

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 173rd Semi-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, October 4, 2003, at 10:00 A.M. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Richard Elliott and John Longhurst were the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang "Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise." President Monson then made the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

Brothers and sisters, we welcome you to this, the first general session of the 173rd Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and at the overflow locations in the Tabernacle and the Assembly Hall. We likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

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

President Gordon B. Hinckley

The growth and impact of this work

My beloved brethren and sisters throughout the world, we send greetings in the name of our Redeemer. We send our love and our blessing. I commend you most warmly on what you are doing to move forward the work of the Lord.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We are also pleased to make available these proceedings via the Church Web site.

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

The choir opened this session by singing "Let Zion in Her Beauty Rise" and will now favor us with "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." The invocation will then be offered by Elder F. Melvin Hammond of the Seventy.

The choir sang "I Know That My Redeemer Lives."

Elder F. Melvin Hammond offered the invocation.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Hammond. It will now be our pleasure to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

Now and again I quietly reflect on the growth and impact of this work. I reflect on that meeting with a few present in the Peter Whitmer farmhouse on the 6th of April 1830. Here the Church was organized, and here began the long march which has brought it to its present stature.

Our people have passed through oppression and persecution; they have suffered drivings and every imaginable evil. And out of all of that has come something which today is glorious to behold.

Responsibility to preach the gospel

In the opening of this work the Lord declared:

“Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

“For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

“And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.

“And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them” (D&C 1:1–2, 4–5).

There can be no doubt concerning our responsibility to the peoples of the earth. There can be no doubt that we are moving forward in pursuing that responsibility.

A strong worldwide church

As I speak to you today, most members of the Church, regardless of where you live, can hear me. It is a miracle. Who in the earlier days could have dreamed of this season of opportunity in which we live?

We now have strong congregations in every state of the United States and in every province of Canada. We have such in every state of Mexico, in every nation of Central America, and throughout the nations of South America. We have strong congregations in Australia and New Zealand and the isles of the Pacific. We are

well established in the nations of the Orient. We are in every nation of Western Europe and in much of Eastern Europe, and we are firmly established in Africa.

Tremendous missionary program

We are being recognized for the tremendous virtues of our programs and the vast good which they do. A California newspaper recently commented:

“The white shirts, backpacks and bicycles give them away, even before you spot the Book of Mormon.

“They’re stereotyped, for good reason.

“These armies of young men—missionaries in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—are strictly regimented while serving missions around the globe.

“For two years, they spend 60 hours a week doing ecclesiastical work, praying, studying, and telling others about the Gospel that drove them to leave families, friends and the comfort of home behind.

“Contact with their loved ones is limited to letters and two calls a year.

“They live frugally, in private homes and apartments with companion missionaries, rising at 6 a.m. to study and pray for guidance in the work they will do until long after the sun sets. . . .

“This life, they say, is a sacrifice—and the most ‘fun’ they can imagine” (Pricilla Nordyke Roden, “Answering the Call,” *San Bernardino County Sun*, 26 Aug. 2003, p. B1).

That might have been written of our missionaries in the more than 120 nations in which they are found serving.

What a miracle it is that we should have some 60,000 of them, most of them young, giving of their time and their testimonies to the world.

I recently met with a group of missionaries who were to be released the next day to return home. They were from various nations across the earth, from Mongolia to Madagascar. They were clean and bright

and enthusiastic. They bespoke love for the Church, for their mission president, for their companions. What a marvelous thing is this unique and tremendous program of the Church.

Likewise other programs.

Wonderful humanitarian programs

We recently were applauded in the public press for giving three million dollars to vaccinate children against measles in Africa. This money did not come from tithing. It came from contributions of the faithful to the humanitarian work of the Church. We have joined the American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, and the Pan American Health Organization in an effort to immunize 200 million children and prevent 1.2 million deaths from measles over the next five years. Our contribution alone will provide vaccine for three million children.

What a marvelous and wonderful thing that is. And so it is with each of our humanitarian programs.

Perpetual Education Fund report

One more item.

In March 2001 we announced that the Church was establishing a plan to assist our returned missionaries and other young adults in gaining education and training leading to better employment opportunities in countries with less abundance and fewer opportunities.

