

An Open Letter
TO
“Protesting Saints”
and
All Other Interested Persons



Reorganized
Church of Jesus Christ
of
Latter Day Saints

Independence, Missouri

U. S. A.

An Open Letter to "Protesting Saints" and All Other Interested Persons



The late General Conference of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was one of the best held in many years. A spirit of unity and peace developed in the councils of the priesthood and in the conference itself that was very encouraging.

As a possible help toward further unification of the church, the conference adopted a document to which we wish to call your careful attention. Please read it prayerfully. It is as follows:

Whereas, distress and sorrow have troubled some minds and hearts, due to a misunderstanding and misinterpretations of the Document on Church Government, adopted by the General Conference of 1925, and

Whereas, particularly that portion of the document referring to "supreme directional control" as resting with the First Presidency has by some been represented as implying autocracy, papacy, infallibility, monarchy, an invasion of the legislative rights of the people, etc., and

Whereas, such implications have been foreign to our understanding and in no way representative of the intentions of those who framed and supported the document and in no way representative of the intentions of those who administer it, and

Whereas, we desire so far as possible to promote a clearer and more unified understanding, that wounds may be healed, and all be assisted to find true fellowship and final salvation in the church.

Therefore, be it resolved, That we approve the interpretation set forth by President Frederick M. Smith and his associates, which interpretation recognizes:

Firstly, the supremacy of God, who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and the divine right of that Son as builder of the church militant and the church triumphant to overrule and guide all the affairs of his church through the ministration of his Holy Spirit in testimony to all faithful Saints and through revelation to the one called and ordained to receive revelation for the church;

And which recognizes secondly, the undisputed right of General Conference as the chief legislative body of the church is the legislative arm of the church through which the people may speak and either approve or disapprove or initiate legislation;

And which thirdly sets forth, in the administrative work of the church only, the right of the Presidency as the chief or first executive body of the church to administer the laws and policies of the church as approved by General Conference;

And which fourthly disclaims any and all offensive application of the words *supreme directional control* as hereinbefore mentioned, and claims for the Presidency only the authority and the rights set forth under the law of the church as contained in the three standard books of the church, the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants;

And be it further resolved, That we reaffirm our unshaken belief in the doctrines, the organization, the authority, and the divine mission of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as the church in succession to that body organized by divine commandment April 6, 1830;

And be it further resolved, That we invite all the honest in heart who before time have made covenant with us in the waters of baptism to cherish the ardor of their first love, to remain true and loyal to the church and her Lord, to have their part in her devotional services in the congregations of the Saints, and to gladly continue or renew their portion of service, whether spiritual or temporal, under the admonition that all are called according to the gifts and callings of God unto them, and that minister and laborer and

man of business shall all work together for the accomplishment of the work intrusted to all;

And be it further resolved, That we reaffirm our belief in the gathering of God's people to Zion and the second personal coming of our Lord and Master, and hold ourselves ready with all diligence to build up his kingdom and establish his righteousness, that Zion may be redeemed and a pure people be made ready for his coming.—*Saints' Herald*, April 28, 1926.

Having read the document, please permit a few comments. Undoubtedly the church has first and best right to say what she believes and to interpret her own positions. Her interpretation must stand as opposed to any other interpretation.

This interpretation is no change or modification of the action of the conference of 1925. It is in exact accord with the interpretation given by President Smith at that time, and it shows clearly that the charge of "apostasy" brought against the church is without foundation and was based on an entire misrepresentation of the position taken by the church.

No Man Put in Christ's Place

Some have complained that the statement on "supreme directional control" put Christ out of the church and "elevated puny man to his place." Such a thought was never in the mind of the church or of general church representatives. The document which you have just read, adopted by an overwhelming vote (only twenty-eight negative votes), restates our belief that God is supreme. His Son is the great head and leader of the church.

There are those who act as "leaders" under Christ.

There are those who under the law are recognized as “overseers” or “heads of the church” or of departments in the church. (See Doctrine and Covenants 104: 2; 122: 2; 54: 2; book of Mosiah 13: 63; Acts 20: 28.) But never has the church put the President of the church or any other person in the place of Christ.

We love our Lord and honor him. When we reflect upon his power, we are humble. When we consider his mercy and kindness, we love him. When we behold his greatness, we adore him. This confession we believe truly represents the mind of the church. Our epitome of faith begins: “We believe in God the eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”

Properly Selected and Ordained Leadership

The church must have leadership. To recognize the leadership of properly chosen officers is no repudiation of Christ as leader. The “Protesting Group” found leadership necessary. An editorial in *The Messenger* said:

We *must* have *leadership* which is the natural outgrowth of the desires of a group of people who have some ideas of what they have set out to do. Looking about *among themselves* they [the group] choose to appoint some one or ones in whom *they* have confidence to carry out *their* wishes. The policies are the *desires of the people*. The methods must meet with the approval of the mass.—*The Messenger*, November, 1925.

