



Type: Magazine Article

The Relationship of Spirituality to National Prosperity

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (March 1952), pp. 160–161, 176–178

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: The Book of Mormon makes it clear that the economic welfare of any nation is inevitably linked with the level of spirituality among the people. Nations become prosperous when their spiritual level remains high or they sink into social decay with continual disregard for the word of God.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SPIRITUALITY TO NATIONAL PROSPERITY

by William E. Berrett

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BY ALL known money standards the people of the United States should be living in plenty: a national production of goods valued at 328 billion dollars a year,¹ phenomenal wages and salaries, a million machines doing the work of many, many millions of men, mountains of goods pouring off the production lines.

But wait! Something is amiss. What of those people still living in the slums? What of those millions who are in debt? What of those tens of millions struggling to make ends meet—battling the wolf at the door? The financial figures are deceiving. The high wages buy little or nothing. The mountains of goods melt away before our very eyes. We think we are doing well, but are we? In desperation we seek higher wages only to find that in turn we are confronted with higher prices. We try again with the same result. It becomes a mad race and with what prospect of victory?

What is happening to American production? We do not need to search far to find the answers.

First, we must realize that the only true wealth is goods, and we are not producing so much as we should produce. There are four million of our potential producers under arms. Another three million are in non-productive federal jobs; another million are engaged in non-productive gambling, making, distributing, and manipulating gambling devices, book-making, and allied questionable pursuits. Some 250,000 are languishing in jail. Another million are recuperating in hospitals. Still other millions are idle from heterogeneous causes.

But this is not the worst of the picture. That which is being produced is not being used to bless and beautify our homes.

One-third part of our productive force is being used to carry on and prepare for war.

One-sixth part is used for the preparation and dissemination of harmful foods and drinks.

One-fifteenth part is used to protect property against criminals.

Yes! We may produce greatly, but we may also dissipate the end product.

The appalling cost of breaking the Ten Commandments

Whether we realize it or not, the appalling cost of breaking the Ten Commandments is destroying our seeming prosperity:

Sixty billions a year for war; twenty billions a year as the cost of crime; a tobacco and liquor bill of fifteen billion dollars—equal to the cost of all educational institutions of the nation; billions in organized gambling rackets—all of which could be saved by a generation that would obey the commandments of God!

In this day when wealth slips out of our hands, we need to listen to the voice of a great book—the Book of Mormon. This book was written long ago, but it was written to us—to help us solve our problems and to lead us back to Christ. What does the book teach us about our economic problems? Listen to what the centuries are saying to the minutes!

Civilizations perish when nations forget God

The Book of Mormon furnishes us with salient facts concerning the longest continuous experiment in human living that the world has known. It gives the story of the ups and downs of two great nations, one of which existed for nearly a two-thousand-

year period and the other for some nine hundred and fifty years. The evaluations are made in each instance by a competent observer standing at the conclusion of the performance, having viewed, through the records, all the acts of the long and eventful dramas. Perhaps no other historians have had such an array of unbroken records before them as had Mormon and Moroni when they summed up the causes of the rise and fall of the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations. What did they observe which contains a message for our day, and how might that message save our civilization?

The over-all observation of these seers was that the economic welfare of a nation is linked inevitably with the spiritual level of the people. Nations become prosperous when the spiritual level remains high. They sink into decay with continued disregard of the word of God.

In the Nephite account we see two parallel nations, the Nephites and the Lamanites, the one preserving the scriptures and the Church of Christ, the other generally neglecting spiritual matters. Other factors were relatively the same. They were of the same race, with a common social and cultural background. They were transplanted to the same goodly land. Both were free of outside pressures and influences, except as they rubbed elbows with each other. Yet the Nephite civilization rose to the heights while the Lamanites languished in near savagery. Only at wide intervals did the Lamanites develop a measure of civilization, and these upsurges of culture seem closely connected with periods of missionary work among them by the Nephites. And when, at long last, the Nephite civilization sank to the level of the Lamanites and the remnants merged with them, the cause is clearly a national abandonment of the word of God.

It is little wonder that the Nephite

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The Book of Mormon
speaks on current
problems

¹Survey of Current Business. U. S. Department of Commerce, November 1951.

observers, standing at the close of this civilization, should record in their observations the warning of God given to the earlier nation, the Jaredites:

And he had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off.

