

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD MEETING

The General Priesthood meeting of the Church convened in the Tabernacle at 7:00 p.m., Saturday, October 6th.

In addition to the great crowd that met in the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall to the south of the Tabernacle, and Barratt Hall (60 North Main), were filled with men of the Priesthood.

President David O. McKay was present and presided at this meeting and conducted the services.

The Tabernacle Choir Men's Chorus furnished the choral music for this meeting, and joined with the congregation in singing as an opening number "O Say, What Is Truth?"

Elder David F. Haymore, formerly president of the Spanish-American Mission, offered the opening prayer.

The Tabernacle Choir Men's Chorus then sang, "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

BISHOP LEGRAND RICHARDS

Presiding Bishop of the Church

Brethren, I have certainly enjoyed this conference with you, and the spirit thereof, and I appreciate the privilege this night of addressing this great body of Priesthood.

A CALLING OF SERVICE

As I thought of the Priesthood being gathered here, knowing that this Tabernacle is full, and the Assembly Hall, and Barratt Hall, representing the Priesthood of this great Church, I thought of the Apostle Paul, speaking of the Priesthood of his day, when he said that the Lord had given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we should all come to a unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,—that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Now, if you will analyze this statement you will see that Paul understood that our calling is a calling of service; the work of the ministry,—the great missionary cause of this Church. The edifying of the body of Christ, and the perfecting of the Saints:—all this work that we do in the wards and the stakes of Zion, and in the branches, in order to try and teach the Gospel, so that the people, after they take upon them the name of Christ and become members of His great Church, will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, but

that we watch over the Church and see that they are taught the Gospel.

I hope that in all of our efforts, we will try to plant a testimony in the hearts of the membership of this Church so that they will be able to stand no matter what teachings may come among us.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOSPEL

In some of our Priesthood council meetings, there has been some apprehension for fear that our own might be led away from us because of the missionary efforts of other churches. One large church in the land has publicized that their greatest missionary effort for the next ten years would be conducted right here in the state of Utah, and we have lost a few. I think we have gained more from them than they have taken from us.

We wonder how any of ours can ever leave us if we have taught them the Gospel, and are watching over them as the Priesthood of the Church, so that they will not be led away by these false teachings.

I was interested in attending a conference here in Salt Lake a few weeks ago, in visiting with Sister Williams who used to be on the M. I. A. Board of the Church. Formerly she wrote a column in the Deseret News called the "Question and Answer" column. She told about a young girl, one of our Latter-day Saint girls who went east, and wrote home, and said something like this:

"I have been asked so many questions about our Church and what we believe in since I have come here, that I am writing to ask you to tell me what the first principles of the Gospel really are. I know the first two are that we should not use coffee or tea or play cards."

That was about her conception of what the first principles were, but she had that testimony that burns inside and she wanted to know more about our teachings.

ADVICE TO MISSIONARY

I had a missionary write me once, who said something like this: "I met a minister the other day who knows more about religion than I ever dreamed of. I told him if he had something better than I had, I would join his church."

I wrote him back, and said, "You said just the right thing exactly. If he has something better than you have you ought to join his church. But," I said, "have you ever stopped to figure out how it is possible for him to have something better than you have. Has he something better than a personal visit from God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to open a new gospel dispensation? And in answer to the question of the boy prophet,

which of all the churches he should join, he was told that he should join none of them for they all taught for doctrine the commandments of men. Now why worry about all of the other churches with an answer like that coming direct from the Savior of the world, the one who has the right to speak and to pronounce judgment upon all the Christian churches in the world?"

Then I went on to add, "Does he have something better than a visit from Moroni with the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, a visit from John the Baptist with the Aaronic Priesthood, Peter, James and John with the Melchizedek Priesthood and the keys of the holy apostleship?" and then I continued by referring to the coming of Elijah the Prophet of whom Malachi testified that if it were not for his coming the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming, and then of Moses and Elias. Then I said, "If he has something better than that you join his church."

STORY OF PROPHET JOSEPH

I usually make a similar statement to the missionaries when I interview them for their missions. I say "when you go to buy a suit, it either fits or it doesn't fit. Now," I say, "Take the story of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Does it fit, or doesn't it fit? Then I enumerate these things, and then add, "If you can believe the Prophet's story, you know we do not have just another Church, but we have the only true Church, for no other church is built upon such a foundation. When you hear that song of what rapture filled his bosom because he saw the God of love, I think of it so many, many times. I think of the rapture that fills the bosoms of our missionaries when they get in the field and catch the spirit of this work. I have seen many of them that I think could have given their lives and given them gladly for the testimony of Jesus that they had because of the rapture that filled their bosoms because of the spirit of this great latter-day work.