The “Protesting Group” found they *must* have *leadership*, despite the statement that Christ is the only leader. Looking about among themselves they

chose leaders in whom they had confidence. (At that time T. W. Williams and two associates were elected. Since writing the above, notice has been published of his resignation as pastor of the group in Independence.) The principle of leadership was recognized. However, we hold that God from the beginning selected the leaders and should yet so select. The right of selection is his primarily.

The Lord called the first president of the church, "Joseph the Martyr." The Lord selected his successor. On that point note the following from the pen of Brother T. W. Williams:

The established law of the Lord as regards leadership, provided that Joseph Smith's successor should be "called of God," "chosen by the body," "appointed and ordained unto that office" . . . The Lord in 1831 gave a revelation as follows: "There is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken," and that "none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him (Joseph)." In every respect this was fulfilled as to Joseph's son, Joseph, who became president of the Reorganized Church in 1860.

In due time and in the regular way (Doctrine and Covenants 99: 6; 43: 2) the present president of the church and his counselors were called and ordained, and were sustained by vote of the church.

To recognize such leaders in their rights under the law is no denial of the leadership of Christ. To reject such leaders and seek of ourselves to set up an organization with officers of our "own selection" and "policies" of our own "desires" is no solution to problems that may confront us. That way lies chaos.

Verily I say unto you, that he that is ordained of me, shall come in at the gate and be ordained as I have told you before, to teach those revelations which you have received, and shall receive through him whom I have appointed.—Doctrine and Covenants 43: 2, given 1831.

The Rights of the People in General Conference

Again, complaint has been made that the “document on church government” adopted in 1925 robbed the people of their rights, and all that they henceforth could do would be to “assent” to propositions submitted to them by the Presidency.

That grave misrepresentation made necessary the declaration in the foregoing document which clearly sets forth the right of General Conference as the highest legislative body of the church through which the people in assembled capacity speak.

Everyone, including the Presidency, and the rank and file of the church, priesthood and membership, should respect the authority of the General Conference, which may approve or disapprove or *initiate* legislation.

Directional Control in Executive Matters

When conference has spoken (legislated), some one or ones must administer (execute) the laws and policies that have been approved. In the church there are several administrative bodies. The highest or “first” of these is the First Presidency.

The document above quoted sets forth that *only* in the administrative (executive) arm of church work does the statement on “supreme directional control” apply; and that it must be interpreted and

executed in harmony with the law set forth in the three standard books of the church.

Probably this is not at all what you have been led to believe "supreme directional control" to mean; but it is no longer a matter of "private interpretation." The church has spoken, and undoubtedly has a right to speak for herself. We would ask that in all future discussion the interpretation rendered by the church be respected. That is only fair and Christian.

The Interpretation

It will be observed that the church has put forth an official interpretation by which the document adopted in 1925 must henceforth be judged. It can no longer be judged righteously on the extreme and sensational interpretations which some have put upon it (on which was based the charge of "apostasy"), and we are told that we shall not "judge unrighteously."

You are urged to ponder that interpretation. It may remove many of your difficulties and permit you with joy to continue your church work.

You may say, "The document should need no interpretation." But unfortunately, human, yea even divine language constantly needs interpretation. For many years we have found it necessary to interpret the law on baptism, the doctrinal statements of the scriptures, our position on marriage, etc., etc. We must constantly refute wrong and defend right interpretations.

Having been at some pains to interpret her posi-

tion on church government, the church now sets forth an invitation. All are invited to cherish the ardor of their first gospel love; to continue or resume their full share of worship and of service.

Reaffirmation

The validity of the three books is reaffirmed. The original doctrines, organization, and authority of the church are again set forth. This church was organized by divine commandment, directly from heaven. God has not since that day commanded any man to organize another church—or any group of men to organize separately.

Both Sides Heard

These words are written in love and with a desire to help. We have little desire to argue. This is called the “*Latter Day Work.*” We should be at work, not at argument. So, in all kindness, and with no desire to reproach, may we set forth the following:

One whole year prior to the conference of 1925 was spent in discussion. The discussion was taken into the *Herald* and went to the ends of the earth. We have been reminded of the tract, “A Plea for the Golden Rule,” and the question is propounded as to why years ago we asked that “both sides should be heard” if not willing that both sides should be heard now.

Dear friends, both sides *were* heard, extensively and intensively, for one whole year. Then both sides were fairly heard in General Conference (1925) in

protracted debate. Then the church voted. It has been alleged that some of the delegates were "instructed" by their districts and should not have been so instructed. But even if all instructed delegates were ruled out, the decision would yet be the same. The decision was by a very large majority; and the priesthood, free agents and uninstructed, gave practically the same majority as that given by the delegates. The church spoke decisively, as much so as at any time in her history.