We invited those who wished to help in this plan to contribute to a fund called the Perpetual Education Fund, patterned after the 19th-century Perpetual Emigration Fund. I offer a brief report on what is happening with that plan.

Because of your generous contributions, we have been able to keep current

with the growing need for loans. To date the Church has granted about 10,000 loans to young men and women in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other areas of the Church. These young people have committed to repay their loans so that others may enjoy the same opportunities they are experiencing.

Many have graduated and are experiencing the benefits of their training. To date, about 600 young men and women have completed their training. The majority of these have found good employment. Many more will graduate and enter the workforce in their own communities in the months ahead. They will make their mark in the world, rear families, and serve the Church. Many are already achieving these objectives.

For example, Patrick was the first Perpetual Education Fund student to complete school in Jamaica. His basic training in management earned him a well-paying job at the national airport, with a promising future. Repayment of his loan began immediately.

Flavia, a sister from a poorer part of South America, found little opportunity and means for training and regular employment until help came through the PEF to receive training in operating computers. With the help of LDS Employment Services, she found work in a good company after completing her training. She reports: "Today I am responsible for the financial consulting area of one of the largest hospitals in Recife using [a sophisticated] computer system. I was among the crew that implemented this financial system in the company."

These examples could be multiplied. We are happy to report that the plan is working well and gradually expanding as we gain experience. Early reports of loan repayments are encouraging. Again, we thank you for your generosity, interest, and prayers in behalf of the Perpetual Education Fund.

The sun never sets on the Lord's work

It was said that at one time the sun never set on the British Empire. That empire has now been diminished. But it is true that the sun never sets on this work of the Lord as it is touching the lives of people across the earth.

And this is only the beginning. We have scarcely scratched the surface. We are engaged in a work for the souls of men and women everywhere. Our work knows no boundaries. Under the providence of the Lord it will continue. Those nations now closed to us will someday be open. That is my faith. That is my belief. That is my testimony.

The little stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands is rolling forth to fill the earth (see Daniel 2:31–45; D&C 65:2).

To the Latter-day Saints everywhere, as we gather in this great conference, I say, may God bless you. Keep the faith; be true to your covenants. Walk in the light of the gospel. Build the kingdom of God in the earth.

The Church is in wonderful condition and can and will improve. It will grow and strengthen.

Ordinary people, an extraordinary work

We are ordinary people who are engaged in an extraordinary undertaking. We are men who hold the priesthood of the living God. Those who have gone before have accomplished wonders. It is our opportunity and our challenge to continue in this great undertaking, the future of which we can scarcely imagine.

Thank you, my brothers and sisters, for your faith and faithfulness. Thank you for the love you carry for this, the work of the Almighty. We live in the world. We work in the world. But we must rise above the world as we pursue the work of the Lord and seek to build His kingdom in the

earth. Let us now join together in a great world conference of men and women who are indeed brothers and sisters as children of God.

During the next two days we shall hear from many of our number, not one of whom has been told what to speak about, but each one of whom has pleaded with the Lord to be able to say something that will help, inspire, and lift all who hear.

May the blessings of heaven attend you. May you be faithful and true to the great and glorious cause which you have embraced is my humble prayer, in the name of our Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Greeting from Elder Haight

Now we have a special treat. I would like to ask Brother David B. Haight to come to the pulpit. Here is a grand old warrior. He is 97 years of age. He has lived longer than any other Apostle in the history of this dispensation. He recently became ill and has had a little difficulty. But he wanted to come this morning and just wave to you with a feeling of gratitude and appreciation for you and the great love which he feels for you. And to him, dear friend, we say, God bless you and heal you. We love you; we sustain you; we pray for you. May heaven's blessings rest upon you, dear Brother Haight. Thank you.

Elder Haight: Thank you.

President Hinckley: Do you want to wave to these people?

Elder Haight: Yes, I must. I am waving. Thank you, thank you. Nice to be with you.

President Hinckley: Thank you.

Elder Haight: Thank you.

President Hinckley: We will excuse him now. He will be watching on television. What a great soldier he has been in the army of the Lord. Thank you so much, Brother Haight.