

JOSEPH SMITH AND THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

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I appreciate the opportunity of meeting with you people to discuss a topic that has been near and dear to my heart for some time. I can certainly say amen to the introductory remarks of Dr. Madsen relative to the tremendous vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He indicated that the Prophet's vision of life in its several relationships is almost (and this is the understatement of the year) beyond the power of finite comprehension.

When Moroni came to the Prophet Joseph in the month of September, 1823, he stated that the gospel was to be restored for certain basic purposes. He said the time had come for God's covenant with Israel to be fulfilled. This was one great objective. Second, he said the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was to speedily commence. And third, he said the time was at hand for the gospel in all its fullness to be preached in power unto all nations, that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign.

It is about this last point that I would like to pay particular attention—that a people might be prepared for the millennium. To say it another way, the law of the kingdom of God must be established preliminary to the coming of Christ in glory. Thus, we are not here to discuss something pertaining to the millennium but a program that must precede and prepare a people for the millennium.

We must ever keep in mind that the gospel is the framework in which this law must be developed. That is, that the Law of Consecration is an economic law to be developed within the framework of the gospel, within the environment of the gospel. To develop this economic law the people must be regenerated by the spiritual powers of the gospel and be brought into union, to where they see eye to eye and through the spirit of God have their hearts knit together. The economic program is then intended to facilitate and

further develop that feeling of union and brotherhood, while, at the same time, stressing the individuality and the freedom of man.

In this sense the Law of Consecration is a subordinate program to the gospel, to establish further the ideals of union and brotherhood among the Saints. By living this law, the Saints can make the preparations necessary for Christ to dwell in their midst.

Finally we need to keep in mind that this is the economic law of ancient Israel perfected and restored in the latter days, and the correlations between this law and the ideology of Israel are certainly tremendous. I will not have time to treat these correlations today, but I do want to mention this fact. We need, for example, teachers schooled in the Old Testament who can see God's ancient law through the modern vision of Zion; men who see those ideals that the Lord anciently endeavored to develop among his people, and how they come to full fruition in the vision of Zion and in the kingdom of God.

Having said this by way of a preliminary, I would now like to treat the philosophy of economics envisioned in the gospel, within its proper framework of regenerating spiritual powers. Later, I will say something about the mechanics of the Law of Consecration.

The ideals of the gospel are not adverse to the desire to accumulate wealth. Brigham Young maintained, for example, that improvement belongs to the spirit and plan of the heavens. John Taylor, drawing from the Prophet Joseph's ideas, agreed on this particular concept. Said he:

The desire to possess and accumulate goods is as correct as any other principle, if we can only understand it, control it, and rightly appreciate the possessions and blessings we enjoy.¹

These statements have their origin in revelations given to Joseph Smith. Orson Pratt, for example, observed that before the Church was one year old a revelation promised that under the Law of God the Saints were to become the richest of all people.

While LDS philosophy of wealth is not adverse to the accumulation of wealth, it places emphasis upon its control. The Prophet Joseph Smith, for example, made this statement: "Be charitable and liberal with your substance, for it is only a secondary consideration—the use you make of it is the primary consideration."

Concerning the related principle of self-aggrandizement, he once explained,

It is a correct principle and may be indulged upon only one rule or plan—and that is to elevate, benefit and bless others first. If you will elevate others, the very work itself will exalt you. Upon no other plan can a man justly and permanently aggrandize himself.²

Here are the Prophet Joseph's teachings relative to economics and where the emphasis should be placed in economic matters. The economic philosophy of the gospel, then, emphasizes liberality and stresses mutual trust and brotherhood within the spirit of the gospel.

In a patriarchal blessing given by the Prophet Joseph Smith through the Urim and Thummim to Bishop Newell K. Whitney, in 1835, we have the spirit and idea of the economic concepts he envisioned brought out. He said in this blessing: "Blessed of the Lord is Brother Whitney, even the bishop of the Church of the Latter-day Saints, for the bishopric shall never be taken away from him while he liveth, and the time cometh that he shall overcome all the narrow-mindedness of his heart." Now Bishop Whitney was a businessman of the finest order—a man of a great integrity, but somewhat imbued with the idea of accumulating wealth for himself through approved economic policies as they were carried out in his day. And here the revelation chided him, while expressing a more liberal, dynamic, and soul-elevating philosophy:

The time cometh that he shall overcome all the narrow-mindedness of his heart and all his covetous desires that so easily beset him. And he shall deal with a liberal hand to the poor and the needy, and the sick and the afflicted, the widow and the orphan, and marvelously and miraculously shall the Lord his God provide for him, even that he shall be blessed with all the fulness of the good things of the earth and his seed after him from generation to generation. And it shall come to pass that according to the measure that he meteth out with a liberal hand unto the poor, so shall it be measured unto him again by the hand of God, even a hundredfold.³

The Book of Mormon also gives us certain basic principles that are gems of correct insight into economic matters. Jacob, for example, in admonishing his brethren, made this statement:

Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you.

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God.

And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted.⁴

King Benjamin, that great personality of the Book of Mormon, properly associated the correct philosophy of economics with the gospel by showing that there was a direct relationship between one's use of economic wealth and the gospel program for retaining a remission of sins. Now it is one thing to obtain a remission of sins through faith, repentance, and baptism; and it is another thing to retain the remission of sins continually in your life—to be alive in Christ or to be in grace, and to grow in grace thereafter. Here is the kernel of King Benjamin's formula: