

Elder L. Tom Perry

I was on an airplane a few weeks ago on my way home. On the seat next to mine was a news magazine opened to an article which intrigued me. It was entitled "The Doubting American—A Growing Breed." (*U.S. News and World Report*, 26 Feb. 1979, p. 74). Its message was that belief, the energizer of progress and the cement of civilization since the dawn of history, is running into trouble. People no longer have confidence in their government leaders. They think business does not have the integrity it once had, and even more alarming, a survey indicated there is less feeling regarding their obligation to religion.

The conclusion to the questions asked on religion was that organized religion is not playing a central role in the religious lives of a sizable portion of the unchurched. Many feel that they can go it alone.

Then the article went on to point out that young people gave replies like: "Why should I do something for another person? We do not see anymore why we shouldn't steal, why we shouldn't commit adultery, why we should honor our mother and our father."

I would guess it would be only natural in a world beset by one major problem after another that fears and doubts would trouble the souls of mankind. How contrary, however, is the lesson of history that man within himself cannot solve his problems. How fallacious is the thinking that one can be a law unto himself. How wrong it is to believe each individual can establish his own moral code, standards for honesty, and principles to be governed by. I have not found in history the success of any peoples who attempted to live under such an order. In fact, history has recorded that those civilizations which have been able to establish a value standard, a central belief, a uniting to-

gether, have experienced the greatest progress.

Seek the Kingdom of God

The religious history of mankind has demonstrated the success of those peoples who were strong enough to follow a standard which was above those established just by man. From the very beginning prophets have been heard to encourage mankind to seek a higher kingdom, the kingdom of God. We find, in the early pages of the Book of Mormon, Nephi warning the people:

"And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Ne. 9:23).

John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, preparing the way for the mission of our Savior on earth, cried to the people, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

As the Church was restored to the earth in this dispensation, the people were admonished to assist in building the kingdom of God here on earth in preparation for the return of our Lord and Savior. Brigham Young, addressing the Saints at Winter Quarters in 1847, said:

"The kingdom which we are establishing is not of this world, but is the kingdom of the Great God. It is the fruit of righteousness, of peace, of salvation to every soul that will receive it, from Adam down to his latest posterity. Our good will is towards all men, and we desire their salvation in time and eternity; and we will do them good so far as God will give us the power, and men will permit us the privilege. . . .

"Come, then, ye Saints; come,

then, ye honorable men of the earth; come, then, ye wise, ye learned, ye rich, ye noble, according to the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of the great Jehovah; from all nations, and kindreds, and kingdoms, and tongues, and people, and dialects on the face of the whole earth, and join the standard of Emanuel, and help us to build up the Kingdom of God, and establish the principles of truth, life, and salvation, and you shall receive your reward among the sanctified, when the Lord Jesus Christ cometh to make up his jewels; and no power on earth or in hell can prevail against you." (*Millennial Star*, 15 Mar. 1848, p. 87.)

Surely there would be an obvious difference between one who is attempting to conduct his life as though he were a citizen of the kingdom of God, and one who is conducting his life by the standards made by man. When a person determines to live a higher law, there should be a visible difference, a marked change in his appearance, his actions, the way he treats others, and the way he serves his fellowmen and his God. The scriptures are full of dramatic changes which occurred in the lives of individuals when they were converted to living the law of the Lord.

Alma the younger

There is a story in the Book of Mormon about the conflict that was occurring between those who wanted to believe and the unbelievers who were on the earth at that particular time. The scriptures record:

"And now it came to pass that the persecutions which were inflicted on the church by the unbelievers became so great that the church began to murmur, and complain to their leaders concerning the matter; and they did complain to Alma. And Alma laid the case before their king, Mosiah. . . .

"And it came to pass that king Mosiah sent a proclamation throughout the land round about that there should not any unbeliever persecute any of those who belonged to the church of God. . . ."

The sad part of the story is "The sons of Mosiah were numbered among the unbelievers; and also one of the sons of Alma was numbered among them, he being called Alma, after his father; nevertheless, he became a very wicked and an idolatrous man. And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people; therefore he led many of the people to do after the manner of his iniquities.

"And he became a great hindrance to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people; causing much dissension among the people; giving a chance for the enemy of God to exercise his power over them.

