

Bishop Victor L. Brown

Presiding Bishop

My dear brethren, my spirit is subdued and my heart is full tonight as I stand before this great body of priesthood and realize that there are thousands upon thousands in other gatherings throughout the Church, and as I contemplate the responsibilities that have been placed on my shoulders.

New calling

After receiving my call the other day, I was asked by President Lee if I was shocked. I had difficulty replying. Being shocked was an understatement. I might say that the aftershocks have been much more severe than the original. Notwithstanding this, I have faith and look forward with great anticipation and enthusiasm to the future.

I do this because I know that God lives. I know that his Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, is the head of this Church and that he is actively directing the affairs of this, his Church today, through his prophet, President Joseph Fielding Smith, who has just borne witness in such a powerful way of his calling and also of mine.

I also know I have been called by the Lord through his prophets, as President Smith announced, and that if I will repent of my sins, He will bless me and strengthen me for the tasks ahead. If I did not know these things to be true, I would not have the courage nor the temerity to accept such a call. Even knowing this, it is frightening to contemplate assuming such a sacred trust.

Tribute to former leaders

The last ten and one-half years under the direction of a great leader, Bishop John H. Vandenberg, have been wonderful indeed. I have been associated with him as a member of my stake presidency when I served as bishop of the Denver Fourth Ward, as

a fellow counselor in the Denver Stake presidency, and now for more than ten years as one of his counselors in the Presiding Bishopric. I want him and you to know that I love and appreciate him. He is a man of great ability. I am deeply grateful for having had the privilege of being his counselor.

Bishop Simpson, as first counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, has made a great contribution to the Church, as evidenced by the love the people everywhere have for him. He is a man without guile.

Response of counselors

And now I am deeply grateful to two wonderful high priests for their dedication and total commitment to the Lord, which caused them to respond to the call to complete the Presiding Bishopric as my counselors.

In approaching the task of selecting counselors, I sought the inspiration of the Lord in prayer. I reviewed hundreds of names of worthy brethren, any of whom could have been called. The two who were called were the ones the Lord wanted. You witnessed confirmation of this truth as you listened to their testimonies in the first session of this conference.

Duties of Presiding Bishopric

We recognize our dependence on our Heavenly Father in assuming the responsibility as your Presiding Bishopric. We have but one desire and that is, to accomplish the work of the Lord in his own way and in his own time, for we recognize that this is his Church. We are his servants called to assist him in accomplishing his purpose, which is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

The Presiding Bishopric functions under the supervision and direction of the First Presidency, who constitute

the presidency of all the priesthood throughout the world. Under their direction and through their delegation, the Presiding Bishopric presides as the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood throughout the world.

The Aaronic Priesthood is the lesser priesthood. It is a preparatory priesthood preparing its holders for the greater or Melchizedek Priesthood. Therefore, the Presiding Bishopric's responsibility is to support and sustain the presidency of the Melchizedek Priesthood by assisting in the preparation and qualifying of young men to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.

In this regard we sustain the inspired prospective elders program that has just been introduced. There are tens of thousands of wonderful adult male members of the Church who hold the Aaronic Priesthood or who have not been ordained whose spiritual welfare has now been assigned to the elders quorum presidencies of the Church. This program is, and will become even more so, a great blessing to these brethren.

Blessings through Aaronic Priesthood

As I now reflect on the responsibility that has come to me as the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, I recall some of my feelings as a boy. I am humbled by the many blessings the Lord has granted me through the Aaronic Priesthood.

I remember with some clarity the thrill of passing the sacrament as a deacon in the Cardston Second Ward, Alberta Stake, in Canada. That same thrill returns each time I am invited to pass the sacrament to the General Authorities in our monthly meeting in the Salt Lake Temple.

I remember how I considered it an honor to participate in such a sacred service. I remember so well how my parents taught me that my hands and heart should be clean and pure so that I would be worthy to participate in this ordinance.

The greatest of all lessons was the example my father and mother set for me. Next was the example of my deacons quorum adviser, who was also my Scoutmaster. Brother Ben Wood was the epitome of what leaders of boys should be. Every boy under his leadership felt his great love. His influence was not limited to Sunday morning or Tuesday evening; it was felt all through the week. I shall ever be grateful to my deacons adviser for the lessons of life he taught me as a twelve-year-old deacon, lessons that have helped me from that day until now.

Many young men throughout the world are having experiences today similar to those I had as a twelve-year-old boy. All of you, whether you are twelve years of age or older, have the opportunity to experience these wonderful things.

A son of God

The foundation on which each boy begins is recognition that he is in very deed a son of God, with something of the divine in his soul. All men are children of God, but you have something more. You have the authority to act in his name. This sets you apart from the rest of the world. It does not automatically make you better than others, but it gives you the responsibility to live a better life than others.

Because you know you are a child of God and hold his priesthood, more is expected of you than of those who do not have this great blessing.

I have been thrilled as I have met young men of the Aaronic Priesthood throughout the Church who have a comprehension of the great blessing and honor that is theirs by virtue of this priesthood and who have consequently begun to build their lives on a sure foundation.

