

## Implementing Social Righteousness

*Thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support, that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which can not be broken; and inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me, and it shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall or has appointed and set apart for that purpose. And it shall come to pass that after they are laid before the bishop of my church, and after that he has received these testimonies concerning the consecration of the properties of my church, that they can not be taken from the church, agreeable to my commandments; every man shall be made accountable unto me a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, inasmuch as is sufficient for himself and family.—D. and C. 42:8, 9.*

IN PREVIOUS chapters we have pointed out that in the last analysis man is dependent on God for every gift, resource, facility, and blessing which makes it possible for him to live on earth and to enjoy and profit by that experience. We have pointed out also that man is morally obligated to recognize and acknowledge God's ownership of all the earth by rendering a regular and periodical accounting of his stewardship, and by making regular and systematic dedication of a stated portion of his wealth to the purposes of God and his kingdom. We have also stated that because all our wealth is accumulated with the help of countless other

men, both those who have gone before and those who are contemporary, we also owe an accounting to those who have helped us produce or create our wealth, and whose presence and whose needs give our wealth its value. All such accounting and all sharing of wealth must be voluntary, must be an outgrowth of the steward's own sense of responsibility and his desire to be a good steward, must be the result of his own choices arrived at through the exercise of his free moral will and agency. If accounting for and sharing of the wealth are to be made compulsory, there is no real stewardship, only slavery.

### HOW CAN SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS BE IMPLANTED?

We come now to a consideration of how man's desire for social righteousness is to be implemented. If men are to share as stewards over the good things of earth which God has placed within our reach, there must be some machinery, some organization, some implementation set up or established whereby men can accomplish these ends together in an orderly, reasonably, equitable fashion. If a good steward owes an accounting to God and his fellowman, and if he owes a debt to God as tangible acknowledgment of his stewardship, there must be some authoritative means established whereby the accounting can be received in the name of God, and the tithe paid to God's representative and used for the purposes of God and his kingdom. If there is to be a voluntary sharing of the proceeds of labor, so that some men are not forced to live in poverty in spite of all their best efforts while others live in idle ease by the sweat of another's toil, there must be some sort of organization or framework or mechanism established by which men can combine their efforts as stewards to insure the well-being of all.

What does the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints believe about this implementation of social

righteousness? We believe that God has set certain officers in his church to direct this implementation of social righteousness, that he has given priesthood authority to not only those who perform the spiritual ordinances of the church but those who direct the temporal or financial efforts and concerns of the church. He has set two orders of priesthood in the church, the Melchisedec, which is primarily concerned with the spiritual welfare and administration of the church, and the Aaronic, which is primarily concerned with the administration of physical ordinances and of the finances, property, and other temporalities of the church. The highest officers of this Aaronic order are the bishops, under whose care all the physical assets, property, and finances of the church are placed, and who are available as financial consultants to those members who are trying to be good stewards. Like all other men holding priesthood authority, the bishops must first be called of God as was Aaron and given God's authority through ordination, for they are to be the financial representatives of God. Like all other men holding priesthood authority, they must likewise be approved and sustained by the voice and vote of the people, for they are also to be representatives and financial officers of the people.

It is to the bishops and their counselors, then, that Latter Day Saints are required by the law of the church to make an annual accounting for their stewardship. Such accounting and payment, however, are not compelled.

How do we determine the amount of tithing due? The principle used in determining the tithe is simple, just, and equitable. It is a principle that dates from earliest Old Testament times. Man owes one tenth of his *increase* annually. Increase is that portion of income which remains after necessary living expenses have been met. A good steward is entitled to deduct reasonable living expenses as recompense for managing his stewardship. Certainly if he could not make enough from his stewardship to live, he would die and there

would be no more steward, no more stewardship. If there is no increase, no tithing is due, no matter what the income, though such a steward may still wish to make a freewill offering. It is expected of a good steward placed in a productive stewardship, however, that he so manage his stewardship and control his wants as to show an increase from year to year.

Part of that increase belongs to the *steward* because of his effort which he has put into its production. Part of it belongs to the *society* which has made its contribution to the processes of production. Part of it belongs to God, the Creator and original Owner of all the resources necessary to establish and operate the stewardship. God's requirement is one tenth of the *increase*. Notice again that we do not say one tenth of the gross income, for in the case of those stewards who had small income and large family obligations, the requirement of one tenth of gross income would take bread out of the mouths of children and cause the efficiency and productive capacity of the steward and his family to deteriorate. One tenth of *increase*, after the needs and just wants of the steward and his family have been met, is fair, equitable, and just.

