

PRESIDENT STEPHEN L RICHARDS

First Counselor in the First Presidency

MY DEAR brethren and sisters: I thank the Lord for the inspiration of this great conference, coming to us from lovely singing, part of which we have just listened to, and from the lofty, inspirational messages of our brethren. I humbly pray that I may contribute a little to the appreciation of the great work in which we are engaged and to its advancement in the world. I think the missionary work of the restored Church of our Lord has received major emphasis at this conference. The extended and outstanding labors of our beloved President; the dedication of a European temple with the prospect of others to follow; the history-making tour of the choir over the seas to foreign lands; the organization of new missions on the other side of the world, and the extended visits of existing missions by our brethren of the Twelve, have all served to arrest and focus our attention on missionary work to an extent probably never exceeded in the history of the Church, except perhaps in its early beginning when such a vast proportion of the means and energies of the people were devoted to the carrying of the gospel to foreign lands.

What an encouragement, and what rejoicing this has brought to all those who love the Lord's work of the latter days! On every hand are heard expressions indicative of the gratification and joy of the people in these accomplishments. They voice their love for and admiration of the President, their jubilation over the successful trip of the choir, and their expectation of great results to follow.

I have thought, my brethren and sisters, that it might be appropriate here today to propound this question: How may all this just pride, admiration, rejoicing and enthusiasm be translated into effective service and devotion for the continued expansion of our Father's kingdom here in the earth?

Perhaps a general answer to this question might suffice—to live righteously and serve faithfully—but I think

a breakdown of that answer might be of some value to us.

The first specific item which I shall mention is the need for more people to serve in these missionary callings.

Fortunately, after deliberations and negotiations covering a long period of time, we have some clarification and consequent liberalization in the calling of our young men to serve as foreign missionaries. A foreign missionary is one who serves outside the stake where he lives. It has long been the practice of the Church to utilize young men for this service. I wish here to express my own gratitude and that of the officers and membership of the Church for the young men who have so dutifully, willingly, and faithfully responded to their missionary calls. What a glorious and admirable segment of our society are these young men of the Church! They are the pride of the communities from which they come.

Young men are well adapted to missionary service. They have the physical strength and stamina; they have the mental alertness; they have the adaptability and the buoyance of youth, and when properly conditioned for the service, they have the spiritual receptiveness to bring them a firmness of conviction and testimony that becomes contagious to those whom they serve.

The innate goodness of these young men shines from their very countenances, as they visit the homes of the people.

It has been my observation that although young, these missionaries quickly attain a maturity in thought, judgment, and wisdom that is without parallel for those of their age. As ministers of religion they are frequently confronted with important problems and situations of vital nature to those concerned. They handle organizational matters; they deal with delicate domestic problems; they give fatherly counsel to young and old alike; and they bless with a sagacity and power far beyond the maturity of their years. You know what it is, my brethren and sisters, which enables them so

successfully to perform these labors of wisdom and love.

Some understandings have recently been reached which enable us to call to the missionary service more of our young men. We need them. We can use them to great advantage. We hope bishops, presidents of stakes, and presidents of missions, will diligently search out those who are eligible for this distinguished service. The young men do not call themselves. No one does in this Church. All are responsive to the appointment of the Holy Priesthood which presides over all. So I appeal to the presiding officers to make a diligent search and make recommendations, and I appeal to all who receive calls to respond with glad hearts to embrace the glorious opportunities of missionary service.

Missionary service is strenuous. Its success depends on energy and intelligent devotion to its ideals and procedures. Good health is a requisite for mission eligibility, at least in the foreign missionary service. Our missionaries travel in pairs. No one goes alone. One sick or disabled man detains another from his work and often retards the performance of important responsibilities. So, while we cannot insure against unforeseeable sickness and accident in the mission field, we must take every precaution to assure physical fitness and good health before departure on these assignments.

If any of our people suffer disappointment because of our requirements for good health as a requisite to the foreign missionary calling, we hope they may take a measure of comfort in the realization that the missionary work to be accomplished is immeasurable, and that it is just as important to bring the gospel to their next door neighbors as to one of our Father's children ten thousand miles away.

I cannot pass by without mention of some phases of the preparation for our missionaries. We have had a little difficulty in recent years in convincing some public officials that our young men possess the qualifications to be classified as ministers of religion. Legally now the point is pretty well cleared.

We extend our appreciation for the good offices of this state's representa-

tives in Congress and their friends in bringing about a Congressional Historical Record in the Legislation extending the Draft Act, which clearly recognizes in the interpretation of the statute the exemptibility of our missionaries as ministers of religion. We do not regard this favorable interpretation as being a discriminatory concession to us in any respect or degree. It helps us because it is a just clarification which may not have been clear to some officials.

Now, not because there is urgent need of it, but because I think it may serve other purposes, I wish to bring forward a few items which justify this conclusion that our young men missionaries are ministers of religion. I grant you that they do not always look as other ministers look. They may be disappointing to some in formality and grace of expression. Many of them may not have attained the scholastic standing reached by most of the profession. What is the missionary's training for the ministry?

