

Patriotism Is of God

JOHN H. VANDENBERG

I am grateful to be here tonight, brothers and sisters. There is always a great deal of anticipation when someone calls and says, “Will you come down and speak to the students here on the campus?” Someone has said that anticipation is greater than realization. But I must confess tonight that realization of where I am and who I am with is far greater than any anticipation I have had. I need help tonight: I have this modern convenience to help amplify my voice, and I’ve called on the Lord to help me to amplify my thoughts that this evening might not be wasted, that thoughts of this great country and thoughts of this great Church that was reestablished in this country may penetrate our hearts.

Importance of Individuals in the Nation and the Church

Preservation of this country takes people, and there are no greater people than are here tonight—the cream of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I know sometimes we feel modest about what we think we can do. And I know that the modest person likes to think that he, as an individual, amounts to little, that the world cares not what he does, nor pays any attention. We call this attitude modesty, but it fails to measure up to the true situation. The truth is that every individual

counts for something. And some part of the world notes what he does and does care. What I am trying to say is that everyone of us has the power to influence other people. We influence people every day, every hour of the day, either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. For this reason we must be careful of the influence we exert.

I came from an immigrant family. My parents had the courage to listen to the truth of the gospel in the little country of the Netherlands. Since I was reared in this kind of family, my mother sometimes had difficulty expressing what she wanted to in English, so she reverted to Dutch. Because I understood a little Dutch at that time, since we spoke some of it in the home, she taught me this little maxim. I’ll say it in Dutch and then give you the meaning in English: “Waar U mede omgat wordt U mede besmet,” which means simply this: “That which you go around with you become tainted with.” I always try to impress upon young people the importance of good

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associates and good companions. This is because we must recognize the fact that every person influences, to some degree, the person he may be with. If a person is good, wholesome, and clean in his thoughts and actions, his influence will be upright and beneficial. Because of this power, which each of us has, to influence other people, we should not be modest about our importance. We can help to shape the lives of others. Our influence is the words and actions that we give out. Now as you go through life you hear little stories that have an influence on your life—to give you strength, to give you stability, to give you maturity.

The other day I was reading the story of a baseball player. His name was Charles Gerringer. I guess he was quite a star on the Detroit Tigers team. The story indicated that it was the last half of the ninth and two men were down. Charlie Gerringer came to bat. He stood there with confidence and the first pitch came. He didn't swing. The umpire called, "Strike!" He frowned, looked at the umpire. The second ball came by. "Ball!" cried the umpire. Charlie smiled. The next ball came. "Strike!" Charlie looked at the umpire and glared at him with that kind of glare that implied he'd like to throw down his bat, take off his cap, and engage the umpire in fisticuffs. But he knew better. He was there to hit that ball. So he pulled down on his cap, took a determined look, and here came the next pitch and Charlie smote. I don't suppose he ever hit a ball harder. Somehow it didn't rise in the air more than twelve feet, but it went for the left field fence. And by the time it got there it was low enough that the outfielder could grab the ball with a running jump, a one-handed spear catch. The ball game was over. Charlie didn't say a word, but walked toward the dugout. One of his friends came up, patted him on the back, and said, "Tough luck. I have never seen you hit a ball so hard."

Charlie's answer, gravely, was this: "I have hit 'em higher."

Personal Freedom

There's a lesson in that we should never fail to try to do the best we know how. We're going to make mistakes, but there is a power within the individual to really achieve what he wants to achieve. This country did not come about easily. Yes, the Lord told those of us who knew and were willing to listen to him that it was a land above all other lands, a choice land. But they didn't know that fact when this country was organized. Immigrants came to this country seeking a new life, but as they came they were still under bondage. Someone threw out an idea that we ought to be free. I don't know who it was, but it was an idea of truth and it grew. And of course, the only value of any idea is that it grows, if it's a good idea. It's no good lying dormant. And it grew, and it grew to the point that there was one who, I think, was raised by God—a man called George Washington, a man to help create a union, to give the freedom to worship God as men pleased. It really makes me sick, brothers and sisters, when we have President's Day, and about the only thing you hear is who's having a "sale." To think that the father of our country and all the presidents of these great United States are belittled to a "sale" day. Hopefully, the time on the radio and the television would be given to extolling this great nation and the men who made it great. We can change that, you and I, if we'll use the power that we have in unison and in demanding that we honor the great people who caused this nation to be and to survive.

I really haven't had much to do with the military. I seemed to live in the in-between times when there wasn't war. I was thirty-five years of age when the Second World War broke out. Back in Boston, while I was attending a wool auction, they called for all people who were under thirty-six years of age to register. I was thirty-five. I went into an old building, a historical building, called Faniel Hall, in Boston. It's called the cradle of liberty because it is said that that's where the meeting was held

that resulted in the Boston Tea Party. I remember going to that building, and when I heard and found out what its reputation was, a thrill went down my spine as I thought back on the tremendous sacrifices that our forebears gave in connection with the establishment of this country.

