

is probably better known—than any man in this part of the world, as he talks to the world, at least a large portion of it, every Sunday from this Tabernacle.

Singing by the Choir and congregation: "How Firm a Foundation."

## ELDER RICHARD L. EVANS

### *Of the First Council of the Seventy*

I am always awed in the presence of this congregation. I am much more accustomed to seeing these seats empty or only partially filled. For eighteen years I have been in this building almost every week, usually a number of times each week.

I think I have been in this Tabernacle at every hour of the day and night, at one time or another. I love the spirit of it, and I have been well aware of the memory and the achievements and the spirit of those generations of stalwart men and women who have come and gone here. These walls speak great things of the past, and I am as firmly convinced that they speak great things of the future.

### BRETHREN WHO HAVE PASSED ON

I have been thinking as I have been sitting here today of those of my brethren with whom I have occupied these seats who are not now with us. Many of them have passed away during my brief association here. Five of my own Council of seven men (including the one whose vacancy I was called to fill) have gone in these years, and a like number of the Quorum of the Twelve. The ranks of the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric have also been touched by death during these brief years.

Of course, no one ever quite completely takes the place of anyone else. But able and good men come along and take their own places and make their own contributions in their own way in their own time and generation. I have no fear of a continuing leadership in this Church and a continuing faithful membership, and no fear of the faltering of the oncoming generations, those youth of ours who have been spoken of here already this afternoon.

President Smith did some reminiscing in his opening remarks of yesterday morning, and I would like to continue for a few moments of thinking back and thinking ahead with a few comparative figures.

### GROWTH OF CHURCH

It is forty-four years ago, this conference, I believe, since President Smith first came to the Council of the Twelve Apostles. At that time the Church had fifty-one stakes; it now has one hundred sixty-eight. There were only three stakes then in Salt Lake County; there are now twenty-four in Salt Lake County.

Part of what this means is this: Whereas, then, forty-four years ago, there were two hundred and four stake conferences a year, there are now nearly seven hundred of these appointments to be filled by someone—672 to be exact, or 468 more stake conferences to be conducted each year than there were forty-four years ago.

There have been nineteen stakes come into existence since President Smith became President of the Church, these past two years and more. This means that seventy-six stake conferences have been added to the annual schedule of this Church in the past two years, since President Smith's administration began.

There were twenty-one missions when President Smith became a member of the Council of the Twelve. There are forty-four missions today, I believe (unless more have been created in the last day or two.)

This is no longer a small Church. The latest religious census that I have seen, the one recently published in the *Christian Herald*, and in the Associated Press, and elsewhere, indicates that today there are only thirteen religious denominations in the United States larger than this one, out of some two hundred fifty. Only five, exclusive of the merging of two churches, had a greater increase of membership during the most recent period reported, and none of the larger denominations had a greater per capita increase of membership.

#### INCREASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Now whatever else this may mean, it means certainly no less than this: that an increasing number of people are going to have to take increasing responsibility in the wards and stakes and missions of this Church.

And it isn't only membership and stake units that have increased, but all of the other problems and their perplexities. It isn't only ordinations and setting apart of officers, but so many, many administrative and personnel problems and all else that pertains to a worldwide operation. Life is not as simple as once it was.

I see the First Presidency in their offices at Church headquarters early and late. I see them there over weekends and on holidays when the building is supposedly closed. They and their associates, the Quorum of the Twelve, their Assistants, the First Council of the Seventy, the Presiding Bishopric, and all the others who labor in this cause are worked to the limit, I can testify to you of my personal knowledge. When they are not in their offices they are traveling or filling other assignments and appointments. Few, indeed, are the days or hours that they have for themselves or for their families. I marvel at what they do; I wonder how they do it.

And I know that you in the wards and stakes are likewise crowded in your lives and are accomplishing beyond what men ordinarily are expected to accomplish. And it is only with the help of the Lord that such things are possible.

## ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

The work wouldn't need to be so burdensome to anyone, or at least, not to the extent that it is, if we had a broader base of activity—if everyone who held membership in the Church were carrying his full share of the load.

I was thinking the other night as I witnessed the excellent Aaronic Priesthood pageant which was presented here, and which has been referred to previously in this conference, that some twenty percent of the total priesthood of this Church are members of the Aaronic Priesthood over twenty-one years of age. They are good and able men, and among them is a reservoir of leadership and of service almost as yet untapped.

There are many other sources of untapped leadership and service in this Church. And I plead with all of you, my brethren, who are in positions of responsibility and leadership, in the wards and stakes and the missions, to put your arms around these brethren and sisters who are nominally members but who are not in activity and bring them into service in this Church for their own sakes and for the good of the work. You will bring great blessings to their lives as well as great blessings to the Church if you do so.

Even if it takes longer sometimes to convince a man that he ought to labor in an assignment than it would take to do the assignment yourselves, it will ultimately bear richer fruit if you persuade someone who is relatively inactive to render some service. It is better to have three men do one job each than to have one man do three jobs. The secret of the strength of this Church (in addition to what we know to be its foundational strength, the power and authority and priesthood of God our Father), is the activity of the men and women who give their lives and their means and their devotion and their faith and works.

## AVOID GIVING OFFENSE

Referring again to the pageant that was presented, I recall that one of the reasons given why some did not continue in activity was that they had been offended. This is a common cause of complaint, sometimes real and sometimes imagined, sometimes merely a statement of convenience. But whatever it is, I plead with you also, you who are in positions of leadership and who are dealing with other men, to avoid, if you can, giving cause for offense.

And I say to you who feel that you have been offended, this isn't sufficient reason for withdrawing yourself from activity in the Church and kingdom of God.

I know of no perfect men; I know of no man in whom others could not find fault if they were looking for it. But the imperfections of men don't change facts. It doesn't matter who makes a mistake, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is still true. And any man who withdraws himself from activity because he has been offended or because he thinks he has (or because he is afraid he is going to be) is

depriving himself of blessings which have nothing to do whatever with the acts and the imperfections of the men by whom he may think he has been offended.

And I say again, may we earnestly avoid giving offense. I have pleaded in a number of the stakes where I have been, and I plead with you here, that we be as considerate of the feelings of men when we release them from office as we are when we appoint them to office. We wait upon them, and we are solicitous and long-suffering when we are seeking someone to take a position. And then, I am afraid, some of us have sometimes been guilty of dropping men unceremoniously from office when it seemed that for some reason a change would be indicated for the good of the work or for the good of the man, or to give someone else opportunity.

I plead with you to be as considerate of your brethren when you are releasing them as you are when you are persuading them to accept an office, or an obligation. This is but one means of avoiding giving offense, which has been the real or alleged cause of many of our brethren and sisters withdrawing themselves from activity in the Church.

I see that the time is passing very rapidly. It often does so when one is speaking. I am not always so sure it does when one is listening. But I would like to close with just one other thought suggested by a proverb recently recalled by Carl Sandburg: "This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers."

#### CONFIDENCE IN CHURCH

We do live in a day of much confusion, of much purpose and counter-purpose, and of many theories that beat upon the anvil, of many schemes and organizations and all manner of confused ideas among men, in addition to the fears and forebodings which are so much a part of the daily lives of so many of the people of this world in this day. And it is comforting to know where the old anvil is, and that it is equal to all of the hammers that pound at it, and all of the blows that would break it.

I have no fear for the future of this Church; I have no fear for the future of anyone in this Church who lives as well as he knows how to live. And I pray my Father in heaven, with you, that he will help all of us not merely to be inheritors of the truth, nor possessors of it, but also to use it, to live it, to proclaim it, and to be worthy of the confidence of our children, to be worthy of the confidence of those who look to us for leadership, to be worthy of the blessings of our Father in heaven.

I testify to you of the conviction of my soul as to the truthfulness of those things which are proclaimed here, and have been, and which this Church represents, and I do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.