

Implications of the Church's Recent "Course Correction"

TIGHTENING OUR BELTS AND STREAMLINING OUR PROGRAMS

Late in 1989 the LDS church announced that, beginning initially in the United States and Canada, operating expenses for local wards and stakes would be paid out of general tithing funds according to a formula based on sacrament meeting attendance. Understandably, the Saints welcomed not having to contribute to the ward budget in addition to paying tithing, fast offerings and other contributions such as supporting full-time missionaries. Few people, however, were aware that this action resulted from a dramatic reassessment of the role of the institutional Church and its programs in the lives of its members.

Apparently spurred in part by the challenges faced in providing the full array of Church programs in other countries and a desire for one world-wide Church organizational model, LDS leaders are lessening the Mormon collective approach to religious life, which had its roots in pioneer communitarianism and was manifest in the twentieth century through numerous auxiliary organizations and priesthood programs. Apparently in the future the principles of the Restoration will be increasingly lived by self-reliant families and individuals freed of many Church programs and activities.

This "new" direction is, of course, only the latest "course correction" of the Correlation Movement which is designed to consolidate, simplify, and regulate all essential Church affairs under the direction of priesthood line officers. In February 1990 the Church broadcasted a satellite fireside which featured general authorities

explaining the new changes. Among other points, Church leaders emphasized that the reduction in social activities as a result of the budget changes was intentional and desirable. These addresses were published in the May 1990 Ensign.

At the regional representatives seminar held on the Friday before the April 1990 general conference, Apostle Boyd K. Packer, a senior member of the overseeing Correlation Executive Committee, explained in more detail to senior Church leaders the guiding philosophy behind the changes. He titled his address "Let Them Govern Themselves," an obvious expansion of his satellite address, "Teach Them Correct Principles." Photocopies of his address have circulated widely within the Church and are available from his office.

The opening session of the Sunstone Symposium XII, held in Salt Lake City on 22 August 1990, featured a panel exploring the implications of the recent "course correction." As an introduction to the discussion, Elder Packer's regional representatives address was summarized; three BYU professors then spoke. Mormon historian James B. Allen gave some historical thoughts, sociologist J. Lynn England shared his views as a bishop on the changes, and sociologist Marie Cornwall discussed the dynamic between programs and faith development. The following articles originated from that session. Elder Packer's address is reprinted to provide a more informed context for their discussions.

ELBERT EUGENE PECK

LET THEM GOVERN THEMSELVES

*Address delivered by Elder Boyd K. Packer
Regional Representatives Seminar, Friday, March 30, 1990*

THE LORD SAID, "BEHOLD, I WILL HASTEN MY work in its time. And I give unto you, who are the first laborers in this last kingdom, a commandment that you . . . organize yourselves, and prepare yourselves, and sanctify yourselves; yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean." (D&C 88:73-74.)

In the last period of time, since the October conference, the Quorum of the Twelve has been following that admonition against the obvious hastening that is taking place; the unpre-

cedented, miraculous changing of the circumstances across the world. Nations, in a sense, are being born in a day and the invitation now is for our missionaries to move into countries where we have no members and to move into countries where we have had members who have lived under almost impossible circumstances. This hastening has been the source of sobering reflection and we of the Twelve, under the direction of President Hunter, have held many meetings, overviewing and calling into attention things

of the past; looking at our circumstances at the present, and looking into the future as is not only our calling, but our responsibility as prophets, seers, and revelators.

We have held meetings with the First Presidency and I think the theme that you have felt in this meeting and will feel from the conference and will see as the conference concludes with momentous events having occurred, that we need now to prepare ourselves and to put on the new man and the new woman, to change a mind-set and to move into that future that the Lord is preparing for us.

Recent letters announced the decision to fund the Church henceforth from tithes and offerings. As has been mentioned here two or three times today, other collections, assessments, and fundraising, with a few and perhaps temporary exceptions, are to be discontinued.

In a recent satellite broadcast that was viewed here in the United States and Canada, the principles and doctrines which should govern the change were presented. While three men spoke, it was a single message. Since those talks were distributed or will reach you where translation is necessary, I will present but a brief quote, one from each of the counselors in the First Presidency which embody the spirit of the instruction.

