

I think of the words of President McKay, not only at the beginning of this conference but prior to that, when he said:

"He is our head. This is his Church. Without his divine guidance and constant inspiration, we cannot succeed; with his guidance, with his inspiration, we cannot fail."

To this I humbly add my own witness. I know that God lives, and that Jesus Christ is his Son and Savior of the world; that this Church was restored by a prophet of God and is directed by a prophet of God today; that this Church is directed and led by revelation.

God knows and loves and cares, and he is most anxious that you young people establish your own personal relationship with him, so he can, by the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, arm you with this divine knowledge, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Elder Boyd K. Packer

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

I have thrilled with you, my brethren and sisters, at the singing of this great pioneer anthem ["Come, Come Ye Saints"]. I think there is no sound quite like the Saints singing at conference.

This is a year of conventions and conferences. Many of them are held throughout the world. They are of many kinds: governmental, political, business, educational, religious, but of them all this one is unique. Nowhere in the world is there, or could there be, an assembly such as this.

Purposes of general conference

President David O. McKay lists the purposes for holding general conferences as follows:

"... Reference to the Doctrine and Covenants will disclose the fact that there are four principal purposes for holding conferences of the Church:

"First, to transact current Church business.

"Second, to hear reports and general Church statistics.

President N. Eldon Tanner

He to whom we have just listened is Elder Loren C. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy.

The congregation and Combined Choruses will now join in singing, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," after which Elder Boyd K. Packer, Assistant to the Twelve, will speak to us.

The congregation and the Combined Choruses joined in singing the hymn, "Come, Come Ye Saints."

President N. Eldon Tanner

Elder Boyd K. Packer, Assistant to the Twelve, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Theodore M. Burton, Assistant to the Twelve.

"Third, to 'approve of those names which I (the Lord) have appointed, or to disapprove of them.'

"Fourth, to worship the Lord in sincerity and reverence, and to give and to receive encouragement, exhortation, and instruction." (*Conference Report*, October 1938, pp. 130-31.)

Early conferences

The first conference was held on June 9, 1830. I read from the minutes:

"Our numbers were about thirty, besides whom many assembled with us, who were either believers or anxious to learn. Having opened by singing and prayer, we partook together of the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We then proceeded to confirm several who had lately been baptized, after which we called out and ordained several to the various offices of the Priesthood. Much exhortation and instruction was given, and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon us in a miraculous manner—many of our number prophesied, whilst others had the heavens opened to their view."

Saturday, October 5

Second Day

(*Documentary History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 84-85.)

This was the first conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Seventeen years later there was held an even more humble conference than the first. It is described by Elder John Young.

"I reached the valley during the sitting of Conference, and some of the brethren said, 'The Conference is sitting; won't you go?' So I walked down to where they were holding Conference, and I found them by the side of a haystack. There was Father John Smith and a little handful of men that might have been covered with a small tent, and they were holding the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 6, p. 232.)

Those men who met that October morning by that haystack, which no doubt stood somewhere near this building, had vision enough to know that someday their message would be carried across the world. From that small group of pioneers the influence of these great conferences has grown, and now the message is heard beyond the seas and across the world. There is a great spirit in our conferences.

Established by God

President Heber J. Grant declared that "God established these conferences. Nothing but the spirit of the living God could bring together such a congregation. . . .

"The General Conferences of the Latter-day Saints are one of the great outstanding testimonies . . . of the divinity of the work in which we are engaged." (*Conference Report*, October 1933, p. 118.)

What of those who attend conference? Perhaps we could introduce just one of them. Sometime ago there came to a conference the religious editor of a large newspaper. He came across the country to get the "feel" of the conference.

Interview by editor

Before the opening of a session, we came down the aisle of this building.

It was filled to capacity. He noticed a middle-aged man, dressed unpretentiously, sitting next to the aisle, and asked to be introduced. We found him to be from the West Coast, a convert to the Church. As I recall, he had once been a member of the same church to which the editor belonged. He was a counselor in a bishopric. The interview proceeded something like this:

"How long have you been a member of the Church?"

"About eight years."

"Did you join the first time the missionaries contacted you?"

"Oh, no. It took me several weeks before I joined the Church." Then he added with a smile, "I don't like to rush into things."

"They tell me," the reporter inquired, "that the President of your Church is a prophet. Is that true?"

"Oh yes! I know him to be a prophet of God, just as much a prophet as any of the biblical prophets."

"Are you paid for your service in the Church?"

"Oh yes!" he said. "Generously paid—in blessings, not money. It seems that the principle of tithing requires that we pay for the privilege."

The editor, satisfied with the interview, turned to leave. Then, as an afterthought, he turned again with another question and said, "Tell me, why—why do you pay tithing?"

I noticed that the good brother's countenance became very serious, and there was a brimming bit of emotion in his eyes as he softly answered in a single word: "Obedience."

Participants in conference

These, then, are those who come to conference. From the pulpit here I can see the lumberman from Oregon, the electrician from Maine, the policeman from Tonga, the nurseryman from Auckland, the civil servant from Holland.

