

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 166th Annual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 7, 1996. President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley and Craig Jessop conducting and Richard Elliott at the organ.

President Faust made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President James E. Faust

President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 166th annual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We note that Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin, Dallas N. Archibald, and F. David Stanley are seated on the stand in the Assembly Hall. Elders Harold G. Hillam, Vaughn J. Featherstone, L. Lionel Kendrick, and Lino Alvarez are in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building.

We also send our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, cable, or satellite transmission.

The Tabernacle Choir, directed by Jerold Ottley and Craig Jessop and accompanied by Richard Elliott, will provide the music for this session.

The choir will begin this service by singing "He Is Risen!" The invocation will be offered by Elder John H. Groberg of the Seventy.

The choir sang "He Is Risen!"
Elder John H. Groberg offered the invocation.

President Faust

The choir will now sing "How Great the Wisdom and the Love." Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then be our first speaker.

The choir sang "How Great the Wisdom and the Love."

Elder Neal A. Maxwell

I add my warm welcome to the newly sustained Seventies, promising them friendship as we now company one another through the years which lie ahead.

Today's Sinai of secularism

First, brothers and sisters, some brief samples illustrating the challenge of making our way through today's Sinai of secularism, and then a focus on how inspired children help in that trek.

All about us we see the bitter and abundant harvest from permissiveness. A perceptive person has acknowledged:

"The struggle to live ethically without God has left us not with the just and moral order we imagined but with disorder and confusion.

"Something has gone radically wrong with secularism. The problem has more than its share of irony, for secularism, in the end, has converted itself into a kind of religion. . . .

“. . . Now the transition is complete: the state has become the church” (Peter Marin, “Secularism’s Blind Faith,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Sept. 1995, 20).

The more what is politically correct seeks to replace what God has declared correct, the more ineffective approaches to human problems there will be, all reminding us of C. S. Lewis’s metaphor about those who run around with fire extinguishers in times of flood. For instance, there are increasing numbers of victims of violence and crime, yet special attention is paid to the rights of criminals. Accompanying an ever increasing addiction to pornography are loud alarms against censorship. Rising illegitimacy destroys families and threatens the funding capacities of governments; nevertheless, chastity and fidelity are mocked. These and other consequences produce a harsh cacophony. When Nero fiddled as Rome burned, at least he made a little music! I have no hesitancy, brothers and sisters, in stating that unless checked, permissiveness, by the end of its journey, will cause humanity to stare in mute disbelief at its awful consequences.

Ironically, as some people become harder, they use softer words to describe dark deeds. This too is part of being sedated by secularism! Needless abortion, for instance, is a “reproductive health procedure,” which is an even more “spongy expression” than “termination of pregnancy” (George McKenna, “On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1995, 52, 54). *Illegitimacy* gives way to the wholly sanitized words *nonmarital birth* or *alternative parenting* (see Ben J. Wattenberg, *Values Matter Most* [1995], 173).

Tares masquerading as wheat

Church members will live in this wheat-and-tares situation until the Millennium. Some real tares even masquerade as wheat, including the few eager individuals who lecture the rest of us

about Church doctrines in which they no longer believe. They criticize the use of Church resources to which they no longer contribute. They condescendingly seek to counsel the Brethren whom they no longer sustain. Confrontive, except of themselves, of course, they leave the Church, but they cannot leave the Church alone (see Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 17; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 14). Like the throng on the ramparts of the “great and spacious building,” they are intensely and busily preoccupied, pointing fingers of scorn at the steadfast iron-rodgers (see 1 Nephi 8:26–28, 33). Considering their ceaseless preoccupation, one wonders, Is there no diversionary activity available to them, especially in such a large building—like a bowling alley? Perhaps in their mockings and beneath the stir are repressed doubts of their doubts. In any case, given the perils of popularity, Brigham Young advised that this “people must be kept where the finger of scorn can be pointed at them” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1941], 434).

Therefore, brothers and sisters, quiet goodness must persevere even when, as prophesied, a few actually rage in their anger against that which is good (see 2 Nephi 28:20). Likewise the arrogance of critics must be met by the meekness and articulateness of believers. If sometimes ringed by resentment, we must still reach out, especially for those whose hands hang down (see D&C 81:5). If our shortcomings as a people are occasionally highlighted, then let us strive to do better.

