



Type: Book Chapter

Evidence of Inspiration Derived from the Wisdom in the Plan Proposed for the Betterment of the Temporal Condition of Mankind

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Source: *New Witnesses for God: Volume I - Joseph Smith, The Prophet*

Published: Salt Lake City; Deseret News, 1911 (2nd Edition)

Pages: 392-405

CHAPTER XXVIII.

EVIDENCE OF INSPIRATION DERIVED FROM THE WISDOM IN THE PLAN PROPOSED FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE TEMPORAL CONDITION OF MANKIND.

The New Dispensation of the gospel of Jesus Christ does not regard alone the spiritual welfare of man; it contemplates also his temporal salvation. That is, it looks to the amelioration of those conditions which today render the lot of by far the greater portion of the human race so hard to endure.

Nothing can be more patent to the understanding than the fact that the basis of all our commercial or other industrial enterprises, is selfishness. The selfish desire for wealth that ease and luxury may follow and be enjoyed, or power wielded that shall administer to family pride or individual ambition, seems to have taken complete possession of the thoughts of civilized man, and well nigh fills up the sphere of his activity. Almost unconsciously selfishness has been intensified in our modern life. The inventions of our time have greatly multiplied human conveniences and luxuries. Ease that springs from affluence has been brought within the reach of a greater number of people than at any other time in the world's history; yet those who have entered within the charmed circle of the enjoyment of ease and luxury are not satisfied. Something is lacking to the completeness of their contentment. They see for one thing the instability of their wealth, and note what small circumstance may wrest it from them. So that the fear of losing what is possessed is well nigh as tormenting as the inability to gain

riches. The wish to permanently secure that which is possessed, and in like security have it descend to their posterity occasions as much anxiety and effort on the part of the rich, as the determination to come to the possession of wealth occasions the less fortunate—the envious poor.

Instead of this wider distribution of comforts and luxuries among mankind contributing to the sum of human contentment, it has increased its restlessness; for luxury being more commonly paraded in the face of the masses has maddened all with a desire to possess it, and, failing in that, life is felt to be scarce worth the living. But possession is possible only to the few; the great mass of humanity is excluded from its attainment.

This success of the few and the failure of the many divides civilized communities into two classes—the proud and the envious. It also results in the division of communities into capitalists and laborers; the former living in affluence on the proceeds of their wealth, the latter, for the most part, eking out an existence on the insufficient means secured through their labor. Capital, it must be said, feels power and forgets right; labor in its despair grows desperate and violates the law. Capital, to secure and perpetuate its interests, combines into huge corporations which control production and the markets, waters its stock, bribes legislatures, congresses and parliaments; oppresses labor in its wages, robs the people; and having thrived by it chicanery and fraud, laughs at all attempts to wrest from it the spoils in which it revels.^a

^aLet no one suppose that religion is not affected by the fact of extremes of wealth and poverty. Religion is vitally affected by both these extremes. “The Churches may well pray like the wise man,” says a thoughtful writer upon the subject, “‘Give me neither poverty nor riches.’ Poverty and luxury alike enervate the will and degenerate the human material for religion. Both create the love of idleness, vagrant habits, the dislike of self-

Labor, to protect itself against the ever-increasing greed and power of capital, forms societies and leagues and asks not only what is easily recognized as its rights, but often demands that which capital cannot give. Each confident in its ability to coerce the other, lockouts and strikes follow, with the result that not infrequently the conflict ends in civil strife, lawlessness and bloodshed.

Meantime wealth accumulates in the hands of the few; and if every year does not see the condition of the masses growing worse and worse, it is a fact at least that there is no just proportion between the increasing gains of the capitalists and the wages of the laborers. As a result, the bitterness between employer and the employed increases every year; and the sphere of our industrial activities, instead of presenting a scene of harmony and good-will, where the interests of both capital and labor are recognized as existing in common, and the welfare of both dependent on each, it represents more nearly the scene of two hostile camps where distrust and jealousy have arrayed the respective parties for deadly conflict.

