

The State of the Church

Gordon B. Hinckley

First Counselor in the First Presidency

I've been very proud of my Brethren tonight. I've been proud of them in the two sessions today. We have heard tremendous things this day as we have listened to these men who have dedicated their lives to the service of the Lord. I almost shrink from the responsibility of talking to this tremendous gathering of priesthood, more than a hundred thousand strong across the world, who are listening, and I seek the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Every man and boy here is a member of a priesthood quorum. What a wonderful thing it is to belong, to be a part of a significant organization, to have a place where one can gain a sense of security and friendship in the most wholesome kind of environment.

On a previous occasion, in October of 1985 in our general priesthood meeting, I endeavored to give a report on the state of the Church, posing a series of questions and then endeavoring to answer them. I did a similar thing in a regional conference not long ago, and I thought I might do something of the same thing this evening.

I am grateful that the report I have to make is encouraging and uplifting. I have endeavored to see that it is reliable in every respect, because I know that I have a very serious responsibility of accountability to you, my brethren of the priesthood, as well as to the Lord whose church this is.

And so, again, I intend to pose a few questions and then endeavor to answer them as truthfully and frankly as I know how.

My first question is one that we get all over the Church, wherever we go. That question is "*How is President Benson?*"

I am pleased to report that President Benson is reasonably well for his age. He is now ninety-one. He has lived a life of vigorous activity, filled with heavy responsibility and its attendant stress. The years have taken some toll. He arises and dresses each day, and on some days attends our meetings. It is a delight to have him with us. He was with us this morning, and I am sure the entire Church who saw him appreciated that. He is the prophet of the Lord, put in that place under the divine will of our Father in Heaven for the accomplishment of His eternal purposes. There are serious limitations on what he can do, as might well be expected. But I assure you, my brethren, that nothing of substantial consequence is done without his knowledge and concurrence. I am his counselor, as is President Monson. We have a responsibility to see that the work moves forward. I think we

understand the parameters of our callings, and we endeavor to remain within these. With you, we sing with sincerity, “We ever pray for thee, our prophet dear.” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 23.)

Question 2: *“How is the Church doing?”*

The Church is doing very well. We are far from that state of perfection for which we work, but we are trying—and we are making substantial progress. We are growing consistently and remarkably. I note that the *1991 World Book Yearbook* shows there are now only six other religious bodies in the United States larger than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

More importantly, there is growing faith and faithfulness among the Latter-day Saints. I am encouraged by what I see. Things are getting consistently better. We have wards and stakes where sacrament meeting attendance runs in the 60-, 70-, and even 80-percent range. I think there is nothing like it in any other organization of substantial size of which I know. I have served as a stake or general officer of this church for more than half a century, and I am confident that never, during all of that time, has a larger percentage of our people been actively engaged in Church responsibility. I submit that this is one of the great success stories of all time. The credit does not belong to us. It is the Lord’s success, for this is His work, and we rejoice with Him in that which has been accomplished.

Question 3: *“What is happening with reference to missionary work?”*

The work continues to expand. It has become a truly tremendous undertaking in fulfillment of the commandment of the Lord, a commandment we are faithfully trying to observe. As of the end of the year, as you heard Brother Watson report this morning, there were 43,651 full-time missionaries under call throughout the world. We now have 256 missions worldwide, of which 28 were created in 1990. It is contemplated that 12 more will be created in 1991. We find it necessary to add substantially to the facilities at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah.

Question 4: *“Are we able to construct buildings enough to accommodate the growth of the Church?”*

Approximately 330,000 converts came into the Church during 1990. This number is sufficient to constitute 110 new stakes of Zion, each with a membership of 3,000. There were more converts in 1990 alone than all of the members of the Church presently residing in the state of Arizona or in the state of Idaho. As you might well expect, we are faced with a constant and pressing need for new facilities.

Five hundred and twenty new chapels were dedicated in 1990. It is interesting to note that 330 of the 520 were constructed in countries outside of the United States and Canada. All of this, I submit, bears witness of the remarkable and wonderful expansion of the Church in many nations of the earth. To me it is a constantly unfolding miracle that we have been able to construct new facilities to accommodate this growth.

Question 5: *“What about the temple and family history work?”*

It is moving forward on an unprecedented scale. A computerized program is being put into place which will greatly facilitate the accurate preparation of family records. The salvation of the Lord applies to every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth. The exaltation of our Father's children rests upon the completion of required ordinances, if all are to move forward on the road that leads to immortality and eternal life. The determination of accurate family history records and the work which follows in the temples are basic in this vast undertaking which the Lord has placed upon our shoulders.

