

The Calling of Two New Apostles

This weekend in General Conference we have sustained two new apostles – Dieter F. Uchtdorf and David A. Bednar. Elder Uchtdorf gave a wonderful conference address two or three conferences ago on the subject of living prophets; I feel like I already know him. Elder Bednar is new to me, I look forward to learning more of him.

As I listened to these two brethren speak this afternoon a flood of thoughts went through my heart. Elder Uchtdorf described himself as being “calm as a hurricane,” while Elder Bednar proclaimed himself as one of the weakest of the weak things of the world¹. I heard their testimonies and grew to love them.

Being called to the holy apostleship is both a blessing and a challenge. It is a blessing, of course, because they have the opportunity to dedicate their lives to the Lord's service as his especially called and sent messengers. It is a challenge for much the same reasons. They now have the responsibility to speak for and act for the Lord wherever they go. Their lives will never more be private, everywhere they go members of the church will watch them and listen to them as the Lord's anointed ones. They have given up more than their time, they have effectively given up themselves.

What is that commitment like? I probably have no way of knowing. But it is a weighty responsibility, and I am grateful that they are prepared and willing to accept it. The Lord has placed on them a huge responsibility and trust, and they are both well aware of what that means.

Elder Uchtdorf will get special scrutiny since, although not the first foreign born apostle in this dispensation, at least in modern times he is the only non-(native) English speaking apostle. The people of Germany will always consider him as “their” apostle, and all of the church will follow his career with an interest in seeing how he will interact with a quorum that has been primarily US born and bred. I have no doubt that he is very capable of fulfilling this role. His last conference address showed clearly that, although he is proud of his German background, he views the gospel of Jesus Christ as belonging to no particular people of country. As we complete our transition into being a world-wide church, I think his service will be especially important.

¹ See 1 Corinthians 1:27

I have reflected much on the responsibility President Hinckley has felt to call these brethren. I assumed they had been called a few weeks ago; in fact, they were both called only this past Friday. Gordon B. Hinckley has also dedicated his life to the service of the Lord, and I know how he must have felt the importance of this decision. Having lost his wife and two of the apostles to death since the last conference, I know that some of the support he has been used to feeling has been removed. Yet with everything that is going on, he continues to magnify his calling with optimism and love, and I love him for it.

Elder Bednar expressed his gratitude to the church for our sustaining vote yesterday, even though (as he pointed out) most of us do not know him. That is an important part of a living testimony of this church as the Kingdom of God on the earth. Probably very few of us had the opportunity to get a divine confirmation of the divinity of his calling in the brief interval between the presentation of his name and the sustaining vote, but hopefully all of us have previously refined our testimonies to the point where we recognize the Lord's guidance in this work, and we had no hesitation in ratifying His choice through President Hinckley.

I am profoundly grateful to each of the men and women who dedicate their lives to serving the Lord. The most visible, perhaps, are those who serve at the general level. However, that does not exclude the bishoprics, Relief Society and Primary presidencies, and all others who serve at a local level. Each of them, through serving the Lord, also serve and strengthen me. Without the service of the Prophet Joseph Smith there would be no church for me to join. Without Brigham Young there would have been no exodus to the west, and no continued organization of the church to sustain and support me now. My bishop prays for me every day. Countless Primary workers have helped to make sure that my children are well educated in the Gospel. The Relief Society has strengthened my wife, and so made my family stronger. Missionaries, whose names may forever be unknown to me in mortality, reached my ancestors and shared the gospel with them so I wouldn't have to find the church myself. I truly am indebted to hundreds, if not thousands, of others who have worked and served so that I could enjoy the blessings I now have. If I have achieved anything in my life it is because of many others who may not be visible, but did the work anyway.

And not least am I indebted to my Heavenly Father for the eternal plan of Salvation, of which I am a beneficiary. He created the plan, he created a world for me, and gave me existence to enjoy it all. He works

through means that are unknowable to me to provide for my progress and happiness. There is no way in which I can be sufficiently grateful to him, so all I can do is all I can do, and know that he knows my heart.

Finally, how can I ever render enough thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ? He paid a debt he did not owe to discharge a debt I could never pay². His atoning sacrifice is operative in my life every day. His love and intimate knowledge of me make possible my eternal salvation, although by myself I would be lost. My heart must be full of gratitude at all times toward him.

And so it goes. I am blessed by a man from Germany whom I may never meet, as well as by a God who sees all I do. I only pray that I may be sufficiently grateful for all these gifts to me, and that in some way I may similarly be a tool in the hands of God to bless the lives of others. I love the Lord, I love his people, and I wish to be a part of his work here on the Earth.

² See Elder Wirthlin's conference talk from April 2004