

Bruce D. Porter, H. Bryan Richards, Ned B. Roueché, Dennis E. Simmons, Donald L. Staheli, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, Jerald L. Taylor, D. Lee Tobler, Richard E. Turley Sr., Gordon T. Watts, Stephen A. West, Robert J. Whetten, Richard H. Winkel, Richard B. Wirthlin, Ray H. Wood, and Robert S. Wood

The Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

Other authorities present

Other Church authorities in attendance included general, area, stake, and ward officers.

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 170th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 1, 2000, at 10:00 A.M. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop, Mack Wilberg, and Barlow Bradford directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang "The Morning Breaks." President Hinckley then made the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My dear brothers and sisters, we welcome you to the 170th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In this, the first general session of the year 2000, we are assembled in this magnificent new Conference Center.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand at the over-

flow locations in the Tabernacle and Assembly Hall. We likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies seated on the stand here in the Conference Center.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop, Mack Wilberg, and Barlow Bradford, with John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "The Morning Breaks" and will now favor us with "Redeemer of Israel." Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder F. Enzo Busche of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Redeemer of Israel." Elder F. Enzo Busche offered the invocation.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

New Conference Center filled to capacity

My dearly beloved brethren and sisters, what a magnificent sight you are, this vast congregation of Latter-day

Saints gathered together in this new and wonderful hall.

The organ is not completed, and there are various construction details yet to be attended to. But fortunately the

work is far enough along that we are able to use it for this conference. A year or so ago in speaking concerning it, I expressed the opinion that we may not be able to fill it initially. It seats three and a half times the capacity of the Tabernacle. But already we are in trouble. People are filling all of the seats.

During the four general sessions and the priesthood session, we will be able to accommodate about 100,000. We had requests for 370,000 tickets. The Tabernacle and Assembly Hall will serve as overflow. But with all of this, many, very many, will be disappointed. We apologize. We ask for your forgiveness. We are powerless to do anything about it. So many wanted to attend this first conference in the new hall. Unfortunately, that is impossible. I was somewhat shocked to learn that the people from my own ward, who are nearby and whom I love, have received no tickets.

But we are grateful for the enthusiasm of the Latter-day Saints concerning this new meeting place. I hope that enthusiasm will continue and that we shall have a full house at every conference in the future.

This is the newest in a series of meeting places constructed by our people. When first they came to this valley, they built a bowery. It shaded them from the sun but provided no warmth and very little comfort. Then they built the old Tabernacle. That was followed by the new Tabernacle, which has served us so very well for more than 130 years.

Now in this historic season, when we mark the birth of a new century and the beginning of a new millennium, we have built this new and wonderful Conference Center.

Each of the undertakings of the past was a bold venture, and particularly the Tabernacle. It was unique in its design. No one had constructed a building like that before. It is still unique. What a wonderful hall it has been and will con-

tinue to be. It will go on living, for I believe that buildings have lives of their own. It will go on serving long into the unforeseeable future.

Construction was a bold undertaking

The building of this structure has been a bold undertaking. We worried about it. We prayed about it. We listened for the whisperings of the Spirit concerning it. And only when we felt the confirming voice of the Lord did we determine to go forward.

At the general conference of April 1996, I said:

"I regret that many who wish to meet with us in the Tabernacle this morning are unable to get in. There are very many out on the grounds. This unique and remarkable hall, built by our pioneer forebears and dedicated to the worship of the Lord, comfortably seats about 6,000. Some of you seated on those hard benches for two hours may question the word *comfortably*.

"My heart reaches out to those who wish to get in and could not be accommodated. About a year ago I suggested to the Brethren that perhaps the time has come when we should study the feasibility of constructing another dedicated house of worship on a much larger scale that would accommodate three or four times the number who can be seated in this building" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 88-89; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 65).

The vision of a new hall was clearly in mind. Various architectural schemes were studied. One was finally selected. It included a massive structure to seat 21,000 with a theater accommodating another thousand. There would be no interior pillars to obstruct the view of the speaker. There would be trees and running water on the roof.

Ground was broken July 24, 1997, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the

first pioneers in this valley. That was an historic event.

Prophetic statements and actions

We did not know it at the time, but in 1853 Brigham Young, in speaking of temples, said, "The time will come when . . . we shall build . . . on the top, groves and fish ponds" (*Deseret News Weekly*, 30 Apr. 1853, 46).