During 1990, the Toronto Temple was completed and dedicated. Work on the San Diego Temple is now going forward. We presently have forty-four operating temples in the Church. Three of these—the Alberta, the Swiss, and the London—are temporarily out of service while renovation work is done after many years of heavy use. It is contemplated that the Alberta Temple will be rededicated in June.

We have announced new temples for Ecuador; Colombia; Orlando, Florida; Bountiful, Utah; and most recently St. Louis, Missouri. Architectural work on these is going forward. We expect that others will be announced—I will not tell you where tonight.

Question 6: *“What about Church education?”*

We now have some 403,000 seminary and institute students enrolled worldwide. Additionally, some 46,500 students are enrolled in Church universities and schools. This is a huge and costly undertaking, but it yields noteworthy benefits in the lives of our youth in terms of spiritual enrichment, moral strength to resist the evil that is all about us, as well as a tremendous increase in gospel scholarship.

Question 7: *“Is there anything new in the welfare program?”*

President Monson has talked to you of some aspects of the welfare program. I may add that the principles under which it operates are as old as the gospel. It is an expression of the Golden Rule: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” (Matt. 7:12.)

The care of the poor is in the hands of bishops of wards—those Church officers who are nearest to the members and most intimately aware of their needs. As you well know, the funds to administer such aid come through a simple, divinely inspired program—what we call fast day and fast offerings. The millions of dollars which are needed for this purpose each year really cost no one anything. It is not a sacrifice for anyone to go without two meals a month and give the equivalent cost, and even more, to his or her bishop for the care of the needy.

Think, my brethren, of what would happen if the principles of fast day and the fast offering were observed throughout the world. The hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. Our burden of taxes would be lightened. The giver would not suffer but would be blessed by his small abstinence. A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere. Can anyone doubt the divine wisdom that created this program which has blessed the people of this Church as well as many who are not members of the Church?

Question 8: *“How has the local unit budget allowance program worked?”*

As you know, we have followed for a year a program under which all operating costs of stakes and wards in the United States and Canada, including construction and maintenance of buildings, as well as the expenses of activity programs, are now met from the tithing funds of the Church.

As you can realize, this has involved a very substantial outlay from the tithing resources. After a year’s experience, we have received numerous expressions of gratitude and appreciation. They have come from far and wide. Let me read to you part of a letter from a stake president which recently came to one of our Brethren:

“At the beginning of 1990 [he wrote], when we were introduced to the new budgeting program, there were many members in our stake that were anxious and even a few that were critical. Throughout the year ... we have emphasized the importance of conserving the financial resources of our people, along with their energies and time. Further to that, we have tried to focus on areas that could enhance the teaching and fellowshipping of members. ...

“As we concluded the year 1990, as a presidency, as bishops, and as high councilors, we recognized the prophetic nature of the new budget program. A review of our statistics indicated that at year-end, we had only expended approximately 70 percent of the funds budgeted to us.

“Through normal channels, our stake will be sending the following funds:

“1. approximately \$20,000 of excess funds from the 1990 annual budget, and

“2. \$13,000 for the general missionary funds of the Church.”

He then speaks of yet other funds they will send in.

This is characteristic of letters from many stake presidents who have returned excess funds to the Church since the end of the year.

We look forward to the time when this budget program will be extended worldwide.

Now this raises question 9: *“What about the management of Church finances?”*

The financial program of the Church—both income and disbursement—is found in sections 119 and 120 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Except for fast offerings and missionary funds, two statements found in these brief revelations constitute the Lord’s law of finance and the management program of the fiscal affairs of the Church.

Section 119 simply states that all members “shall pay one-tenth of all their interest [that which is income] annually; and this shall be a standing law unto them forever ... saith the Lord.” (D&C 119:4.)

Then, concerning the disbursement of the money which comes from the tithing, the Lord has said: “Verily, thus saith the Lord, ... it shall be disposed of by a council,

composed of the First Presidency of my Church, and of the bishop and his council, and by my high council; and by mine own voice unto them, saith the Lord.” (D&C 120.)

These eighteen men—the Presidency, the Twelve, and the Presiding Bishopric—constitute the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes. What might be regarded as executive committees of this larger council include the Budget Committee and the Appropriations Committee. The expenditure of all Church funds comes under the purview of these bodies.

