

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Emergency in an airplane

A few weeks ago, while returning from a regional conference, we had an experience that remains vivid in my mind. As we approached the airport, the captain came on the public address system and spoke in crisp and authoritative tones: "We have an emergency! Please give me your attention. We have an emergency, and the cabin crew will give you instructions. For your own safety, please do what they ask you to do."

The crew sprang into action. This was the moment for which their training had prepared them. Every one of them knew precisely what to do. All utensils were quickly secured in locked containers.

Passengers were shifted to put strong men at each emergency exit.

We were told to remove our glasses, lower our heads, and firmly grasp our ankles.

A woman with a baby seated immediately behind me was crying. Others could be heard sobbing. Everyone knew that this was not just an exercise, but that it was for real and that it was serious.

A man emerged from the flight deck door. He recognized me and stooped down to say, "I am an off-duty pilot. The primary control system has failed, but I think we are going to be all right. They have managed to get the landing gear down and the flaps down."

Strangely, I felt no fear. In many years of flying, I have had experiences when I *have* known fear. But on this occasion I felt calm. I knew that a redundancy system had been built into the plane to handle just such an emergency and that the crew had been well trained.

I also knew that the effectiveness of that redundancy system would be known in a minute or two when the rubber hit the runway.

That moment came quickly. To the relief of everyone, the plane touched down smoothly, the landing gear held in place, the engines were reversed, and the aircraft was brought to a stop.

Fire engines were standing nearby. We were towed to the gate. The crew was appropriately applauded, and some of us expressed to the Lord our gratitude.

The Lord's backup system

I have reflected on this experience in terms of the Church of which we are members. The head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His Church. But the earthly head is our prophet. Prophets are men who are endowed with a divine calling. Notwithstanding the divinity of that calling, they are human. They are subject to the problems of mortality.

We love and respect and honor and look to the prophet of this day, President Ezra Taft Benson. He has been a great and gifted leader, a man whose voice has rung out in testimony of this work across the world. He holds all the keys of the priesthood on the earth in this day. But he has reached an age where he cannot do many of the things he once did. This does not detract from his calling as a prophet. But it places limitations on his physical activities.

We have seen comparable situations in times past. President Wilford Woodruff grew old in office. So did Presidents Heber J. Grant, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, and, more recently, Spencer W. Kimball.

Some people, evidently not knowing the system, worry that because of the President's age, the Church faces a crisis. They seem not to realize that there is a backup system. In the very nature of this system, there is always on board a trained crew, if I may so speak of them. They have been thoroughly

schooled in Church procedures. More importantly, they also hold the keys of the eternal priesthood of God. They too have been put in place by the Lord.

I hope I will not sound presumptuous in reminding you of the unique and tremendous system of redundancy and backup which the Lord has structured into His kingdom so that without interruption it may go forward, meeting any emergency that might arise and handling every contingency with which it is faced. To me it is a wondrous and constantly renewing miracle.

Keys given to all Apostles

Yesterday afternoon we sustained Ezra Taft Benson as prophet, seer, and revelator, and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We next sustained his Counselors and then the members of the Council of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. With fifteen men so described, endowed, and sustained, one not familiar with the Church might feel that there would be great confusion. But the Lord's kingdom is one of order. There is no confusion in its leadership.

When a man is ordained to the apostleship and set apart as a member of the Council of the Twelve, he is given the keys of the priesthood of God. Each of the fifteen living men so ordained holds these keys. However, only the President of the Church has the right to exercise them in their fullness. He may delegate the exercise of various of them to one or more of his Brethren. Each has the keys but is authorized to use them only to the degree granted him by the prophet of the Lord.

Such agency has been given by President Benson to his Counselors and to the Twelve according to various responsibilities delegated to them.

Authority of the First Presidency

According to the revelation of the Lord, "of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church" (D&C 107:22).

This "Presidency of the High Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, have a right to officiate in all the offices in the church" (D&C 107:9).

Further pertaining to this principle, "it is according to the dignity of his office that he [the president] should preside over the council of the church; and it is his privilege to be assisted by two other presidents, appointed after the same manner that he himself was appointed.

"And in case of the absence of one or both of those who are appointed to assist him, he has power to preside over the council without an assistant; and in case he himself is absent, the other presidents have power to preside in his stead, both or either of them" (D&C 102:10-11).

Counselors in the First Presidency

We who serve as Counselors recognize and know the parameters of our authority and our responsibility. Our only desire is to assist and help our leader with the tremendous burdens of his office. The Church is growing large, with more than eight million members now. It is moving across the world. Its program is extensive, complex, and deals with a host of elements. The responsibilities are many and varied.

But I can say that regardless of the circumstances, the work goes forward in an orderly and wonderful way. As it was during the time when President Kimball was ill, we have moved without hesitation when there is well-established policy. Where there is not firmly

established policy, we have talked with the President and received his approval before taking action. Let it never be said that there has been any disposition to assume authority or to do anything or say anything or teach anything which might be at variance with the wishes of him who has been put in his place by the Lord. We wish to be his loyal servants. We ask no honor for ourselves. We simply desire to do that which needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and according to policies on which the President has expressed himself.

Duties and authority of the Twelve

Now, as I have indicated, there are twelve others on whom have been conferred the keys of the apostleship. They are, as the revelation describes them, "the twelve traveling councilors . . . called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.

"And they form a quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned" (D&C 107:23–24).

You ask, can there be two separate bodies with equal authority without confusion? Yes. The Lord has given the answer to this. He has said, "The Twelve are a Traveling Presiding High Council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church" (D&C 107:33).

Concerning this matter, President Joseph F. Smith said: "The duty of the Twelve Apostles of the Church is to preach the gospel to the world, to send it to the inhabitants of the earth and to bear testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God, as living witnesses of his divine mission. That is their special calling and they are always under the direction of the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when that presidency is intact, and there is

never at the same time two equal heads in the Church—never. The Lord never ordained any such thing, nor designed it. There is always a head in the Church, and if the Presidency of the Church are removed by death or other cause, then the next head of the Church is the Twelve Apostles, until a presidency is again organized of three presiding high priests who have the right to hold the office of First Presidency over the Church" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939], pp. 177–78).

Here then, my brothers and sisters, is the remarkable plan of the Lord for the governance of His earthly kingdom. The authority to conduct its affairs was received in this dispensation under the hands of Peter, James, and John, who were ordained by the Lord when He was on the earth. And, as we have seen, there is order in the exercise of that authority.

Called of God by prophecy

I wish now to say a few words about the men who are members of the Quorum of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I know all of those presently serving. I have known all who have filled these chairs in the last sixty years. I am confident that no one of them ever aspired to office. No one campaigned for it. I think none ever thought himself worthy of it. This is a singular and remarkable thing.

In the United States we presently are in a campaign to elect men and women to public office. Millions upon millions of dollars are being spent in the process, with hundreds of thousands working to promote the interests of their favorite candidates.

How different it is with the work of the Lord. No faithful member of this Church would think of applying for ecclesiastical office. Rather, "we believe that a man must be called of God,

by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof" (Articles of Faith 1:5).

The Lord Himself said of the Twelve whom He selected, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you" (John 15:16).

I am confident that no man was ever called as a General Authority of this Church, certainly none I have known, who did not get on his knees, confessing his weaknesses and pleading with the Lord to safeguard him against temptation and any wrongdoing, and asking for the strength and the wisdom and the inspiration to perform well that which he is called upon to do.

Love and unity among Church leaders

I feel that I know my Brethren. I know my leader, President Benson. I have knelt with him in prayer and heard his petitions. I know his heart, and I can testify of its goodness. I know his love, and I can testify of its reality. I know his prophetic pleading, and I can testify of its sincerity.

I know my associate in the Presidency, Thomas S. Monson. I know of his strength and desire to advance our Father's kingdom.

I know each of the Twelve in seniority, from President Howard W. Hunter to Elder Richard G. Scott.

These are my associates in this the work of the Almighty. As I said before, none sought this sacred office. Each was called and, in some instances, made serious sacrifice in accepting the call. We pray together. We meet in solemn assembly in the house of the Lord. Periodically we partake together the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and renew our covenants with Him who is our God, taking upon ourselves anew the name of the Lord, of whom we are called to testify.

As Brethren, we discuss various problems that come before us. Each man is different. We speak from various backgrounds and experiences. We discuss ways to improve and strengthen the work. At the outset of these discussions, there may be various points of view. But before the discussion is ended, there is total unanimity, else no action is taken. The Lord Himself has declared that such unity is an absolute necessity.

Is this a different kind of government? It is the government of the kingdom of God on the earth. It is unique in its organization. It is a system under which, if one man is unable to function, the work does not stumble or falter. To revert to my earlier illustration, there is a crew aboard with long, in-depth training. There is a system, a divinely mandated system, under which there is backup and redundancy to move the work and govern the Church in all the world, regardless of difficulties that may befall any of its leaders.

My Brethren of whom I have spoken are Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. I bear witness of their integrity. I bear witness of their faith. I bear witness of the voice of inspiration and revelation in their calls. Every one is a man of tested strength. But the greatest of these strengths lies in the acknowledgment that he must have divinely given direction and blessing if he is to perform acceptably.

