

Elder Ezra Taft Benson

Of the Council of the Twelve

The prophet Ezekiel declared:

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

"When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

"Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezek. 3:17-19.)

Warning voices

The inspired Book of Mormon prophets saw our day and warned us of the strategy of the adversary. Hear their words:

"For behold, at that day shall he [the devil] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.

"And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security. . . .

". . . wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God. . . ." (2 Ne. 28:20-21, 26.)

Through a modern prophet, Joseph Smith, the Lord has given this further warning: "Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear:

". . . and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles,

shall be cut off from among the people;

"For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;

"They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world. . . .

"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." (D&C 1:11, 14-16, 38.)

These warnings were given 140 years ago. The fulfillment is now. We are living witnesses, unless we are blinded by our own complacency and the craftiness of evil men.

Watchmen on the tower

As watchmen on the tower of Zion, it is our obligation and right as leaders to speak out against current evils—evils that strike at the very foundation of all we hold dear as the true church of Christ and as members of Christian nations.

As one of these watchmen, with a love for humanity, I accept humbly this obligation and challenge and gratefully strive to do my duty without fear. In times as serious as these, we must not permit fear of criticism to keep us from doing our duty, even at the risk of our counsel being tabbed as political, as government becomes more and more entwined in our daily lives.

In the crisis through which we are now passing, we have been fully

warned. This has brought forth some criticism. There are some of us who do not want to hear the message. It embarrasses us. The things which are threatening our lives, our welfare, our freedoms are the very things some of us have been condoning. Many do not want to be disturbed as they continue to enjoy their comfortable complacency.

The Church is founded on eternal truth. We do not compromise principle. We do not surrender our standards regardless of current trends or pressures. Our allegiance to truth as a church is unwavering. Speaking out against immoral or unjust actions has been the burden of prophets and disciples of God from time immemorial. It was for this very reason that many of them were persecuted. Nevertheless, it was their God-given task, as watchmen on the tower, to warn the people.

Age of appeasement

We live in an age of appeasement—the sacrificing of principle. Appeasement is not the answer. It is never the right answer.

One of these modern Church watchmen has given this sound warning:

“A milk-and-water allegiance kills; while a passionate devotion gives life and soul to any cause and its adherents. The troubles of the world may largely be laid at the doors of those who are neither hot nor cold; who always follow the line of least resistance; whose timid hearts flutter at taking sides for truth. As in the great Council in the heavens, so in the Church of Christ on earth, there can be no neutrality. We are, or we are not, on the side of the Lord. An unrelenting faith, contemptuous of all compromise, will lead the Church and every member of it, to triumph

and the achievement of our high destiny.

“The final conquerors of the world will be the men and women, few or many matters not, who fearlessly and unflinchingly cling to truth, and who are able to say no, as well as yes, on whose lofty banner is inscribed: No compromise with error. . . .”

“Tolerance is not conformity to the world’s view and practices. *We must not surrender our beliefs to get along with people*, however beloved or influential they may be. Too high a price may be paid for social standing or even for harmony. . . . The Gospel rests upon eternal truth; and truth can never be deserted safely.” (John A. Widtsoe, *Conference Report*, April 1941, pp. 117, 116.)

It has been well said that “our greatest national problem is erosion. Not erosion of the soil, but erosion of the national morality.”

A spiritual foundation

The United States of America has been great because it has been free. It has been free because it has trusted in God and was founded upon the principles of freedom set forth in the word of God. *This nation has a spiritual foundation.* To me, this land has a prophetic history.

In the year 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French historian, came to our country at the request of the French government to study our penal institutions. He also made a close study of our political and social institutions. In less than ten years, de Tocqueville had become world-famous, as the result of the four-volume work that he wrote, entitled *Democracy in America*. Here is his own stirring explanation of the greatness of America:

“I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commo-

dious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in her fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. *America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.*" (*Prophets, Principles and National Survival*, compiled by Jerreld L. Newquist [Salt Lake City, Publishers Press, 1964], p. 60.)

False ideologies

How strong is our will to remain free—to be good? False thinking and false ideologies, dressed in the most pleasing forms, quietly—almost without our knowing it—seek to reduce our moral defenses and to captivate our minds. They entice with bright promises of security, cradle-to-grave guarantees of many kinds. They masquerade under various names, but all may be recognized by one thing—one thing they all have in common: to erode away character and man's freedom to think and act for himself.

