

Elder L. Tom Perry

of the Council of the Twelve

One of the exciting opportunities which comes from the general conference for me is to arrive a little early and have the privilege of walking through the aisles of this great Tabernacle, greeting the conference visitors as they are here assembled. You discover that this is truly a world conference.

A world conference

Even though some speak a different language, there is another way to communicate, for quickly you discover, as you shake a hand, look into the eye of someone from a different land, there is a common bond, there is a brotherhood and a sisterhood which knows no national boundaries.

We have frequently addressed ourselves in this conference to the country in which the headquarters of this church is located. When this occurs, I watch with interest the faces of those who hear this message through an interpreter. I have detected more than just a courteous attention. There is a genuine interest and understanding. And I guess this is right, for as I study history, there appears to be a common theme, which is played over and over.

We love our great country and we love yours—because it is your home. I have been given an exciting assignment to assist in planning the United States of America's bicentennial celebration. I have never had an assignment which has given me a clearer vision of history and an opportunity to observe the operations of government.

Religious leaders meet

Some months ago I was asked to assist in inviting many of the religious leaders of America to a special meeting for the purpose of increasing the participation of religious congregations in our

nation's bicentennial celebration. About 400 of us assembled in Washington, D.C., and spent two days together discussing ways in which we could make a contribution to this exciting celebration.

While I found myself having a deep respect and admiration for many of the religious leaders in attendance, I also found myself having some grave concerns over a number whom I guess you would describe as the liberal element.

Part of the program covering this two-day period was to divide ourselves into small discussion groups of about twenty in number to examine the role the churches would play during this celebration.

Opposition to plan

As we concluded the first day I discussed the possibility, with a bright young colleague I had invited to attend this assembly with me, of preparing a declaration for the churches of this land to jointly proclaim to our countrymen, a reaffirmation of our need for divine guidance, an expression of gratitude for the Lord's hand in directing the formation of the government of the United States of America. I don't know how late this young man stayed up that night but when I met him for breakfast the following morning he had an excellent draft of the proposed declaration.

I was excited with the possibility of presenting it to our small discussion group as we assembled together that morning. However, my enthusiasm rapidly dissipated. We soon discovered it was the consensus of this small group of religious leaders that any declaration referring to the Lord our God would not be acceptable. They reasoned such a declaration would be offensive to the atheist. After all, they stated, the atheist has a right to his belief, also. Of course,

I completely agree that all men must have their right of free agency but I argued vigorously against locking up our own firm convictions just because they could not be accepted by everyone. The more we argued, the more the opposition united against us. We were not able to get ours or any other declaration out of committee.

Shocking answers

I was so shocked with the outcome and obvious futility of our efforts that I had to seek out the religious leader who opposed our declaration. In talking to him I found myself suffering from even a greater shock. Here was a man with divinity degrees listed in a long string of letters behind his name, a leader of a Christian congregation, giving these kinds of answers to my questions:

Question: "Do you not believe that God inspired the early leaders of this country in the formation of this great nation?"

Answer: "I find no evidence in my studies of God's hand directing the affairs of mankind in any age."

Question: "With such a philosophy, how do you stand in front of your congregation each week and teach Christian doctrine?"

Answer: "Oh, it is not difficult. I gather together a representative group of the congregation and whatever is the consensus of this group, this is what I preach."

Once again, I repeat that while in Washington, D.C., attending this gathering I met many devout and wonderful church leaders, but I must say as I returned home from this trip I had a growing concern that from the pulpits of many of our churches in this land as well as in the world in general there is an increasing tendency to teach the doctrines of man rather than that which God has directed.

Great disappointment

As the meeting concluded I had

great disappointment that a declaration of gratitude to our Eternal Father had not been pronounced or produced by this great body of religious leaders. However, I came away with the firm resolve that I would at least let my voice be heard on two issues during this bicentennial year.

A nation under God

First, I will develop within me the courage to stand up and defend that which I believe to be right. I will declare my personal witness that the heavens are not closed. The Lord continues to guide and direct all of his children on earth if they will but heed his voice. I will teach my firm conviction that the foundation of any righteous government is the law that has been received from the Lord to guide and direct man's efforts. Righteous government receives direction from the Lord. The scripture President Tanner quoted bears this out, in our country, in the establishment of this government. "And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood." (D&C 101:80.)

I have resolved to do all that is within my power to keep alive the same faith which existed in the hearts and souls of our early founding fathers.

It was George Washington who declared, "The people know it is impossible to rightly govern without God and the Bible."

