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Of the First Council of the Seventy

As I travel over the parts of the vineyard of the Lord to which I am assigned, I marvel at the miracle that is the Church.

Each week the faithful gather to hear instruction and to renew the covenant that they made at the time of their baptism and to receive the blessings of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The men who call them together are the appointed leaders, those called by revelation to lead the flock into righteousness.

I say *appointed* leaders, for in this Church we do not wait for men to exhibit the leadership necessary to preside over a stake, or a mission, or a ward, but call them through the guidance of the Spirit. "This one," whispers the Spirit to the soul of the appointed servant, "is the one to now lead at this time." He is presented to the people for their sustaining vote.

#### Manifestation of willingness to sustain

Time after time I have seen the multitude of hands raised. Some doubters have said that the vote is automatic. With this I beg to differ. The unanimity of vote is the sign of the great principle of obedience in action, but this cannot conceal the expression on people's faces. Every conference to which I have gone where this action was taken I have witnessed the approval in the expressions exhibited on the faces of the people. More than once I have heard a deep, rumbling, awesome murmur of approval that has swept through a congregation the moment a name was mentioned, even before the vote was called for. I have seen the smiles and nodding of heads as those in tune with the spirit of the meeting gave more than the raising of a hand in approbation. It is this expression, given so freely, that heartens the presiding officer and confirms his inspiration.

Undoubtedly there are those present at these conferences who do not feel the whispering of the Spirit, yet they raise their hands in confirmation.

They do more than that, for at the bidding of the newly sustained president—or bishop, as the case may be—they respond to his call and serve faithfully. These may not have been assured that the call came from the Lord, but they are sure that the call came from the servant of the Lord and, for reasons known to themselves, believe that their personal call to service by this new servant came from the Lord. And so it will ever be.

The principle on which this constantly recurring scene is based is found in the great vision given to Abraham and preserved for us, as miraculously almost as the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

The papyrus containing the vision of Abraham came to Joseph Smith through a series of events that only the guidance of supernatural power could have made possible. The events that brought it about seem natural enough, but they took place at the right moment in history to the right people, with the result that we have knowledge of the vision. I quote from part of it:

"And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell;

"And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them." (Abraham 3:24-25.)

#### Response to leaders

We acknowledge that in order to obey *all things* whatsoever we are commanded, we must obey the leaders through whom the commands come. In our personal lives we have the Ten Commandments, the 42nd Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, which states again for our day these commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the golden text from Micah (Mic. 6:8) to guide us, but in the service of the organized Church we also obey the

leaders. And in direct proportion to the degree of that obedience we receive the Spirit of the Holy Ghost to guide us and sustain us. If we can obey this principle, we shall avoid contention in the Church.

This principle is universal in the Church. I have just now returned from a visit to the Tongan Mission located in one group, of many groups, of islands in the far Pacific. The living customs are far different from ours; the culture of the people has taken a different path than has ours. Yet the Saints respond in exactly the same way as we do here. They obey their leaders. On a Sunday one can see them dressed in their lava-lavas, their best shell necklaces over their shoulders, wending their way to sacrament meeting in the branch chapel.

One such chapel is a small building with a thatched roof and meager furniture. There in the tongue of the Tongans the branch president conducts the service. And the members go home uplifted through their obedience to the appointed leader and participation in the ordinance reminding them of their acceptance of Christ. I felt at home among these people, just as much at home as Brother [Gordon B.] Hinckley expressed here sometime ago when he described his visits to the Saints on Taiwan and in Korea and Japan.

I am thankful for the binding force of the priesthood when made active by the obedience of the people to their leaders. We see the same principle in force in this building this very day, and we rejoice at its continuation in the Church.

### **Saints in Tonga send love to President McKay**

I desire to make one more statement. Everywhere in Tonga I was asked to convey the love of the Saints to you,

President McKay. They have not forgotten the harassment of the Tongan officials years ago when they found excuse to quarantine you on a nearby island, nor have they forgotten your visit with them after the officials relented.

We tried to visit Niue Island. The same set of circumstances were there. The sea was rough and the captain would not let us go ashore. We talked about your experience in the same situation.

### **President McKay's Samoa visit remembered**

I think I was most moved when we stood in a valley surrounded by cloud-bathed mountains on the edge of a foaming, tumbling stream of clear water in the mountains of Upolu, Samoa. There we read an inscription on a bronze plaque fastened to a monument. It was placed there, it said, in honor of the visit of President McKay to that place, and of the things he had said there. I looked at the school now there in response to President McKay's pledge to the people and could recognize what it is doing to children through their growing years. I do not imitate the Lord as he is quoted in Genesis, but I could see that it was "good."

President McKay, the people standing there with me asked that I bring to you their love. With theirs I add mine. Someone had to have the vision of the service to be rendered to those people. That it fell to your lot to have it gives me joy. With these people, our brothers of the blood of Israel, I sustain you as a prophet, seer, and revelator, and witness that from Joseph Smith the Prophet until now we have been led by prophets called of God and sustained by the people. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.