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UNITY OF PURPOSE IMPORTANT TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S WORK

By President David O. McKay

"Opening address by President David O. McKay, delivered at the 137th Semi-annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 29, 1967."

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My dear brethren and sisters and friends of the radio and television audience: With a deep sense of the responsibility that rests upon me in giving to the membership of the Church a message at a General Conference, I earnestly pray for your sympathy, your understanding, and your spiritual support. I pray that the blessings of the Lord will be with us that we shall have a spiritual response to the truths of the Gospel as never before, not only during this opening session, but throughout all the meetings of this 137th Semi-Annual Conference.

I extend to each of you a hearty welcome, and want you to know that I am grateful for your presence here in this historic tabernacle, the one-hundredth anniversary of which we are celebrating this month.

Members Loyalty and Faith

I acknowledge with deep gratitude the loyalty and faith of the members of the Church, and again express heartfelt appreciation for your prayers in my behalf, which have sustained and upheld me. It is truly a joy and a rich blessing to be associated with you in the work of the Lord, and I am grateful for the success and growth of the Church during the past six months.

You no doubt will be interested in knowing that for the first time sessions of this Conference are being televised in color over more than 200 stations in the United States and Canada, and will reach a potential of 40 million homes.

Savior's Glorious Prayer

"I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word truth.

"As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

"And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:14-22.)

This text is taken from one of the most glorious prayers -- I suppose the greatest prayer -- ever uttered in this world, not excepting the Lord's Prayer. This was Christ's prayer uttered just before He entered the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal. It must have been impressive for John to remember so much of it and to write it word for word, as he has here.

The occasion itself would be impressive to John, and undoubtedly as they knelt there in that upper room before they went through that beautiful gate into Gethsemane, the garden of olives at the base of the Mount of Olives, he noted particularly the plea of the Savior.

I know of no more important chapter in the Bible. The parts I have quoted contain two important messages to you and to me. One of these messages is found in the words, "Make them one as thou, Father, and I are one."

The Principle of Unity

It is the principle of unity that has enabled the wards, stakes, branches, and missions of the Church to progress and to accomplish the purposes for which the Church was established. It could not have been done by dissension and hatred. There have been difficulties. Each member of the Church has his own ideas. Sometimes they are not the same as those of the bishopric, and not the same as those of the presidency of the stake, and not the same as the Presidency of the Church; but each has had to submerge his own ideas to the good of the whole, and in that united purpose we have achieved something which is wonderful.

As I think of the future of this Church and of the welfare of the young men and women, as well as of the mothers and fathers, I feel impressed that there is no more important message to give than "to be one," and avoid things that may cause a rift among members. I know that the adversary has no stronger weapon against any group of men or women in this Church than the weapon of thrusting in a wedge of disunity, doubt, and enmity.

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke of the cloud that hangs over the Church when we are not united. He said: "The cloud that has been hanging over us has burst with blessings on our heads, and Satan has been foiled in his attempts to destroy me and the Church, by means of the greatest of all the deeds of this people, the assistance of the Lord in drinking these only for fasts, and having no unity and dedication to the Church." (30. Concerning His Servants, the Lord has said, 2, p. 135, italics added.)

Disunity Brings Failure
"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." (Matthew 12:25)
The experiences of the chosen children of the Lord upon other occasions signal to us the causes of temporary failure coming out of disunity, and an unwillingness to abide the will of God. Unto the Jews of ancient Jerusalem, the Lord said:

Priesthood Safeguards Unity
"Ye priests are the guardians of the Church, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered you together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Oh, my brethren -- presidents of stakes, bishops of wards, and all who hold the priesthood -- God bless you in your leadership, in your responsibility to guide, to bless, to comfort the people over whom you have been appointed to preside and to visit. Guide them to go to the Lord and seek inspiration so to live that they may rise above the low and the mean, and live in the spiritual realm.