In 1924 Elder James E. Talmage of the Council of the Twelve wrote: "I have long seen the possible erection of a great pavilion on the north side of the Tabernacle, seating perhaps twenty thousand people or even double that number, with amplifiers capable of making all hear the addresses given from the Tabernacle stands, and in addition to this a connection with the broadcasting system, with receivers in the several chapels or other meeting houses throughout the intermountain region" (journal of James E. Talmage, 29 Aug. 1924, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

In 1940 the First Presidency and the Twelve had their architect draw up a plan of a building that would seat 19,000 and would stand where this building stands. That was 60 years ago. They thought about it, they talked about it, but finally they dropped the idea entirely.

These statements and actions were wonderfully prophetic. We knew nothing about them. All of them have come to our attention since we began this construction.

We have not built a temple with trees and fishponds on the roof. But on this edifice we have many trees and running water. Brigham Young may have foreseen this structure very near the temple. We have what Brother Talmage thought of and much, much more. These services will not only be heard by all who are seated in the Conference Center, they

will be carried by radio, television, and cable, and they will be transmitted by satellite to Europe, to Mexico, to South America. We reach far beyond the intermountain area of which Brother Talmage spoke. We reach beyond the confines of the United States and Canada. We essentially reach across the world.

A truly magnificent building

This is truly a magnificent building. I know of no other comparable structure built primarily as a hall of worship that is so large and that will seat so many. It is beautiful in its design, in its appointments, and in its wonderful utility. It is built of reinforced concrete to the highest seismic codes required in this area. The concrete is faced with granite taken from the same quarry as was the stone for the temple. Both buildings even carry the blemishes of that granite.

The interior is beautiful and wonderfully impressive. It is huge, and it is constructed in such a way that nothing obstructs the view of the speaker. The carpets, the marble floors, the decorated walls, the handsome hardware, the wonderful wood all bespeak utility, with a touch of elegance.

It will prove to be a great addition to this city. Not only will our general conferences be held here, and some other religious meetings, but it will serve as a cultural center for the very best artistic presentations. We hope that those not of our faith will come here, experience the ambience of this beautiful place, and feel grateful for its presence. We thank all who have worked so hard to bring it to this stage—the architects, with whom we have had many meetings; the general contractors, three of whom have worked together; the subcontractors; the hundreds of craftsmen who have labored here; the construction supervisor; the city building inspectors; and everyone who has had a hand in this project. They

have all joined in a herculean effort so that we might meet together this morning. Many of them are with us, I am happy to say.

The black walnut pulpit

And now, my brothers and sisters, I would like to tell you about another feature of this wonderful building. If I get a little personal and even a little sentimental, I hope you will forgive me.

I love trees. When I was a boy we lived on a farm in the summer, a fruit farm. Every year at this season we planted trees. I think I have never missed a spring since I was married, except for two or three years when we were absent from the city, that I have not planted trees, at least one or two—fruit trees, shade trees, ornamental trees, and spruce, fir, and pine among the conifers. I love trees.

Well, some 36 years ago I planted a black walnut. It was in a crowded area where it grew straight and tall to get the sunlight. A year ago, for some reason it died. But walnut is a precious furniture wood. I called Brother Ben Banks of the Seventy, who, before giving his full time to the Church, was in the business of hardwood lumber. He brought his two sons, one a bishop and the other recently released from a bishopric and who now run the business, to look at the tree. From all they could tell it was solid, good, and beautiful wood. One of them suggested that it would make a pulpit for this hall. The idea excited me. The tree was cut down and then cut into two heavy logs. Then followed the long process of drying, first naturally and then kiln drying. The logs were cut into boards at a sawmill in Salem, Utah. The boards were then taken to Fetzer's woodworking plant, where expert craftsmen designed

and built this magnificent pulpit with that wood.

The end product is beautiful. I wish all of you could examine it closely. It represents superb workmanship, and here I am speaking to you from the tree I grew in my backyard, where my children played and also grew.

It is an emotional thing for me. I have planted another black walnut or two. I will be long gone before they mature. When that day comes and this beautiful pulpit has grown old, perhaps one of them will do to make a replacement. To Elder Banks and his sons, Ben and Bradford, and to the skilled workers who have designed and built this, I offer my profound thanks for making it possible to have a small touch of mine in this great hall where the voices of prophets will go out to all the world in testimony of the Redeemer of mankind.

And so to all who have made this sacred edifice possible, and to all of you who are here assembled on this historic occasion, I express gratitude and appreciation, my love and my thanks for this day and this sacred and beautiful house of worship, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "We Love Thy House, O God."

President Hinckley

The choir has just sung "We Love Thy House, O God."

We shall now be pleased to hear from President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder Harold G. Hillam of the Presidency of the Seventy.