

THE CHURCH OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

By *Elbert Eugene Peck*

WHEN ELDER HINCKLEY opened a session of a recent general conference by saying, "We have gathered from around the world to confer together," I reflected how we had a lot of talking but very little conferring in this conference. It's hard to imagine how it could be otherwise on the all-church level, but locally a lot more participation in decision-making would add vitality to our religious life.

For at least the last 40 years, the management sciences have been promoting a leadership style called "participative management," which means decisions in organizations are collaborative, operating on principles of consensus and democratic processes. One way to illustrate various leadership styles is with a continuum:

LEADERSHIP STYLES

AUTHORITARIAN ————— PARTICIPATIVE
Tell - Sell - Check - Consult - Collaborate

Each style has its advantages and disadvantages. Authoritarian styles can be very efficient in placing responsibility and in the amount of time it takes to make and implement a decision. They are effective in disseminating some kinds of information. However, the leader may lack important data and grassroots information and feedback flow very slowly up the channels.

On the other hand, in participative styles the flow of information can be much more free. They assume that by drawing on the resources of more people a better decision can be made. Also, experience shows that when people are involved in policy deliberations they gain a

better understanding of the issues—the vision—and are more committed to implementing the agreed upon policy, even when their views have been rejected. However, participative styles require much more time in order to meaningfully involve everyone in the process, and without effective group skills it is possible that

the democratic process will produce weaker decisions and demoralize the membership. Then, too, a totally democratic process can leave little or no role for the leader and his or her inspiration. (The Society of Friends—Quakers—are a good example of the power and weakness of consensus decision-making. It took over a century of deliberations for the American

groups to completely agree on the abolition of slavery, but when they did they acted powerfully. Nevertheless, he or she is powerless without unanimous consent after long open discussion.)

Different styles work for different situations, and a leader not committed to a participative approach can cause severe problems if he or she is rightly perceived as only "going through" democratic motions. Authoritarian styles are definitely required in crisis situations where fast decisions need to be made and followed, such as in a war or fighting a fire. Likewise, participative styles work well where information needs to be digested and acted on by many people.

If the leaders use a military metaphor (such as the battle against evil or the army of the Lord) to define how the Church is run, then authoritarian styles and an obsession with secrecy naturally follow. If, however, the ruling organizational metaphor is something like "the

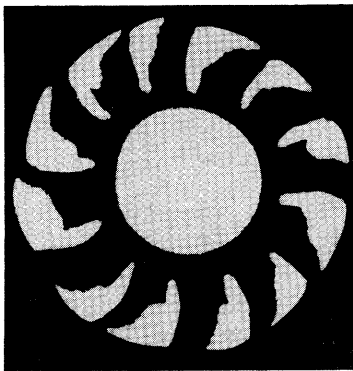
people of God," "the body of Christ," or "the community of believers" it is easier to adopt a collaborative leadership style.

I think it is desirable for us to be more participative on the local levels of the Church. I have attended countless ward conferences and quorum business meetings where the leaders announce a list of goals for the following year, which occasionally are put to the automatic affirmative vote. Even with periodic reminders throughout the year, most ward members respond like I have—sincere wishes of support but little or no change in behavior.

Imagine what would happen if a bishopric chose to have the ward's goals and plans decided through participative processes. Instead of happening over a weekend, the annual ward conference would be a process of meetings over a month, during which individuals involved in various quorums and auxiliaries met to take stock of the state of affairs, discuss what should be done, and arrive at a consensus on a plan of action. I can see teachers and parents of Primary-age children discussing the education of the youth.

Increased member participation, however, does not mean abdication by the leaders. A major responsibility of theirs would be to shepherd the process along and ensure that the flock is truly fed by it; they would set general goals (such as the three missions of the Church do), outline areas of concern that need to be addressed, gather and disseminate the necessary information needed for informed discussions (such as statistics and manuals), and lead the discussions so that the process has constructive results instead of chaos. The leader would then manage the follow-up affairs to implement the conference's conclusions. This style requires more of the leader, because it requires more of the member, but in ways that are more humble and less prominent; exalting others, taking less credit, not assuming you have to have all the answers, but possessing the keys to direct the process and correct when needed.

If this was done effectively, the results of the month-long deliberation process would include a membership with an enhanced view of the dynamics and role of the Church, a sense that their experience and perspective are valued by the organization, a better understanding of how what they do affects the community's purposes, and probably an increased commitment to help achieve the agreed-upon goals. Much of the social bonding that was unintentionally diminished by the consolidated meeting schedule would be strengthened by intense policy discussions through which members would become acquainted with each other in



substantive settings. In addition, since the process draws upon the resources and information of the entire congregation rather than the combined yet limited resources of the leadership, the Church programs may work better because of local customizing which encourages the upward flow of information.