Again from Andrew Jackson the declaration: "The Bible is the rock on which this Republic rests."

I reaffirm before you here today of my faith that the Lord God continues to govern the affairs of his children. His law must be the foundation on which all law is based. We must be willing to support, defend, and live in harmony with his divine law.

Cannot change divine laws

Now second, I want to publicly

profess my opposition to those who are so caught up in their own learning they believe with their enlightened minds they can change the laws of God. A consensus of mankind is not and never will be empowered to change these divine laws.

Let me cite just one example of how these seemingly enlightened minds are trying to destroy the sacred institution of marriage with their erroneous doctrines and teachings. A quotation from a recent publication, which is just one of many I have recently received from concerned citizens, is as follows:

"On the basis of this and other such evidence, some observers suggest that the institution of marriage which had necessarily been changed over the centuries to accommodate the needs of a changing society now faces a future in which it may gradually become obsolete. In their judgment, marriage will ultimately manifest itself, not as a religious sacrament or a legal certification but simply as a sociological fact." (William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *The Pleasure Bond*, Toronto and Boston, Little, Brown and Co., p. 179.) They are calling for a new Christian approach to marriage. They state that dogmatism is being forced to yield to humanism no matter how slowly or how grudgingly. They call attention to studies they claim are on the verge of revealing with assurance that having extramarital relations may serve as a vehicle to faithfulness to God.

I find that such teachings are absolutely contrary to the instructions of the Lord to mankind. As I examine the physical order in the Lord's divine plan, I find no evidence that he has ever found it necessary to make a correction. The earth continues to rotate in the same direction. The angle of its axis is unchanged. The circulation of moisture continues from sea to cloud to earth to river to sea with its same beneficial effect without alteration.

Sacredness of marriage

I find the same consistency in the

divine law he has established for mankind. In the very beginning he declared:

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, . . .

"And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:18, 21-24.)

The union between husband and wife is sacred to the Lord, something not to be trifled with. The marriage covenant was essential to the Lord God to accomplish his mission and purposes for which he created the heavens and the earth.

In all periods of time, he has declared his divine law is to safeguard and protect this holy union between husband and wife. When Moses found need for laws to govern the children of Israel, one of the pronouncements by the Lord to him was, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Exod. 20:14.)

Adultery forbidden

In another age when the only Begotten Son was on the earth, he reaffirmed with added emphasis this eternal law: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt. 5:27-28.)

The Lord in his dealings on the American continent, as contained in the Book of Mormon, declares again the same consistent teaching, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Mosiah 13:22.)

He has not left us without that

same instruction in our modern scriptures. For again in this day he has declared, "Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out." (D&C 42:24.)

There has not been and never will be contradiction in the divine laws of God. Scripture after scripture in all ages of time declare his divine message that does not change and cannot be changed by man.

It is comforting to me that the early founders of this country had the same conviction of the powers of the Almighty. Thomas Paine said, "What is it we want to know? Does not the creation, the universe we behold, preach to us the existence of an Almighty power, that governs and regulates the whole? And is not the evidence that this creation holds out to our senses infinitely stronger than anything we can read in a book that any imposter might make or call the word of God? As for morality, the knowledge of it exists in every man's conscience." (*In God We Trust*, ed. Norman Cousins, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1958. p. 1.)

Warning

And so today, I sound the same words of warning as Paul the Apostle of old: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. 4:3-4.)

I leave you my witness that there is a consistency in the laws of God that will not change. When we conform our lives to his laws we will find a rewarding joy, a fulfillment, and a peace as we live here on earth. When we would pervert or change his laws or disregard them, we must stand the judgments of God, and as surely as that occurs, misery, sorrow, and heartache will be the result.

Let us catch the spirit of the Psalmist who wrote, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." (Ps. 24:1.)

May God grant that we may have the courage to stand up and be counted for that which we know to be right, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Without announcement following Elder L. Tom Perry's address, the Tabernacle Choir sang the hymn, "O How Lovely Was the Morning."

President Marion G. Romney

We have just listened to Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve, followed by the choir singing, "O How Lovely Was the Morning."

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," following which we shall hear from Elder Adney Y. Komatsu, Assistant to the Twelve.

The choir and congregation sang the hymn, "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning."

President Romney

To those of the television and radio audience who have just joined us, we are convened in the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah in this the sixth session of the 145th Semi-Annual Conference of the Church.

We shall now hear from Elder Adney Y. Komatsu, Assistant to the Twelve, and supervisor of the Japan and Far East Area.