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Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

FOR ALMOST two days now I have been looking out over the faces of those who have congregated here, noting the evidence of devotion to the purpose which has brought them together. Every aspect of their features has indicated that they have come with solemn intent. Not that there is sadness, there is a joyous sobriety manifest in their countenances.

I note, too, a manifestation of expectancy written all over your faces, and that is very sobering because I realize that you expect something from those who assume this position. The purpose, I have no doubt, is that you might draw some fortification for your faith, and some strengthening help to face the issues of life and wrestle with its problems as they come to you day by day.

We very rarely pick up a magazine now or a newspaper, that does not advise us somewhere along the line that somebody has said that the great need of this world today is increased spirituality. That idea is voiced in varied forms. Sometimes it is expressed as a greater dedication to religion, a more complete incorporation of the principles of religion into our lives, and that is heralded as one of the things that could cure the ills of the world.

But as I listen to further expositions, I find a great deal of vagueness in those expressions. I am not sure that I know just what those who use them mean. I am not sure that I know just what, in their minds, religion signifies.

There are a great many learned disquisitions about what religion is, the features that constitute it, and, what the essential factors in it are.

It is not my purpose here to go into any of those discussions. This is neither the time nor the place for that. But I am going to assume that I can tell you what our religion is, and I intend to say and do say that our religion comprises the teachings and life and actions

of Jesus of Nazareth. That constitutes our religion.

It all centers in Jesus the Christ. So far as I know, in all the reading I have been able to do, all the research made, there is no principle of right action, no ethical principle, recognized in the world today that is not comprehended in the teachings of Jesus Christ. I believe that if all the books on ethics were burned today, and we had left the utterances of the Christ and the teachings of the Apostles whom he commissioned to carry his message to the world, we should have a perfect and concrete guide to human conduct.

Our religion comprehends more than just the ethical code. It contains a body of principles, through the observance of which we are promised the great reward of eternal life and salvation in the kingdom of God.

I want to turn here to the words of Peter, as recorded in the Acts,

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

(He was referring, of course, to the supposition that the Apostles must be drunken because of the manifestations of the Holy Ghost that they were actuated by.)

But this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel;

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: . . .

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

Him, being delivered by the determinate

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counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. . . .

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:14-17, 22-24, 36.)

That is the kind of teaching that introduced the gospel of Jesus Christ in the ancient day. There is no equivocation, no temporizing, there is no dodging of the issue. There is the straightforward declaration that this man who had lived among them was recognized of God, that they had taken him in foul hands and had destroyed his life, but that he was raised up and had become and was recognized of God as both Lord and Christ.

That is our religion. That is what we believe. Wipe that out, and we have nothing left upon which to rest our faith. It is basic to every principle that is acknowledged in our teaching or in the teaching of those who, under guidance of the Christ, were his messengers to establish his work.

This is a great teaching Church. Its business is to teach. Men can be persuaded, their lives reformed through persuasion. No man may be coerced, and no belief was ever established by attempted coercion or force. Jesus resorted to the method of persuasion, and our business as his representatives is to persuade people over whom we may have influence to accept the doctrine, and when they have accepted it in their hearts, they are born again. They do not want to resort to the evil practices from which they have been converted. They want to order their lives according to the purity of his teachings.

Foremost among the teachings that Jesus uttered was his recognition of God the Father. To him he prayed. He said that he was come to do the Father's will, not his own. He told his disciples that he had done nothing except what he had seen the Father do, putting himself into humble submission before

the omnipotent power of the God of heaven.

As he directed his messengers to go out, he told them that they should carry his message and teach it to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and teaching them to observe all things "whatsoever I have commanded you." That is all that is required of any man.

If we would do all the things whatsoever God commanded, or his Son, Jesus Christ, which is the same thing authoritatively, we would have no troubles in this world. There would be peace and harmony and good will. War would be impossible. All the ugliness of life, everything that destroys beauty and desirability would be cleansed out from the earth. In that instruction is comprehended the whole sweep of the gospel teaching.

He taught that man has a destiny, what that destiny is, and how to achieve it; that it is all dependent upon conformance to the plan given. We have heard something in this conference about a plan. It is a designed plan. It is the only plan that assures salvation to the children of men, the promise is predicated upon the assumption that we obey the teachings of that plan.

All that we know of record about the earth life of the Son of God is contained in the books of the New Testament—the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles. It has been said that if you blot out the books of the Acts, you would leave a great blank covering a very important period in the life and ministry of Jesus prior to his death and resurrection, as well as occurrences after that period.

We turn to those books as the authoritative source of our information, accepting them as the word of God for the guidance of his children. And that same fidelity of purpose, the same courageous conviction and declaration of it, as was voiced by Peter on that pentecostal day, has rung down through the ages since that time.

Paul was not of those who had lived with the Christ, walked with him. He was rather a persecutor of his saints—by his own account he had viciously persecuted them, but he became a great expounder of the faith. This is how it happened.

