

Aaronic Priesthood--Scouting Satellite Broadcast
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Scouting and the Aaronic Priesthood

President Thomas S. Monson

My brethren, as bearers of the holy priesthood, we have been placed on earth in troubled times. We live in a complex world with currents of conflict everywhere to be found. Political machinations ruin the stability of nations, despots grasp for power, and segments of society seem forever downtrodden, deprived of opportunity and left with a feeling of failure.

Some of you have gained renown as doctors, dentists, lawyers, educators, or businessmen. Others are competent craftsmen, salesmen, engineers. Whatever the occupation, in reality each of us is also engaged in the building trade---the building of boys. All are needed.

Where there is one man who is willing and able to build a boy, there are many more who, through greed, selfishness, and lust for power, lurk in the shadows of gloom, away from the light of truth, to tear a boy down. I speak of those who peddle pornography, who belittle morality, who violate law and for filthy lucre sell a boy those products that destroy---those who put sin on a pedestal, who conceal truth, who glamorize error, who look upon a fair-haired boy as a commodity for exploitation.

The priesthood is not really so much a gift as it is a commission to serve, a privilege to lift, and an opportunity to bless the lives of others. We who have been ordained to the priesthood of God and have been called to work with our young men can make a difference. When we qualify for the help of the Lord, we have the privilege to build boys who will eventually become the leaders of tomorrow. It is vital that they bear the standard of morality and integrity and courage. We have a duty to them to teach, to lift, and to inspire, that they may be able to fulfill the responsibilities which lie ahead for them. We can accomplish miracles in the Lord's holy service. Our opportunities are without limit.

Though the task looms large, we are strengthened by the truth. The greatest force in this world today is the power of God as it works through man. If we are on the Lord's errand, we are entitled to the Lord's help.

When our precious young men come to a crossroads in their lives, will we be there to guide them? I think of the words of the poet:

He stood at the crossroads all alone,
The sunlight in his face.
He had no thought for the world unknown---
He was set for a manly race.
But the roads stretched east and the roads stretched west,
And the lad knew not which road was best.
So he chose the road that led him down,
And he lost the race and the victor's crown.
He was caught at last in an angry snare

Because no one stood at the crossroads there
To show him the better road.

Another day at the self-same place
A boy with high hopes stood.
He, too, was set for a manly race;
He, too, was seeking the things that were good.
But one was there who the roads did know,
And that one showed him which way to go.
So he turned from the road that would lead him down,
And he won the race and the victor's crown.
He walks today the highway fair
Because one stood at the crossroads there
To show him the better way.

May we who have responsibility with the young men of the Church be there to help guide their paths. It is our privilege, as well, to provide them opportunities to learn and to serve, remembering:

Who touches a boy by the Master's hand
Is shaping the course of a future man,
Is dealing with one who is human seed
And may be the man whom the world will need.

The Master Teacher, the best Builder of all, gave us the formula: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

Our task is larger than ourselves, our influence more lasting than our lives. We need the help of Almighty God, for the boys we lead are created in His own image. The words of Moses, the great lawgiver, thunder down through time and find lodgment in our souls: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." "In the image of God" was only stated of man and not any other of God's creations.

You builders of boys can be partners with God in bringing to pass His work and His glory---namely, the immortality and eternal life of man.

To help us in our endeavors to build and strengthen our young men who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, we have the Scouting program, which is the activity arm of the Aaronic Priesthood. In March 1913, the General Board of the YMMIA acted to affiliate with the National Organization of the Boy Scouts of America. It was Brother Bryant S. Hinckley--a member of the YMMIA Board and father of President Gordon B. Hinckley--who made the motion in favor of the Church's affiliation with Boy Scouts of America. The matter was then presented to members of the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency, who concurred. That affiliation became official on March 15, 1913.

In the October 1993 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley called Scouting "a program which the Church has sponsored for eighty years, to the blessing of hundreds of thousands of boys and young men."

Twenty-five years ago my wife Frances and I were on an assignment in London, England. One afternoon we walked from the sunbathed street into the semidarkness of Westminster Abbey.

A reverence filled this world-famous edifice where kings are crowned, royalty wedded, and rulers whose mission of mortality has ended are honored, then buried. We walked along the aisleways, thoughtfully reading the inscriptions which marked the tombs of the famous. We remembered their achievements, recalled their deeds of valor, and marked their well-earned places in the world's history.