Enoch's classic description of the people of Zion as "one heart and one mind" (Moses 7:18) cannot mean that everyone thinks the same thoughts. It must mean that after deliberation we are agreed on how we will act as a people, similar to how the Quorum of the Twelve are one in implementing their decisions after discussions with strong differences which are never totally resolved. After we have the opportunity to genuinely have our views aired and valued, we then support and work to make successful ("sustain") the decision eventually arrived at; remembering that since we are human policies will change. This approach maximizes the strength that comes from unity of action and cultivates the vitality that comes from celebrating differences.

Some individuals may have reservations about this process because this Church is a "theocracy, not a democracy," by which they mean an authoritarian style is appropriate because God speaks to our leaders and his word is disseminated downward through an inevitable hierarchal organization. That is definitely true concerning doctrine—that is the calling of a prophet—although for doctrine to be binding upon the Church it must be accepted by vote of the membership. But most of our day-to-day ecclesiastical deliberations are about the policies and programs necessary to realize the doctrinal truths in the community of Saints. In those decisions, I think, the participative process can be appropriately applied. The guiding question is, "How can we organize ourselves to best effect the work of God?" And, like Jethro to Moses, the better answers can come from outside the hierarchal channels and involve the entire membership.

We need to look more closely at what the Lord, Joseph and the early brethren meant when they said that we should do "all things by common consent" (D&C 26:2; 28:13) and "Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesman at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have equal privilege" (D&C 88:122, italics added).

Rooted in the scriptures is a more democratic theocracy than we currently practice. Originally, like a theocracy the Church was named The Church of Christ. Later it was

democratically titled The Church of Latter-day Saints, and lastly The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (D&C 115:4). The final name is a wonderful combination of what constitutes a Church: the marriage of God *and* man. While the Church is a kingdom, that metaphor can be misapplied by solely alluding to the medieval notion of an absolute king with lesser nobles and obedient serfs. Ironically, ours is a king-

dom whose citizens are empowered kings and queens and priests and priestesses; one where we wish that "all of the Lord's people were prophets" (Numbers 11:29). And those theological concepts necessitate other concepts such as stewardship and agency with genuine discretion, where the anointed followers of Christ willingly cooperate in the community as equals.

TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

D. Michael Quinn

A MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS, A HOUSE OF FAITH, AND A PRISON OF CONFORMITY

I FIRST LEFT Brigham Young University as a graduating senior, and now leave BYU's history faculty to pursue career goals outside the university. As a student and teacher, I've developed certain ideas about intellect, faith, and freedom.

A true university should be a Marketplace of Ideas. As in any free marketplace, the goods have various uses, shapes, sizes, colors, and qualities. One size doesn't fit all, certain things may not appeal to some people, and merchandise varies from the price-worthy to the shoddy. As in a free marketplace, the vendors of ideas promote their wares vigorously, and challenge competing products. They do this without asking permission, or feeling that they are taking risks beyond the fact that not everyone will want their goods. This freedom means that you can look at, try on, or obtain anything that interests you. In this marketplace of ideas you can outgrow or otherwise discard once-valued things, but you may also find ideas that will expand with you throughout life. The vendors

of these ideas typically don't monitor what you do with them—dispensing the ideas is their primary objective.

You don't feel that you are being bold, or daring, or courageous, or offensive for exploring and promoting the ideas that are freely part of the marketplace of a university. Like any marketplace, an open university is often boisterous, unruly, energetic, exciting, multidimensional, fluid, and structured only enough to maintain the integrity of that orderly chaos of the mind.

On the other hand, a House of Faith is calmer, more secure, and heavily structured. In it, you move through corridors through which countless others have passed in orderly procession. Rooms have certain uses, and you soon learn the expected behavior as you move from room to room. Yet even within the House of Faith, there is diversity—some rooms are more fully occupied and used than others, and people don't always act the same way in the same room.

The House of Faith doesn't lack adventure, either, because you may chance upon a room so long in disuse that even the custodians of the House of Faith have forgotten it. Equal to your excitement in exploring such a place is the fear on the part of the custodians that you will take a misstep in the dimly lit room. Even if you are

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in the company of a few others, the custodians still worry because they feel responsible for your safety in a house they didn't build, whose floor plans they don't know precisely. How you act, talk, and think are far more important to custodians of the House of Faith than these things are to vendors in the Marketplace of Ideas.

It's difficult to live in a marketplace, or to find constant shelter and comfort there. A house provides shelter, comfort, and the association of those who should be there to love you, rather than to accost you as vendors often do. Ideally, the Marketplace of Ideas surrounds the House of Faith, so that you can pass freely from one to the other, back and forth, without feeling you have lost your place in either. This should be true because the Master of the free-flowing Marketplace of Ideas is also the Architect of the comforting House of Faith.

Yet some vendors in the Marketplace of Ideas may ridicule those who live in the House of Faith, and a few residents may choose to abandon that great house. Others within the House of Faith may complain to the custodians about the quality of goods they found in the Marketplace of Ideas.