We have only the Lord's agenda

Now, in conclusion, do you believe this body of men would ever lead this Church astray? Remember whose church this is. It carries the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who stands as its head. His is the power to remove any who is found remiss in his duty or who is teaching that which is not in harmony with His divine will.

I say for each and all that we have no personal agenda. We have only the

Lord's agenda. There are those who criticize when we issue a statement of counsel or warning. Please know that our pleadings are not motivated by any selfish desire. Please know that our warnings are not without substance and reason. Please know that the decisions to speak out on various matters are not reached without deliberation, discussion, and prayer. Please know that our only ambition is to help each of you with your problems, your struggles, your families, your lives.

May I say, by way of personal testimony, that for more than a third of a century I have served as a General Authority of this Church. For twenty of those years I sat in the circle of the Council of the Twelve. For eleven-plus years I have served as a Counselor in the First Presidency. I know how the system works. I know that it is divine in its plan and in its authority. I know that there is no desire to teach anything other than what the Lord would have taught. He has said that "the decisions of these quorums, or either of them, are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity" (D&C 107:30). It is in this spirit that we seek to serve.

Receive teachings in faith

He further said, concerning that which is taught by His servants, that "those who receive it in faith, and work righteousness, shall receive a crown of eternal life;

"But those who harden their hearts in unbelief, and reject it, it shall turn to their own condemnation" (D&C 20:14-15).

When we plead with our people to observe the Sabbath day, to refrain from making it a day of merchandising, we are repeating only that which the Lord declared anciently and which He

has confirmed through modern revelation. When we decry gambling, we are reiterating only what has been said by prophets who have gone before. When we urge the strengthening of the foundations of our homes, we are doing only that which will bless the lives of our families. When we urge our people to live the law of tithing, we are repeating only that which the Lord spoke of anciently and confirmed anew in this dispensation for the blessing of His people. When we warn against pornography, immorality, drugs, and such, we are doing only that which prophets have always done.

Watchmen unto Israel

Ours is the responsibility outlined by Ezekiel: "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" (Ezekiel 3:17).

We have no selfish desire in any of this, other than the wish that our brethren and sisters will be happy, that peace and love will be found in their homes, that they will be blessed by the power of the Almighty in their various undertakings in righteousness.

I thank all who with uplifted hands and generous hearts sustain us and uphold us in these responsibilities.

This work will never fail

May the Almighty bless you, my beloved brethren and sisters. This is the work of God, our Eternal Father, who lives and rules in the universe. It is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer, the Living Son of the Living God. It has been established upon the earth with divine authority, with a prophet and other leaders called through the voice of revelation and trained through long years of service. It will never fail. It will continue to succeed.

I make a promise to all who uphold and sustain it, and who strive with faith and prayer to live its principles, that they will be blessed with happiness and accomplishment in this life and joy and eternal life in the world to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Elder Richard G. Scott

The rope swing

Some of the sweetest memories of my childhood center in the occasional summer and fall days spent with my brothers at Uncle Zene's farm in rural Virginia. There we hiked through woods with fragrant wildflowers. We marveled at flying squirrels, colorful birds, and even occasionally discovered a fox or pheasant. Meandering streams invited us to catch sunfish, and a cool, pure spring satisfied our thirst. There were roasted hot dogs, potato salad, sweet pickles, and of course hot apple pie with homemade ice cream. Every turn of the crank heightened our anticipation of that seldom-savored treat. But the most treasured experience was the rope swing Uncle Zene had hung in a tall tree near a beautiful brook. Its long gliding passes provided hours of pure joy. We would arch our backs and fling our legs and feet to see who could go the fastest and highest. It was sheer delight.

Once, to treat me to even more excitement, my brother Gerald put me on the wooden seat, then rotated the swing until the ropes were twisted in a double row of knots. With a mighty thrust he launched me into a spin of ever-increasing velocity. At first there was a feeling of exhilaration as I began

to pick up speed. That short-lived pleasure was quickly replaced by increasing feelings of dizziness, nausea, and just plain terror. When the horrible experience was over, I couldn't walk without falling, my head reeled, and I was certain my stomach would never again be the same.

Throughout it all, Gerald jumped with glee. When I finally fell out of the seat, he shouted, "Wasn't that terrific?"

My mind thought, "You're crazy," but my mouth said, "Yeah, that was great. Get in and I'll show you how much fun it is."

Satisfying worldly appetites

I wonder if some of you are doing the same thing in your own life. Instead of enjoying the countless edifying experiences, precious wholesome relationships, and wondrous beauties of the earth the Lord has given for our happiness, do you pursue excitement beyond the bounds He has set? Do you seek transitory stimulation, even recognizing that it is always followed by powerful negative feelings? Do tantalizing emotions stimulate your appetite, creating an insatiable thirst for more? Does that thirst override the motiva-