Eventually we walked toward the doorway. The immortal words of Rudyard Kipling coursed through my mind and spoke to my soul:

The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart;
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

One final marker to see, one more inscription to read. As a Scouter, I wanted to view the plaque of honor dedicated to the memory of Scouting's founder, Lord Baden-Powell. We stood before the magnificent marble memorial and noted the words:

Robert Baden-Powell, 1857–1941
Founder of the Boy Scouts
Friend of all the World

I pondered the thought, "How many boys have had their lives blessed---even saved---by the Scout movement begun by Baden-Powell?" Unlike others memorialized within the walls of Westminster Abbey, Baden-Powell had neither sailed the stormy seas of glory nor founded empires of worldly wealth. Rather, he was a builder of boys---one who taught them well how to run and win the race of life.

The boys of today will become the men of tomorrow.

Nobody knows what a boy is worth;
We'll have to wait and see.
But every man in a noble place
A boy once used to be.

Every boy blessed by Scouting adopts the motto "Be Prepared." He subscribes to the slogan "Do a Good Turn Daily." Scouting provides proficiency badges to encourage skills and personal endeavor. Scouting teaches boys how to live, not merely how to make a living.

Recall with me the Scout Oath: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; [and] to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

The Protestant minister Harry Emerson Fosdick said of duty: "Men will work hard for money. They will work harder for other men. But men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause. Until willingness overflows obligation, men fight as conscripts rather than following the flag as patriots. Duty is never worthily performed until it is performed by one who would gladly do more, if only he could."

And from the Confederate general Robert E. Lee: "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less."

Several years ago a group of men, leaders of Scouts, assembled in the mountains near Sacramento for Wood Badge training. This has been an annual event where men camp out and live as do the Scouts they teach; it is a most interesting one. They cook, and then they have to eat their cooking. They hike the rugged trails, which age invariably makes more steep. They sleep on rocky ground. They gaze again at heaven's galaxies.

This particular group provided its own reward. After days of being deprived, they feasted on a delicious meal prepared by a professional chef named Dimitrious, who joined them at the end of their endurance trial. Tired, hungry, a bit bruised after their renewal experience, one asked the chef why he was always smiling and why each year he returned at his own expense to cook the traditional meal for Scouting's leaders in that area. He placed aside the skillet, wiped his hands on the white apron which graced his rotund figure, and told the men this experience. Dimitrious began:

"I was born and grew to boyhood in a small village in Greece. My life was a happy one until World War II. Then came the invasion and occupation of my country by the Nazis. The freedom-loving men of the village resented the invaders and engaged in acts of sabotage to show their resentment.

"One night, after the men had destroyed a hydroelectric dam, the villagers celebrated the achievement and then retired to their homes.

Dimitrious continued: "Very early in the morning, as I lay upon my bed, I was awakened by the noise of many trucks entering the village. I heard the sound of soldiers' boots, the rap on the door, and the command for every boy and man to assemble at once on the village square. I had time only to slip into my trousers, buckle my belt, and join the others. There, under the glaring lights of a dozen trucks, and before the muzzles of a hundred guns, we stood. The Nazis vented their wrath, told of the destruction of the dam, and announced a drastic penalty: every fifth man or boy was to be summarily shot. A sergeant made the fateful count, and the first group was designated and executed."

Dimitrious spoke more deliberately to the Scouters as he said: "Then came the row in which I was standing. To my horror, I could see that I would be the final person designated for execution. The soldier stood before me, the angry headlights dimming my vision. He gazed intently at the buckle of my belt. It carried on it the Scout insignia. I had earned the belt buckle as a Boy Scout for knowing the Oath and the Law of Scouting. The tall soldier pointed at the belt buckle, then raised his right hand in the Scout sign. I shall never forget the words he spoke to me: 'Run, boy, run!'

"I ran. I lived. Today I serve Scouting, that boys may still dream dreams and live to fulfill

them."

Dimitrious reached into his pocket and produced that same belt buckle. The emblem of Scouting still shone brightly. Not a word was spoken. Every man wept. A commitment to Scouting was renewed.

It has been said that "The greatest gift a man can give a boy is his willingness to share a part of his life with him." Aaronic Priesthood leaders, Scout leaders, may you make the commitment to share your lives with our precious young men. They depend on you. Their very salvation may be at stake. You can build a bridge to the heart of a boy and can help to guide his precious soul back to our Father in Heaven.

May such be so, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.