Oases of the Restoration

Besides, the exhilarations of discipleship exceed its burdens. Hence, while journeying through our Sinai, we are nourished in the Bountiful-like oases of the Restoration. Of these oases some of our first impressions may prove to be more childish than definitive. When we

brush against such lush and verdant vegetation, its fragrance is inevitably upon us. Our pockets are stuffed with varied and lush fruits, and we are filled with glee. There is no way to describe it all. In our appreciation, little wonder some of us mistake a particular tree for the whole of an oasis, or a particularly refreshing pool for the entirety of the Restoration's gushing and living waters. Hence, in our early exclamations there may even be some unintended exaggerations. We have seen and partaken of far too much; hence, we "cannot [speak] the smallest part which [we] feel" (Alma 26:16).

Strength of family and friends

In addition to these oases, the Lord has made further and "ample provision" for our journey, including families, neighbors, and fellow servants (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 220). Each of these is given to strengthen, edify, instruct, comfort, and inspire us while we are "knit together in love" (Colossians 2:2). Therefore, we experience the contagiousness of commitment in these interlacings of our lives.

Some 12 years ago there was a tennis match with two LDS physicians and a nonmember medical student from Brazil. With no intervening communication, last month in Curitiba, Brazil, Valentim Gonçalves stood by me again, not on a tennis court but instead in a regional conference to translate for me. Thanks to his innate goodness and the good work of others, ophthalmologist Valentim is not only a member but is a stake president in Curitiba. Valentim and his special wife, sealed in the temple, have been blessed with three lovely children. This remarkable rendezvous added to my already appreciative wonder over the workings of the hand of the Lord (see D&C 59:21).

Children often show the way

Inspired children often show the way through the wilderness. One reason they are able to do so is implicit in the searching question asked by King Benjamin: "For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?" (Mosiah 5:13).

Children often have the "thoughts and [the] intents of [their] heart[s]" focused on the Master. Though not full of years, such children are full of faith! Too young for formal Church callings, they have been "called to serve" as exemplifiers, doing especially well when blessed with "goodly parents" (1 Nephi 1:1).

Just as the scriptures assure, "little children do have words given unto them many times" (Alma 32:23). For example, the resurrected Jesus revealed things to the Nephite children, who then taught adults and their parents "even greater" things than Jesus had taught (3 Nephi 26:14).

Three-year-old Nate Barker

It has been a privilege to seal several adopted children to Nan and Dan Barker, now of Arizona. Some time ago Nate, then just over three, said, "Mommy, there is another little girl who is supposed to come to our family. She has dark hair and dark eyes and lives a long way from here."

The wise mother asked, "How do you know this?"

"Jesus told me, upstairs."

The mother noted, "We don't have an upstairs," but quickly sensed the significance of what had been communicated. After much travail and many prayers, the Barker family were in a sealing room in the Salt Lake Temple in the fall of 1995, where a little girl with dark hair and dark eyes, from Kazakhstan,

was sealed to them for time and eternity. Inspired children still tell parents “great and marvelous things” (3 Nephi 26:14).

Three-year-old Benjamin Ballam

Benjamin Ballam is the special spina bifida child of Michael and Laurie Ballam. He has been such a blessing to them and many others. Also spiritually precocious, Benjamin is a constant source of love and reassurance. Having had 17 surgeries, resilient Benjamin knows all about hospitals and doctors. Once, when an overwhelmed attendant became vocally upset—not at Benjamin, but over stressful circumstances—little three-year-old Benjamin exemplified the words of another Benjamin about our need to be childlike and “full of love” (Mosiah 3:19). Little Benjamin reached out, tenderly patted the irritated attendant, and said, “I love you anyway.” A similar episode occurred recently in an Israeli hospital, where little Benjamin, going through a necessary but very painful procedure, used the same loving words to reassure a physician. No wonder, brothers and sisters, in certain moments we feel children are our spiritual superiors.