And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done.

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written. (Ether 2:8-12.)

Economic prosperity during periods of high national spirituality

The reader of the Book of Mormon for the first time is likely to remember the accounts of armed conflict and the movements of peoples and quite overlook the long periods of peace and prosperity that are portrayed. Two of the longest periods of peace recorded in history are found in the Jaredite record. One of these lasted more than two hundred and fifty years. Beginning with the reign of one King Emer, the nation carefully obeyed the will of God, and ". . . they became exceedingly rich." (See *Ibid.*, 9:16-23.)

This period of peace and prosperity, lasting over several generations, came to an end only when ". . . an exceeding great wickedness spread over the face of the land." (*Ibid.*, 9:26.)

A second long period of peace and prosperity began with the reign of King Levi and continued uninterrupted for five generations. Of each of the monarchs during that remarkable period Moroni states, ". . . he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." (*Ibid.*, 10:16-17, 19.)

And never could be a people more blessed than were they, and more prospered by the hand of the Lord. And they were in a land that was choice above all lands, for the Lord had spoken it. (*Ibid.*, 10:28.)

Similar examples of the relationship of economic welfare to spirituality are found in the account of the Nephites.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

(Exodus, 20:3-17.)

The great leader Nephi records:

And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi.

And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses.

And the Lord was with us; and we did prosper exceedingly; for we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance. And we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind. (II Nephi 5:9-11.)

Of a portion of the period of Alma, Mormon writes:

And now, because of the steadiness of the church they began to be exceeding rich, having abundance of all things whatsoever they stood in need—and abundance of flocks and herds, and fatlings of every kind, and also abundance of grain, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious things, and abundance of silk and fine-twined linen, and all manner of good homely cloth. (Alma 1:29.)

Concerning the period near the close of Helaman's life, Mormon could again record:

And the people of Nephi began to prosper again in the land, and began to multiply and to wax exceeding strong again in the land. And they began to grow exceeding rich.

But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him. (*Ibid.*, 62:48-49.)

One of the greatest periods of prosperity recorded by man followed the advent of Christ to the American continent. His coming and his teachings turned a whole people into ways of righteousness and peace. The result was the golden era of Nephite civilization. We read:

And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. . . .

And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land; yea, insomuch that they did build cities again where there had been cities burned. . . .

And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly fair and delightful people.

And they were married, and given in marriage, and were blessed according to the multitude of the promises which the Lord had made unto them.

And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from

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THE BOOK OF MORMON SPEAKS

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their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.

And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus . . .

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love

of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the chil-

Do We Know What We Want?

RICHARD L. EVANS

ALMOST all of us could come closer to having what we want, if we were sure we knew what we wanted. Of course we know we want the "happiness" that we have been wishing one another, and "peace" and "plenty"—and some other things that perhaps we could call by name. But we must answer these questions also: What would make us happy? What would give us peace? How much would we need to have before we thought we had "plenty"? Perhaps we could answer by pointing to people who seem to have what we think we want. But they aren't always happy either. And if what they have doesn't make them happy, how can we be so sure that it would make us happy? Sometimes we set our hearts on unessential things and think we can't be happy unless we have them. And if our minds are fixed in a false direction, perhaps we can't. But many things we once thought we wanted, we soon tired of after we got them. And even if we don't tire of them, even if we use and appreciate them, often they don't make the difference between happiness and unhappiness. It isn't that having things is a barrier to happiness. It's just that some of the things we think we want don't make as much difference as we thought they would. In this blessed land we live in, the earth is provident; our comforts, our luxuries, our conveniences are proverbial. But even though the realities we have in our hands are much more than kings could once have had—can anyone honestly say that people are happier than they ever were? And yet others look at us and say, "If we had what they have, we would be happy." Perhaps it wasn't intended that complete contentment should come in this life. Perhaps the reaching and the searching were meant to be so. But those who come closest to happiness are those who know what they want and are on their way; who have some good goal and are willing to work for it, and who have a settled faith in divine plan and purpose—faith in an ultimately worth-while end, that helps them to survive the intervening shocks. And perhaps more people are unhappy because they don't know where they're going or what they want than because they can't have what they want.