PRESIDENT MONSON

PRESIDENT Monson speaking:

- The budget allowance program was created to reduce financial burdens on members.
- Members should *not* pay fees or be assessed to participate in Church programs.
- Priesthood leaders should reduce and simplify activities wherever possible.

Let me repeat: "Priesthood leaders should *reduce and simplify activities wherever possible.*"

- Activities should be planned at little or no cost, should build testimonies and provide meaningful service to others.

And he added, "It is the desire that restraint be used in

programming youth activities and that consistency between young women and young men programs be achieved." (Thomas S. Monson, satellite broadcast, 18 Feb. 1990.)

PRESIDENT HINCKLEY

PRESIDENT Hinckley:

Perhaps we have *gone too far*—[this is the roller coaster

President Monson referred to earlier]—in providing for some beyond what is needed or what is best in terms of the individuals and their families.

It should be recognized that this Church is not a social club. This is the Kingdom of God in the earth. It is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Its purpose is to bring salvation and exaltation to both the living and the dead.

These officers and teachers, and these young men and women, are people of ingenuity who with faith and prayer can work out programs costing little in dollars that will yield tremendous dividends in wholesome recreation and faith-building activities. Perhaps we should

be *less concerned with fun and more with faith.* (Gordon B. Hinckley, satellite broadcast, 18 Feb. 1990.)

This change, announced for the United States and Canada, will, by successive steps, be implemented worldwide. I repeat, just as soon as the procedures can be worked out and some experience gained, it will be implemented across the world.

To many it is just a welcome relief, a change in procedure—a relatively small thing.

It was the prophet Alma who told us "that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass. . . . And the Lord God doth work by [small] means to bring about his great and eternal purposes" (Alma 37:6-7).

To me this "small thing" is among the major decisions that I shall have witnessed in my lifetime. I will attempt to explain



Elder Boyd K. Packer, whose apostolic vision for the Church reduces Church organization and expands individual responsibility.

to you why my conviction of its importance is so fixed.

LIKE A TEAM OF DOCTORS

IN recent years we might be compared to a team of doctors issuing prescriptions to cure or to immunize our members against spiritual diseases. Each time some moral or spiritual ailment was diagnosed, we have rushed to the pharmacy to concoct another remedy, encapsulate it as a program and send it out with pages of directions for use.

While we all seem to agree that over-medication, over-programming, is a critically serious problem, we have failed to reduce the treatments. It has been virtually impossible to affect any reduction in programs.

Each time we try, advocates cry to high heaven that we are putting the spiritual lives of our youth at risk. If symptoms reappear, we program even heavier doses of interviews, activities, meetings, and assessments.

The best answer, perhaps, is to withdraw all prescriptions and start over. The whole correlation effort, which took about twenty years, followed that course and much was accomplished. The habits for moral and spiritual health were defined. The scriptures were prescribed as the basic nourishment. The curriculum, loaded with spiritual nutrients, was developed but we did not allow time for it to work and we failed to close the pharmacy or even effectively control it.

We now have ourselves in a corner. For instance, we have reason to be seriously concerned about the lack of reverence in the Church. Perhaps this one thing, general across the world, is as much an interference with and a short-circuiting of inspiration as anything that could be pointed to. However, I dare not press for the correction of that issue because we do not seem to be able to solve a problem without designing a program with pages of instruction and sending it out again.

It is time now for you who head the auxiliaries and the departments and those of us who advise them, after all the repetitive cautions from the First Presidency, to change our mind-set and realize that a reduction of and a secession from that constant programming must be accomplished.

The hardest ailment to treat is a virtue carried to the extreme. We cannot seem to learn that too much, even of a good thing, or too many good things, like vitamins taken in overdose, can be harmful.

In recent years I have felt, and I think I am not alone, that we were losing the ability to correct the course of the Church. You can not appreciate how deeply I feel about the importance of this present opportunity unless you know the regard, the reverence, I have for the Book of Mormon and how seriously I

have taken the warnings of the prophets, particularly Alma and Helaman.

Both Alma and Helaman told of the Church in their day. They warned about fast growth, the desire to be accepted by the world, to be popular, and particularly they warned about prosperity. Each time those conditions existed in combination, the Church drifted off course. All of those conditions are present in the Church today.