In response, some custodians and residents of that House of Faith may seek to discourage visits to the Marketplace of Ideas unless you have an approved shopping list. If sufficiently worried about the freedoms and vulnerabilities of the Marketplace of Ideas, custodians of the House of Faith may seek to shutter the windows, to discourage visits to the open marketplace, and instead offer a limited selection of "safe" goods, and to persuade residents of the House of Faith that a controlled choice is a free choice.

At the extreme, resistance to the openness of ideas and the vulnerabilities of freedom may develop into a culture which is not the creation of him who established both the Marketplace of Ideas and the House of Faith. All of us may be familiar with such a culture which I have learned about with much interest and some sadness. It is a Prison of Conformity.

In this specific case, its leaders distrust the outside world, and are convinced that this culture is destined to spread throughout the world. In the zeal of that faith, these authorities also distrust members of this culture who are different in any respect from the authorized norms.

Convinced that regular members of the culture would only be confused by unrestricted inquiry the authorities of this Prison of Conformity have adopted several methods of

inhibiting freedom. First, they publicize only positive features of the culture, unless some negative information is necessary to chastise those who don't live up to expectations.

Second, they deny access to crucial information, and allow "free" and "professional" access only to sanitized documents or information.

Third, they use intimidation to discourage those who have forbidden knowledge from circulating or publishing it, unless it is the authorized version of the culture's history, beliefs, and practices.

Fourth, they portray independent thinkers as renegades who are seeking to disturb the happiness and loyalty of the rest of the culture.

Fifth, they persuade the rest of the culture that such information is irrelevant or dangerous, and that they should avoid any contaminating association with such ideas or with persons whose independence of thought and action are by definition disloyal.

Sixth, the leaders persuade themselves and the rest of the people that the culture is actually better off without the presence or influence of these independent people.

Seventh, they use the instruments of power within the culture to harass, isolate, silence, expel, or force into exile those who do not conform sufficiently.

Even though the conforming majority of people feel indifferent or even hostile toward the independent writers and activists, some rank and file members of the society quietly read, circulate, and discuss the independent ideas, and give quiet encouragement to the activists. One of these independent types, who loves the culture but rejects its oppressive conformity, has complained about the attitude of the authorities toward "that 'past' which 'ought not to be stirred up,'" and he continued, "What we remember is not what actually happened, not history, but merely that hackneyed dotted line they have chosen to drive into our memories by incessant hammering. . . . We have to condemn publicly the very *idea* that some people have the right to repress others." Still, in my own study and experience, this culture has good qualities, and its people generally are kind and friendly, even to outsiders.

This Prison of Conformity is, of course, the Soviet Union, about which I just quoted Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. I had personal experience with this culture five years ago as part of BYU's Study Abroad program, and am still impressed by that visit and my reading about this culture of repression.

The Soviet Union is merely an extreme example of lofty goals subverted into a repres-

sive conformity. The French Revolution's ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity disintegrated into the Guillotine Terror in which thousands of men, women, and children died because they did not fit the commoners' ideal. God's revelations and commandments to Moses on Sinai became a repressive burden upon believing Jews who struggled to conform to Pharaisaical requirements. Roman Catholicism emerged from a heritage of persecution and thereafter embarked on centuries of repression against any believing Catholics who did not meet certain standards of orthodoxy and practice. The persecuted Puritans fled to America to establish their "City on a Hill" to God's glory, and then banished from their colony nonconformists such as Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams.

Some years ago, BYU professor of religion Hugh W. Nibley warned students and administrators alike about the dangers of intellectual stagnation and stultifying conformity at BYU. In his "Educating the Saints," he commented that "the authorities have tended to delegate the business of learning to others, and those others have been only too glad to settle for the outward show, the easy and flattering forms, trappings and ceremonies of education." In his "Zeal Without Knowledge," Professor Nibley criticized an administrative and student sense of superiority that stifles spiritual development, and observed that it was common to hear the attitude, "We are not seeking for truth at the BYU; we have the truth!"

There is a danger that BYU's slogans may be more accurate in their inverted form. Instead of "The World Is Our Campus," the reality may be that "The Campus is Our World." Rather than "Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve," BYU's overwhelming emphasis on deference, compliance, and conformity, creates the danger that students enter BYU to serve, and must go forth into a freer world to learn. Twenty years ago, a joke making the rounds was that the autocratic president of BYU had written a book titled "Free Agency and How to Enforce It." To the degree that this attitude exists, the institution and its people are sliding away from the Marketplace of Ideas and House of Faith into the individual and cultural repressiveness of the Prison of Conformity. That development bothers me, and I hope those who remain at BYU will reflect upon the consequences of subordinating thought and faith to conformity.

I'll miss my personal associations at BYU, especially with students. I've learned from them, admire them, and hope that I've shared something of worth in exchange. I wish them God's blessings in their own efforts to live with both vigorous intellect and comforting faith.