Effort will be made to lull us away into a false security. Proposals will be and are being offered and programs sponsored that have wide appeal. Attractive labels are usually attached to the most dangerous programs, often in the name of public welfare and personal security. Again, let us not be misled.

Freedom can be killed by neglect as well as by direct attack.

Too long have too many Americans, and people of the free world generally, stood by as silent accessories to the crimes of assault against freedom—assault against basic economic and spiritual prin-

ciples and traditions that have made nations strong.

Road of goodness

Let us strive for progress down the road of goodness and freedom. With the help and blessings of the Lord, the free people of the United States and the free world can and will face tomorrow without fear, without doubt, and with full confidence. We do not fear the phony population explosion, nor do we fear a shortage of food, if we can be free and good. The Lord has declared, ". . . the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare. . . ." (D&C 104:17.) We can accept this promise with confidence.

President Calvin Coolidge pinpointed the problem some years ago with these words:

"We do not need more material development, we need more spiritual development. We do not need more intellectual power, we need more moral power. We do not need more knowledge, we need more character. We do not need more government, we need more culture. We do not need more law, we need more religion. We do not need more of the things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen. It is on that side of life that it is desirable to put the emphasis at the present time. If that side is strengthened, the other side will take care of itself. It is that side which is the foundation of all else. If the foundation be firm, the superstructure will stand." (*Prophets, Principles, and National Survival*, p. 35.)

Downfall of Rome

As a free people, we are following very closely in many respects the pattern which led to the downfall of the great Roman Empire. A group of well-known historians has summarized those conditions leading

to the downfall of Rome in these words:

"... Rome had known a pioneer beginning not unlike our own pioneer heritage, and then entered into two centuries of greatness, reaching its pinnacle in the second of those centuries, going into the decline and collapse in the third. Yet, the sins of decay were becoming apparent in the latter years of that second century.

"It is written that there were vast increases in the number of the idle rich, and the idle poor. The latter (the idle poor) were put on a permanent dole, a welfare system not unlike our own. As this system became permanent, the recipients of public largesse (welfare) increased in number. They organized into a political block with sizable power. They were not hesitant about making their demands known. Nor was the government hesitant about agreeing to their demands . . . and with ever-increasing frequency. Would-be emperors catered to them. The great, solid middle class—Rome's strength then as ours is today—was taxed more and more to support a bureaucracy that kept growing larger, and even more powerful. Surtaxes were imposed upon incomes to meet emergencies. The government engaged in deficit spending. The denarius, a silver coin similar to our half dollar, began to lose its silvery hue. It took on a copper color as the government reduced the silver content.

"Even then, Gresham's law was at work, because the real silver coin soon disappeared. It went into hiding.

"Military service was an obligation highly honored by the Romans. Indeed, a foreigner could win Roman citizenship simply by volunteering for service in the legions of Rome. But, with increasing affluence and opulence, the young men of Rome began avoiding this

service, finding excuses to remain in the soft and sordid life of the city. They took to using cosmetics and wearing feminine-like hairdos and garments, until it became difficult, the historians tell us, to tell the sexes apart.

"Among the teachers and scholars was a group called the Cynics whose number let their hair and beards grow, and who wore slovenly clothes, and professed indifference to worldly goods as they heaped scorn on what they called 'middle class values.'

"The morals declined. It became unsafe to walk in the countryside or the city streets. Rioting was commonplace and sometimes whole sections of towns and cities were burned.

"And, all the time, the twin diseases of confiscatory taxation and creeping inflation were waiting to deliver the death blow.

"Then finally, all these forces overcame the energy and ambition of the middle class.

"Rome fell.

"We are now approaching the end of our second century." (Address by Governor Ronald Reagan of California at Eisenhower College, New York, 1969.)

Gibbon's account

In 1787 Edward Gibbon completed his noble work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Here is the way he accounted for the fall:

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.

2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies for free bread and circuses for the populace.

3. The mad craze for pleasure, sports becoming every year more and more exciting and brutal.

4. The building of gigantic

armaments when the real enemy was within the decadence of the people.