The Greatness of George Washington

Recently, in a scouting magazine, Margaret L. Coit wrote a few words, and I've taken a few excerpts from what she said regarding George Washington: "He carved victory out of defeat, because he could never give in, never admit he was beaten. At the darkest moment of the Revolution he would only say that this was just the end of the beginning and that the way ahead would be even harder. He had been prepared for the leadership. As we read his history it seems that adversity was constantly his companion, but it was also his teacher."

I think God guarded him as he went through all this adversity. It is said that an Indian bullet missed him just by inches as he was fighting the Indians. And that bullet, had it struck its mark, would have changed, no doubt, the course of history. But he lived. He was the most unlikely of rebels. He had everything to lose in the revolutionary cause: his great fortune, his fame, his honor, and—as a "damned rebel"—life itself if he was captured. Once it had been his pride to serve England, but now with that spirit of liberty he put himself on line, at last convinced that the very rights of Englishmen were at stake. The many retreats, the many losses came. But they only urged him on and on, and finally the tide turned for him. He knew the last battle was what counted. He could be forgiven all lost battles if only he won the last one, and that win came at Yorktown on October 19, 1781. His courage, his purpose, his holding power, could never be conquered. That's the spirit that has been in America ever since that day.

Patriotism Supported by the Church

I hope all of you someday have the chance to go to Yorktown that you might again be reminded and feel your bosom and your heart swelling with pride for the great sacrifices that our forebears gave. Let's not be passive about what we're going to talk about this week. The benefits of our forefathers are evident right here in this great university. We have an obligation. I'd like you to listen to what President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

No man can be a good Latter-day Saint and not be true to the best interests and general welfare of his country. After all these years it is foolish to say that the Church is antagonistic to the national government. The allegiance claimed from its members by the Church does not prevent a member from being a loyal citizen to the nation. It rather aids him. Fidelity to the Church enables a man better to entertain patriotic allegiance to his nation and country. There is nothing required of a Latter-day Saint that can, in any way, be construed to militate against loyalty to the nation.

Of course this stems from our twelfth Article of Faith:

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.

The Lord has been mindful of this, and he has been wise in giving us, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, some very basic instructions:

Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land.

Wherefore, be subject to the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign, and subdues all enemies under his feet. [D&C 58:21–22]

And again, in section 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

Now, verily, I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them.

And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me.

Therefore I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land. [D&C 98:4–6]

And then again, in section 134:

We believe that every man should be honored in his station, rulers and magistrates as such, being placed for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty; and that to the laws all men owe respect and deference, as without them peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror; human laws being instituted for the express purpose of regulating our interests as individuals and nations, between man and man; and divine laws given of heaven, prescribing rules on spiritual concerns, for faith and worship, both to be answered by man to his Maker.

We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy.

We believe that the commission of crime should be punished according to the nature of the offense; that murder, treason, robbery, theft, and a breach of the general peace, in all respects, should be punished according to their criminality and their tendency to evil among men, by the laws of that government in which the offense is committed; and

for the public peace and tranquility all men should step forward and use their ability in bringing offenders against good laws to punishment. [D&C 134: 6–8]

Yes, let's listen to the prophets. Let's take to our hearts that which we believe. I think of a statement that I read some time ago concerning all the programs and all the benefits that we have:

To look at a thing is one thing. To see what you look at is a second thing. To understand what you see is a third. To learn from what you understand is still something else. But to act on what you learn is all that really matters, isn't it?

So let's take to heart and let's listen to the prophets. "Come listen to a prophet's voice." This next statement that I want to read to you from President Joseph Fielding Smith gives me vision, gives me an understanding of what this nation is to be. Listen to it carefully:

This great American nation the Almighty raised up by the power of an omnipotent hand, that it might be possible in the latter days for the kingdom of God to be established in the earth. If the Lord had not prepared the way by laying the foundations of this glorious nation it would have been impossible under the stringent laws and bigotry of the monarchical governments of the world to have laid the foundation for the coming of this great nation. The Lord has done this. His hand has been over this nation. And it is his purpose and design to enlarge it, make it glorious above all others, and to give it dominion and power over the earth to the end that those who are kept in bondage and serfdom may be brought to the enjoyment of the fullest freedom and liberty of conscience possible for intelligent men to exercise in the earth. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be a strong supporter of the nation of which we are a part. In the accomplishment of this grand purpose there are no more loyal people to their country on God's earth today than

are the Latter-day Saints to this country. There are no better, purer, or more honorable citizens of the United States to be found than are found within the pale of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I testify to this and I know whereof I speak. We have never been enemies to our nation. We have always been true to it. Though we have been persecuted we have said, "We will put our trust in thee."

Why is our country important to us? My heart thrills as I read that statement from our prophet, from God's prophet, our President. It gives me new vision, new vistas to what this great America is. And it will reach its destiny. That I know. President Smith wrote those words or spoke them under the direction and influence of God, the Eternal Father. What a joy it can be to us, and it ought to stir our hearts, that we live in such a nation so organized with all the freedom and liberty to achieve God's purpose here upon the earth.

