

THE UNITED ORDER AND SOCIALISM
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The question is often asked, "How does the United Order, as an ideal economic system, differ from socialism?" While the two systems are so vastly different that a book would hardly suffice to note the distinctions, some basic contrasting elements can be mentioned in this brief article.

Socialism and God's Plan

Primarily, the two systems are founded upon contrasting philosophies and propose the establishment of social machinery that differs in form and structure. In socialism, a political state is involved, with state ownership, management, or control of economic affairs. A chief characteristic of the state is power; and by its nature a social and economic program founded in the state must use that power to compel, by persuasion or by force, diverging elements within the body politic to comply with its program, thus curtailing the agency of man.

There is no state or political power involved in the Lord's program of economics. Instead, it is centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ and is dependent upon man's responsiveness to the enlightening powers of God's Holy Spirit for its successful operation.

To establish the law of consecration as it is to be practiced within the United Order, man must first be regenerated spiritually by the living powers of the gospel of Christ and be raised thereby to a spiritual plane of life where true freedom, union, and social authority may be established and maintained. Thus regenerated, man can then love his neighbor as himself. And being filled with the love of God, as it is matured within him through the Holy Spirit, he will then be willing to consecrate himself and all he possesses to establish an economic order that will delegate to each member a stewardship that is sufficient to sustain himself and his family on an equal standard of living with others in the system. In this way, free and united men are to meet the challenge of establishing social justice under the Lord's

plan of society.

While socialism is founded upon the state and its power, the law of consecration and stewardship is based upon mature individualism, where free and mature men covenant with God and with each other to support an economic program that develops the individual while promoting brotherhood and economic well-being among men. Compulsion is not to be exercised within the system. Instead, the appeal of truth and the stimulus of spiritual powers in the lives of humble men promote the needed spontaneity to motivate each individual to fulfill his covenant obligations to God and to others within the system. Under the influence of enlightening spiritual powers, men are blessed with the spirit of love and of truth; and in loving their neighbor as themselves they willingly sustain an economic order of free and mature individuals where each man holds himself obligated to see that every other person has the necessary wherewithal to care for his temporal needs and achieve the good things of life.

Stewardship

In the law of consecration, man recognizes that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; and accordingly he consecrates all that he has, including his time and his talents, to the Lord through the bishop. Thereafter each man is delegated a stewardship — a given portion of the Lord's property to manage and direct as a responsible agent of the Lord.

This plan is not based upon equal division of property or on a division of property at all. It is founded, instead, upon a union of property, the final deed of which is reposed in the Church; and men are stewards over the Lord's property. (D&C 104:54-56.)

The system is decentralized to where it functions largely on a community level. In each community there is a storehouse, which, when developed to fulfill its proper role in the plan, becomes the center of economic interests and activities for the community. In addition, surplus wealth is centered in the storehouse.

Surplus wealth is accumulated in the storehouse, first, by consecrations that exceed the wealth and property that are delegated to stewards within the community. Second, wealth is accumulated in the storehouse by each steward turning surplus profit in to the storehouse — profit over and above that required to support his

family and give them a standard of living equivalent to other families in the community.

As indicated above, the Lord's program is intensely individualistic, while being founded upon that union and brotherhood that is made possible only by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Having consecrated his property to the Lord, each member becomes an heir within the system; and as such, he is guaranteed certain "private rights."

First, as an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, he has the right to be a steward — to have property or income-producing responsibilities delegated to him, according to his needs and according to his ability to manage.

Second, he has the right to negotiate as to the size and the kind of stewardship he receives; and if he and the bishop cannot mutually agree on these matters, he cannot be forced to accept the bishop's decision. Instead, the bishop must then turn the case over to an independent body of twelve high priests (possibly the high council) to consider the matter and make the decision.

Third, each steward has the right to be secure in his stewardship. It is delegated to him by a deed, so that no other person can take it from him without his consent, except, possibly, where the principle of eminent domain might thereafter apply. The steward can even take his stewardship out of the system and make of it private property, should he leave the system or be cut off from the Church.

Fourth, he has the right personally to manage and develop his stewardship. Here the principles of free enterprise largely apply under the law of consecration and stewardship. The steward sells his produce on the open market and receives a return based upon the principles of supply, demand, etc. In this respect, the system is much like capitalism. However, each individual's covenant of consecration, coupled with the fact that he is a steward over a portion of the Lord's property, requires him to manage the property in the Lord's interest and in cooperation with other stewards within the system. Here there is a modification of the free enterprise system that minimizes cutthroat competition and fosters union.

