

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Young men and women of faith

My brethren and sisters, I have enjoyed several heartwarming experiences in recent months. I use them as a basis for something I wish to say particularly to the youth and young adults of the Church, many thousands of whom are joined with us in this great world conference.

A few weeks ago I looked into the faces of a huge fireside congregation who had gathered on a Sunday evening on the campus of Brigham Young University. I was told there were about eighteen thousand in attendance. They were bright-eyed and attentive. They were eager and alert. They gave their undivided attention, and when the meeting was over they were generous in their expressions of appreciation.

A few months before that I met with students of the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, who gathered in our institute building in Los Angeles. Most of these are involved in graduate studies. They are in a challenging and wonderful season of their lives, concerned with great and serious undertakings. I have no doubt they will become leaders in their chosen disciplines. But they are also young men and women with faith who gathered that Sunday to listen and learn of the things of God.

Within the past month I have met with other comparable groups in Spain and Italy, in Switzerland and Denmark. In each place they were clean, neatly dressed, with an eagerness that was wonderful and infectious. It mattered not that they spoke a different language from mine and that they live in a different part of the world. They are partakers of the same gospel of Jesus Christ with a tremendous understanding of that gospel and a deep and abiding sense of gratitude for it.

Then two weeks ago I was in southern Utah on the campus of Southern Utah University. Sprinkled all through that congregation were young men and women, many of whom are enrolled in that school and who again reflect in their appearance and manner something that is wholesome and uplifting.

These are some of our young people of whom I am proud and concerning whom I have a great sense of gratitude and a compelling sense of optimism. In saying this, I do not wish to imply that all is well with all of them. There are many who have troubles and many who live far beneath the high expectations we have concerning them. There are also those who waver in their faith and who are troubled and frustrated within themselves. There are some, I regret to say, who step over the line of acceptable moral behavior and suffer great tragedies in their lives. But even considering these, I have great confidence in our young people as a whole. I regard you as the finest generation in the history of the Church. I compliment you, and I have in my heart a great feeling of love and respect and appreciation for you.

Each time I have stood before such a group, there has come into my mind the great and prophetic statement made by Peter of old. Said he, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

I know of no other statement which more aptly describes you nor which sets before you a higher ideal by which to shape and guide your lives.

A crisis of behavior and belief

Some time ago I read a letter to a newspaper editor which was highly

critical of the Church. I have forgotten the exact language, but it included a question something like this: When are the Mormons going to stop being different and become a part of the mainstream of America?

About this same time there came to my desk a copy of an address given by Senator Dan Coats of Indiana. He spoke of a study made by "a commission of educational, political, medical and business leaders" dealing with the problems of American youth. The committee issued a report called *Code Blue*. That report, according to the Senator, concluded, "Never before has one generation of American teenagers been less healthy, less cared for, or less prepared for life than their parents were at the same age."

He went on to say: "I have seen the parade of pathologies—they are unending and increasing:

"Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among adolescents, increasing 300 percent since 1950.

"Teen pregnancy has risen 621 percent since 1940. More than a million teenage girls get pregnant each year. Eighty-five percent of teenage boys who impregnate teenage girls eventually abandon them.

"The teen homicide rate has increased 232 percent since 1950. Homicide is now the leading cause of death among fifteen- to nineteen-year-old minority youth. . . .

"Every year substance abuse claims younger victims with harder drugs. A third of high school seniors get drunk once a week. The average age for first-time drug use is now thirteen years old."

The report reached a shocking conclusion. It said: "The challenges to the health and well-being of America's youth are not primarily rooted in illness or economics. Unlike the past, the problem is not childhood disease or unsanitary slums. The most basic cause of suffering . . . is profoundly self-

destructive behavior. Drinking. Drugs. Violence. Promiscuity. A crisis of behavior and belief. A crisis of character" (*Imprimis*, Sept. 1991, p. 1).

When I read those statements, I said to myself, If that is the mainstream of American youth, then I want to do all in my power to persuade and encourage our young people to stay away from it.

The loss of moral values

Now I know, as do you, that there are millions of young people in this nation and in every nation who live wholesome, good lives and who are ambitious to make something of themselves. But no one can blink at the fact that in this land, and in other lands across the world, there is an epidemic affecting the lives of millions of youth. It is a sickness that comes of a loss of values, of an abandonment of moral absolutes. The virus which has infected them comes of leaderless families, leaderless schools, leaderless communities. It comes of an attitude that says, "We will not teach moral values. We will leave the determination of such to the individual." Parents, in all too many cases, have abdicated their responsibility to "train up a child in the way he should go" so that "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Educators in all too many cases have adopted an attitude of moral neutrality.

Many public officers have abandoned any reverent use of the name of God in public meetings, thereby closing the door to Deity when it is plainly evident there is a need for wisdom beyond their own.

If we deny the one sure source of moral truth, then from whence will it come?

Lately we have been following in our papers the trial of a group of young men in New York City who attacked a family from Provo, Utah, to rob them

to get money to go to a discotheque. A son in that family, in trying to defend his mother, was killed.

I do not pretend to know all of the facts. But if what I have read is true, that tragedy finds its roots in the absence of a proper set of values implanted in the lives of those young men. They are now faced with tragic consequences, the spending of years in prison.

In a recent year more than four hundred youth were killed in Los Angeles by other young people, in many instances the result of gang warfare.

A chosen generation

And so I might continue with a picture familiar to all of you, but I return to Peter's great statement as I make a plea and offer a challenge: "Ye are a chosen generation." How very true that is. Notwithstanding all of the problems that we have, this, I believe, is the greatest age in the history of the world. And you young people of this generation are a part of it. You are the beneficiaries of it. Its fruits are here to bless your lives if you will grasp them and live worthy of them.