Young Jacob and Andrew Clark

Joseph and Janice Clark were blessed with two sons, Jacob and Andrew. Five years ago, Joseph was stricken suddenly and, in effect, became a hospitalized quadriplegic. There, supine Joseph’s sons would often be cradled in his arms. Joseph would always smile even when he could not speak audibly. In the eyes of the world, his was a catastrophic illness. Nevertheless, Joseph, his saintly wife, and their two boys, with strong support from parents and families, coped remarkably for five years. Because they trusted God as to what was really going on, like Job they did not “[charge] God foolishly” (Job 1:22).

Amid all the incessant and difficult problems, many of us watched Janice and Joseph apply King Benjamin’s words by showing that they were “willing to submit” to what had been inflicted upon them (Mosiah 3:19). Radiant Joseph died recently. The very day after his death, prescient, nine-year-old Jacob, who knew firsthand of his father’s loving and out-reaching nature, said, “Mom, I’ll bet Dad already has a lot of friends in heaven!” A few days later, seven-year-old Andrew struggled with a computer assignment at school but later reported to his mother, “I just thought of Dad, and he helped me.”

Four-year-old Mayara Fernanda dos Santos

A four-year-old Brazilian girl, Mayara Fernanda dos Santos, suffering from leukemia and on oxygen, was blessed recently by Elder Claudio Costa and myself in Curitiba, Brazil. After the blessing, empathetic little Mayara smilingly wiped a tear from her anxious mother’s cheek. Instinctively wise beyond her years, Mayara knows how to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort,” including her precious parents, who are willing to wait upon the Lord (Mosiah 18:9).

Seven-year-old Jared Ammon

Elder Craig Zwick and I shared a precious moment in Fortaleza, Brazil, where we were privileged to bless a special seven-year-old boy who was dying of leukemia. His names—Jared Ammon—tell you much about his parents and family. Accompanied by a thoughtful mission and stake president, there was scarcely room for the four of us to stand beside the bed in the tiny room where Jared Ammon’s faithful 14-year-old sister held him in her arms. His stomach was so severely swollen. When the stake presi-

dent lifted the oxygen mask to ask if he would like a blessing, Jared said, "Yes, please." It was a privilege to bless him and to call him to serve beyond the veil. Tears flowed, for the Spirit was strong. The oxygen mask was then lifted again, and Jared Ammon was asked if there was anything else we could do for him. Jared meekly requested that we sing for him "I Am a Child of God" (*Hymns*, no. 301). Weepingly, we responded to a submissive Jared Ammon's last request, and two hours later he was released from this life.

Before explaining the next day, we went to the viewing at the chapel. His wonderful parents were full of faith, composed, and reverently "willing to submit" (Mosiah 3:19). The sister who held Jared plans to serve a mission later on this side of the veil while Jared serves on the other.

Become as a child

Brothers and sisters, no wonder the divine direction is for each of us to be-

come "as a child" (Mosiah 3:19). Such saintliness will sustain us as we cross our Sinai, including in those moments when we must "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Such submissive stillness is necessary because the process of consecration is not one of explanation. Only "after the trial of [our] faith" does the full witness come; meanwhile, often "a little child shall lead [us]" (Ether 12:6; Isaiah 11:6).

I gladly testify to the truth of this work, and I witness to the wonder of it all, as we are led so ably by President Hinckley. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen!

President Faust

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Dallin H. Oaks, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. He will be followed by Elder W. Mack Lawrence of the Seventy.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

Joseph, the man and the prophet

On this beautiful Easter Sunday, I have chosen to speak about the Prophet Joseph Smith and to emphasize some lesser-known aspects of his life that further affirm his prophetic calling.

During my college studies at BYU, I was introduced to the *History of the Church*, an edited compilation of the writings of Joseph Smith and others. After I graduated from law school, I carefully read all seven volumes. I also pursued personal research in original records in Illinois, where the Prophet Joseph lived the last five years of his life.

The man I came to know in this way was not the man I had imagined. When I was a boy, growing up in the Church,

I imagined the Prophet Joseph to be old and dignified and distant. But the Joseph Smith I met in my reading and personal research was a man of the frontier—young, emotional, dynamic, and so loved and approachable by his people that they often called him "Brother Joseph." My studies strengthened my testimony of his prophetic calling. What a remarkable man! At the same time, I could see that he was mortal and therefore subject to sin and error, pain and affliction.

Acquired knowledge rapidly

Overarching the Prophet Joseph's entire ministry were his comparative youth, his superficial formal education,