"And now it came to pass . . . he was going about to destroy the church of God, for he did go about secretly with the sons of Mosiah seeking to destroy the church, and to lead astray the people of the Lord, contrary to the commandments of God, or even the king." (Mosiah 27:1-2, 8-10.)

As Alma the Younger was going about in rebellion, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and the sons of Mosiah, and spake as with a voice of thunder.

"And so great was their astonishment, that they fell to the earth." And then the angel commanded him, saying, "Alma, arise and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God? For the Lord hath said: This is my church, and I will establish it; and nothing shall overthrow it, save it is the transgression of my people.

". . . Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that

thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith." (Mosiah 27:12-14.)

The appearance of the angel was so shocking to Alma the Younger that he became dumb. He could not open his mouth, he became so weak he could not move his hands or his legs, and the people had to carry him and lay him before his father and rehearse before him all the things that had happened. Alma's father rejoiced, for he knew the Lord had answered his prayers, and he caused the priests to assemble themselves together, and they fasted and prayed that Alma would again receive the use of his limbs and receive his speech. They fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights. After such a display of faith, Alma received his strength and stood up and began to speak to those assembled and said: "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit,

"... Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters;

"And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God." (Mosiah 27:24-26.)

Alma's life was changed. From this time forth the scriptures record that he went forth not to destroy the Church, but now to build it up, and he became a mighty leader in this land. Now we find him declaring:

"I know that which the Lord hath commanded me, and I glory in it. I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath

commanded me; yea, and this is my glory, that perhaps I may be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance; and this is my joy." (Al. 29:9).

Obligated to keep God's commandments

Conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ brings a requirement to live according to a higher law. From there on we must conduct ourselves as citizens of His kingdom. President Stephen L. Richards once defined what these attributes would be. He stated:

"The attributes of Jesus are the standards of perfection in human living. Kindliness, sympathy, tolerance, mercy, forbearance, charity in judgment, loyalty, justice, integrity, and abiding love are Christian virtues that lie at the foundation of the idealism of the race. These and the incomparable concepts of the good neighbor, doing unto others as you would be done by, and the abundant life—losing one's self in the service of others that he may save it—are the soundest and truest philosophies in the society of men and the way to happiness." (*Where Is Wisdom?* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1955, p. 324.)

We have the obligation when we accept the teachings of the gospel to demonstrate by our lives that we, indeed, keep God's commandments. We know His son, Jesus the Christ, stands at the head of this Church, and mankind has not been left alone to find the way by himself in a troubled world. There is great joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in living God's law as He has declared it and will continue to declare it to His children here on the earth.

The scriptures have instructed us to set the example of living the higher law. Nephi declared:

"Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ,

having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

“And now, behold, my beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God.” (2 Ne. 31:20-21.)

God lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. His kingdom will prevail. The greatest joy we can find on this earth is conforming our lives to His law.

This is my witness to you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Following Elder Perry's remarks, the Tabernacle Choir sang the hymn, “Still, Still With Thee,” without announcement.

President Spencer W. Kimball

The Tabernacle Choir has sung, “Still, Still With Thee.”

We welcome those who have just joined us on television or radio for this, the first session of the 149th Annual Conference of the Church.

President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will now address us.

President N. Eldon Tanner

In 1896, about two years before I was born, Mr. R. M. Bryce Thomas from London, England, paid a visit to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he first learned about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Characteristics of the Church and its members

Following this visit, and after a thorough and searching investigation into the practices and doctrines of the Church, and a comparison of the teachings of the primitive Church of Jesus Christ which was established by Him, with his own church in England, he subsequently became a baptized member.

On May 24, 1897, in London, England, he penned an article which he entitled, “My Reasons for . . . Joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” In the preface to the first edition he stated:

“The object that I have had in

view in writing this article, explanatory of my reasons for leaving [my] church [in] England and joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is to comply as far as possible with the wishes of those of my relatives and friends who have expressed a desire to know something of the teachings of the Latter-day Saints, and also of the reasons which have led me to reject the faith of my fathers.”

He concluded with this paragraph:

“In sending out the following pages then I would ask our Heavenly Father in the name of His Son, our Lord Jesus, to let His blessing rest upon what I have written so far as it may be in strict accordance with His truth, and with His holy word and will” (Liverpool, England: Millennial Star Office, 1897).

In a preface to the second American edition, December 9, 1904, we read: