

## President Gordon B. Hinckley

### Questions that people ask about us

My beloved brothers and sisters, it is a tremendous honor to speak on this occasion.

We are interviewed frequently by the media these days. As many of you know, I recently appeared on the *Larry King Live* television program. I consented to do so because I felt that while there were possible hazards in it, there also was a great opportunity to speak to the world on issues before us.

In the course of the show Mr. King asked me point-blank, "What is your role? You're the leader of a major religion. What's your role?"

I replied: "My role is to declare doctrine. My role is to stand as an example before the people. My role is to be a voice in defense of the truth. My role is to stand as a conservator of those values which are important in our civilization and our society. My role is to lead."

This reply was extemporaneous. I never expected that question. But in the spirit of that response I have thought this morning that I would like to raise a half-dozen or so questions we are invariably asked by those of the media and other churches. For this occasion I must be necessarily brief. Every one of these issues is worthy of a full discourse.

I have chosen these questions at random, not putting them in any special order except for the first. I do not wish to argue with anyone. I respect the religion of every man and woman, and honor them in their desire to live it. I simply wish to set forth, as simply as I know how, my response to what people are asking about us.

### The Mormon doctrine of Deity

*Question 1: What is the Mormon doctrine of Deity, of God?*

Since the time of the First Vision, people have raised this question, and they continue to raise it and will do so for so long as they believe in the God of their tradition, while we bear testimony of the God of modern revelation.

The Prophet Joseph declared, "It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 345).

"We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost" (Articles of Faith 1:1). This first article of faith epitomizes our doctrine. We do not accept the Athanasian Creed. We do not accept the Nicene Creed or any other creed based on tradition and the conclusions of men.

We do accept, as the basis of our doctrine, the statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith that when he prayed for wisdom in the woods, "the light rested upon me [and] I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

Two beings of substance were before him. He saw them. They were in form like men, only much more glorious in their appearance. He spoke to them. They spoke to him. They were not amorphous spirits. Each was a distinct personality. They were beings of flesh and bone whose nature was reaffirmed in later revelations which came to the Prophet.

Our entire case as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rests on the validity of this glorious First Vision. It was the parting of the curtain to open this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. Nothing on which

we base our doctrine, nothing we teach, nothing we live by is of greater importance than this initial declaration. I submit that if Joseph Smith talked with God the Father and His Beloved Son, then all else of which he spoke is true. This is the hinge on which turns the gate that leads to the path of salvation and eternal life.

Are we Christians? Of course we are Christians. We believe in Christ. We worship Christ. We take upon ourselves in solemn covenant His holy name. The Church to which we belong carries His name. He is our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer through whom came the great Atonement with salvation and eternal life.

#### **Attitude toward homosexuality**

*Question 2: What is your Church's attitude toward homosexuality?*

In the first place, we believe that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God. We believe that marriage may be eternal through exercise of the power of the everlasting priesthood in the house of the Lord.

People inquire about our position on those who consider themselves so-called gays and lesbians. My response is that we love them as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. Most people have inclinations of one kind or another at various times. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church. If they violate the law of chastity and the moral standards of the Church, then they are subject to the discipline of the Church, just as others are.

We want to help these people, to strengthen them, to assist them with their problems and to help them with their difficulties. But we cannot stand idle if they indulge in immoral activity, if they try to uphold and defend and live in a so-called

same-sex marriage situation. To permit such would be to make light of the very serious and sacred foundation of God-sanctioned marriage and its very purpose, the rearing of families.

#### **Position on abortion**

*Question 3: What is your position on abortion?*

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were more than 1,200,000 abortions performed in 1995 in the United States alone. What has happened to our regard for human life? How can women, and men, deny the great and precious gift of life, which is divine in its origin and nature?

How wonderful a thing is a child. How beautiful is a newborn babe. There is no greater miracle than the creation of human life.

Abortion is an ugly thing, a debasing thing, a thing which inevitably brings remorse and sorrow and regret.

While we denounce it, we make allowance in such circumstances as when pregnancy is the result of incest or rape, when the life or health of the mother is judged by competent medical authority to be in serious jeopardy, or when the fetus is known by competent medical authority to have serious defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth.

But such instances are rare, and there is only a negligible probability of their occurring. In these circumstances, those who face the question are asked to consult with their local ecclesiastical leaders and to pray in great earnestness, receiving a confirmation through prayer before proceeding.

There is a far better way.

If there is no prospect of marriage to the man involved, leaving the mother alone, there remains the very welcome option of placing the child for adoption by parents who will love it and care for

it. There are many such couples in good homes who long for a child and cannot have one.

### Position on polygamy

*Question 4: What is the Church's position on polygamy?*

We are faced these days with many newspaper articles on this subject. This has arisen out of a case of alleged child abuse on the part of some of those practicing plural marriage.

I wish to state categorically that this Church has nothing whatever to do with those practicing polygamy. They are not members of this Church. Most of them have never been members. They are in violation of the civil law. They know they are in violation of the law. They are subject to its penalties. The Church, of course, has no jurisdiction whatever in this matter.

If any of our members are found to be practicing plural marriage, they are excommunicated, the most serious penalty the Church can impose. Not only are those so involved in direct violation of the civil law, they are in violation of the law of this Church. An article of our faith is binding upon us. It states, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law" (Articles of Faith 1:12). One cannot obey the law and disobey the law at the same time.