My feeling is that if we could get that spirit into the hearts of our young people we could trust them anywhere. They don't need to know all of the answers to the scriptures. They don't need to be able to explain all of the writings of Holy Writ. They need to know what the God of Heaven has done in our day, and then the rest of it is only a process of study and information in order that they might be able to better preach and teach and know of the teachings of the prophets of old.

When I went on my first mission, President Anthon H. Lund addressed us missionaries, and said something like this:

"Now, brethren, when you go on your missions, if you ever lack for anything to say, just bear testimony that you know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and the Book of Mormon is true, and I promise you that you will have something to talk about."

MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

I have put that promise to the test. One time while I was secretary of the Netherlands Mission, and had only been there a few months and did not know the language very well, the Mission President told me that if I would write down the addresses of the brethren, including President Grant's who was then president of the European Mission, he would not call on me to speak.

But there was one greater than the mission president there, and that was President Grant, and he said, "I want to hear from Brother Richards." So while I was sitting down in front taking the minutes of the meeting I was announced as the next speaker. As I walked up on that platform with an audience of some 1500, many of whom came with their stovepipe hats and their walking sticks, I thought of the promise of President Anthon H. Lund that if you ever need anything to talk about, just bear witness that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that the Book of Mormon is true and the Lord will give you something to talk about, and one of the finest testimonies of my life came out of that experience that night. There are some Latter-day Saints here in Salt Lake today who give credit to my testimony that night for having started them to investigate our message. I have truly learned the truth of the words of the scripture: "for the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life."

I just feel that if we could feel that rapture in our bosoms from telling these glorious stories, and that our young people could feel it, we would not need to worry too much about interpretations of the scriptures.

STRENGTH OF THE MORMON POSITION

I am impressed with a statement that Brother Orson F. Whitney used to tell from this stand, and published in the little pamphlet he wrote on the "Strength of the Mormon Position." He told about an interview he had with a prominent Catholic priest who once occupied this pulpit here in this tabernacle, in these words:

"Many years ago a learned man, a member of the Roman Catholic Church came to Utah and spoke from the stand of the Salt Lake Tabernacle. I became well acquainted with him, and we conversed freely and frankly, a great scholar with perhaps a dozen languages at his tongue's end. He seemed to know all about theology, law, literature, science, and philosophy. One day he said to me, 'You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don't even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world. That is the position of the Catholic church.

"The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong. If you are right, we are wrong, and that is all there is to it. Protestants haven't a leg to stand on, for if we are wrong they are all wrong with us since they were a part of us

and went out from us, while if we are right, they are apostates whom we cut off long ago. If we have the apostolic succession from St. Peter as we claim, there is no need of Joseph Smith and Mormonism. But if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism's attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the Gospel from ancient times, or the Restoration of the Gospel in the latter days." And we know it has been restored and so that is all there is about it. That ought to settle all disputes when we have to discuss religion with any other church.

They might be able to out-argue some of our young people, but they can't take away the visit of the Father and the Son nor the visit of the other holy messengers, nor the visit of Moroni and the information contained in that Book of Mormon.

EXPERIENCE IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

When I was a boy in the little town where I was raised, I had the privilege of leading the Sunday School in reciting the testimony of the three witnesses. I remember upon that occasion Karl G. Maeser and Brother George Goddard were there. Brother Goddard used to teach us to sing, "Take away the whiskey, the coffee and the tea. Cold water is the drink for me," and "Who's on the Lord's Side, Who? Now is the time to show. We ask it fearlessly, who's on the Lord's Side, who?"

I will never forget that experience, and the testimony of those three witnesses has never left me. It is a marvelous thing when the Lord touches your heart to realize that these things that He has given unto us are divine, and that they come from Him.

MARRIAGES OUT OF THE CHURCH

As we travel about the Church we see a good many people who have strayed away from the Church. Sometimes their testimonies become dim for a time because some of them have married out of the Church. They think they can get away from the Church. I remember that while I was president of a stake in California a young lady came into my office one day selling neckties.

She said, "I guess you don't remember me, do you, Brother Richards?"

I said, "No, I don't believe I do. Who are you?"