First, he is usually reared in a home presided over by a man of the priesthood, who, in certain aspects at least, may be looked on as a man of the ministry. The functions of the ministry are carried forward in large measure in the future missionary's home. Prayer, blessings, scriptural and religious learning are features of his early environment. He is accorded the opportunity of participation. He prays, he sings, he reads, he studies, and in adolescent years, joins in sacred religious ordinances.

Second, in the religious educational program of the Church, he becomes identified with the organizations of the Church. His mother may bring him to Sunday School as a baby; he toddles into the infant classes; and from then on he is taught, and he learns the literature of the Church and the ways of the Lord.

Third, he is integrated into a spiritual society. His recreation, which not infrequently brings the contacts which enable him to choose his life's partner, is supervised and directed under religious auspices, whose constant endeavor it is to clarify and define the ultimate goals of life. In the atmosphere of such spirituality, his spirit na-

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ture is nurtured and developed. His liberal participation in all such institutions and exercises is calculated for the development of that spirituality. What I may ask, is more essential to a ministerial calling?

Fourth, there then comes to the adolescent youth training and experience without counterpart in any other institutions of which I am aware. He enters the quorums of the priesthood. At the age of twelve he is first ordained and inducted into a group of approximately his own age.

He is taught the history of the priesthood, and he is made to understand that the power conferred upon him, even though a mere youth, derives from the authentic power given by the Lord Jesus Christ through his servants to those selected to receive the priesthood in this dispensation of time, and from whom it has come in direct and authentic succession to this boy. He has respect for this calling, and he seeks to discharge his duties as a youthful holder of the priesthood of the Lord. Is that training for a minister in the gospel of Christ? Is there anything taught in the seminaries of ecclesiastical learning more important as a groundwork for ministerial service than actual participation in the functions and offices of the priesthood?

Well, this young man continues through the various gradations of the priesthood, always being given and assuming larger participation in the functions of the Church and the blessing of the people.

Fifth, much of the education of the young man, not only in the Sunday School, the other auxiliary organizations, and the priesthood quorum, but also in his academic training, is directed toward acquisition of theological learning and capacity to live and expound the principles of the gospel. Church schools, institutes, and seminaries are available to him in this preparation.

If he avails himself of all these privileges, I say he is prepared for missionary service and for ordination and setting apart to go forth as an ambassador and minister of the Lord Jesus Christ in teaching his gospel to the people and performing ministerial serv-

ices among them. I hope that never again in our own country or in other countries will the ministerial status of our missionaries be seriously questioned.

We can use young women of eligible age, health, and spiritual qualifications in the missionary service. They have performed an outstanding work in foreign and local missions. Their pleasing manner, their intelligent and persuasive elucidation of the principles of the gospel have won for them sympathetic listeners where others have failed. Their services are sought by all the missions because of their competence and the lovely atmosphere and spirit they bring, but they must have good health, for the labors are strenuous.

We have need for married couples in the missions—men and women of maturity and experience whose families have been reared, who can go into missions and not only proselyte but also teach to branches of the mission the great principles of self-government, to give guidance under the direction of the mission president to the efforts of new members who have not been schooled in the procedures of the Church.

Perhaps I have said too much with reference to the details of some of our missionary procedure. If I have, please ascribe it to my intense interest in the success of our great system.

May I now make a few comments on some matters which, in my judgment, have a bearing on our whole missionary endeavor. I have spoken to you about these matters before, but I deem them worthy of further attention to fortify our resolution to capitalize on the notable missionary experiences which I first mentioned.

These comments and observations I bring forward under the general caption of *courage* and *frankness* in gospel exposition. I think perhaps I may have received my idea and urge to mention this matter from the series of addresses presented by our brethren during recent months on the Sunday evening program of the Church broadcast over the radio. I do hope that many of you have listened to these programs, and I hope sincerely that many of our friends not in the Church have listened, also. The messages were meant for them.

I think these messages are furnishing a pattern that all of us may well adopt in our attempt to share the gospel with our neighbors and with the world. The addresses were dissertations on gospel principles, literally reciting scriptural support for the doctrines we espouse and teach. The feature of the discourses, however, which arrested my attention was the speaker's approach to the listening audience.

After or during each exposition of a principle of the restored gospel, the speaker confronted his listeners with one or more personal questions, of which the following are examples. (I attempt to give only the idea, not the language.) All of the questions were presented with the utmost courtesy, and in a spirit of friendliness, but in frankness.

After the lecture on the personality of God, follows the question: Are you, my friend, converted to the worship of a personal God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Eternal Parent, and the Organizer and Ruler of the universe? Is he a real Father in heaven to you, as you offer your prayers and supplications to him? Or are you inclined to accept in lieu of such a concept that God is merely a principle of power in the universe without personality? Do you believe that such a nebulous concept of the Almighty will be adequate to govern in the affairs of men and bring reverential obedience to divine law and brotherhood among the sons of God?

