

OPENING REMARKS

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IN THE FALL OF 1999, we had 1,938 foreign students attending BYU from 113 different countries. The language capability here is enormous. We hope while you are here you would evaluate the opportunities for international students. We are striving to develop the highest quality of life and learning. I asked one Jordanian leader why he sent his sons so far from home for their education. He replied, "One, they receive outstanding instruction, and two, they are safe."

I stand before you as one having a tremendous sense of gratitude for what has been accomplished by first and foremost Richard Wilkins and Allan Carlson, Paul Mero, Kay Balmforth, Cory Leonard, and the committee for the World Congress on the Family held in Geneva last year. Serving on the planning committee in Rome, Italy, I was struck with the united efforts of all nationalities and religions striving to acquire solutions to the serious problems facing the family in today's challenging world. Our president, Gordon B. Hinckley, has said of the family:

Fathers and mothers are needed who will rise and stand upon their feet to make of their homes sanctuaries in which children will grow in a spirit of obedience, industry, and fidelity to tested standards of conduct. If our society is coming apart at the seams it is because the tailor and the seamstress in the home are not producing the kind of stitching that will hold under stress. (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, p. 200)

I had an opportunity of hosting Lady Margaret Thatcher five years ago, and one of her comments penetrated my mind and will never be forgotten:

You can't build a building without cornerstones, you can't build faith without cornerstones, you've got to seek a place upon which to put your feet. (*Business magazine interview with Joseph Cannon*, 1996)

This is why we are here today: to determine cornerstones to assist in building and preserving the family.

For the past three years I have served as the general president of the Relief Society organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our organization was founded in 1842 with twenty women and has now grown to five million in 165 countries, one of the largest women's organizations of its kind. We were commissioned to assist the sick and the poor and to save souls, with counsel from our leaders to always put our own families first. Quietly, we have assisted charitable organizations and families all over the world in humanitarian efforts.

I had the privilege of traveling to Kosovo, where we distributed some of the 30,000 quilts made by our Relief Society sisters. We also assisted with hygiene kits, stoves, and tractors. I had the opportunity to wrap quilts and coats around older men and women, teenagers, and babies as young as two months old. We hoped for 30,000 quilts, and 132,000 quilts later they are still coming. Our quilts and hygiene kits during this past year have also gone to Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, the Ukraine, Mexico, Honduras, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Indonesia.

Literacy is also a high priority for us. In every congregation there are those responsible to evaluate the needs for literacy and to set classes for improving it. Education for women around the world is vital if they are to build successful homes and marriages and raise children who can resist the negative forces that confront them on a daily basis. We believe this is still possible; we can and are raising strong young men and women in homes of devoted parents. However, as one father put it, "We must mend the damaged reservoir each day." As our youth return home, we can have open conversations around the dinner table, share uplifting thoughts, and correct misinformation and mixed signals they have received during the day. We can give them a vision of their potential and let them know of our love and confidence.

From India to Taiwan and from Peru to the Ukraine, I have trained women to take leadership positions and in turn teach those qualities to those with whom they serve. I have listened to the women in all of these countries who grieve over the daily avalanche that assaults the family. They are committed to strong vital family relationships. They have committed not only their words but their actions and energy. This body assembled here today could give powerful testimony to the fact that families are endangered the world over.

Between Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, we have assisted women that call themselves the Kukambaira group. We provide sewing machines that run without electricity. When I visited them, we handed out needed materials for the schoolchildren meeting under the trees. Many of these precious children in the preschools are orphans due to the AIDS epidemic. We are now assisting with the building of their preschool.

Dr. Margaret Ogala, medical director of the Hospice for HIV-positive children in Kenya, blames the rise of promiscuity in Africa on an emerging belief among the people that they can "get away with infidelity and premarital sex. . . . The

worldwide dissemination of a culture of pleasure as the ultimate desirable good," and an "entirely individualistic philosophy of me and I." These are the major contributing factors in the loss of virtue, character, and respect for others.

I am ashamed to acknowledge that the U.S. in many ways rationalizes, condones, and even encourages behaviors that are destructive and degrading. In many countries throughout the world I have heard women and men say, "We do not like the women we see on your television shows that come from America." I want to say that Hollywood sitcoms do not represent most of the women in America. And they most certainly do not represent the five million women in the Relief Society organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Marie Hafen, wife of Bruce Hafen, who gave a stirring speech at the World Conference, said,

I am distressed that the modern world's devaluation of motherhood is signaling to my daughter and her friends that preparing to be a homemaker, mother and wife is "no big deal." . . . In truth, learning to be a superb mother is a very big deal . . . such a task involves creating and maintaining a total environment of human warmth, intellectual stimulation, and spiritual strength.