Respect the Action of the Church

We hold at this point with the signers of the "Open Letter," to which Brother T. W. Williams and some seventeen others affixed their names:

We declare for government in the church by *orderly processes* and hold that General Conference enactments are binding *without exception* upon members, officials, and quorums. —*Saints' Herald*, June 4, 1924.

On that point in years gone by, Brother T. W. Williams held such strong convictions and possibly had such light that he made the following promise to the late President Joseph Smith, in a letter dated Los Angeles, May 15, 1908:

I wish to say I have never knowingly acted contrary to the decision of any representative body of the church since I have been a member of the church. I have reserved the right to freely express myself on public questions but whenever the councils of the church have expressed themselves I have accorded thereto. As a representative minister of the church I have not opposed the action of these bodies. When the Bishopric have sent out articles setting forth their positions I have accorded to them, not that I always agreed with them, but I felt it was my duty as a representative

of the body to do so. I have done likewise with the Presidency or the Joint Councils of the body. I stand *ready to do the same*, reserving however, to myself the right when matters are under discussion *before the General Conference* of the church to express my honest convictions. Should the body decide *adversely* to my positions I *pledge myself* to act in *accord* with the majority or *resign my ministry*.

The Lord himself has definitely spoken at this point regarding the individual rights of the elders in relation to general church legislation.

Their right to free speech, their right to liberty of conscience, does not permit them as individuals to frustrate the commands of the body in conference assembly. They are sent out as ministers to preach the gospel, and their voices if opposed to what may be presented to the conference should be heard *in the conferences, and not in the mission fields*, to prevent the accomplishment of the object with which the officers of the church have been intrusted.—Doctrine and Covenants 125: 16.

The conference spoke decisively in 1925; and now in 1926 by almost unanimous vote has again officially spoken, putting the true interpretation upon the “document on church government,” particularly that portion regarding “supreme directional control.”

The Hope of the Latter-Day Glory

The hope of the “Latter-Day Glory” lies in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Probably not one of us would look for that hope in the Utah Mormon Church.

We cannot believe that it lies in “The Church of Christ on the Temple Lot.” They are not the church in succession and cannot become the church in suc-

cession. Their slogan, "Back to 1829 and 1830," is not God's slogan, for he invites us forward: "So be ye encouraged and *press on* to the consummation designed of God for his people."—Doctrine and Covenants 129: 9, given in 1909.

He has done too many things since 1829 for us to ignore them and try to go back of them to start over. It is a fallacy and a dream. No man can go back to 1829.

Not Backward, But Forward

The Saints were driven from Zion in 1833. The Lord then said:

Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered, they that remain and are pure in heart shall return and come to their inheritances; they and their children, with songs of everlasting joy; to build up the waste places of Zion.—Doctrine and Covenants 98: 4.

This is one of many revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants and not in the Book of Commandments which are self-evidently true. No man could have made that prophecy in 1833 with human hope that it would be fulfilled. Within very recent years it has come true. We have now in Independence more than four thousand Saints. When we arranged the Easter Sunday program preceding General Conference, we supplied eight pulpits in Independence and fourteen in Greater Kansas City.

This gathering, which the Lord predicted, he has brought about of late years and *through the Reorganization*. It is mentioned only as an illustration of many similar things. Why go back on all that

the Lord has done and try to start over at 1829, when he wishes us to go forward from this point to which he has now brought us." "Forward to 1930" is a better slogan.

No Separate Group

The hope of the Latter Day Glory does not lie in any separatist movement. This is said in all charity and kindness, but in frankness. No movement of protest and denial has adequate program and foundation upon which to build. Most of the outstanding men of the church, even among those who were not in accord with the action of 1925, recognized that fact and acted accordingly. With T. C. Kelley they say: "When I am through with the Reorganization, I am through with churches."

God originally moved to organize the church. He spoke directly. We have not even heard claim that he has spoken now commanding a separate organization. Indeed he has commanded exactly to the contrary through a man whom you have loved and trusted, the late Prophet and President Joseph Smith:

"Let nothing *separate you from each other* and from the work whereunto you have been called; and I will be with you by my Spirit and presence of power unto the end. Amen."—Doctrine and Covenants 122: 17.

Conclusion

Feeling it therefore to be in harmony with God's will and way, all are urged to continue or return to

their full measure of devotion in the congregations of the Saints; to join with diligence in building up his kingdom and establishing his righteousness, that a people may be prepared for his coming.

Personal offenses, human mistakes, should not deter us from our devotion to his cause. If we respect the "common consent" of the church and seek the divine guidance that is promised us, these offenses may be reconciled, these mistakes be rectified. The promise, "I will be with you by my Spirit and presence of power to the end," will be kept.

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY.

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI, May 18, 1926.

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Published and Distributed
by
Department of Publicity

Box 255

Independence, Missouri

U. S. A.

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Furnished on Request