5. The decay of religion—faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

Is there a parallel for us in America today? Could the same reasons that destroyed Rome destroy America and possibly other countries of the free world?

For eight years in Washington I had this prayerful statement on my desk: "O God, give us men with a mandate higher than the ballot box."

Lessons of history

The lessons of history, many of them very sobering, ought to be turned to during this hour of our great achievements, because during the hour of our success is our greatest danger. Even during the hour of our great prosperity, a nation may sow the seeds of its own destruction. History reveals that rarely is a great civilization conquered from without unless it has weakened or destroyed itself within.

The lessons of history stand as guideposts to help us safely chart the course for the future.

As American citizens, as citizens of the nations of the free world, we need to rouse ourselves to the problems which confront us as great Christian nations. We must recognize that these fundamental, basic principles—moral and spiritual—lay at the very foundation of our past achievements. To continue to enjoy present blessings, we must return to these basic and fundamental principles. Economics and morals are both part of one inseparable body of truth. They must be in harmony. We need to square our actions with these eternal verities.

Eternal verities

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands firm in

support of the great spiritual and moral principles which have been the basic traditions of the free world. We oppose every evil effort to downgrade or challenge the eternal verities which have undergirded civilization from the beginning.

We will use every honorable means to strengthen the home and family; to encourage obedience to the first and great commandment to multiply and replenish the earth through noble parenthood; and to strengthen character through adherence to high spiritual and moral principles.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints chastity will never be out of date. We have one standard for men and women, and that standard is moral purity. We oppose and abhor the damnable practice of wholesale abortion and every other unholy and impure act which strikes at the very foundation of the home and family, our most basic institutions.

A continuation of these immoral practices will surely bring down the wrath and judgments of the Almighty.

In our concentration upon materialism and material acquisitions, are we forgetting the spiritual basis upon which our prosperity, security, and freedom rest? God help us to repent of our evil ways and humble ourselves before the offended power.

A nation on its knees

There is great safety in a nation on its knees.

What assurance it would give of the much-needed blessings of the Lord if the American people, and people everywhere, could all be found daily—night and morning—on their knees expressing gratitude for blessings already received, acknowledging our dependence upon

God, and seeking his divine guidance.

The spectacle of a nation praying is more awe-inspiring, more powerful, than the explosion of an atomic bomb. The force of prayer is greater than any possible combination of man-controlled powers, because "prayer is man's greatest means of tapping the resources of God." The Founding Fathers accept this eternal verity. Do we? Will we?

Yes, it is in our own enlightened self-interest to engage in this simple practice, this powerful practice of prayer. Roger Babson said many years ago: "What this country needs more than anything else is old-fashioned family prayer." Yes, our greatest need is a return to the old-fashioned, time-tested verities.

God help us, as free men, to recognize the source of our blessings, the threat to our freedom and our moral and spiritual standards, and the need for humble, yet courageous, action to preserve these priceless, time-tested blessings, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Harold B. Lee

This powerful address to which we have just listened was from Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Council of the Twelve, who has been our concluding speaker.

A special welfare meeting will be held at 7:30 a.m. tomorrow morning (Saturday) in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square. Regional representatives, stake presidencies, high councilors involved in welfare work, bishoprics, and stake and ward Re-

lief Society presidencies are invited to attend.

All sessions of the conference will be received over KSL Radio and KIRO Radio—Seattle beginning at midnight tonight, and can be heard in many areas as has been previously announced.

The singing for this session has been furnished by the Combined Choruses of the Ogden Institute of Religion. We are grateful for your presence, you wonderful young men and women, here today, and for the beautiful numbers you have rendered at this session of the conference.

Brother Cropper, we commend you. Thank you for your great service. Brother Cropper has been conducting the chorus and Brother Robert Cundick has been at the organ. They will now favor us with "The Creation."

Following the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Edward Y. Okazaki, Mission Representative of the Twelve and the First Council of Seventy. He formerly presided over one of the missions in Japan.

This conference will then be adjourned until 10:00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The number, "The Creation," was sung by the Combined Choruses of the Ogden Institute of Religion.

Elder Edward Y. Okazaki, Mission Representative of the Twelve and First Council of Seventy, offered the closing prayer.

The conference was then adjourned until Saturday morning at 10 o'clock.