Then she told me that she had taught Sunday School under me here in Salt Lake when I was superintendent of a ward Sunday School. Then I remembered her and said, "What is the rest of the story?"

She said, "I fell in love with a Catholic boy, and I loved him so much that I didn't think it would make any difference to the Lord whether I worshipped him in the Catholic church, or the Mor-

mon Church, so I went all the way with him, and we were married by his priest, and I agreed to raise my children in the Catholic church. Now we have three children, and I told him the other day that I was the biggest hypocrite in the whole world, that I didn't believe a thing that was going on in his church, that I knew that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that the Book of Mormon was true. I don't know what is going to become of you and me and the children, but I am going back to my Church."

I was in New York some time ago, and the president of the stake told me about a woman there who, on her deathbed, called the stake president and her bishop. She had married a Catholic, a Salt Lake girl, and she went east with him, and he died, and he left her quite an estate, but he left his old maid Catholic sister to administer it, with the instructions that if she attempted to bring her children up in the Mormon Church she was to be cut off entirely from the estate.

On her deathbed, with her son and daughter having entered their twenties she plead with her bishop and stake president to see if they could not do something to save her children to the Church.

She said, "I made an awful mistake. If I had it to do over again, I would crawl on my hands and knees back to Salt Lake City in order to raise my children in the Church, if I had to go out washing every day to earn a living for them."

I was in Chicago attending a conference meeting, and a little mother with a baby in her arms sitting down in the center, at the close of the meeting came up and said, "Bishop, I would like to shake your hand."

I said, "I would certainly be glad to shake yours." Then she started to cry, and I said, "You're a western girl, aren't you?" I got a nod of approval, and I said, "And you married out of the Church?" and I got another nod. She couldn't talk. Her emotions had gotten the best of her. I said, "And your husband does not like you to come and meet with your people?" and I got another nod. Then I said, "And you're homesick—homesick for your Church and for your people." With that she sat down on the front bench, covered her face in the shawl that wrapped her little baby, and wept like her heart would break.

"TESTIMONY OF THE SPIRIT"

I tell you this world is not big enough that you can run away from the testimony that the Lord plants in your heart—as President Clark tells us so often—"the testimony of the Spirit."

I want to bear witness of that testimony. I would like to see us plant it in the hearts of our young people. I would like to see them encouraged to bear their testimonies in Sunday School and in our fast meetings. President Brigham Young is accredited with having said that we can get a testimony quicker on our feet than we can

on our knees, and I believe it. As I have gone around this Church and listened to men who have been called to represent the Adult Group of the Aaronic Priesthood, I have seen those men stand up and weep. One man right near here recently said he had lived in his ward 16 years, and his bishop had never asked him to do anything. He stood there and wept with gratitude and thankfulness for the opportunity he had to speak.

I heard another man who manages a chain store, who was called to represent that group, and before he got through, he had caught the spirit of it, and he said, "I haven't done as I should have done, but I am here today to tell you that before this year ends I am going to be ready to ask my bishop for a recommend to take my wife and children to the temple and have them sealed to me."

He had had a long time to think about it but he had to get on his feet before he felt inspired to make such a resolution. It is a little like the story they tell of the old lady who came home from fast meeting one day, and said to her daughter, "That is the best fast meeting I have ever attended."

The daughter said, "Is that so, Mother? Who spoke?" "I did," she said.

There is something about this testimony of the spirit that is the most wonderful thing in all the world. It was what Peter had when Jesus announced that he was the Son of God, and that was more than the multitude could take, so one by one they went away. Then Jesus turned to Peter and to the apostles, and asked them why they did not leave also. Then Peter replied, "Whither shall we go, Lord, for we know that thou hast the words of eternal life?"

RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIESTHOOD

Brethren, you are called in this great Priesthood of the Lord for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, for the perfection of the Saints, and it is our responsibility to plant in their hearts a testimony of the divinity of this work, so that no matter where they go, and no matter what arguments are brought, they know that these fundamental facts are true—that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ did appear to the Prophet Joseph, and if these facts are not true then we have no right to be holding this conference because then the whole thing is a deception.

Our testimonies of this great latter-day work to many are like the testimonies of the women who went to the tomb, and saw that the body of Jesus had arisen and when they told this story it seemed to the people to be but idle tales. Many think when we bear them our testimony of the marvelous work and wonder the Lord has brought forth, that it is nothing but idle tales.

But it is God's eternal truth. Of this I bear you my testimony in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.