Helaman repeatedly warned, I think four times he used these words, that the fatal drift of the Church could occur "in the space of not many years." In one instance it took only six years. (See Helaman 6:32, 7:6, 11:26.)

The announcement on tithes and offerings, which has been sent now, is of such *enormous* importance because, perhaps for one time only, we have an opportunity in one sweeping stroke, to correct much of what heretofore we have been unable to correct.

The revelations tell us that there are limits to what mankind will be allowed to do. When those limits are reached, then comes destruction. And, the patience of the Lord with all of us who are in leadership position, is not without limits.

REGIMENTATION

THE most dangerous side effect of all we have prescribed in the way of programming and instruction and all, is the overregimentation of the Church. This overregimentation is a direct result of too many programmed instructions. If we would compare the handbooks of today with those a generation ago you would quickly see what I mean. And Brother Hanks mentioned that the Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook is an amalgamation of several handbooks and a reduction of them all with, I think, nothing lost; much gained.

"Teach them correct principles," the prophet said, "and then let," *let*—a big word, "them govern themselves." (See *Messages of the First Presidency*, p. 54.) Our members should not, according to the scriptures, need to be commanded in all things. (See D&C 58:26.)

Local leaders have been effectively conditioned to hold back until programmed as to what to do, how, to whom, when, and for how long. Can you see that when we overemphasize programs at the expense of principles, we are in danger of losing the inspiration, the resourcefulness, that which should characterize Latter-day Saints. Then the very principle of character revelation is in jeopardy and we drift from a fundamental gospel principle!

"Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy." That much-quoted verse in the Book of Mormon is followed by this one:

Overmedication, over-programming, is a critically serious problem. It has been impossible to affect any reduction in programs.

“And the Messiah cometh in the *fullness of time*, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to *act for themselves* and *not to be acted upon*.” (2 Nephi 2:25-26.)

My feeling about our present opportunity with this change in funding is based on doctrine. For generations we have taught that the temporal salvation of the Saints depends upon independence, industry, thrift, and self-reliance. We would never stray from that in teaching about temporal things.

On the other hand, is it possible that we are doing the very thing spiritually that we have been resolutely resisting temporally; fostering dependence rather than independence, extravagance rather than thrift, indulgence rather than self-reliance.

We send two diverging signals and the Lord has told us: “If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25).

It is not that any one thing we have been doing is wrong, for we have acted with the best of intentions. Some of us remember when President Kimball saw the outlay of curriculum and the vast display of printed material. He said he was frightened, “We have done it all with the best intentions.” It is just that we can do far too much of good things. One or two reports of inactivity or extreme behavior and we rush to make corrections across the whole Church with more programs, more interviews, more assessments.

RISKS INVOLVED

THIS change will cause a reduction in programs and activities; that we intended. I quickly admit that there are risks involved when we simplify instructions or loosen up on regimentation. It is no different than what we face when our own children begin to mature and venture out into the world. Wise parents loosen the apron strings and help children to leave the nest to start anew the cycle of mortal life.

If we teach them correct principles rather than overburden them with too many instructions and programmed activities, they can be both free and spiritually safe in any nation, among any people, in any age. If we indulge them too much, or make them too dependent, we weaken them morally, then they will be compelled by nature itself to find the wrong way.

The only safe course is to make sure that they know the gospel, that they are acquainted with the scriptures, with revelation, with repentance, with how the Holy Ghost functions, with the voice of the Spirit.

A knowledge of right and wrong does not automatically result from programmed activities. It must be taught.

WE NEED TO BE TEMPERATE

WE need a sensible balancing of and a careful withdrawal of this medication of overprogramming. It can begin simply by restraining ourselves from writing more prescriptions, and by counseling local leaders not to replace the ones we phase out. So, the problem, Regional Representatives! There will be the tendency, we have seen it already when we began to phase out and withdraw, for the local leaders, conditioned as they are, to want to use that time and build up more detailed programs on their own.

We must use great care and be temperate. There are always those who will go to the extreme and want to cancel all activities. That is not what I am talking about, not at all. I am talking about a careful course correction.

There are always those who cry for a lifting of all the rules and regulations and laws and restraints. Always they claim that the doctrine of free agency demands that.