Experience in Pago Pago Stake

I was in the Pago Pago Stake in American Samoa. President Peters, the stake president, invited me to accom-

Saturday, April 8

pany him to one of the ward sacrament meetings. We arrived unannounced, so there were no special arrangements made.

It was a hot, humid day. As we approached the humble, one-room chapel with no air-conditioning, I suggested it might be appropriate to leave our jackets off. President Peters was quick to tell me that they wore jackets in sacrament meeting in their stake—no matter what the temperature—as a means of showing the Lord that they not only worshiped him but they also honored and respected him by being dressed in their very best.

As I took my place on the stand, there sat the priests and deacons at the sacrament table. Each had on a shirt, tie, and jacket. It was so hot and humid.

The normal dress of the islands is very casual, as you know, but in the eyes of these wonderful Samoan leaders and their Aaronic Priesthood boys, participating in the sacred sacrament service was not a casual experience. It was a sacred duty. They felt that their appearance helped show the respect and reverence they had for the Lord. I shall never forget their influence of reverence in that meeting. Surely their understanding of their relationship with Heavenly Father is an important step in magnifying their priesthood.

Scripture contest

One day several years ago, I attended the finals of an Aaronic Priesthood scripture contest in Sao Paulo, Brazil. These were the finals in a mission-wide contest held under the direction of President Wayne Beck. Sitting on the stand, acting as judges, were the district counselors. Gathered in small groups through the chapel were the contestants. As they were called up before the judges, they were challenged to repeat from memory scriptures selected at random by the judges and then to explain the meaning of each scripture.

I witnessed as much enthusiasm and excitement among these teams of young men of the Aaronic Priesthood as one normally sees at a basketball or soccer game. Because of the location, it was not as vocal, but it was just as intense. It was fun for them to make the scriptures become a part of themselves.

Honor of priesthood ordination

After a meeting with some of our servicemen in Da Nang, South Vietnam, one man in battle dress came up to me and asked if I would write a letter to his parents, who were nonmembers, explaining to them the great honor that had come to him that day. He said they knew nothing about the Church and asked, "Bishop Brown, would you mind telling them what a great honor it was for me to be ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood today?"

Some time ago in New York City a fine-looking young man said to me, "It isn't easy to be a Jew and a Mormon." When this young man was baptized, his parents were so displeased they held a formal funeral. As far as they are concerned, their son is dead.

How important it is that all young men of the Aaronic Priesthood recognize their responsibility as priesthood holders and, as President McKay used to say, act accordingly.

Cause of youth

And now a word to fathers, bishops, and other Aaronic Priesthood leaders, with emphasis for the fathers. With a feeling of brotherhood and love, we the Presiding Bishopric lock arms with you in the great causes of youth. Never has there been a finer generation of young people.

I have a conviction that the spirits of this generation were held back by the Lord to come forth at this time because they are special spirits. And yet the world into which they have come is filled with evil and temptation. Satan is at work with his legions. We who have been called—in the home and in

the Church—to lead the youth have a sacred responsibility to them.

Parental responsibility

Regarding the home, the Lord has said in the Doctrine and Covenants:

“And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

“And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord.” (D&C 68:25, 28.)

The first responsibility rests with the parents. The position of the Church is to aid the parents and the family, not to replace them.

Charge to leaders

Bishops, you are the presidents of the priests quorums, and with your counselors you are the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood in your wards. These young men need your leadership. They need your attention, for you have a special calling with a special blessing. You have the power of discernment. You are common judges in Israel.

If you will take the time to become involved with these young people and see that they become involved with you, you can become saviors on Mount Zion to many. You are the ones, along with the other leaders in the wards and branches, who make the difference.

We want you to know of our love and support for you. We are grateful to the Lord for each of you and pray our Heavenly Father's blessings upon us all that, through our united and devoted leadership, we may help every young man in this church honor his priesthood so that not one of these precious children of God will be lost. I pray this humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. □

President Harold B. Lee

I am sure that you would wish me to extend to Bishop Brown and his counselors your support, your blessing and your prayers for their ministry in this great responsibility.

Bishop Victor L. Brown, the Presiding Bishop of the Church, has just spoken to us.

Elder J. Thomas Fyans, managing director of the Department of Internal Communications, will now address us. He will be followed by Elder Paul H. Dunn of the First Council of Seventy.

Elder J. Thomas Fyans

Director of Internal Communications

In the 64th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 34, we are told, “Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind. . . .” There are many such people, both on a church-service basis and some giving their full time, who are responding to the challenge of getting the materials to you on time.

Department of Internal Communications

Under the direction of the First Presidency and the Council of the

Twelve, a Department of Internal Communications has been organized. Three members of the Council of the Twelve are advisers to this organization. They are Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Thomas S. Monson, and Elder Boyd K. Packer. We are grateful to them for their continuous inspiration.

The Department of Internal Communications has assignments in four major areas: instructional materials, magazines, administrative services, and distribution and translation.