

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth general session of the 163rd Semiannual General Conference commenced at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, October 3, 1993. President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session, with Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger conducting and Richard L. Elliott at the organ.

To begin the session, the choir sang "In Hymns of Praise."

President Monson then opened the meeting with the following remarks:

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this Sabbath morning from the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah, to the fourth general session of the 163rd semiannual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our love to President Ezra Taft Benson, who is watching conference in his apartment. We also excuse President Howard W. Hunter and Elders Marvin J. Ashton and Clinton L. Cutler because of illness.

We acknowledge the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle; in the overflow gathering in the Assembly Hall, where Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin, Hartman Rector, Jr., and Durrel A. Woolsey are seated on the stand; and in the Joseph Smith Memorial Build-

ing, where Elders Lloyd P. George and Robert K. Dellenbach are in attendance.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the stations which are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders and members of the Church who have assembled to worship together.

The Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Brothers Jerold Ottley and Donald Ripplinger, with Brother Richard Elliott at the organ, will provide the music for this session. The choir opened these services by singing "In Hymns of Praise" and will now sing "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," following which Elder Robert E. Wells of the Seventy will offer the invocation.

The choir sang "Joseph Smith's First Prayer."

Elder Robert E. Wells offered the invocation.

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our first speaker this morning.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My brethren and sisters, near and far:

I extend to each of you my love and gratitude. I am deeply grateful for your sustaining faith and prayers. We need your prayers. We desire always to be worthy of them. Many of you write letters of encouragement and confi-

dence. These are deeply appreciated. We likewise pray for you.

A painting of butterflies and flowers

A few days ago there came to my office a man from Las Vegas, Nevada. His wife and married daughter were

with him. When we had accomplished the purpose of his visit, the younger woman asked if I would accept something from her thirteen-year-old daughter. She unwrapped a painting of two butterflies around a flowering shrub.

The mother explained that her daughter had been struck by a car in a terrible accident when she was four years of age. Her body was badly broken. She was left paralyzed from the shoulders down, a quadriplegic—without the use of arms or legs. She had painted this picture holding a brush between her teeth and moving her head.

As I listened to that story, the painting grew in beauty and value before my eyes. It became more than a portrayal of butterflies. It represented remarkable courage in the face of blinding adversity; tenacious practice in holding and moving the brush; pleading prayers for help; faith—the faith of a child, nurtured by loving parents, that she could create beauty notwithstanding her handicap.

Some might say that this is not a masterpiece. Without knowledge of its origin, that could be the judgment. But what is the test of art? Is it not the inspiration which comes from looking at it?

I will hang this small painting in my study so that during occasional hours of struggle there will come into my mind the picture of a beautiful little girl, robbed of the use of her feet and hands, gripping the handle of a paintbrush in her teeth to create a thing of beauty. Thank you, Krystal, for what you have done for me. I hope the telling of your story will bring a new measure of strength to others who, facing discouragement, have felt they could not go on. I hope that your example will be as a polar star to lead them in the darkness through which they stumble.

President Benson, our beloved prophet

When I think of those who carry heavy burdens, my mind goes to our beloved prophet. President Benson is

now in his ninety-fifth year. He still wears the mantle of his sacred office. But his activities are seriously limited. He is unable to be with us this morning or to speak to us. We love him. We honor him. We pray for him. We sustain him. And we go forward.

This church is established on principles that are divine. From the day of its organization, it has been led by prophets, and I solemnly testify that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose church it is and whose name it bears, will never let any man or group of men lead it astray. His is the power to remove them if they should ever be found taking the wrong turn.

Moral deficit and decay

We have critics both within and without. Although they are vocal and have access to the media, they are relatively few in number. If we were entirely without criticism, we would be concerned. Our responsibility is not to please the world but, rather, to do the will of the Lord, and from the beginning the divine will so often has been contrary to the ways of the world.

These worldly ways appear to be on a course that should be of concern to every thoughtful man and woman.

We in America are saddled with a huge financial deficit in our national budget. This has led to astronomical debt.

But there is another deficit which, in its long-term implications, is more serious. It is a moral deficit, a decline in values in the lives of the people, which is sapping the very foundation of our society. It is serious in this land. And it is serious in every other nation of which I know.

Some few months ago there appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* what was spoken of as an index of what is happening to our culture. I read from this statement:

“Since 1960, the U.S. population has increased 41%; the gross domestic

product has nearly tripled; and total social spending by all levels of government [has experienced] more than a fivefold increase. . . .

"But during the same . . . period there has been a 560% increase in violent crime; a 419% increase in illegitimate births; a quadrupling in divorce rates; a tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent homes; more than a 200% increase in the teenage suicide rate" (William J. Bennett, "Quantifying America's Decline," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 Mar. 1993, p. A12).

The article concludes with a statement from Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

"The West . . . has been undergoing an erosion and [an] obscuring of high moral and ethical ideals. The spiritual axis of life has grown dim."