And in our own dispensation, to the saints who again by division and disunity did not see the redemption of Zion, he said: Recognize those who preside over you and, when necessary, seek their advice. The Savior Himself recognized His authority on earth. He would use men by the expedient of the transgressions of men as Damascus was preparing his shackles and arrest all who believed in Jesus Christ. He might have been redeemed even now, and (Doctrine & Covenants 105:2) "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

The challenge is before us: we cannot fail in the divine commitments given to us as a people. Unity of purpose, with all working in harmony within the structure of Church organization as revealed by the Lord, is to be our objective. Let each member, teacher, and leader feel the importance of the position that each one holds. All are important to the successful accomplishment of God's work, which is our work.
He could have told Saul in a few words what he should do, but there was a branch of the Church in Damascus, presided over by a humble man named Ananias, and Jesus recognized that authority. He knew Saul's nature. He knew that in the future it would be difficult to recognize the authority of the Church, as instances later proved. Saul had to receive from the very man whom he was going to arrest instructions regarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Recognize Authority
"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."
Here is a lesson for all of us in this Church. Let us, too, recognize the local authority. The bishop may be a humble man. Some of you may think you are superior to him, and you may be, but he is given authority direct from our Father in heaven. You recognize it. Seek his advice and the advice of your stake president. If they cannot answer your difficulties or your problems, they will write to the General Authorities and get the advice needed. Recognition of authority is an important principle.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
Unity and its synonyms -- harmony, good-will, peace, concord, mutual understanding -- express a condition for which the human heart constantly yearns. Its opposites are discord, contention, strife, confusion.
For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Unity in the Home
If we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of I can imagine few if any things more objectionable in the home than the absence of unity and harmony. On the other hand, I know that a home in which unity, mutual helpfulness, and love abide is just a bit of heaven on earth. I surmise that nearly all of you can testify to the sweetness of life in a home in which these virtues predominate. Most gratefully and humbly I cherish the unity of purpose that we all working in harmony in the home of my own children ever seek. An instance of discord between Father and Mother and the good will and mutual understanding that end the world in a sense that takes hold in a father's great work, can be accomplished, has been restored for the sifting of mankind and to prepare the way for His second coming. Said He:

Attitudes that Destroy Unity
And even so have some of the everlasting covenant into the world, to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and first of all, that speaking about disunity will be a self-stress in a man's face to wipe from the "brother So-and-so" and to speak of as nothing to me about the matter"; "The bishopric chose Sister So-and-so to be organist, and she can't play half as well as I"; "I'm not going to Priesthood Meeting any more because the bishopric appointed a certain man to act as advisor of the priests"; "The Sunday School chose So-and-so as a teacher"; "The superintendent released me, and I feel hurt"; "The presidency of the stake has never recognized me, and I feel offended"; "The General Authorities do not always see eye to eye." Oh! a hundred and one little things like that may come up -- little things, insignificant in themselves when we compare them with the greater and more real things of life. And yet, I know from experience that the adversary can so magnify them that they become mountains in our lives, and we are offended, and our spirituality starves because we entertain those feelings.

There is another element -- faultfinding -- associated with that spirit of envy. We find fault with a neighbor. We speak ill of each other. When that feeling comes, it is a good thing just to sing that simple little Mormon hymn, "Nay, Speak No Ill."

"Nay, speak no ill; a kindly word
Can never leave a sting behind;
And, oh, to breathe each tale we've heard
Is far beneath a noble mind.
Full oft a better seed is sown
By choosing thus the kinder plan,
For, if but little good is known,
Still let us speak the best we can.

"Then speak no ill, but lenient be
To other's failings as your own.
If you're the first a fault to see,
Be not the first to make it known,
For life is but a passing day;
No lip may tell how brief its span;
Then, O the little time we stay,
Let's speak of all the best we can.'
(Hymns, 116)

See Good in Others

"Let us speak of all the best we can." Would not that be a glorious lesson in the world today in the midst of the false propaganda that is going out from one nation to another -- reviling, defiling, defaming? Is it not terrible when you think of it in the light of the gospel?

And that reminds me of a beautiful story that I read many years ago. It happened before the English guns opened the doors to the Japanese nation. During those days they worshipped their ancestors as they do now, but they worshipped beautiful spots in nature, too; and even today, if you follow a walk up one of those hills, you will be sure that it will lead you to a magnificent view where you may contemplate the beauties of nature.

The story says that an old philosopher used to meet the people and teach them the lessons of virtue and uprightness which he drew from the flowers and shrubs that grow so luxuriantly in that land. One morning, following his lecture, the old philosopher was accosted by a workman who said, "Tonight, when you come back from your walk, will you please bring me a rose that I may study its stamens, its petals, and see the lesson that you gave us last night?"