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SYSTEM, JANUARY 6, 1952

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dren of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

And how blessed were they! For the Lord did bless them in all their doings; yea, even they were blessed and prospered until an hundred and ten years had passed away; and the first generation from Christ had passed away, and there was no contention in all the land. (IV Nephi 1:2, 7, 10-13, 15-18.)

Why righteous peoples prosper

The reason why a nation existing on a high spiritual level prospers should be obvious: The wealth produced is used for beneficial things and not wasted and destroyed. The Prophet Alma makes an observation in his time that strikes at the heart of the matter:

For those who did not belong to their church did indulge themselves in sorceries, and in idolatry or idleness, and in babblings, and in envyings and strife; wearing costly apparel; being lifted up in the pride of their own eyes; lying, thieving, robbing, committing whoredoms, and murdering, and all manner of wickedness. (Alma 1:32.)

In the following account Enos shows what may happen to a nation that turns from God:

And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a bloodthirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness; feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven; and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us. (Enos 1:20.)

The distrust and insecurity that come to a nation that forgets God are observed by Moroni in his study of the Jaredite nation. The following observation of one period of the Jaredite history should be a warning to all nations of our time:

And now there began to be a great curse upon all the land because of the iniquity of the people, in which, if a man should lay his tool or his sword upon his shelf, or upon the place whither he would keep it, behold, upon the morrow, he could not find it, so great was the curse upon the land.

Wherefore every man did cleave unto that which was his own, with his hands, and would not borrow neither would he lend; and every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defence of his property and his own life and of his wives and children. (Ether 14:1-2.)

We may not think that such a situation is possible in our fair land,

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THE BOOK OF MORMON SPEAKS

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but some of the front pages of our newspapers arouse dark forebodings.

Riches do not mean spiritual decline

Contrary to the prevailing point of view, riches do not necessarily bring about spiritual decline. The nations of Europe impoverished by war have suffered a greater spiritual decline than have the nations which retained their prosperity. The Book of Mormon bears witness to the same thing. Consider the long periods of prosperity and righteousness referred to above. And listen to this observation of Mormon about the Nephites in the days of Alma:

And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

And thus they did prosper and become far more wealthy than those who did not belong to their church. (Alma 1:30-31.)

Of a later period we read:

But notwithstanding their riches, or their strength, or their prosperity, they were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him. (*Ibid.*, 62:49.)

Prosperity brings opportunities to exercise spirituality

The Nephite prophets did not look upon wealth as a curse but as a blessing of God. In the hands of a spiritual man it opened the door of opportunity for spiritual expression. Consider the beauty of this philosophy:

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. (Jacob 2:17-19.)

King Benjamin advised those who could not exercise spirituality by actually giving to others to nevertheless develop the right attitude,

. . . all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not: I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give. (Mosiah 4:24.)

The American nations may be blessed

The nations upon the American continent have an abundance of resources before them. They occupy a goodly land. But they cannot become truly prosperous without love of God and fellow men which alone enables man to enjoy the fruits of his labors.

Roger W. Babson recently made this pointed observation:

But what causes these fluctuations in business and prices? Statistics show that crises are caused by spiritual causes, rather than financial, and prosperity is the result of righteousness rather than of material things. These spiritual forces are the true fundamentals of prosperity. (Roger W. Babson, *Fundamentals of Prosperity*, p. 73.)

The words of Mormon, who personally saw a civilization destroy itself, should be a constant warning:

They were once a delightful people, and they had Christ for their shepherd; yea, they were led even by God the Father.

But now, behold, they are led about by Satan, even as chaff is driven before the wind, or as a vessel is tossed about upon the waves, without sail or anchor, or without anything wherewith to steer her; and even as she is, so are they. (Mormon 5:17-18.)

IF YOU LOVE SILENCE

By Courtney Cottam

IF you love silence, do not seek this wood
And do not seek this mountain that I know,
Lest that which sings its songs in solitude
Enchant your heart and never let you go.

Seek not the passive depth of spring-fed pools,
Deep woodland pools whose murmur beckons sleep
And soothes and rests; exquisite peace

Hangs mystically on crag and canyon deep.
No faulty note disturbs this rhythmic calm;
Though thunderheads split wide, and wild rains pound;

The song is sung; the lyrics form and flow;
The solitude is vibrant with its sound.

Seek not these passive ways, lest you shall find

That silence breaks the heart and haunts the mind.