MORAL AGENCY

THE agency the Lord has given us is not a “free” agency. The term “free” agency is not found in the revelations. It is a *moral agency*. The Lord has given us freedom of choice:

“That every man may act in *doctrine* and *principle* pertaining to futurity, according to the *moral agency* which I have given unto him, that every man may be *accountable* for his own sins in the day of judgment.” (D&C 101:78.)

There is no agency without choice; there is no choice without freedom; there is no freedom without risk; nor true freedom without responsibility.

This change in budgeting will have the effect of returning much of the responsibility for teaching and counseling and activities to the family where it belongs. There will be fewer intrusions into the family schedules and into the family purses.

It will set a better balance between families being assessed time and money to support Church activities, and Church activities complementing what families should do for themselves and backing away to an extent so they can do it. That is, if all of us will understand and will do it.

I repeat, perhaps for one time only we have the opportunity to adjust that balance so that Church activities sustain parents and families rather than the other way around.

Now, there will be smaller budgets and fewer activities, fewer programs. That will leave a vacuum. Nothing likes a vacuum.

We must resist, absolutely resist, the temptation to program that vacuum. That space belongs to families. When we cut down on Sundays to the block plan that consolidated our meetings and left some time open, you know what happened.

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Now brethren, it is their time. Let them use it as they feel to do—for better or for worse. That is the risk. If we fail to teach them correct principles, teach them the doctrine, they will not know how to govern themselves.

If we do, then that vacuum will be filled with prayer and work and study, study for school, for instance, study the gospel. It will be filled with faith and reverence. It will be filled with the intimate love between husband and wife, with the tender love of parents to children. There will come a safe and virtuous dependency. Latter-day Saints will come to depend upon the Lord instead of upon the headquarters of the Church.

We are in mortality to receive a mortal body, to be tested, to prepare for Godhood. There is no testing without choice. Please, for this one time, honor the agency of the members, the families.

REORIENTATION OF THINKING

THIS change has given me renewed hope. It will require some considerable adjustment in our thinking and a change in deeply ingrained habits.

What we do we must do wisely, temperately. We can effect a course correction and we will see the Church delivered safely to the next generation. And then we can move into these developing nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is my personal conviction, I think it is obvious, that this change in budgeting will have *enormous* reactivating influence on those who have held back because they could not afford the cost of Church activities.

Stake leaders now *must* sponsor fewer activities, leaving most of the time and money to ward leaders. We have had reports, for instance, of stake presidents that, in one case, want to keep 65 percent of the allotment so that they can continue with their stake activities and leave the wards to themselves. Now, will you Regional Representatives watch that, to see that budgets are shifted down to the wards. It will need your attention. Ward leaders in turn, by this action, will be leaving more of both time and money to the families.

Another point. Some of us have missed the point that this is a reduction in both *time* and money. In fact, the letters that came out from the First Presidency over the last years, one of them issued five times, for instance, emphasize the reduction in the time required of Church members first, not just the money.

COMMERCIAL SUBSTITUTES

SOMETHING else we must watch; already there grows up

commercially oriented activities. Resourceful members of the Church saying, “Well, if the Church is going to back off on this, we can provide that” and you can see the obvious. Be careful of those. Be alert to them; beware of them.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS

WHEN President Benson was a stake president, he wrote the First Presidency proposing that the Church be operated on tithes alone. It took him a little while to get it done. He said: “We will depend on tithing more than ever to finance the programs of the Church. That will be possible only as all our leaders and more of our membership are full-tithe payers.” (President Ezra Taft Benson, Regional Representative Seminar, 2 April 1982.)

There should not be the slightest hesitancy to teach and preach and emphasize the principle of tithing. Tithing is a principle with a promise. Read in Malachi. That statement “prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it,” those blessings come simply from bringing your tithes and offerings. And He said “neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.” (See Malachi 3:10-11.) This is a principle with a promise, and it is the door to the temple.

The scriptures speak of tithes and of *offerings*, they do not speak of assessments or fund raising. To be an offering it has to be freely given—not assessed or requested.

SPIRITUAL VS. TEMPORAL

TITHING is not so much a matter of money as a matter of faith. While the change in budgeting may seem at first to be a temporal matter, the effect of it will be spiritual.

The Lord said that not at any time has he given either a law or a commandment which is temporal. (See D&C 29:34-35.) Of course he has not! Temporal means temporary and, whether his laws govern the physical or the spiritual, his laws are eternal!