The women in our Relief Society have lives filled with meaning, purpose, and direction. We seek to dedicate ourselves to strengthening marriages, families, and homes. We raise as one of our most treasured virtues a belief in the nobility of motherhood and joy in womanhood. We rejoice in service and good works. We love life and learning.

An exemplary mother, Patricia Holland said, "If I wanted to destroy society, I would launch an all-out blitz on women." Is that happening today? The feminist movement has failed the women of the world. It has created broken marriages, and latchkey children. These women have become much like the men they detest. They are empty, angry, and confused. Motherhood can be the most fulfilling experience in life.

David O. McKay stated:

Motherhood is the greatest potential influence for either good or ill in human life. The mother's image is the first that stamps itself on the unwritten page of the young child's mind. It is her caress that first awakens a sense of security; her kiss, the first realization of affection; her sympathy and tenderness, the first assurance that there is love in the world (IF, May 1969, p.3).

I found one of the greatest examples of motherhood in Bahía Blanca, Argentina. In the poverty area of the city, it seemed the people had lost their desire to make the best of what they had. However, as we turned the corner, there was an oasis. Our driver pulled up in front of a home. A painted fence had been erected in the front yard. A pathway of rock led to the front door; on one side there were daisies bloom-

ing, on the other side grass and trees. The door was painted. We were soon greeted by a lovely young woman twenty years old. Inside, a rock fireplace had been constructed, with shelves on the side neatly stacked with educational books. A piano was the focal point of the room.

This woman was only two years old when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. The mother never focused on her own painful illness, and now, eighteen years later, she is in her last stages of life. However, she has taken advantage of teaching her daughter the art of making the most of what you have.

I know a young woman who was selected to attend a leadership conference in the east. There was a class listed "Women leaders of the next century." As the class continued, this young woman became uneasy but being firm in her convictions finally she raised her hand and said, "Is this class for all young women?" The class leader answered affirmatively. "I am not represented here. I believe an intelligent woman can create a blissful marriage and a successful home and raise happy, well-adjusted children. I want to be that kind of woman. I want to be there for my children and assist them in finding their identity. I want to give my family roots and wings." This young woman was ridiculed for her beliefs, told she had been brainwashed, that families did not work and she needed to look out for the individual. Finally, a well-educated black woman listened and then stood. "If we are going to save the next generation of children in this country, we must do exactly what this young woman has suggested."

Elder Bruce Hafen, who served on the original committee for the World Congress, said,

Are we losing what women have traditionally contributed to cultural cohesiveness? Like the mortar that keeps a brick wall from toppling over, women have held together our most precious relationships—our marriages and child-parent ties. But now we're seeing cracks in that mortar, which reveals some things we have too long taken for granted.

Many women in the world today are confused. Still, the Wirthlin poll indicated that close to eight in ten respondents agree that "A family created by lawful marriage is still the fundamental unit of society." Opinion regarding this statement is so strong that majorities in every region of the world agree.

We are all aware that society's problems arise, almost without exception, out of the homes of the people. If there is to be change, we must return to old and sacred values. And this must begin in the home, with parents instilling within children the virtues that will make them into strong, contributing members of society. Our homes may be ever so simple. We may live in a poor neighborhood, but with a righteous father and a conscientious mother, it can become a place of wondrous upbringing.

Sam Levenson's mother raised eight children in a crowded tenement. She said, "The moral standard of the home had to be higher than that of the street." When the children acted inappropriately, she would say "You are not on the street, you are in our home. This is not a cellar or a pool room. Here we act like human beings" (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Standing For Something*, p. 165).

Ambassador George Haley lost his mother when he was only six years old. He said,

Although I lost my mother; my father, my two brothers, my sister, a wonderful grandmother, my stepmother and a bevy of loving aunts, uncles, and other relatives filled the void. . . . They bestowed on me the warmth of love, the guiding firmness of discipline, and the gentle hand of protection. They were wonderful role models. I owe much to them.

His brother Alex wrote *Roots*, and one of the important lessons from *Roots* is the realization that a family, itself comprised of living beings, is also alive. It can be sick or well. It can flourish or wither and die, but like all living things, it instinctively fights to exist and thrive.