Fifth, each steward has a voice and a vote in community expenditures from the storehouse.

Sixth, each steward has the right to draw upon the storehouse

for funds to develop and expand his stewardship. He must exercise this right, however, in conjunction with the equal right of others to do the same; and is limited by the fact that he must demonstrate integrity and ability in the management of his stewardship before receiving large outlays of cash or property from the storehouse. Under this provision, men of integrity and ability have the support of the storehouse in expanding and developing their stewardships. Consequently, this is a vital and stimulating factor within the system. Thereby each steward "may improve upon his talent [i.e., financial holdings]"; a revelation to Joseph Smith revealed, "that every man may gain other talents, yea, even an hundred fold, to be cast into the Lord's storehouse." (D&C 82:17-18.)

Seventh, each steward has the right to draw upon the storehouse to supply his family needs in the event of reverses that critically curtail his income from his stewardship. Eighth, widows and fatherless children have claim upon the storehouse in supplying their physical needs. Ninth, in coming of age, young people, as natural heirs within the society of Zion, have claim upon the storehouse for stewardships by which they may become financially independent and self-sustaining.

United Order and Law of Consecration

It may be noted that there was a technical distinction between the law of consecration and the United Order in Joseph Smith's days. The basic law and practice of this heavenly system is spoken of as the law of consecration and stewardship. But having revealed this law, the Lord later commanded the Prophet to organize the United Order (D&C 78), as an *administrative organ* designed to coordinate and regulate the various communities within the system, and the various corporative stewardships that had been organized — the United Firm, the Literary Firm, etc. Those who were involved in the administration of the total overall system were required to consecrate themselves and their wealth to the Lord and accept responsibility within the United Order as a stewardship. They were a select group of men who managed the economic affairs of the Church from its general level of administration. In this way, there was an organization that united all economic concerns together under the central leadership of the United Order. The law of consecration was therefore concerned with the principles of consecration, stewardship, rights of individuals, and the role of the

storehouse, while the United Order was an administrative system designed to unite all segments of the economic program together.

Other Economic Laws Incorporated

There is also evidence that the law of tithing was expected to operate along with the law of consecration and stewardship. When this law was revealed, it was designated as a "standing law" unto the Church "forever." (D&C 119:4.) In 1831, the brethren in Jackson County, Missouri, who were organized under the law of consecration and stewardship, were also endeavoring to apply the law of tithing to their new economic program. When a revelation finally defined how the principle of tithing was to function, it explained the operation of this part of Zion's economic program in context with the law of consecration which had not as yet been officially suspended. And Orson Pratt, in speaking of the future redemption of Zion, indicated that the law of tithing will then be operative along with the law of consecration.

While the law of consecration will be largely decentralized to function within the various communities of Zion, it seems evident that the law of tithing will still function to bring needed funds up to the General Authority level, to care for the more spiritual needs of the Church and provide operational funds for the benefit of the whole Church.

Some phases of the Welfare Program will probably be retained as a part of this great economic program, for insurance and rehabilitation purposes, to the extent that they may be needed. Instead of being but a preliminary program to the law of consecration, this program might be integrated into the overall plan.

Finally, it should be noted that the law of consecration and stewardship was not designed to be the foundation of merely an agrarian society. Provisions were made to organize corporative stewardships, where a group of stewards might be organized together in large-scale enterprises. Early examples of corporative stewardships included the Literary Firm, the United Firm and the Big Field United Firms that were organized in Caldwell County, Missouri. It is evident from these early examples that the system of economics revealed through Joseph Smith can adequately be expanded to meet the complex situation of a technical age.

Divine Plan Fosters Temporal Well-being

In short, the Lord's program of economics is centered in the gospel and is by nature a highly individualistic system, requiring and fostering the mature exercise of agency on the part of men. Here is a basic difference between this divine plan and the socialized state, for, while socialism may sometimes espouse the ideals of economic freedom and equality, these ideals militate against each other and cannot be reconciled within a state-fostered program of economics.

They can only be reconciled where free and humble men are sufficiently united by the influence of enlightening spiritual powers to where they achieve union and brotherhood while retaining their individual freedom; and on this foundation the society of Zion seeks to establish an economic program that fosters equal opportunity for all, founded in the Christian ideal of loving one's neighbor as oneself. Only under such a program can the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity be achieved and reconciled in society. The gospel of Jesus Christ, not socialism, holds the key to man's temporal well-being.