And then after an explanation of baptism, these frank questions: Are you, my Christian friend, convinced in your own heart that the baptism you have received is the baptism prescribed by the Savior of the world as essential for the salvation of man and entrance into the Father's kingdom? Have you complete confidence that the authority performing baptism for you emanates directly from the Savior, who is the Author of salvation? Would you not, if you seek for truth, feel far more contented to receive baptism in the manner in which our Lord himself received it, performed by divine authority traceable directly to reliable sources verified by recent history, not subject to the debate and confusion arising out of question-

able interpretations and practices of antique times with historical records inadequate for present competent proof?

After the subject of the Holy Ghost has been explained in the light of the scriptures and modern revelation, these questions, very frank, perhaps bold, addressed to the friend who listens: Have you received the Holy Ghost? If you answer yes, how did you receive it? Do you believe, after what you have heard, that it can be conferred upon anyone except under the laying on of hands by him who holds the priesthood of God? Would you like to have the Holy Ghost as a guide and companion in life as promised by the Savior?

Finally, as to modern revelation, so important and essential in the establishment of the restored Church: Have you, my friend, one single piece of competent evidence to negate the actuality of the experiences of Joseph Smith, which through his record and solemn testimony he has left to the Church and all men? Do you deny the power of the Lord to reveal himself to his children and to give to them his word and will? Do you acknowledge the necessity, in the varying and discordant interpretations of the Lord's ministry and the subsequent history of his Church, for a word from him, which you must admit is the answer to disputation and controversy? Do you not find it in your heart, if you love God, to seek to know the truth about him and his work? Is there any adequate answer except in revelation?

I dwell upon this personal approach by personal questions because I think it is calculated to bring a personal blessing to him who is questioned. I do not want the investigator to be offended. I do not want his right of privacy and thinking and affiliation to be invaded. I do not want to do anything of this nature without his consent, but if he does consent to listen, I believe the greatest good to him comes in a frank statement of the way the principles we teach affect his personal life.

Now, you may say, we are always frank. Are we? How many men and women are there among us who find it much easier to present things about the Church and the gospel in more or less generalized statements? It is not diffi-

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cult to uphold and contend for the virtues of Christian life in a Christian community. Many like to do it; I am glad they do. The more all people acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, the more hope we shall have for the prevalence of his doctrine and principles in the affairs of men.

I have observed that there is frequently adopted a principle of negotiation between conflicting groups and interests which runs something after this order: emphasize the areas of agreement and minimize those of difference. It may be that that is acceptable as a diplomatic policy, and it may have some virtue in religious discussion, but I am not able to see how we can make great progress in teaching the true gospel to our fellow men without forcefully bringing to their attention in frankness, but good spirit, the differences which in reality represent the essence of revealed truth.

This is the sesquicentennial year of the birth of Joseph Smith. We should like to pay great honor and respect to him as the chosen servant and prophet of the Lord. How, may I ask, can we hope to do this in a way more acceptable to him than by the world-wide dissemination of the distinctive interpretations and features of the gospel which have come to us through his inspired teachings?

May I mention a final item in our missionary effort. It is what I choose to designate as background for the missionary. Communication in the world today is relatively easy. Many travel. There is widespread knowledge, particularly where there is no censorship in the dissemination of news, of communities, and social systems. Our missionaries go to the world representing not only great principles of truth, but also a divinely appointed society, established under the revelations coming from our Father in heaven. The principles of life which they teach are exemplified in that society, and their vitality and effectiveness are measured and appraised very largely by the living and behavior of that society.

We often say we have a converted

ministry who go forth with complete conviction and testimony. These missionaries need a converted constituency whose conviction is attested by their living. They must be able to point with pride to us as we point with pride to them. It is almost impossible to calculate the retardation and injury to the great cause which comes from those whose performance is not consistent with their professions. In the stakes and wards of Zion the Lord has caused to be set up divisions of his kingdom. God grant that the Latter-day Saint in these divisions may have the courage, the vision, the devotion, and the strength of character to make these divisions of the kingdom effective and impressive background for the proclamation of his gospel by his missionaries.

We live in a good day, my brethren and sisters, a day of encouragement and hope and boundless opportunities. Above all else we are blessed with truth, truth about God, truth about man, his salvation and destiny. We have a burning desire to share that truth with all the children of our Father. To that end we send our missionaries to them at great cost and sacrifice.

We invite all men to listen with open minds and hearts, and fortified by divine authority and the prophecies of the holy scriptures and lifetime experiences of good men, we solemnly make the promise to them that if they will hearken and receive, their lives will be enriched. Whether wealthy or poor, they will be infinitely happier, and they will thank the Lord to the end of their days for the missionaries who brought them the truth.

I invoke the blessings of the Lord on his Church and kingdom in the earth, and upon all men, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

President Stephen L. Richards of the First Presidency of the Church has just spoken to us. We shall now hear from Elder George Q. Morris of the Council of the Twelve, who will be followed by Elder S. Dilworth Young.