The old philosopher said, "I will give you the rose tonight."

And a second accosted him and said, "Will you bring me a hawthorn twig that I may continue my study of that?" And he replied, "I will bring you a hawthorn twig."

And a third said, "Will you please bring me a lily tonight that I may study the lesson of purity?"

"I will bring you a lily."

After working hours the three were at the gate to meet the philosopher. To the first he gave the rose, to the second the hawthorn twig, and to the third the lily, as he had promised.

Suddenly the man with the rose said, "Oh, here's a thorn on the stem of my rose!"

And the second said, "And here's a dead leaf clinging to my hawthorn twig."

And the third, encouraged by the remarks of his companions, said, "And here's dirt clinging to the root of my lily."

"Let me see," said the old philosopher, and he took the rose from the first, the hawthorn twig from the second, and the lily from the third. From the rose he broke the thorn and gave it to the first. He plucked the dead leaf from the hawthorn twig and, handed it to the second. He took the dirt from the roots of the lily and placed it in the hands of the third. Holding the rose, the hawthorn twig, and the lily, he said, "Well, each of you has what attracted him first. I left the thorn on the rose purposely, the dead leaf on the hawthorn twig, and the dirt on the lily. Each of these attracted you first. You may keep them now, and I will keep the rose, the twig, and the lily for the beauty I see in them."

Not a few of us have a thorn in the flesh as did Paul. Perhaps to some of us a dead leaf of some past act is clinging. It may be that there is a little dirt in our character, but each one has also a rose in his life, a hawthorn twig, or a lily. And it is a glorious lesson for us to learn: to see the rose and be blind to the thorn; to see the hawthorn twig and be blind to the dead leaf; to see the lily and not the dirt in our fellow's character.

I do not know of anything that will contribute more to unity in a ward, in a stake, and in the Church than for members to see the good in man, and to speak well of each other.

World Threats to Unity

On the world horizon calamities continue to menace the people -- the tragedy of war with the suffering of the innocent, the broken harmony of the homes in the death of a valiant son or husband. The seeds of discord and confusion among the masses caused by riots and violence of all sorts make important the need for complete unity within our own ranks, as we see these worldwide disturbances tear apart the home, and undermine our very civilization.

As we concern ourselves with unity in the Church, we must not be insensible to the evil forces around us, both here in America and in the world at large -- the influences, the avowed object of which is to sow discord and contention among men with the view of undermining, weakening, if not entirely destroying constitutional forms of government. If I speak plainly and, in condemnation, refer to reprehensible practices and aims of certain organizations, please do not think that I harbor ill will or enmity in my heart toward other United States citizens or the citizens of any country whose views on political policies do not coincide with mine. But when acts and schemes are manifestly contrary to the revealed word of the Lord, we feel justified in warning people against them. We may be charitable and forbearing to the sinner, but we must condemn the sin.

The Enemy From Within

Timely references and appropriate warnings have been given from time to time on the danger and evils of war. There is another danger even more menacing than the threat of invasion of a foreign foe of any peace-loving nation. It is the unpatriotic activities and underhanded scheming of disloyal groups and organizations within any nation, bringing disintegration, that are often more dangerous and more fatal than outward opposition.

For example, an individual can usually protect himself from thunder showers, and even from tempests, from freezing weather or intense heat, from drought, or floods, or other extremes in nature; but he is often helpless when poisonous germs enter his body or a malignant growth begins to sap the strength of some vital organ.

The Church is little, if at all, injured by persecution and calumnies from ignorant, misinformed, or malicious enemies. A greater hindrance to its progress comes from faultfinders, shirkers, commandment-breakers, and apostate cliques within its own ecclesiastical and quorum groups.

So it is with any government. It is the enemy from within that is most menacing, especially when it threatens to disintegrate established forms of good government.

Anti-Americanisms

Today, there are in this country enemies in the form of "isms." I call them anti-Americanisms, and what is true in America is true in other countries. Only a few of the leaders fight openly; most of the army carry on as termites, secretly sowing discord and undermining stable government. Of the truth of this statement, investigations made by a committee of the United States Senate and the FBI bear ample evidence.

