

The Price of Religious Complacency

By Dwight D. W. Davis

Latter Day Saints are a "chosen" people. "Behold, I say unto you, The redemption of Zion must needs come by power; therefore I will raise up unto my people a man, who shall lead them like as Moses led the children of Israel, for ye are the children of Israel, and must needs be led out of bondage by power, and with a stretched out arm; and as your fathers were led at the first, even so shall the redemption of Zion be." (*Doctrine and Covenants* 100: 3)

Such a thought should be sobering. Too often among chosen people the knowledge of having been "chosen" results in an attitude of smug complacency; yet nowhere in religious history has God condoned spiritual inertia. The promises of the Lord stand sure only when His people take the initiative in obedience to the commandments of Deity. "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise."

If ever a curse falls upon the "chosen people" of latter day Israel it will be an outgrowth of their religious complacency. In this connection we might learn well the lessons of Zion's Camp and Nauvoo.

In February of 1834 a revelation was given in Kirtland, Ohio, outlining the course of procedure to be followed in relieving the distressed conditions of the Saints in Zion. Five hundred young and middle-aged men were to be sought out and organized in companies of tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds. Under no circumstances, however, was the expedition to start for Zion unless one hundred, as a minimum, of the strength of the house of the Lord had been secured.

We are familiar with the reasons for the failure of Zion's Camp. The Saints were unwilling to impart of their substance or devote their time to the cause of Zion until the success of the enterprise was guaranteed. It was against this very attitude of spiritual indifference that the opening paragraphs of section 102 are directed.

The Saints of Nauvoo were commanded to build a temple unto their God within a reasonable length of time. If the temple were completed, the promise was given that they should not be moved out of their place; but if the temple were not completed, the church would be rejected. The temple was never finished. Spiritual procrastination, even as the Lord had spoken, led to the rejection of the church.

RELIGIOUS COMPLACENCY

Let none of us sit in judgment on those who labored before us. Today is our day! Can it be said of us that the curse of the church is the religious complacency that exists among the membership? How smugly content are we in the knowledge of being a chosen people?

If there be this attitude of religious complacency among us—a self satisfied conceit—it might be timely to consider three of the forces that, working among us, result in passive, spiritual inertia.

Whenever the time comes that Latter Day Saints fail to pray with consistent regularity, a condition of religious lethargy is bound to settle down upon the church. Often we hear Saints tell about how difficult it is for them to live righteously in this day and age; yet have we ever paused to realize that the Lord has given us the key to higher planes: "Pray always, lest ye enter into temptation and lose your reward." If Latter Day Saints are to be spared the degeneration of flabby spirituality (a spirituality lacking in both moral and intellectual vigor) they must not fail to keep in contact with divinity through prayer.

A refusal upon the part of the church membership to study continuously the word of God, and all other good works, will have the same deleterious effect. It is not without significance that within a period of five months three different revelations were given to the church commanding the Saints of God to seek wisdom and knowledge, to "study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people . . . and to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man." Why? "All this for the salvation of Zion."

The third force which, if left unguarded, will create within us an attitude of religious complacency is that of failing to participate in the divine program of the church. The parable of the talents has been presented to our attention so often that it might appear even hackneyed to mention it here; nevertheless the full import of the parable has yet to become a part of us: failure to participate simply means we shall lose the creative powers given us by God for the uplift of others.

THE PRICE OF RELIGIOUS COMPLACENCY

A failure upon our part to pray, to study the word of God, and to participate in the spiritual

program of the church will bring forth a membership whose spiritual personalities are undeveloped.

Our young people's church school class is studying Church History. The other Sunday we had occasion to marvel at the rapid progress made by many of the early missionaries of the church—not alone in the organization but also in the reorganization. We were attempting to explain why it was they could assimilate so much of the doctrine of the church in such a brief space of time when it seems as though we aren't doing as well today. Someone made reference to the *driving need* of the church in those days to assimilate the message if the work were to endure. Others thought we had more need—a greater driving necessity—today. Certainly the need for personal effort to assimilate the message of divinity is no less today! More and more we must come to realize that years spent in the church are in and of themselves no guarantee of knowledge absorbed nor of specific abilities acquired. Just as our forefathers put forth the effort to acquire, so likewise must we.

A church whose membership is undeveloped spiritually can be nothing but an undeveloped church—which is a crippled church. Thus, in the ultimate, the greatest price we pay for our religious complacency is an unfulfilled command: Evangelize the world and Zionize the church. Will the spiritual forces of the church rally to meet the desperate needs, or will passive inertia prevail?

OVERCOMING RELIGIOUS COMPLACENCY

How might we combat this religious complacency? The leading quorums of the church, gathered together at the 1932 General Conference, have given us the answer. "We must do these things, and teach others to do them:

1. "Spiritualize our lives by righteous living, pure thinking, clean conversation, and daily prayer at the family altar.
2. "Prepare ourselves for work in the church by daily study of its books and papers, and other good writings.
3. "Attend church regularly, and help maintain the dignity and beauty of the services by reverent conduct.
4. "Give willingly of our talents and labor whenever and wherever we are needed in the work.
5. "Support the church by continuous and conscientious compliance with the financial law."

May God help us realize that Zion cannot be established until we rid ourselves from the placid languor of contemplative indifference.

If Europe shall ever be ruined it will be by its warriors.—Montesquieu.

Rash, fruitless war, from wanton glory waged, is only splendid murder.—Thomson.

BLUE PENCIL NOTES

(Continued from page 452)

most of us remember he has been an active and helpful member of the General Conference. (A minister since 1876.) The very serious illness of his wife keeps him at home this year. Our sympathy and fraternal greeting to Brother Griffiths we are quite sure will represent the feelings of the Saints generally.

Apparently the watchword of the conference of 1936 is good fellowship. "Blest be the tie that binds," might well be the theme song of the conference. Not the least of the pleasures of the conference comes between meetings—to drift from group to group and meet old friends or make new ones.

Doctor Benson, of Independence, thinks that the conference should be held annually. When reminded that the conference takes the missionaries and general officers from the field for some weeks, he replied: "Yes, but remember, it sends six thousand missionaries back to the branches and districts."

ELBERT A. SMITH

Diamonds of Thought

SILENCE

"There are three kinds of silence. Silence from words is good, because inordinate speaking tends to evil. Silence or rest from desire or passions is still better, because it prompts quickness of spirit. But the best of all is silence from unnecessary and wandering thoughts, because that is essential to internal recollection, and because it lays a foundation for a proper regulation and silence in other respects."—Madame Guyon.

"Looking around on the noisy inanity of the world—words with little meaning, action with little worth—one loves to reflect on the great Empire of Silence, higher than all stars; deeper than the Kingdom of Death! It alone is great; all else is small."—Carlyle.

"Silence is a true friend who never betrays."—Confucius.

"That silence is one of the great arts of conversation is allowed by Cicero himself, who says that there is not only an art, but an eloquence in it."—Hannah More.

"Study to be quiet."—Paul.

"A word unspoken is like a sword in the scabbard, thine; if vented, thy sword is in another's hand. If thou desire to be held wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue."—Anonymous.

"Silence is an art."—Selected.

Collected by Lawrence D. Campbell.