BISHOP'S INTERVIEWS

ANOTHER “small thing” has happened, something unprecedented. You know that the guides and handbooks prescribe so many bishop's interviews and regulate the frequency of them that it would be literally impossible for a bishop to conduct them all without him having to neglect other things. Because of that, bishops often end up feeling inadequate or guilty.

When we over-emphasize programs at the expense of principles, we are in danger of losing inspiration. Individual revelation is in jeopardy!

I will read a statement from the *new* Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook that Brother Hanks introduced to us. Listen carefully:

"In large wards, the interviews of Aaronic Priesthood young men and young women may become burdensome. Bishops, *acting with inspiration and wisdom*, may wish to *adjust their scheduling and frequency of interviews*." Can you see the loosening up? "For example, some young members may need added attention while others may need less frequent interviews *than are suggested*. The bishop should interview priests and young women of corresponding age and may assign other youth interviews to his counselors. When a counselor encounters serious matters, such as transgressions that require confession, he should refer the member to the bishop without delay. Parents should be encouraged to stay close to their children, allowing local Church leaders to act in a supporting role."

Yesterday in our temple meeting we were talking about this and talking a little about the other meetings that the bishop is scheduled to be to. Every time there is a graduation or a change in something, they prescribe the bishop to be at the meeting. President Monson mentioned that when he was a bishop he followed the practice that if the counselor had something to do with the organization, he said, "Well even though the handbook said the bishop should be there, you will be the bishop for that meeting!" There can be a delegation.

THE FAMILY

NOW, in conclusion, I once thought the family was unfairly neglected in the Church, particularly in the organization. We have Melchizedek priesthood quorums to foster the interest of men; the Relief Society for sisters. We have Aaronic priesthood quorums for boys, young women for girls, primary for the children, and so on. Each organization has general and local presidencies and quorums and boards.

But for the family there is no such thing, not so much as a committee. The family has been everybody's business. Everybody's business, as we know, is nobody's business. I used to worry as we designed programs to fit the weak, unstable family, scheduling for men, women, children, youth, young adults, singles, everything, with too little attention paid to the effect it was having on stable families.

I remember when some pressed for a written form so families could report their compliance with the family home evening program. We did not permit it. And to this day we have some who want to program formal interviews between parents and their children.

I once wondered if we should create an agency to represent the family. But on more serious reflection, I changed my view.

There are some things which cannot be counted and should not be programmed. Matters with deepest doctrinal significance must be left to married couples and to parents to decide for themselves. We have referred them to gospel principles and left them to exercise their moral agency. Serious problems often come voluntarily to the bishop. That is the best way.

We cannot program individual and family prayer, indeed all

of the basic human relationships, the emotions and feelings, the bonds that bind man to woman and parents to children, all of the quiet influences, the sacred things that are centered in family life. The family is apart from and above the other organizations and, under the sealing authority, more enduring than them all.

While the family may suffer both neglect and intrusion because of our penchant to program everything, nevertheless, at the same time, the family has been protected. Therein lies a testimony of the genius of Church organization.

I have but to ask one "what if" question to convince you of that. What if, in the correlation process, we had organized a general board of the family? The very thought of it sends chills of horror through my being.

Now, you know why I feel as I do about this change.

The world opens to us. We move now into developing nations and into nations liberated from slavery, not unlike the Israelites as they came from Egypt. Their wilderness will be one of poverty in both temporal and spiritual knowledge. We must not indulge them as we

have indulged ourselves. If we do as we should, wherever there is a Latter-day Saint family, there the Church stands organized.

Alma spoke also of miracles worked by small means, and he included a warning: "Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means it did show unto them marvelous works." But, "they were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvelous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey." (Alma 37:41.)

Brothers and sisters, have *you* not heard that voice from the dust, the prophets of ancient times warning us, teaching us? Can we not now move into the future to meet the tremendous opportunities that are before us and take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, leaving much behind, not neglecting those fundamental doctrines, those fundamental gospel principles and ordinances. Then we will have acted in the offices to which we have been called with all diligence and the Lord will bless us.

I bear witness that He lives, that this is His church, that it is led by inspiration and that His spirit is guiding us, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ☪

There will be smaller budgets and fewer activities. That will leave a vacuum. We must absolutely resist the temptation to program that vacuum.