Philosophers and philanthropists who have seen and deplored the evils of our modern system of economics have not

restraint, and the inclination to indulge in passing emotions. Ethical religion calls for precisely the opposite qualities. It is written large in the present conditions of the churches that they flourish best among people who have income enough for health and comfort, security enough for cheer and hope, and leisure enough to cultivate the higher sides of life. In London the type of religion represented by the 'Free Churches' thrives best in the middle-class parishes. When a certain line of poverty has been passed, the churches lose their hold almost completely, in spite of the most heroic efforts of Christian men and women. A social system which lifts a small minority into great wealth, and submerges a great number in poverty, is thus directly hostile to the interests of the church. A system which would distribute wealth with approximate fairness and equality would offer honest religion the best working chance."—(Christianity and the Social Crisis—Rauschenbusch, 1907, p. 308.)

been wanting; but only a few have ventured to propose remedies. Of these some have suggested co-operative methods in trade, in manufactures, in commerce and other labor, with an equal distribution of profits, as not only securing the conservation of energy, but also a more equitable basis of economics than our present individual and competitive methods. Many attempts have been made to carry out these principles in practice, and for a time, in several instances, partial success has been attained. In the end, however, human greed, weakness, or individual necessity, real or imagined, together with inability to make the system universal—a condition necessary to the system's success, according to the claims of its advocates—have proven too much for these attempts at co-operation, and the several enterprises have either drifted into the hands of a corporation or become the concerns of individuals, or else have been absolutely abandoned.

Others seeing the failure of voluntary attempts to secure the benefits of the co-operative system, have advocated the enlargement of the powers of the State to the extent of consigning to it the management of all industry; so far taking control of the individual as to compel him to work, according to his capacity and remunerate him according to his wants.

Others have gone even further than this, and proposed not only to make the individual a creature of the State, in relation to the matter of labor and wages, but to control him in all the relations of life, even invading the domestic relations to the extent of abolishing the marriage institution and all domestic government founded on paternal authority. These last two suggestions, with various amplifications, are classed as socialism and communism respectively. The former has many advocates in nearly all civilized countries, especially in Germany and France, where they wield a polit-

ical influence of considerable potency. The latter, communism, since the abortive efforts of Robert Owen in England, of St. Simon and Fourier in France, and M. Cabet—the disciple of Fourier—at Nauvoo, Illinois, United States, may be considered as relegated to the graveyard of impracticable theories which from time to time have engaged the attention of philosophical minds with a bent for speculation in human affairs.

But bad as our modern system of economics may be, with all its manifest absurdities in the waste of energy, the unfairness in the distribution of the products of industry, still mankind has, so far, preferred to endure its known evils and incongruities rather than to trust their fortunes to the proposed systems of the socialists and communists.

The New Dispensation of the Gospel, however, contemplating as it does the ushering in of that era of peace on earth and goodwill among men of which angels have sung and prophets written, must perforce and does, as I remarked at the opening of this chapter, take account of the social and industrial conditions prevailing, and offers a solution for the difficulties presented which, while within the possibility of performance, is effectual as a remedy for the evils under which humanity groans. Failure to do this would have been a grave defect in a work making the pretensions of that founded by Joseph Smith. Moreover, since what it has to offer as a solution of existing industrial inequalities and evils is either based on or is itself direct revelation from God, the Divine wisdom must appear in the plan proposed for the betterment of humanity's condition. All this mankind has a right to expect of a divine plan for such a purpose, and all this I claim for the plan revealed through Joseph Smith.

