

Thursday, April 6

Regions, conducted by Patricia Maughan. Elder Roy M. Darley was at the organ console.

President Tanner made the following introductory statement:

President N. Eldon Tanner

Members of the Church are convened in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the second session of the 142nd Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Sessions of this conference will be received by millions in the United States and Canada over hundreds of radio and television stations cooperating to provide the extensive coverage of this conference.

We extend a cordial welcome to our television and radio audience and to all present in this historic Tabernacle this afternoon—special guests, educational and government leaders, our regional representatives and stake presidencies from near and far, temple presidencies, bishoprics, and members of the General Auxiliary Boards.

The chorus of the leaders in our Primary organizations, who are responsible for directing to a very great extent the work of our young people, our children, made up of combined choruses of the Utah North Regions,

conducted by Patricia Maughan, will begin this service by singing "Come, Come Ye Saints."

The invocation will be offered by Elder Raymond J. Pace, Regional Representative of the Twelve.

The Primary Leaders Chorus sang "Come, Come Ye Saints."

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President N. Eldon Tanner

The Primary Leaders Chorus, under the direction of Patricia Maughan, with Roy Darley at the organ, will now sing "Sweet Is the Work."

The Primary Leaders Chorus sang "Sweet Is the Work."

President Tanner

Elder Robert L. Simpson, newly appointed Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, will be our first speaker, and he will be followed by Milton R. Hunter of the First Council of Seventy.

Elder Robert L. Simpson

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My beloved brothers and sisters, I am so grateful to my Heavenly Father for the spirit of this day and especially that I have been preceded by these lovely Primary sisters. The Primary has meant so much to me in my responsibilities of the past few years, and their singing has given me the peace and feeling that I need at this moment.

Overseas leaders

How thrilling it has been to sit here today and look down at our ever-expanding section of overseas leaders; and I am sure that the Lord's word is being fulfilled, as found in the 33rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, when he said:

"And even so will I gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, even as many as will believe in me, and hearken unto my voice." (D&C 33:6.)

And how thrilling it is to see these leaders who have listened and who have hearkened and who have become faithful and true and are found worthy to be counted as leaders in their areas.

As we listened to the prophet this morning and as we listened to the other brethren who have responded, I was also struck by the great scripture that we hear so often: "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; . . . whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same." (D&C 1:38.) Indeed, it is the same, and as a prophet of God talks to us, we are hearing the will of the Lord without question.

Personal tribute

May I just take a brief second to pay personal tribute to two of the greatest men I have known in my life, Bishop Vandenberg and Bishop Brown. These two great companions have meant so much and have given so much to me in my life, as they have given to you as they have traveled throughout the Church.

I have never known a man of greater courage and integrity than Bishop John H. Vandenberg. I have never been with a person so qualified in administrative and organizational ability as Bishop Victor L. Brown. These men are great assets to the work of the Lord, and I am so grateful for the blessing that came in my association with them.

Common judges in Israel

In traveling around the Church for the past ten and one-half years, what a joy it has been to meet so many of our bishops, stake presidents, men who have been designated as common judges in Israel, men who are guardians over the flock, men who have been given a charge and a responsibility that is second to none. May I take a

few moments at this session of our conference to discuss what I believe is perhaps the most misunderstood meeting of all the meetings that convene in the Church. I refer to the bishop's court. I would like to begin by relating a story.

Verdict of church court

The brief episode I am about to relate is true, and the facts are accurate because those who were present will never forget them.

The hour was very late; the room was quiet except for the audible sobs of a young man who had just received the verdict of a Church court. Justice had taken its true course. There was apparently no alternative. The unanimous decision, following serious deliberation, fasting, and prayer, was excommunication.

After several minutes, a weary face looked up, and the young man's voice broke the silence as he said, "I have just lost the most precious thing in my life, and nothing will stand in my way until I have regained it."

The process leading up to the court was not an easy one. Certainly, courage is a most important factor for every person who has seriously slipped but wants to get back on the Lord's side.

After the meeting was finished, the communications that followed the young man's dramatic statement of hope for the future were so reassuring. From some there were firm promises of help during the ensuing months of continuing repentance; from others a pat on the back and a handshake, with an eye-to-eye assurance that conveyed a feeling of confidence and the hand of fellowship. There was complete knowledge among all present at that meeting that all could be regained in the life of this young man if it were done in the Lord's way.

The way back

This young man had just taken his first giant step back. As an excom-

Thursday, April 6

municated member of the Church and with his heart determined to make things right, he was far better off than just a few days before with his membership record intact but carrying deceit in his heart that seemed to shout the word *hypocrite* with every move he made toward doing something in the Church.

