan; that he has ordained that there is but one man at a time on earth who receives revelations for the whole Church, and that man is of his appointing, approval and upholding.

That, as to my faith, is what I call fundamental principles. What I have said marks off my faith in this present dispensation of the gospel; and if there has been any wavering anywhere or at any time from this conviction that I now express, I have not been conscious of it. Such my faith—briefly expressed—in fundamental principles that I hold in connection with you, I presume, in relation to this great latter-day work. And my faith is that it is going on to its triumph. I know not through what trying circumstances as a Church we shall pass in the second century of existence, even as we have had to pass through experiences in this first century now drawing to a close. I know not that; but I have supreme confidence that the second century as well as the first century will close gloriously, and that the purposes of God will be achieved even as his wisdom shall unfold them.

I happened to be reminded today that next April it will be fifty years since I commenced my public ministry in the Church. Fifty years since I was called in a conference of the Church such as this to

become a traveling elder; and between then and now what wonderful experiences are stretched out! Will you pardon me just a moment if I refer to some of these things? During that time my labors have been almost incessant in the interest of this work, in preaching from the pulpit, in lecturing from platforms, in writing books—expository books, defensive books, historical books—until I think I may say, without disparagement of others, at least the volume of my work in this kind—in the contributions I have made to the Church—is not exceeded by any other man in that fifty years. I mean as to the volume of the contribution. As to the value of that contribution of course others may have written more valuable books. I will not go into that. I want to bear testimony to you that I have at least been busy in the period mentioned. I have preached the gospel in many lands; not in as many as some, but I have traveled almost as much as any man within the last fifty years—not perhaps to such great distances as others, but within the English-speaking races I have covered as much territory.

I am mentioning some of these things in order that my profession of faith that I have made here today may be supported by the evidence of steady, persistent effort on my part to develop and to advocate and to establish this great work of God. I have preached under many circumstances; within prison walls where I myself was a prisoner for the sake of this work; and in the halls of congress too, where if I did not fill the term of my office I had the opportunity at least of bearing witness to the truth of this work. I saw the wrath of a nation rise to break upon my head; and when I took my station in the hall of Representatives before the speaker's desk, to take the oath of office, I was confronted by a petition signed by seven millions of people, rolled in upon trucks before the speaker's desk, to protest against my instalment into office. And I was thrust away from the first rung of the ladder that I had dreamed and hoped might lead to a career of usefulness in behalf of my people. This, too, for obedience to the doctrine of the New Dispensation. I was crushed and mangled in the lone fight; for it was a lone fight, so far as human aid is concerned, with the exception of a few dear hands that were thrust out to render a little assistance in a material way, all of which I returned for the most part. But the helpers were very few.

I still held on in spite of these things. I have faced both in the old world and the new, the violence of mobs. I have known men to be practically shot from my side, martyrs to the cause of God; and I did not desert them. I took my risk with them to render them service, dead though they were. I do not know how I shall ever obtain your pardon for such references as these to personal services in this, God's work. But this is my object, and my object alone; that after bearing testimony to the fundamental things of this work, and my confidence in it, I hope that if anywhere along the line I have caused any of you to doubt my faith in this work, then let this testimony and my indicated life's work be a correction of it. I make reference to these personal things in fifty years of service so that you may know that my testimony

has some sanctions for it in the life of service I have given to the cause. And if to your minds, I say again, there does not occur remembrance of this service, then let the shame of it be mine. It would not be good taste for me to make further allusion to such things.

After the hymn, "O Ye Mountains High," had been sung by the congregation, the benediction was pronounced by Elder John E. Hepler, who is in charge of the Bureau of Information on the Temple Grounds.