I can see those who saved and skimped to come. I can see others who regard it merely as an incidental expense.

And now of the men who speak here—the First Presidency, the twelve apostles, and the other General Au-

thorities. They too come from varied occupations. One was a newspaper editor, another a building contractor, another an engineer. Several are attorneys. One was a bank president, another an air line executive, and two or three are insurance men. Several are teachers. Four of them hold doctorates. A number have held public office—two of them as cabinet members. Several have served in the military. They are all married men with families. Though most of them have known success in their chosen profession, almost to a man they come from humble beginnings.

As it was when he was here, they have been welded together in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So it should be, for was not Peter a fisherman, and Andrew and James and John; and was not Matthew a publican?

Subjects discussed

What do General Authorities talk about in conference? Some people say that they are out of their province when they speak up on temporal or political issues. President John Taylor said of these conferences:

“. . . as we possess bodies as well as spirits, and have to live by eating, drinking, and wearing, it becomes necessary that temporal matters should be considered and discussed in our Conferences, and that we should deliberate upon all things that are calculated to benefit, bless, and exalt the Saints of God, whether they refer to our spiritual affairs or to our avocations and duties in life as husbands and wives, as parents and children . . . whether they refer to the policy we should pursue in our commercial relations . . . or to any other matter affecting us as human beings composing part of the body politic of this nation or as citizens of the world.” (*JD*, Vol. 11, pp. 353-54.)

Others complain that the brethren are blind to social developments and urge them to be obedient to the “revelation of social progress.”

Come the Sabbath day you will find these men scattered across the world holding conferences, bearing witness, and preaching the gospel. One will be in Hong Kong, another perhaps visiting

the servicemen in Vietnam, another effecting a new organization in Australia or New Zealand. Others will be in South Africa, England, Germany, Canada, Brazil, or Guatemala.

Yet, when the council meetings come in the middle of the week, we find the brethren here again. They sit in council to prayerfully deliberate over the affairs of the Church and kingdom of God here upon the earth.

Traveling as they do across the earth (literally, the full extent of it), it is hardly conceivable that they could miss or would ignore any significant development—social, political, religious, national, or racial—anywhere on the earth. Also, they have lifelong training and achievement in fields of activity so important to mankind.

Speakers called of God

However, it is not because of travel nor professional success that we ought to pay heed to them. Nor is it because they are nimble of mind or wise in years. These things are incidental only.

We listen to them because they have been “called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.” (Article of Faith 5.)

They are given divine authority. Not one of them aspired to the office he holds, nor did he call himself, for “in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one takes the place to which one is duly called,” said President Clark, “which place one neither seeks or declines.” (*The Improvement Era*, June 1951, p. 412.)

“Ye have not chosen me,” said the Lord, “but I have chosen you, and ordained you.” (John 15:16.)

Lesson from scripture

We don’t have to listen to them or pay heed to them—we have our agency. But there is a lesson in scripture to consider.

The children of Israel entered the land of Edom. It was infested with serpents and snakes, the bite of which was so painful and so dangerous that they called them fiery, flying serpents. They cried for deliverance.

“. . . And Moses prayed for the people.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

“And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.” (Num. 21:7-9.)

“How silly,” some must have said. “How can such a thing cure me? I’ll not show my stupidity by paying any attention,” and some would not look.

In First Nephi we read that “after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished.” (1 Ne. 17:41.)

The lesson is enlarged in the Gospel of John.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:14-16.)

Great witness from conferences

And today many say, “How silly! How could accepting Christ save me?”

They will not turn their heads to look nor incline their ears to hear. They ignore the great witness that comes from these conferences. We ought to, indeed we must, heed the counsel of these men, for the Lord said, “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.

“For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, and the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true, and the truth abideth forever and ever. Amen.” (D&C 1:38-39.)

Though it is my privilege to serve among them, I have not forgotten for one moment that these men, the brethren, are the servants of the Lord. And individually, independent of their knowing it, I know and testify that David O. McKay is a prophet of God, that Jesus is the Christ, and that this conference is his voice speaking to his children. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President N. Eldon Tanner

He to whom we have just listened is Elder Boyd K. Packer, Assistant to the Twelve.

Elder Theodore M. Burton, Assistant to the Twelve will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Council of the Twelve, as the concluding speaker of this conference session.

Elder Theodore M. Burton

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My dear brothers and sisters, and all who are watching and listening to these messages: If you were to approach a military installation some dark night, you would be immediately challenged by a sentry with the question, “Who goes there?” If you were to answer that challenge with the word “friend,” the sentry would answer, “Advance, friend, and give the password.” If you were neither able to give

the password nor to identify yourself, you would be placed in an embarrassing and a dangerous position.

Yet millions of those presently living on the earth are totally unprepared for death and to enter through the gates of the celestial kingdom. They know neither the password nor will they be able to identify themselves as a son or a daughter of God. They have never taken upon themselves the name of the