This episode took place a few years ago. The young man's pledge has been fulfilled, and in my opinion, no member of the Church stands on ground more firm than the man who has had the courage to unburden himself to his priesthood authority and to set things in order with his Master. What a relief to have once again the peace of mind that "passeth all understanding."

Priesthood courts of the Church are not courts of retribution. They are courts of love. Oh, that members of the Church could understand this one fact.

The time to repent

The adversary places a fear in the heart of the transgressor that makes it so difficult for him to do what needs to be done; and in the words of James E. Talmage, "As the time of repentance is procrastinated, the ability to repent grows weaker; neglect of opportunity in holy things develops inability." (*Articles of Faith*, p. 114.) This simply means that doing what needs to be done will never be easier than right now. As in all other paths and guideposts that have been provided for us to achieve our eternal destiny of exaltation, there are no shortcuts.

Heavenly Father is not antiprogress: he is the author of eternal progression. In his own words, "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

Our achievement of eternal life adds glory to his name and is the only ultimate objective acceptable to a true Latter-day Saint.

Reduced to its simplest terms, our mission here in mortality is to overcome weaknesses of the flesh and all

irregularities in our lives, to the point that our control of personal desires is sufficient to bring about a daily living and thinking pattern that will be compatible with his holy presence.

Be not disillusioned by doctrine of the adversary that there will likely be a magic point in eternity when all of a sudden selfish and improper actions are automatically eliminated from our being. Holy writ has confirmed time and time again that such is not the case, and prophets through the ages have assured us that now is the time to repent, right here in this mortal sphere. It will never be easier than now; and returning to Brother Talmage's thought, he who procrastinates the day or hopes for an alternate method that might require less courage waits in vain, and in the meantime, the possibilities grow dimmer. He is playing the game as Satan would have him play it, and exaltation in the presence of God grows more remote with each passing day.

Availability of bishops

Now bishops, be available to your people. Let them know about the kindness and compassion that dominates your soul. Don't become so caught up in the business affairs of your ward administration that you fail to convey to your people all of those wonderful attributes referred to in the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants. I am talking about the attributes of kindly persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and love unfeigned.

Bishops, learn the great principle of delegation so that your heart and your mind can be free to counsel with the Saints. You are their common judge. There is no one else in the entire ward so designated by the Lord. It is you they must turn to. You must be available to listen, and, equally important, you must live in such a way that the voice of heaven will find utterance through you for the blessing and edification of your people.

I am certain that a basic cornerstone

of true justice is compassion. Perhaps even more important than the transgression itself is the sensitivity of a person's soul and his desire to repent and to follow the Master.

The need for help

It would be so much easier to talk about serious transgression to someone you had never seen before and would likely never see again; or better still, to talk in total seclusion to an unseen ear and receive your forgiveness then and there from unseen lips. But in such a process, who would then be at your side in the struggling months ahead, as you attempt with great effort to make your repentance complete, as you strive to prevent a tragic recurrence?

Few, if any, men have the strength to walk that hill alone, and please be assured, it is uphill all the way. There needs to be help—someone who really loves you, someone who has been divinely commissioned to assist you confidentially, quietly, assuredly—and may I reemphasize the word *confidentially*, for here again, Satan has spread the false rumor that confidences are rarely kept.

May I assure you that bishops and stake presidents are not in the habit of betraying these sacred confidences. Before being ordained and set apart, their very lives have been reviewed in that upper room in the temple by those divinely called as prophets, seers, and revelators. Without question, they are among the noble and great ones of this world and should be regarded as such by the Saints.

What a glorious plan this is! How reassuring to know that we all have hope for a total blessing, in spite of all the mistakes we have made; that there might be complete fulfillment; that we might enter his holy presence with our family units.

Process of true justice

Even excommunication from this church is not the end of the world; and

if this process is necessary in carrying out true justice, I bear you my personal and solemn witness that even this extreme penalty of excommunication can be the first giant step back, provided there follows a sincere submission to the Spirit and faith in the authenticity of God's plan.

These processes can only be carried out in this church through properly designated priesthood authority, for his house is a house of order. All of this is made very clear in the Doctrine and Covenants. May I quote:

"And again, verily I say unto you, that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same.

"That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willet to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still.

"All kingdoms have a law given;

"And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom.

"And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions.

"All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified." (D&C 88:34-39.)

In other words, brothers and sisters, all beings who abide not in those conditions, all who fail to correct infractions of the eternal law by proper priesthood procedures that have been established for such corrections, are not acceptable to the Lord and will likely never be eligible for his presence.

God bless us to accept eternal law and understand that there can be no other way is my humble prayer, and I ask it for each and every one in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. □