Evils of Communism

Of the menace of one of these, Dr. William F. Russell, dean of Teachers College, Columbia University, and one of the many authorities whom we might quote as to the pernicious activity of these groups, said some 30 years ago in an address which has since proved to be prophetic:

"Communist leaders have steadily insisted that Communism cannot live in just one country. Just as we fought to make 'the world safe for democracy,' so they are fighting to make the world safe for Communism. They are fighting this fight today. Every country must become Communistic, according to their idea. So they have sent out missionaries. They have supplied them well with funds. They have won converts. These converts have been organized into little groups called 'cells' each acting as a unit under the orders of a superior. It is almost a military organization. They attack where there is unemployment. They stir up discontent among those oppressed. They publish and distribute many papers and pamphlets."

Continuing, Dr. Russell states:

"These are scurrilous sheets. In one issue I noted twenty-nine errors of fact. After a recent address of mine they passed out a dodger attacking me, with a deliberate error of fact in each paragraph ... The idea is to try to entice into their web those generous and public-spirited teachers, preachers, social workers, and reformers who know distress, and want to do something about it. These Communists know what they are doing. They follow their orders. Particularly they would like to dominate our newspapers, our colleges, and our schools. The campaign is much alike all over the world. I have seen the same articles, almost the same pamphlets, in France and England as in the United States." ("How to Tell a Communist and How to Beat Him," an address given in 1939.)

Civil Disobedience

One of our U.S. senators just recently called attention to conditions existing in our country today. He said: "America has been afflicted over the past three or four years by an epidemic of acts of so-called civil disobedience. Municipal ordinances and state statutes have been wilfully and intentionally disobeyed by individuals and groups. Private property has been subject to deliberate trespass.

"Mobs have taken to the streets, interfering with commerce, creating public disorder, and breaching the peace. Civil disobedience has at times been advocated from some of the pulpits throughout the land and encouraged, upon occasion, by ill-advised statements of public officials. Mobs have frequently been so large that the police were helpless to make arrests.

"These acts of so-called disobedience have been proclaimed by important political personages to be in the finest American tradition. It was said to be good Christian doctrine to disregard man-made laws which conflicted with one's own conscience, and, of course, by implication, those who enforced man-made laws were likewise to be disregarded. This [is indeed] a strange and false doctrine ...

"Few people have dared to voice an objection for fear of being labeled 'bigot,' and representatives of law and order have become pictured as villains while lawless marchers and sitdowners have become the figures for compassion."

The Senator then continues, "Finally, perhaps the most responsible and damaging factor underlying the riots, growing crime rate, and disrespect for law and order, is that of a lessened discipline, which is evident today among an increasing number of young people in our society. The American home is not what it once was and this is reflected in a parental discipline which is not

what it used to be.

"All too many children are not taught to respect their elders. The general atmosphere of permissiveness permeates too many homes, too many schools and too many churches in America. A few, but highly articulate and vocal, churchmen advocate the decease of divinity.

"These are all symptoms of a sick society, a sickness which, if left to run its course unchanged, will destroy law and order and a progressive society of free men.

"In such an atmosphere of permissiveness, civil disobedience and disrespect for civil law, the seeds of crime have taken deeper root and the nation is now reaping the harvest." (Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, Deseret News, August 7, 1967.)

Thus, we are witnessing the attempts that are being made at this very time by insidious forces to induce contention and confusion in organized societies of mankind.

"Make Them One"

And now, brethren and sisters, I echo the prayer of the Savior: "Make them one, Father, as thou and I are one. In the world, but not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil." (See John 17:15 ff.)

God help us that we may continue to serve humanity; that we may feel in our hearts that we are privileged to serve God's children; that we shall be united as His people, and that we shall be united as a country.

May every father magnify the priesthood of God in his own home and, with his beloved wife and companion, teach his children the ways of the Lord as revealed to us.

Priesthood bearers are to watch over the Church always, for the Lord has given this instruction, that our families may walk uprightly before our Father in heaven:

"The teacher's duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them;

"And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking;

"And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty." (Doctrine & Covenants 20:53-55.)

I bear testimony that we are engaged in God's work, in the saving of souls. May we find the strength, by unity within the Church, to go forward in the accomplishment of His purposes. This I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.