That plan does not begin with the community or the nation, and through the community or state seek to reach

the individual. While not ignoring the value of institutions or the necessity for favorable conditions, it does not put its whole trust in arbitrary institutions or regulations for the successful accomplishment of its purposes. It comes first to the individual with a cry of repentance, with an appeal to turn unto righteousness. It teaches him that by repentance, accompanied with true and holy faith in God, he may attain through baptism to a remission of sins, to consciousness of renewed innocence, lost through transgression, and to the possession of the Holy Ghost. This last adds to his own strength, in some degree, the strength of the Almighty God. Through its influence he is guided into all truth, taught a knowledge of the things of heaven, receives a testimony that Jesus is the Christ; by it he is reproved for his errors; commended for resisting evil; prompted in uncertainty; by courting its influence and listening to its counsels he is purified in heart, is purged of his lusts and his selfishness, loves his neighbor as himself, and is ready to seek another's rather than his own good.

It is with an element such as this—cleansed and purified by such a process, and thus made fit for the Master's use—that the plan revealed through Joseph Smith proposes to deal. It is an evidence that other schemes for the amelioration of the distresses of mankind originated in the petty wisdom of man that they did not take into account the necessary preparation of the elements for their model communities. And let me observe, in passing, that that preparation can only be made through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the spirit of it outlined above. It is vain for men to seek to build up communities in which selfishness shall be abolished, and love and goodwill abound, until they have developed in the separate units that are to compose it the same qualities that are to be characteristic of the community; for communities can

be no better than the individuals that compose them. As well might men hope to mix to the same consistency pieces of iron and pieces of clay, make a rope of dry sand, or do anything else impossible, as to undertake to organize a society in which want shall be abolished, unselfishness abound, and all the virtues prevail, with men unrighteous, proud, envious, jealous, lustful, suspicious, treacherous and possessed of no higher gauge of right and truth than human intelligence. Here, then, begins to be seen the wisdom of the plan for the temporal salvation of mankind revealed through Joseph Smith: it begins with the individual—with the preparation of the elements.^a

Next to the preparation of the elements, the plan recognizes the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It also recognizes the fact that the earth is the Lord's; that it is his by right of proprietorship. He created it and sustains it by his power, and man's right to the portions of it he seizes so greedily can only be that of a steward. Following these principles to their legitimate conclusion, the plan contemplates the complete consecration unto the Lord all the possessions of those who accept it. The person who desires to make the consecration brings his possessions to the bishop of the Church, and delivers them to him, with a deed and covenant that cannot be broken.^b The consecration is complete.

^aSpeaking of social machinery that might be devised to take the place of that now existing, Mr. Hays Robbins in a recent magazine article on "The Church and Social Movements," says: "Sooner or later the old familiar crack will appear in every piece of social machinery devised to replace one discarded, until we get at the faulty metal in man himself. Then, and then only, the movement or system of actually superior possibilities may hope for just and adequate opportunity to demonstrate its worth." All of which is in harmony with what is contended for in the text above.

^b Doc. and Cov., Sec. xlii: 30-32.

The person so consecrating his possessions, whether they be great or small, if it be a full consecration, has claim upon the bishop for a stewardship out of the consecrated properties of the Church. That stewardship may be a farm, a factory, a publishing house, mercantile establishment, a home with the privilege of following a trade or profession, according to individual tastes, abilities or capacities. The stewardships are secured to those unto whom they are granted by a deed and covenant that cannot be broken, hence the stewards are secured in their stewardships.

The income from a stewardship over and above that needed for the maintenance of the steward and his family, is consecrated to the Lord's storehouse, where all the surplus means from the community is, in like manner, collected. Said surplus to be used, first, in supplying the deficiency where stewardships fail to yield sufficient income for the necessities of those who possess them; second, to form or purchase new stewardships for such as have not received any; third, to supply those with means who may need it for the improvement or enlargement of their respective stewardships; fourth, the purchase of lands for the public benefit, to establish new enterprises, develop resources, build houses of worship, temples, send abroad the Gospel or for anything else that looks to the general welfare and the founding of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

The several stewards have claim upon the general fund created by the consecration of the surplus of each, for the means necessary to the improvement or enlargement of the business entrusted to him as his stewardship; and so long as he is in full fellowship with the Church, and is a wise and faithful steward, his application to the treasurer of the general fund is to be respected by being granted; the treasurer, of course, being accountable to the Church for his manage-

ment of the general fund, and subject to removal in the event of incompetency or transgression.