In the financial operations of the Church, we have observed two basic and fixed principles: One, the Church will live within its means. It will not spend more than it receives. Two, a fixed percentage of the income will be set aside to build reserves against what might be called a possible “rainy day.”

For years, the Church has taught its membership the principle of setting aside a reserve of food, as well as money, to take care of emergency needs that might arise. We are only trying to follow the same principle for the Church as a whole.

Some of us, I submit, are old enough to remember vividly the dark times of the Great Depression of the thirties. I hope we shall never see such again. But we know that they are not outside the realm of possibility. We are mindful of the story of Pharaoh’s dream of the fat and lean cattle and the full and thin ears of corn. (See Gen. 41.)

How grateful I am to be able to say to the priesthood of this church that the Church in its ecclesiastical operations has no debt. No temple, no meetinghouse, no seminary or institute facility, no welfare facility, no building or property used in the ecclesiastical operations is under mortgage.

Question 10: *“Is the Church an organization of great wealth as some have maintained?”*

The Church has substantial assets necessary to its program. These assets are primarily in buildings. They are in ward and stake meeting facilities, in schools and seminaries, colleges and institutes. They are in welfare projects. These assets are in mission homes and missionary training centers, temples and family history archives, as well as related activities and facilities all concerned directly with our mission. But it should be recognized that all of these are money-consuming assets and not money-producing assets. They are expensive to build and maintain. They do not produce financial wealth, but they do much to strengthen and build Latter-day Saints.

We have a few income-producing business properties, but the return from these would keep the Church going only for a very brief time. Tithing is the Lord’s law of finance. There is no other financial law like it. It is a principle given with a promise, spoken by the Lord Himself for the blessing of His children.

I repeat what I have said before—when all is said and done, the only real wealth of the Church is in the faith of its people.

Question 11: *“Why is the Church in commercial enterprises?”*

Essentially, the business assets which the Church has today are an outgrowth of enterprises which were begun in the pioneer era of our history when we were isolated in the West. When there was no longer a need for a number of these, they were disposed of. The remaining number are relatively few.

I repeat, the combined income from all of these business interests is relatively small and would not keep the Church going for longer than a very brief period. I add, also, that these commercial properties are tax-paying entities who meet their tax obligations under the laws of the areas where they are located.

Question 12: *“Does the Church own substantial farm properties, as some have indicated?”*

The Church does own a number of farm properties. As you know, we have some welfare properties whose produce is used to supply food for the needy. These are operated strictly for charitable purposes and legally qualify for tax-exempt status.

Then we have some commercial farm properties. I spoke earlier of the reserves of the Church. Prudent management requires that this money be put to use. In that process, we have purchased and hold some good, productive farms. They are well operated under capable management, and they yield a conservative rate of return. We have felt that good farms, over a long period, represent a safe investment where the assets of the Church may be preserved and enhanced, while at the same time they are available as an agricultural resource to feed people should there come a time of need.

Again, all such commercial properties are taxed under the government entities where they are located. Not only do they pay property taxes, but also income taxes on any profits. So it is with all of the commercial operations of the Church.

The final question, one frequently asked by our young people: *“What is the future of the Church?”*

The charge laid upon the Church is almost beyond comprehension. While yet upon the earth the Lord declared: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matt. 24:14.)

Furthermore, the work of the Church is concerned with the eternal welfare of all generations who have lived upon the earth.

No other organization, in my judgment, faces so great a challenge. That challenge, I am confident, will be met by the growing generation and by generations yet to come. To our youth I say—you young men who are here tonight—great is your responsibility, tremendous is your opportunity.

I am confident that you will be a part of a beautiful pattern of growth and strengthening vitality that will be marvelous to look upon and awesome to experience.

As the Prophet Joseph once said, no man can stop this work from progressing.

Many who are clever and deceitful may try to thwart or destroy it, but none will succeed.

And so, to you, my young brethren tonight, I pass the challenge to keep yourselves clean and worthy and to grow in knowledge and understanding, that your part in the future of this great thing which is the work of the Lord may be well performed and add to the building of the kingdom of God in the earth.

I thank every one of you, my brethren. I thank the wonderful and faithful women of the Church—your wives, your mothers, your sisters—this great and remarkable body of women who walk with us in faith and faithfulness as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We pray for all of you constantly. We are grateful for your prayers and confidence, and humbled thereby. We constantly plead with the Lord that we may be true and faithful to the great and sacred trust which is placed in us.

May the Lord smile with favor upon each of you. May each of us ever be grateful for His blessings and constantly strive to walk worthily before Him is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.