There is no such thing as a "Mormon fundamentalist." It is a contradiction to use the two words together.

More than a century ago God clearly revealed unto His prophet Wilford Woodruff that the practice of plural marriage should be discontinued, which means that it is now against the law of God. Even in countries where civil or religious law allows polygamy, the Church teaches that marriage must be monogamous and does not accept into its membership those practicing plural marriage.

### Reasons for the Church's growth

*Question 5: To what do you attribute the growth of the Church?*

We are growing. We are growing in a wonderful way. Between natural growth and converts baptized, we are adding about 400,000 per year. On a base of 10 million, that is about 4 percent, which is exceptionally good for a church.

People are looking for a solid anchor in a world of shifting values. They want something they can hold to as the world about them increasingly appears to be in disarray.

They are welcomed as new converts and are made to feel at home. They feel the warmth of the fellowship of the Saints.

They are put to work. They are given responsibility. They are made to feel a part of the great onward movement of this, the work of God.

And, of course, we have missionaries to assist them in their search for truth.

They soon discover that much is expected of them as Latter-day Saints. They do not resent it. They measure up, and they like it. They expect their religion to be demanding, to require reformation in their lives. They meet the requirements. They bear testimony of the great good that has come to them. They are enthusiastic and faithful.

### Position on spouse and child abuse

*Question 6: What about spouse and child abuse?*

We condemn most strongly abusive behavior in any form. We denounce the physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse of one's spouse or children. Our proclamation on the family declares: "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. . . . Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for

their physical and spiritual needs. . . . Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102).

We are doing all we know how to do to stamp out this terrible evil. When there is recognition of equality between the husband and the wife, when there is acknowledgment that each child born into the world is a child of God, then there will follow a greater sense of responsibility to nurture, to help, to love with an enduring love those for whom we are responsible.

No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to hold the priesthood of God. No man who abuses his wife or children is worthy to be a member in good standing in this Church. The abuse of one’s spouse and children is a most serious offense before God, and any who indulge in it may expect to be disciplined by the Church.

### Financing the Church’s operations

*Question 7: How does the Church finance its operations?*

Brother Faust has spoken on that very ably this morning. Those in the outside world wonder how we are able to do so much. They speak and write of the Church as having great wealth and tremendous assets.

We do have assets. We have houses of worship that dot the earth. We are building a large number of new ones every year. We carry on a great program of higher education, of seminaries and institutes. We have an unequaled family history facility. We foster a tremendous missionary organization that entails the maintenance of mission homes and other facilities in addition to the cost of maintaining the missionaries, which is borne by the missionaries themselves and their families. We carry on other programs, all of which require money.

But all of these and more are money consuming and not money creating. It costs a great deal to operate this Church. Its worldwide operations are financed through the consecrated tithes of faithful members. What a wonderful and glorious principle is the law of tithing. It is so simple to understand and follow. It is the Lord’s law of finance.

I thank the Lord from the bottom of my heart for the faith of those who pay their honest tithes. Are they the poorer for it? We testify that somehow under the divine providence of the Lord, He makes it up to us and does so generously. It is not a tax. It is a voluntary offering given in confidentiality. It is a principle that carries with it a remarkable promise. God has stated that He will “open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). That is *His* promise. He has the capacity to fulfill that promise. And it is my testimony that He does so.

### This is God’s work

Well, that is all I have time for now. There could be many other items. These are only a sample of questions that those of a curious world ask of us.

We have to know this, you and I who subscribe to the doctrines of this Church, that this is God’s work, directed by the Lord Jesus Christ, that it operates according to Their plan and Their pattern, and that it carries with it Their blessings.

Why are we such a happy people? It is because of our faith, the quiet assurance that abides in our hearts that our Father in Heaven, overseeing all, will look after His sons and daughters who walk before Him with love and appreciation and obedience. We will ever be a happy people if we will so conduct our lives. Sin never was happiness. Transgression never was happiness. Falsehood in word or behavior never was happiness.

Happiness lies in obedience to the teachings and commandments of God our Eternal Father and His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have said before from this pulpit, my brothers and sisters, we love you. We love you for your faith and goodness. We love you for your willingness to do whatever you are asked to do. We love you for your obedience to the will of the Lord.

Knowing this work to be true, we go forward, each of us. May we make a renewed effort to put on the whole armor of God and look to Him is my humble prayer in the name of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "O Thou Kind and Gracious Father."

Elder Ned B. Roueché offered the benediction.

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## SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 168th Semiannual General Conference commenced at 2:00 P.M. on Sunday, October 4, 1998. This session was conducted by President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music, with Jerold Ottley 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 168th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked me, Brother Monson, to conduct this session.

We welcome our state and national officials and others who are our guests. You honor us by your presence. We also welcome all of the General Authorities of the Church to this session, including Andrew W. Peterson, who is recovering nicely after a very, very long time in rehabilitation.

We extend 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 music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Brother Jerold Ottley, with Brother John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir will now sing "Redeemer of Israel." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Wm. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy.

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The choir sang "Redeemer of Israel."

Elder Wm. Rolfe Kerr offered the invocation.

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### **President Monson**

The choir will now sing "Called to Serve." Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will then be our first speaker.

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The choir sang "Called to Serve."

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