Military Preparedness

Sometimes we wonder about military. The Lord says to renounce war and proclaim peace. But I also read in the Doctrine and Covenants: "If ye are prepared ye shall not fear" (D&C 38:30). And I think we have an obligation to be strong in morality, in courage, in faith. This nation has an obligation to raise up the strength of military might, not to invade other countries, not to seek the enlargement of our boundaries, but I know, as you know, that the strong preparation we have will curtail in a great measure the movement of the enemy. I congratulate this school that it has a training program here to augment that great military might of this great nation. For our nation is taking its leadership. It is moving forward. And while we have problems, if we united will stand behind those whom we have chosen to lead us and give them our faith and our prayers, this nation will never lose its destiny.

That preparation comes in sustaining. It comes in the sustaining of local governments, the sustaining of law enforcement. You need government. You need government right here at this university. If you didn't have it there'd be chaos. We need to understand that. And we need to honor those who take the position and even seek employment in that unthankful job of policing. We can let our government know what we want. And I know that they will respond. I can bear personal testimony to that. We need, to obey the laws of the land. We need to obey our national leaders. As I said, I haven't had much experience with the military, but what I have had has convinced me that they are noble men.

A few years ago I had the privilege of going up to Fort Lewis as an honored guest. Some boys from Utah and Idaho were up there, and they asked me if I would go up and play soldier with them. I am sure I got treatment that very few people get. I had a private home with a houseboy. They saw that I was fed well and dressed properly. And yet I joined in with the boys and went through the gas chamber. I laid on my stomach and fired a machine gun. I had pistol practice. I pulled the lanyard on a cannon and watched the missile go to its destruction. I saw the airplanes drop napalm bombs to cause fires and destruction. My most thrilling experience was on the day of the dress parade. The boys came by saluting me as the honored guest. My, what handsome, what noble young men. They pulled at my heartstrings as I saw them—immaculate in their dress, perfect in their deportment—honor their uniform and this great country. It's a thrilling thing, my brothers and sisters, the strength that lies in the youth of this nation. That's why I say tonight I am honored to be in your presence. Someone has said that the greatest thing in the world is to be in the presence of good company and to have good conversation. Many people have died for this nation.

Loyalty Expressed by Great Americans

As I went through some material for thoughts relating to this subject that might penetrate your souls as they did mine, I found one that comes from Phillip A. Silk, a Unitarian universal register leader. He says:

I think the relationship between a person and his country is something like that between a person and his parents. There is kinship, but the amount of love and affection and concern varies according to your experiences with them and how you react to those experiences. The command that all children love their parents or their country, no matter what, is unwise, and it won't work anyway. Love, affection, loyalty, are given. They cannot be commanded by law or oath. We cannot expect everyone to show the same amount of patriotism nor to show it in uniform ways.

Another thought from Eugene P. Burton from the *Pennsylvania School Journal*:

Our country is as great as our wills, as strong as our desires, and will rise as high as our aspirations. Patriotism is the emblem of our unity, our power, and our purpose. It is a lively sense of collective responsibility, the expansion of filial love, a kind of religion with freedom its creed, national freedom its heritage, and world freedom its goal.

One from Adlai Stevenson:

Patriotism is not the fear of something. It is the love of something. Patriotism with us is not the hatred of Russia. It is the love of this republic. It is the love of the ideal of liberty of man and of mind in which this republic was born and to which it is dedicated.

"I am an American by choice, not by birth," says Paul Malloy, who spoke to Oath of Citizenship a few years ago. (How many people have thanked God that they were able to come to this country?)

You see things differently [Malloy continues] when you get yourself adopted, and you have perhaps a deeper appreciation of what others take for granted. So I had become depressed, the word is nauseated, by the wail of sophisticates that this country was going to hell in a golf cart. I guess I am old-fashioned. But I can't share the sheeplike applause for saloon comics who made patriotism a derisive word. I am more concerned with what God thinks of this country, than what the stone-throwing delinquents abroad and our campus progressives here think of it. Perhaps it's corny. But lately I had been longing for some lusty flag-waving.

And from Arthur J. Goldberg:

Our fundamental liberties were guaranteed in the Constitution, not for enjoyment by a majority but for the protection of a minority—whether it be one or many, in war or peace, equally for the weak as for the powerful. True patriotism, it seems to me, requires us to guard jealously those liberties for others as well as for ourselves.

My dear brothers and sisters, how grateful I am to be an American. "Yes," as one person said, "I was born a baby, but I was raised as an American." The glorious opportunities that we have in this nation shall never be defeated—think about that—so long as we give honor to God, the Eternal Father, and obey his laws.

I am so grateful that I had the privilege of being born in this country from goodly parents who sought the will of God, came here, and obeyed the laws of the land. May God implant in our hearts a patriotism that will make us so grateful that, every night when we get upon our knees to thank God for our blessings, we shall not fail to thank God for this great country and the power that he has given it to achieve its purposes.

I bear you my witness that I know that God lives, that he did protect and preserve

this land for his choice people, so that his kingdom might be established in the earth. I

know these things to be true, and I so bear that testimony in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.