The amount of this tithe of one tenth of the annual increase is determined from the annual accounting, which places before the bishop a record of income and expenditures, and shows the increase or decrease in net worth. Since we all come into the world with nothing, the first step for new members of the church who want to keep the financial law and recognize their stewardship is to file the first financial statement, which lists assets and liabilities and shows net worth. The first payment of the tithe will therefore be one tenth of the net worth, the net increase since birth, and after that, one tenth of the increase, annually. After the steward has paid the tenth of his increase, he still has nine tenths which remains under his control as steward. Out of this nine

tenths he may wish to make a further freewill offering to the General Church, or an offering for the support of his local congregation, which does not receive any of the tithes. He may consider it wise to use some or all of that nine tenths to increase, develop, and expand the business of his stewardship. He may consider it wise and necessary to put it away as a reserve against the proverbial rainy day. If he does not need it for those or any other legitimate purpose, it is surplus. Each steward is to determine for himself, in conference with the bishop, what is and what is not surplus for his particular stewardship.

#### ALL THINGS COMMON

Many people have been puzzled by the statement in Acts 4:32 that in the New Testament church the saints had "all things common." This verse says, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." The New Testament church did not achieve equality by throwing all property into one common pot into which everyone dipped as he felt inclined. A careful reading of this verse will disclose that the saints of the New Testament church did possess private property, for specific mention is made of the "things which they possessed." They recognized God's ownership, however; for none of them said that the things he possessed were his own. But as each man examined himself and his financial statement or balance sheet and determined that he had some surplus that was not essential to his stewardship, he turned that surplus over to the church, in order that from it others might be provided with the means of making a living. Those who had more houses or more lands than they needed (for they needed only one homestead on which to live) turned the surplus into cash and imparted to those who had need that they might also be established as stewards.

The church and its officers served as the organization through which this result was accomplished.

This is the principle of consecration of surplus. Every man is a steward over his own property, but if he has a surplus for which he has no need, it should rightfully be made the common property of the group where it becomes a surplus for all, a revolving fund from which any wise and faithful and diligent steward may borrow in time of emergency, or when he needs more capital to expand his stewardship. It is a fund which could be drawn upon for the establishing of worthy young people in business or profession which would be their stewardship; or a fund which could be utilized in the establishment of group stewardships which give employment to worthy persons who have neither the business capacity nor the financial capital to establish individual stewardships of their own. The funds resulting from consecration of surplus are not to be dissipated in temporary relief to the poor, or for administrative or operating expenses of the church; those needs are met from the tithes and offerings. Surplus ceases to be an individual surplus, and becomes the common property of the group which contributes it, where it stands as a safeguard against emergency or disaster to any member of the group.

If followed to its logical conclusion, the "all things common" principle of consecration of surplus would do away with most of the warfare between capital and labor. Labor would have the incentive of helping the capitalist employer increase his production, knowing that any surplus would be consecrated to the common good of all. The capitalist would gladly pay the highest possible wages in recompense for this kind of wholehearted, high efficiency production, knowing that if any man received more wages than he needed, the surplus would still find its way into the common fund.

Of course, there is one fatal weakness in this plan, the weakness of human nature. Selfish, unregenerate, sinful men

don't act in the way we have described good stewards should. That is why we believe that the task of social and economic reform is primarily a task not for the state but for the church, which, through its teachings, its spiritual ordinances leading to regeneration and new birth, and through the power of Jesus Christ which flows through it, can change human nature and make men into the kind of men who will be good, wise, worthy, unselfish, and diligent stewards, devoted to the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth, and the working out of righteous principles in all social and financial relationships.

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### *Thy Kingdom Come*

*After this manner shall ye pray, saying, Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.—Matt. 6:9-15 (I.V.).*

IT IS significant that when John the Baptist came preaching, he did not say that the kingdom of heaven was going to be available in some far-off, distant day and time; it was available then. "The kingdom of heaven is *at hand*" (Matthew 3:28). Jesus expressed the same idea somewhat later when he said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Some people have interpreted this verse to mean that the kingdom is in the individual heart. Since Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, it is not plausible to believe that the kingdom of which he was speaking was within *them*, or in *their* hearts. A marginal note in the King James version reads, "Or, *among* you." Another version says, "The kingdom of heaven is in the midst of you." Still another says, "The kingdom of God has already come unto you." Moffatt says, "The reign of God is now in your midst." The Emphatic Greek Diaglott says, "God's royal majesty [that is, the King] is among you." A very recent study of this passage and of the Greek preposition translated "within" has brought the conclusion that the real meaning of the passage is, "The kingdom of God is available unto you."