

O N T H E R E C O R D

LEADER OF MORMON
CHURCH LOOKS TO
FUTURE

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TO BELIEVERS, Gordon B. Hinckley is God's living prophet on Earth. To others, he is the leader of one of the fastest-growing religions in the world as president of the 9.7-million member Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . Earlier this week, in a meeting with editors and reporters of *The Times*, he discussed the church's pioneering legacy and its future.

Question: Do you see moral danger in human cloning?

Answer: Well, there's a possibility. . . . If it should become an increasing matter of concern, I'm confident we'll speak out on it. Our [September 1995] proclamation on the family clearly sets forth our position concerning the family, concerning marriage, concerning the place of father and mother and children and so on. I think we're still for the traditional family.

Q: One of the hypotheticals is that in cloning it only takes one person to create human life. You wouldn't need both a father and a mother. Do you foresee that causing a theological divide?

A: Oh, I think it might. . . . It isn't that far along . . . but it could become a matter of serious concern.

Q: While the Mormon Church has been growing in this country for decades, most major churches are losing membership. Could you comment on why?

A: In the first place, we're a rather demanding church. We wish we didn't have any milquetoast Mormons, but we do have a

few. But we expect great things of our people, the little things, the big things. We expect a measure of sacrifice. If it's worth belonging to the church, it's worth sacrificing for it—and people do sacrifice. These missionaries that go out make a sacrifice. It's real sacrifice. The payment of tithing. The church is in good financial condition. We have no debt. . . . We're building 350 to 400 new buildings a year across the world. . . .

The other reason [for growth] is that the family's coming apart all over the world. We have to face it. We have terrible social ills. You have them here in Los Angeles. You have them everywhere. . . . The terrible illegitimacy rate and all of these things. People are looking for stability in a shaky world. They want something they can get hold of that's firm and sure and an anchor in the midst of all of this instability in which they're living. I think we offer that.

Q: I'm wondering whether you foresee the day when other churches will accept the saints as a "Christian" church—and does

it matter?

A: Well, let me say first that it doesn't matter very much. Second, I don't think there's any question about it. We are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We worship him. He's the central figure in our theology, and more and more people are recognizing that. We're living in a world of information these days where there's less prejudice and more understanding. We're feeling the effects of that.

Q: . . . [A]re you concerned—as other churches are—that in a pluralistic society it may be more difficult to hold your membership to doctrinal purity?

A: I don't think so. For 150 years now and more, we have held to the doctrine. . . . We modify the organization from time to time. We modify the way we do some things, but the doctrine remains fundamental. . . . We have a clear-cut vision of where we're going, of what we believe, what we're out to do. And I just think we keep rolling, just keep rolling along the way we're going. Yes, we'll be misunderstood, of course. We'll be disliked. We'll even be hated by some people. But that isn't what it once was. Goodness sakes! I'm speaking to this group tonight on the 150 anniversary of the arrival of Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley [after being driven from Illinois and Missouri]. When you go back to those days and see what our people went through, these are really very favorable times for us.

Q: Will the rules on the priesthood change to admit women?

A: No. . . . I don't think they will in my time. I can't speak much beyond the next year. I'm careful about buying bananas! (Laughter.)

Q: Given the persecution the church went through in its early years, being called a cult, I'm wondering what your feeling is when you see groups today in a similar path. We're coming up on

the third anniversary of Waco.

A: We believe in allowing men to worship how, where or what they will. . . . We want to extend to all others the same privilege that we expect. . . . Now we get these fringe groups, we know, Waco or the [Jim] Jones group in Guyana. We don't get involved with them. If the law chooses to take care of them, that's the law's basic right. We simply plow our own furrow and go forward.

Q: When you look ahead, what do you see as your largest challenges as president of the church?

A: For me? My largest challenge is to preserve my health! (Laughter.) Keep going. And I want to say I feel very well. I do. I don't feel [like] a man whose next birthday is 87. . . . Our most serious problem is growth. That imposes some very real problems for us. Building facilities is a real problem, but we take care of it. . . . Another thing is leadership, the training of leadership. All of our congregations throughout the world are presided over by local men. The church in Japan is a Japanese church. The church in France is a French church. . . . They have to be trained.

Q: What are the greatest satisfactions of your presidency?

A: Seeing what this church does for people. It lifts them. It gives direction to their lives. It gives them the hope of eternity. It fills their sights. They look beyond the little grubby day-by-day things to a greater perspective.

Q: How does it feel to be sitting in Brigham Young's chair and to be responsible for the preservation of such a legacy?

A: Brigham Young was a tremendous leader. He faced different kinds of problems from the kind of problems we face today. . . . I feel very humble. I feel inadequate, I think I can say. But I hope that we're trying to do the kind of job that would make him smile and say, "You're doing all right. Just keep going." ☐