One need not, of course, read statistics to recognize a moral decay that seems to be going on all about us. It is evident in the easy breakup of marriages, in widespread infidelity, in the growth of youth gangs, in the increased use of drugs and the epidemic spread of AIDS, and in a growing disregard for the lives and property of others. It is seen in the defacement of private and public property with graffiti, which destroys beauty and is an insult to art. It is expressed in the language of the gutter, which is brought into our homes.

The endless sex and violence on network TV, the trash of so many motion pictures, the magnified sensuality found in much of modern literature, the emphasis on sex education, a widespread breakdown of law and order—all are manifestations of this decay.

The answer: teach values at home

What is the answer? Is there any way to change the course of the ethical and moral slide we are experiencing? I believe there is.

What is happening is simply an ugly expression of the declining values of our society. Those who are concerned with

the problem advocate more legal regulation, large appropriations for increased police forces, tax increases to build additional jails and prisons. These may be needed to deal with the present problems. They may help in the near term. But they will be only as a bandage too small for the sore. They may help in taking care of the fruits, but they will not get at the roots. In searching for remedies, we speak of a greater work that must be done in our schools. But educators have largely abdicated their responsibility for teaching values. The Church is looked to—this and all other churches. I am grateful for what the Pope recently said in Denver in warning against moral pitfalls. I am pleased to note that the Baptists have begun a campaign for chastity. We as a church are doing much, very much, and I think we are accomplishing much. But it is not enough.

When all is said and done, the primary place in building a value system is in the homes of the people.

Shaping the honey locust tree

I read the other day of a father who pleaded with a judge to lock up his son because he could not control him. I do not doubt that he has tried. But it is now too late. Attitudes have been fixed. Habits have become rigid. If we are to turn this tide, the effort must begin with children when they are young and pliable, when they will listen and learn.

Not long after we were married, we built our first home. We had very little money. I did much of the work myself. It would be called "sweat equity" today. The landscaping was entirely my responsibility. The first of many trees that I planted was a thornless honey locust. Envisioning the day when its filtered shade would assist in cooling the house in the summertime, I put it in a place at the corner where the wind from the canyon to the east blew the hardest. I dug a hole, put in the bare root, put soil around it, poured on water, and

largely forgot it. It was only a wisp of a tree, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It was so supple that I could bend it with ease in any direction. I paid little attention to it as the years passed.

Then one winter day, when the tree was barren of leaves, I chanced to look out the window at it. I noticed that it was leaning to the west, misshapen and out of balance. I could scarcely believe it. I went out and braced myself against it as if to push it upright. But the trunk was now nearly a foot in diameter. My strength was as nothing against it. I took from my toolshed a block and tackle. Attaching one end to the tree and another to a well-set post, I pulled the rope. The pulleys moved a little, and the trunk of the tree trembled slightly. But that was all. It seemed to say, "You can't straighten me. It's too late. I've grown this way because of your neglect, and I will not bend."

Finally in desperation I took my saw and cut off the great heavy branch on the west side. The saw left an ugly scar, more than eight inches across. I stepped back and surveyed what I had done. I had cut off the major part of the tree, leaving only one branch growing skyward.

More than half a century has passed since I planted that tree. My daughter and her family live there now. The other day I looked again at the tree. It is large. Its shape is better. It is a great asset to the home. But how serious was the trauma of its youth and how brutal the treatment I used to straighten it.

When it was first planted, a piece of string would have held it in place against the forces of the wind. I could have and should have supplied that string with ever so little effort. But I did not, and it bent to the forces that came against it.

I have seen a similar thing, many times, in children whose lives I have observed. The parents who brought them into the world seem almost to have abdicated their responsibility. The results

have been tragic. A few simple anchors would have given them the strength to withstand the forces that have shaped their lives. Now it appears it is too late.

Parents' responsibility to teach children

Every individual in the world is a child of a mother and a father. Neither can ever escape the consequences of their parenthood. Inherent in the very act of creation is responsibility for the child who is created. None can with impunity run from that responsibility.

It is not enough simply to provide food and shelter for the physical being. There is an equal responsibility to provide nourishment and direction to the spirit and the mind and the heart. Wrote Paul to Timothy, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8).

I am satisfied that Paul was speaking of more than physical nourishment.

Roles of father and mother

Many years ago, President Stephen L. Richards, then a Counselor in the First Presidency, speaking from this pulpit made an eloquent plea to put father back at the head of the family (see Conference Report, Apr. 1958, p. 94). I repeat that plea to all fathers. Yours is the basic and inescapable responsibility to stand as the head of the family. That does not carry with it any implication of dictatorship or unrighteous dominion. It carries with it a mandate that fathers provide for the needs of their families. Those needs are more than food, clothing, and shelter. Those needs include righteous direction and the teaching, by example as well as precept, of basic principles of honesty, integrity, service, respect for the rights of others, and an understanding that we are accountable for that which we do in this life, not only to one another but

also to the God of heaven, who is our Eternal Father.

Let every mother realize that she has no greater blessing than the children who have come to her as a gift from the Almighty; that she has no greater mission than to rear them in light and truth, in understanding and love; that she will have no greater happiness than to see them grow into young men and women who respect principles of virtue, who walk free from the stain of immorality and from the shame of delinquency.

Bring up children in light and truth

Said the writer of Proverbs, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

The health of any society, the happiness of its people, their prosperity, and their peace all find their roots in the teaching of children by fathers and mothers.

The very structure of our society is now threatened by broken homes and the tragic consequences of those homes.

I believe that with effort we can change this course. We must begin with parents. We must provide understanding on the part of every man and woman of the eternal purposes of life, of the obligations of marriage, and of the responsibilities of parenthood. To men who beget children and then abandon them, I say that God will hold you accountable, for these are also His children, whose cries over what you have done reach up to Him. With the obligation to beget goes the responsibility to nurture, to protect, to teach, to guide in righteousness and truth. Yours is the power and the responsibility to preside in a home where there is peace and security, love and harmony.

I remind mothers everywhere of the sanctity of your calling. No other can adequately take your place. No responsibility is greater, no obligation more

binding than that you rear in love and peace and integrity those whom you have brought into the world.

To both of you, let no bickering cloud the spirit of your home. Set aside your selfishness in the interest of a far greater and eternal cause. Bring up your children in light and truth as the Lord has commanded.

Could you wish for anything more than peace for your children? Could you benefit society in any better way? I make you a solemn and sacred promise that if you will do this, the time will come when, looking upon those you have created, nurtured, and loved, you will see the fruits of your nurturing and get on your knees and thank the Lord for His blessing to you.

Give love, patience, and encouragement

Now, with all of this, I know there are very many of you who are wonderful parents and whose children are growing in righteousness. Happy and productive will be their lives, and the world will be the better for them. I thank you and most warmly congratulate you. Surely you are fortunate.

But there are others—too many among our own—whose children, to quote the revelation, are "growing up in wickedness" and who "seek not . . . the riches of eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness" (D&C 68:31). To these I make my appeal.

It may not be easy. It may be fraught with disappointment and challenge. It will require courage and patience. I remind you of the faith and determination of the thirteen-year-old girl who, holding a paintbrush in her teeth, created the painting I showed you earlier. Love can make the difference—love generously given in childhood and reaching through the awkward years of youth. It will do what money lavished on children will never do.

—And patience, with a bridling of the tongue and self-mastery over anger.

The writer of Proverbs declared, "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

—And encouragement that is quick to compliment and slow to criticize.

These, with prayers, will accomplish wonders. You cannot expect to do it alone. You need heaven's help in rearing heaven's child—your child, who is also the child of his or her Heavenly Father.

O God, our Eternal Father, bless the parents to teach with love and patience and encouragement those who are most precious, the children who have come from Thee, that together they might be safeguarded and directed for good and, in the process of growth,

bring blessings to the world of which they will be a part, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Come, Thou Glorious Day of Promise."

President Monson

President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Come, Thou Glorious Day of Promise."

Elder David B. Haight of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will be our next speaker.

Elder David B. Haight

Faithfulness of convert ancestors

I have prayed that the blessings of heaven will direct my expressions this morning that I might convey to you the desires of my soul.

A few weeks ago, joy and nostalgia dominated our conversation as Sister Haight and I drove to the airport to see our eleventh grandchild leave for his mission. During our brief visit—with warm greetings and emotional embraces—we recalled some of the historical accounts of how the message of the restoration of the gospel had influenced our family, of how our missionary grandson's great-great-grandfather, Joseph Toronto, heard and believed the message of the gospel from missionaries in Boston in 1843, 150 years ago.

Joseph Toronto assisted with the building of the Nauvoo Temple. Brigham Young had made a strong appeal on Sunday, July 6, 1845, for the Saints to "remember [and pray for] the temple" and to "pay your tithing." The Saints were anxious that the temple be finished sufficiently that ordinance work might

begin before the exodus westward. More workers and tithing were desperately needed. Joseph Toronto, the new convert, visited Brigham Young after the meeting and declared that "he wanted to give himself and all he had to the kingdom of God." He handed Brigham Young \$2,600 in gold coins (see "Italian Pioneer," *Church News*, 20 June 1981, p. 16). Brigham Young blessed the Italian convert, proclaiming that "he should stand at the head of his race and that neither he nor his family should ever want for bread" (*Joseph Toronto: Italian Pioneer and Patriarch*, comp. Toronto Family Organization [1983], p. 10). Later, in 1849, he was called to accompany the new Apostle Lorenzo Snow to his native Italy to open that land for the preaching of the gospel (see *Church News*, 20 June 1981, p. 16).

We also spoke of Hector C. Haight, another ancestor, called from his home in Farmington, Utah, to preside over the Scandinavian Mission in 1856 with little or no ability to speak Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian. But trusting in the Lord and with the assistance of the Scandina-