Each steward is independent in the management of his stewardship, and is the master of his own time. He must pay for that which he buys; he can insist on payment for that which he sells. He has no claim upon the stewardship of his neighbor; his neighbor has no claim upon his stewardship; but both have claim, as also have their children—when the latter come of age and start in life for themselves—upon the collected surplus in the Lord's storehouse, to aid them in the event of their needing assistance.

The various branches or ecclesiastical wards of the Church, where the above plan of managing the temporal affairs of life is carried out, are each to be independent in the management of their respective storehouses, subject of course to the general supervision of the presiding bishop of the Church and of the First Presidency.

Such is a brief and, I fear, because of my effort to be brief, a rather imperfect outline of the plan for the management of the temporal affairs of life in the Church of Christ. It is a system which contemplates the humiliation of the rich and the exaltation of the poor, by the operation of consecration and stewardship, above described. By the act of consecration both the rich man and the poor one make a formal acknowledgement that the earth and the fullness thereof is the Lord's; and by receiving back a stewardship, each receives that which his wants demand, or that his capacity will warrant placing under his management; and which may be added upon as he gives increased evidence of faithfulness and ability to wisely control the stewardship for his own and the general good.

The plan recognizes the truth that there is enough and to spare in the earth to provide plentifully for all the wants

of the human race; for all its necessities and all reasonable luxuries, if the wealth created by the race's industry be justly distributed. In it, too, is recognized the truth that transcendent abilities for the manipulation of the elements or the management of affairs by which wealth is created are not possessed that they might minister alone to personal advantage, or pride, or ambition; nor are they to be employed alone for the benefit of the possessor's family. This plan revealed to Joseph Smith teaches a nobler and higher use of abilities than this; a broader field of sympathy than that which merely comprehends a family. A great mind in any department of abilities, and no less in financial or temporal affairs than in law, or government, or literature, belongs to the race, and is God's best gift to it; for through it God, in part shines. The employment of talents and genius for the common interest is to be the outgrowth of universal sympathy and a willingness to co-operate with God to bring to pass the eternal life, and, both in time and eternity, the eternal happiness of man. Hence it is written that the inhabitant of Zion shall labor for Zion and if he labor for money he shall perish with his money.

The plan also recognizes the dignity of all labor; and provides that the idler shall be had in remembrance before the Lord.^b Idleness is an offense against the doctrine of the gospel and has received God's severe condemnation; for he has declared that the "idler shall not eat the bread, nor wear the garments of the laborer,"^c nor have place in the church, except he repents.^d

It will be observed that the plan revealed through Joseph Smith, while differing from the present selfish and competitive system, is neither state socialism nor communism.

^b Doc. and Cov. Sec. lxxviii: 30.

^c Doc. and Cov. Sec. xlii: 42.

^d Doc. and Cov. Sec. lxxv: 29.

It neither makes man the creature of the state, nor invades the sanctity of his fireside. It preserves a healthy individualism in that it allows each man control of his own stewardship and makes him the disposer of his own time. It provides for the general welfare in that it centralizes all the surplus means of the community and places it at the disposal of the wisest men who apportion it out to the improvement of enterprises or stewardships under the management of men of demonstrated ability and approved integrity; or who employ it in the development of new enterprises or distribute it in new stewardships to those who as yet may not have received them. This system therefore guards against want and destitution on the one hand; while on the other it collects the surplus means to be used in those new enterprises, the success of which shall remove the community further and ever further from poverty and wretchedness which is now at once the world's anxiety and shame.