We today enjoy more of comfort, more of opportunity, more of the blessings of science and research than any generation in the history of the earth. We live longer to enjoy these things. When I was born, the life expectancy in the United States was fifty years. Today it is seventy-five-plus years. It is difficult for me to believe that during the seemingly short time I have lived, the average life expectancy in this nation has increased by a quarter of a century. There has been more of scientific discovery in my lifetime than in all the previous years of the history of mankind. I do not know why I have been so blessed as to have been born in this favored season. But I am grateful, profoundly grateful. I hope that you are also.

And on top of this flowering of knowledge has come an even greater blessing in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You and I are experiencing the profound and wonderful blessings of the dispensation of the fullness of times. In this day and time there have been restored to the earth all of the principles, powers, blessings, and keys of all previous dispensations. By certain and clear and unequivocal revelation there has come knowledge of the living reality of God our Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

John the Baptist has come to earth and conferred the priesthood of Aaron with "the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins" (D&C 13:1).

Peter, James, and John, who in mortality were ordained of the Lord, have restored to earth the divine power given by Jesus Himself when He said to them in the flesh, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

As a part of this great unfolding of knowledge and light and truth, there has come the Book of Mormon, this added testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, a companion volume to the Holy Bible, a declaration of the living reality of the Son of God which speaks in testimony of Him as that knowledge was revealed to prophets who long ago came to know Him in this western hemisphere.

Truly, my dear young friends, you are a chosen generation. I hope you will never forget it. I hope you will never take it for granted. I hope there will grow in your hearts an overpowering sense of gratitude to God, who has made it possible for you to come upon the earth in this marvelous season of the world's history.

A royal priesthood

You young men, you *are* a royal priesthood. Do you ever pause to think of the wonder of it? You have had hands placed upon your heads to receive that same priesthood exercised by John who baptized Jesus of Nazareth. With worthiness in your lives, you may enjoy the comforting, protecting, guiding influence of ministering angels. No individual of earthly royalty has a blessing as great. Live for it. Be worthy of it, is my plea to each of you.

A holy nation

Peter speaks of "an holy nation." He does not refer to a political entity. He refers to a vast congregation of the Saints of God, men and women who walk in holiness before Him and who look to Jesus Christ as their Savior and their King. Young men and women, what a treasured privilege to have citizenship in this holy nation. Never belittle the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that flow therefrom.

A peculiar people

Peter's final description—"a peculiar people."

Of course you are peculiar. If the world continues its present trend, and if you walk in obedience to the doctrines and principles of this Church, you may become even more peculiar in the eyes of others.

Value system comes from God

To each of you I say this: As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you have been taught many values of divine origin. These values are based on the commandments which the finger of the Lord wrote upon the tablets of stone when Moses spoke with Jehovah upon

the mountain. You know them. You are familiar with them.

The values you have been taught likewise are based upon the beatitudes which Jesus spoke to the multitude. These, with others of His divine teachings, constitute a code of ethics, a code of values, a code of divine doctrine familiar to you and binding upon you.

To these have been added the precepts and commandments of modern revelation.

Combined together these basic, divinely given principles, laws, and commandments must constitute your value system. You cannot escape the consequences of their observance. If you will shape your lives according to their pattern, I do not hesitate to promise that you will know much of peace and happiness, of growth and achievement. To the degree that you fail to observe them, I regretfully say that the fruits will be disappointment, sadness, misery, and even tragedy.

You cannot afford . . .

You of this generation, this chosen generation, this royal priesthood, this holy nation, you of this peculiar people—you cannot with impunity follow practices out of harmony with values you have been taught. I challenge you to rise above the sordid elements of the world about you.

You cannot afford to drink beer and other liquors which can rob you of self-control. You cannot afford to smoke cigarettes or use other forms of tobacco and abandon the values which the Lord has set for your guidance. The partaking or distribution of illegal drugs is to be shunned as you would shun a terrible disease.

You cannot afford in any degree to become involved with pornography, whatever its form. You simply cannot afford to become involved in immoral practices—or to let down the bars of sexual restraint. The emotions that stir within you which make boys attractive

to girls and girls attractive to boys are part of a divine plan. But they must be restrained, subdued, and kept under control, or they will destroy you and make you unworthy of many of the great blessings which the Lord has in store for you.

Some young women have thought it clever to bear a child outside of marriage. That illusion soon fades. Teenage pregnancy brings only a harvest of regret, misery, self-depreciation, and unhappiness. It will not happen if there is a true understanding of values and the application of self-discipline on the part of both young men and young women.

You cannot afford to cheat in school or to shoplift or steal or do anything of the kind.

You cannot afford to do any of those things which do not square with the precepts, the teachings, the principles which the God of heaven has set down because of His love for you and His desire that your lives be rich and full and purposeful.

Nor can you afford to idle away your time in long hours watching the frivolous and damaging programming of which much of television is composed. There are better things for you to do. The world into which you will move will be terribly competitive. You

need to increase your education, to refine your skills, to hone your abilities so that you may fill responsibilities of consequence in the society of which you will become a part.

Ponder your purpose and potential

And so I invite you, every one of you within the sound of my voice, to think for a moment upon why you are here under the divine plan of your Father in Heaven and of your tremendous potential to do good during the life that He has given you.

Please know that we love you. We appreciate you. We have confidence in you, knowing that it will only be a short time until you must take over the leadership of this Church and of other great responsibilities which may be yours in the world in which you will live.

God bless you, I humbly pray, as I bear witness and testimony of these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Thy Servants Are Prepared."

Elder Durrel A. Woolsey offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 162nd Annual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 5, 1992. President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger conducting and John Longhurst at the organ.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began:

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 162nd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

President Ezra Taft Benson, who has attended other sessions of the conference, is watching this session in his apartment and has asked that I conduct.