

Elder Hartman Rector Jr.

Receiving emeritus status

When a Seventy of the First Quorum becomes seventy years old, he becomes emeritus. Or you can call it "emeritis." It's in the air; all you have to do is keep breathing and you'll get it. It seems that just about everything I do of late, I am doing for the last time, and so it is with speaking in general conference.

I can't say that this is doing any particular violence to my sensitivities, however, because I have never felt particularly comfortable in this position behind this microphone anyway.

I do appreciate the opportunity to express my love to my Brethren, most of whom I have seen called, and to all the many strong Saints all over the world whom I have had the privilege to know and serve with.

Yes, the gospel of Jesus Christ does truly make us brothers and sisters and a great family of Jesus Christ as we seek to follow him and become his sons and his daughters (see John 1:12; Ether 3:14).

Story of conversion

As most of you are aware, I am a convert to the Church, having been baptized in Tokyo, Japan, back in 1952 while serving in the U.S. Navy during the Korean conflict. I was born and reared in Missouri, where much of the early history of this church took place. But I had never heard anything about the Mormon church. I was looking for the truth, and although I had read the Bible and believed that Jesus Christ had lived on the earth and had been resurrected, yet I had so many unanswered questions—questions such as: Why doesn't God speak to man today as he did anciently when the Bible was being written? How can Jesus be his own father and the Holy Ghost too? Why did Jesus have to be

baptized when he had no sin? Where was I before I was born, and where do I go when I die? How can just believing in Christ save me when I haven't kept God's Ten Commandments?

I knew there must be answers that I had not heard. The answers came when Elders Ted Raban and Ronald Flygare knocked on my door in San Diego, California, in July 1951. My wife, Connie, let them in and accepted a copy of the Book of Mormon from them. I was in Hawaii at the time, attending a fourteen-week training course preparatory to deployment to Korea.

When I returned home, Connie gave me a copy of the Book of Mormon, and I began to read. I knew the book was true before I had finished 2 Nephi—Nephi had converted one more—and began to attend church in the old Valencia Park Ward in San Diego. Because of my preparation for deployment, I was not able to study and attend church as I wanted to and longed for the time when I could. The time came aboard the aircraft carrier *Philippine Seas*, where I read fourteen of the best books that have ever been written. They included the standard works of the Church, plus the writings of each of the Presidents of the Church from Joseph Smith Jr. to David O. McKay, plus Parley P. and Orson Pratt and a few others. I was like a starving man who had found food and drink for the first time. I loved it.

When we arrived in Japan, the LDS group aboard ship decided I should be baptized. So we traveled to the Tokyo mission home, where I requested baptism. I was informed that I had not been an investigator for the required one-year time period; therefore, I could not be baptized. However, I persisted. I asked to be interviewed. The interview took an hour and a half, but in the end I received a recommend for baptism and confirma-

tion. McDonald B. Johnson, the LDS group leader on the *Philippine Seas*, baptized me, and Fred Gaylord Peterson confirmed me, and I became a member of the Church on February 26, 1952. I was ordained a deacon that day and subsequently to another office in the priesthood each time the ship returned to Japan, until on July 26, 1952, I was ordained an elder and returned to San Diego in August, where my wife had been baptized on March 1 of that same year. We were a united family in the gospel of Jesus Christ and were looking forward with much anticipation to being sealed together with our three children in the Mesa Arizona Temple, which happened in May 1953.

Sixteen years after baptism, I was called by President David O. McKay to be a member of the First Council of the Seventy. That was in April of 1968. I was the first convert to be called as a General Authority since John Morgan, a period of eighty-six years. I have served in this capacity for twenty-six years.

Repent of sins

I have found the gospel to be very simple but also very profound. Once we have sufficient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we believe he has paid for our sins, then we will repent. And no one truly repents until he believes in Christ.

You see, there is a difference between stopping sinning and repentance. In the first instance we are still guilty; in the second we are free of the sin and guilt. People stop sinning all the time because they are afraid they will get AIDS or die of lung cancer or some other reason, but they do not get rid of their sins. That can happen only when a nonmember follows Jesus Christ down into the waters of baptism, then comes forth and receives the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands by priesthood authority. That's how we get clean before the Lord (see D&C 84:74).

Again, in the first instance we are still *in* our sins, but in the second instance we are free *from* our sins. The word of the Father to Nephi was "Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son." Then Nephi reports he heard a voice from the Father saying, "Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (2 Nephi 31:11, 15).

Endure to the end

Then after baptism by the water and the Spirit, it appears that all the Father requires of us is that we endure to the end. What does that mean? I believe it means basically three things.

One: We must continue to repent for the rest of our lives because we will still make mistakes, and we must go home clean or we can't dwell with the Father and the Son (see D&C 84:74).

Two: We must continue to forgive others. If we do not forgive others, we cannot obtain forgiveness ourselves (see D&C 64:9-10).

And three: Yes, we must be nice. If we're not nice, I don't think we're going to make it. In other words, we must have charity, which is really love plus sacrifice. We must serve our fellowmen, women, and children, and if we do all else but we do not serve the poor, the needy, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the sick and afflicted, both temporally and spiritually, according to their wants, we cannot retain a remission of our sins from day to day. Without serving others, we cannot "walk guiltless before God" (Mosiah 4:26).

It is a fact that God is no respecter of persons. He loves all of his children, and I believe he loves them equally. Of course, he cannot bless his children if they do not keep his commandments, for he has said:

"There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this

world, upon which *all* blessings are predicated—

“And when we obtain *any* blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21; italics added).

God tells us he cannot deny his words. Quite obviously he is much more pleased with us when we keep his commandments, and he delights to bless us when we do. But if we do not keep his commandments, he will chasten us. It does not mean that he doesn’t love us, any more than when parents discipline children. In fact, it is because he *does* love us that he chastens us so we might learn obedience (see Hebrews 12:6; D&C 95:1).

Love and serve others

Then to walk guiltless before God, we must love and serve others. His statement through King Benjamin that “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17), I believe, can properly be turned around to say that “unless you *are* in the service of your fellow beings you are *not* in the service of your God.” Mormon expressed this thought, which was recorded by his son Moroni, when he said:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. . . .

“. . . And whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. . . .

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure” (Moroni 7:46–48).

I am persuaded that only this charity—this pure love of Christ, this love plus sacrifice, which is exemplified in the work that goes on in our temples—can save this nation (and the world, for that matter) when the Lord comes. The Lord was willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if Abraham could find just ten good men, which he could not do. I presume I could not have a more important hope for you and me than that we may be filled with this charity, this pure love of Christ, to serve our fellowman. I express this hope to you in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

These two delightful and impressive men have spoken to us out of their hearts as they leave their service as General Authorities. That doesn’t mean they’re through. Brother Tenorio’s native tongue is Spanish—Mexican. Brother Rector’s native tongue is Missourian.

Elder Claudio R. M. Costa, who was called as a Seventy at the April conference, will be our next speaker.

Elder Claudio R. M. Costa

Learning the true meaning of success

Dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for having sent me to this earth to loving parents who, from my boyhood, taught me

the priceless principles of righteousness, honesty, faithfulness, and how to work.

I was born into a poor family, and early in my life I had to work. This has been a great blessing to me. When I was twelve years old, I had to go to evening