Standing in bonds before Agrippa to answer the charges made against him, he said:

At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. (*Ibid.*, 26:13-15.)

It is the testimony of those who walked with him during his mortal life. It is the testimony of those who received their testimony and became convinced in their own souls. It was the testimony of Paul. It is the one sure way to live by the teachings which he expounded, and that same authoritative declaration of personal knowledge has come down through all the ages of time and has been repeated in our day, and thus we read that the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, in the temple, declare this:

And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about.

And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness;

And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever.

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—

That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. (D. & C. 76:19-24.)

Here is a sober declaration of men just as those who had been associated with the Christ gave their testimony of what they had seen and heard, and those testimonials may not be idly brushed aside. They are entitled to every credence that is normally accorded to the words of any honest man whose integrity has not been impeached.

That is the foundation of our religion. That is the kind of teaching that won its way until it had established itself as a recognized religion of the great empire of Rome after a period of persecution. That is the only kind of faith that will keep men safe in the course that leads to eternal salvation.

It did happen. It happened by slow degrees. Nobody can tell just when it first began, but these sober declarations began to meet with some doubt, and men began to philosophize about these sober declarations. Gradually questionings began to have their effect by infiltration and dilution, until this profound faith was sadly shaken.

By the third or fourth century it was almost blotted out as a simple declaration of faith through an attempted admixture with Greek and other philosophies. Such is the inevitable consequence when men try to rationalize the word of God, the testimony of his servants, to accommodate it to the teachings of their philosophies, and make it more palatable to their understanding or their likes. From that day to this, the Church has been derelict in its duty to proclaim the undiluted word so that now when men say to us, "We need a revival of religion," a lot of them who use those phrases do not even believe in the existence of God.

They do not believe that Jesus was the Son of God nor that he was resurrected from the dead. They are using idle phrases. If men really believed,

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they would do something about it, and if that belief were implemented into the lives of men in this world, it would cure the ills under which the world is groaning.

During the war, the editor of a national magazine, the magazine *Fortune*, to be exact, wrote out a series of questions that he distributed to a large body of the clergy, asking their opinions about certain beliefs. Their answers disappointed him by their wordy circumlocutions and avoidance of positive commitments.

He wrote a most penetrating editorial about it. This, among other things, is what he said:

A Christian leadership has passed from the hands of the church to the hands of the active and practical laity—the statesmen and educators, the columnists and pundits, the scientists and great men of action, and this is only another way of saying that there is no true Christian leadership at all. So far as the record goes, the American people would do as well by their souls to follow the advice of the industrial leaders as to follow the advice of the spiritual leaders. Thus the flock is leading the shepherd.

So long as the Church pretends or assumes to preach absolute values, but actually preaches relative and secondary values, it will merely hasten the process of disintegration. We are asked to turn to the church for enlightenment, but when we do so we find that the voice of the church is not inspired. The voice of the church today, we find, is the echo of our own voices, and the result of his experience is disillusionment.

This is the profound and absolute spiritual disillusionment arising from the fact that when we consult the church we only hear what we ourselves have said. The effect of this experience upon the present generation has been profound. It is the effect of a vicious spiral like the economists talk about that leads into depressions, but in this spiral there is at stake not merely prosperity, but civilization.

There is only one way out of that spiral. The way out is the sound of a voice. Not our voice, but a voice coming from something not ourselves, in the existence of which we cannot disbelieve. It is

the earthly task of the pastors to hear this voice, to cause us to hear it, and to tell us what it says. If they cannot hear it, or if they fail to tell us, we as laymen are entirely lost. Without it we are no more capable of saving the world than we were of creating it in the first place.

That is a penetrating analysis of the cause for the ills of the world. To gain favor, to enhance our popularity, to avoid giving offense, we have adopted the theories of men and tried to integrate them with the teachings of the Son of God, and they will not mix. The result is that the church, instead of setting the pattern, marking out the path, has been adopting what has been adopted as practice among the men of business—the laboring men, the laity of the world—and the voice of the laymen, modified and given essence by the things they want to do and like to practise, guided by their selfish interests, has drowned out the voice of the church, and the leaders of the church have lost their powerful, guiding influence. Men refused to heed its words, finding in them only the echo of the words of the laity that are spoken about.

In my view there is only one safety; there is only one cure; and that is to take the pure and unadulterated word of God and set that up as our standard of measurement, and measure every creed and doctrine and dogma by that yardstick. That which will not square with the declarations of Almighty God we can lay aside as unsuited for the need of man, and orient ourselves again in that declaration of Peter, re-echoed by Paul, by all the disciples of the Christ, so long as his teachings remained undefiled and uncorrupted, and set that up as the guide to our course of life.

Then we shall not have these appeals, we shall not need these appeals to men to modify their governments because their governments will be founded in righteousness, and righteousness will prevail.

God grant it may be, I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.