By this plan the anxiety of the fathers to secure estates or a fortune for their posterity is relieved, since their children will have claim upon the surplus property of the community for a stewardship when they are prepared to start in life. And since the prosperity and success of their children depends upon the success and prosperity of the community, the fathers shall in that find an incentive to honorable exertion. The children find no fortune to squander, no opportunity to grow up in idleness, or contract those vices which unfit them for life's serious affairs. But trained from youth to be industrious, and starting with a stewardship that by industry and economy shall minister to their necessities, and enable them to contribute something to the general good, they have an opportunity by wise management of their stewardship, the improvement and enlargement of it, to demonstrate their abilities, rise in public esteem and have more

and still more entrusted to their control, until they reach a position where they can do all the good they are capable of doing, or that is in their hearts to accomplish.

The two prime objections to co-operative methods, state socialism and communism are, first, that by taking the proceeds of individual industry, talent or transcendent financial abilities and applying them to the common good rather than to individual aggrandizement, one of the chief incentives to earnest endeavor is stricken down; and second, by creating an assurance in the minds of individuals that their wants will be provided for out of a common fund and that necessity cannot overtake them, the other chief incentive to industry is swept aside. In other words it is held that ambition and the fear of coming to want are the chief incentives to human activity. Remove these incentives to action, it is contended, and you have, of course, a listless, idle and hence non-progressive community that all too soon from want of motive principle would come to poverty, ignorance and at last to dissolution.

These are held to be the vices of the schemes of socialists and communists so far as the industrial phase of their plans is concerned, and I anticipate that the same objections will be urged to the plan for the temporal salvation of mankind revealed through Joseph Smith.

Volumes have been written upon the unworthiness of a desire for personal aggrandizement, and man's necessities being regarded as the chief incentives to human activity; and it is not my purpose to add anything to the mass of matter that exists on that subject. Indeed, taking average humanity as it is, rather than what idealists would have it or believe it to be, and I am rather of the opinion that the objection urged against socialism and communism in regard to the industrial phase of these schemes is a good one; and that

however unworthy gratification of personal ambition and the fear of want may be as incentives to industry, they are, nevertheless, the prime incentives to action; and if removed, there is grave reason to fear that what the objectors to community of effort and of interests predict, would come to pass. My point is that this objection can be of no force against a system in which individualism is not stricken down. A man's success in the management of his stewardship in the plan revealed through Joseph Smith, depends upon his individual effort; and though the system requires the consecration, from time to time, of the surplus arising from the management of the stewardships, it is also provided that the stewards shall have claim upon the general fund for whatever means they may require to improve or enlarge their stewardships. But the chances of obtaining means to make such improvement or enlargement depends upon the capabilities the individual has developed, in the management of that already committed to his care; hence his advancement, his growth and standing in the community, together with the comfort, convenience and beauty of his surroundings depend primarily upon his individual exertion.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that the system revealed through Joseph Smith teaches as a religious duty the consecration and employment of individual abilities for the common good; and it also teaches that industry and economy are religious duties.

It is by preparing the units of which society is composed through the acceptance and practice of the gospel; by preserving all that is desirable in individualism and at the same time abundantly providing for the common good; by recognizing the religious sentiment and righteousness as elements necessary to its success; by teaching that it is the duty of those possessed of transcendent abilities to employ them

for the common good ; by inculcating that humility that shall make those possessed of humbler abilities willing to be active in less exalted spheres, and, above all, by depending upon the enlightening and directing influence of the Holy Ghost, as well in each member of the community as in the appointed leaders,—it is by doing all this that the plan for the amelioration of the present distressed condition of society, revealed through Joseph Smith, hopes in the end to achieve success.

If I am told that the success of this plan depends upon too many contingencies ; that the attainment of all of them is impracticable ; that humanity can never be brought to that excellence of individual and community righteousness that the plan requires ; my answer would be that the condition of the world, then, is hopeless ; for this is the only plan which can bring to pass the amelioration of the hard conditions prevailing among mankind. But I do not at all despair of the success of it. If it cannot immediately be made universal, its success will be made manifest in the Church of Christ ; and as the peace, prosperity and happiness of those that accept it indicate the wisdom that conceived it, more and more will seek its benefits, until all the children of men shall partake in its advantages.