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## HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

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# THE EDITING OF A GENERAL AUTHORITY

When the news that Elder Ronald E. Poelman's October 1984 general conference address, "The Gospel and the Church," had been heavily edited, partially rewritten, and—horrors!—revideotaped to better conform with the views of his presiding Brethren, not a few Saints noted the eerie Truthspeak parallels to the year with George Orwell's *Big Brother* in his terrifying 1948 futuristic novel, 1984. At the time, SUNSTONE reported the events and excerpted the drastically changed paragraphs of the spoken address alongside the revised versions printed in the November 1984 *Ensign* (see SUNSTONE 10:1).

Prompted by numerous unsolicited requests during the past year for a complete parallel edition of both talks, I recently reread the offending address and compared it to the correlated edition. The distance of six years allowed the "Gee, ain't it awful!" temper of the earlier time to recede and the exercise in contrasts—especially with the more subtle changes—afforded insights into the institutional concerns of the editors.

The episode is still pregnant with numerous relevant issues: individual thought and conscience vs. organizational concerns about its official message; the sanitizing service of Correlation and Curriculum; censorship, honesty, and openness; and, not the least, the speech's topic—the relationship between the gospel and the Church. As friends and study groups revisit this incident, I am sure that a careful and charitable discussion can still benefit questing Saints.

In the following parallel texts, the italicized words were changed by the editors and the **bold** words were added or deleted.

ELBERT EUGENE PECK

## THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH

By Ronald E. Poelman

The First Quorum of the Seventy

*Speech*

Both the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ are true and divine. However, there is a distinction between them which is significant and **it is** very important that this distinction be understood. Of equal importance is understanding the essential relationship between the gospel and the Church. Failure to distinguish between the two and to comprehend their proper relationship may lead to confusion and misplaced priorities with unrealistic and therefore failed expectations. This in turn may result in diminished benefits and blessings and, in extreme instances, even disaffections.

As I attempt to describe and comment upon some distinguishing characteristics of the gospel and of the Church, at the

*Ensign*

Both the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ are true and divine, and there is an essential relationship between them that is significant and very important.

Understanding the proper relationship between the gospel and the Church will prevent confusion, misplaced priorities, and failed expectations and will lead to the realization of gospel goals through happy, fulfilling participation in the Church. Such understanding will avoid possible disaffection and will result in great personal blessings.

As I attempt to describe and comment upon the essential relationship between the gospel and the Church,

*Speech*

same time noting their essential relationships, it is my prayer that a perspective may be developed which will enhance the influence of both the gospel and the Church in our individual lives.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a divine and perfect plan. It is composed of eternal, unchanging principles and laws which are universally applicable to every individual regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The principles and laws of the gospel never change.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a divine institution administered by the priesthood of God. The Church has authority to teach correctly the principles and doctrines of the gospel and to administer its essential ordinances.

The gospel is the **substance of the** divine plan for personal, individual salvation and exaltation. The Church is the delivery system that provides the means and resources to implement this plan in each individual's life.

Procedures programs and policies are developed within the Church to help us realize gospel blessings according to our individual capacity and circumstances. Under divine direction, these policies, programs, and procedures *do change* from time to time as necessary to fulfill gospel purposes.

Underlying every aspect of Church administration and activity are the revealed eternal principles as contained in the scriptures. As individually and collectively we increase our knowledge, acceptance, and application of gospel principles, we become less dependent on Church programs. Our lives become gospel centered.

Sometimes traditions, customs, social practices and personal preferences of individual Church members may, through repeated or common usage be misconstrued as Church procedures or policies. Occasionally, such traditions, customs and practices may even be regarded by some as eternal gospel principles. Under such circumstances those who do not conform to these cultural standards may mistakenly be regarded as unorthodox or even unworthy. In fact, the eternal principles of the gospel and the divinely inspired Church do accommodate a broad spectrum of individual uniqueness and cultural diversity.

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The gospel of Jesus Christ is a divine and perfect plan. It is composed of eternal, unchanging principles, laws, **and ordinances** which are universally applicable to every individual regardless of time, place, or circumstance. *Gospel principles* never change.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is *the kingdom of God on earth*, administered by the priesthood of God. The Church has **the** authority to teach correctly the principles and doctrines of the gospel and to administer its essential ordinances.

The gospel is the divine plan for personal, individual salvation and exaltation. The Church is *divinely commissioned to provide* the means and resources *that* implement this plan in each individual's life.

Procedures, programs, and policies are developed within the Church to help us realize gospel blessings according to our individual capacity and circumstances. Under divine direction, these policies, programs, and procedures *may be changed* from time to time as necessary to fulfill gospel purposes.

Underlying every aspect of Church administration and activity are the revealed eternal principles contained in the scriptures. As individually and collectively we increase our knowledge, acceptance, and application of gospel principles, *we can more effectively utilize the Church to make our lives increasingly gospel centered.*

The eternal principles of the gospel *implemented through the divinely inspired Church apply to a wide variety of individuals in diverse cultures.*



Ronald E. Poelman, whose talk was revised from distinguishing "between the gospel and the Church" to noting the "essential harmony between the gospel and the Church."

Speech

The conformity we require should be according to God's standards. The orthodoxy upon which we insist must be founded in fundamental principles **and** eternal law, **including free agency and the divine uniqueness of the individual.** It is important therefore to know the difference between eternal gospel principles which are **unchanging, universally applicable and cultural norms** which may vary with time and circumstance.

*The source of this perspective is found in the scriptures and may appear to be presented in a rather unorganized and untidy format. The Lord could have presented the gospel to us in a manual, systematically organized by subject, perhaps using examples and illustra-*

Ensign

Therefore, as we live the gospel and participate in the Church, the conformity we require **of ourselves and of others** should be according to God's standards. The orthodoxy upon which we insist must be founded in fundamental principles, eternal law, **and direction given by those authorized in the Church.**

*A necessary perspective is gained by studying and pondering the scriptures.*

tions. However the eternal principles and divine laws of God are revealed to us through accounts of individual lives in a variety of circumstances and conditions.

Reading the scriptures, we learn the gospel as it is taught by various messengers at different times and places.

We see the consequences as it is accepted or rejected, as its principles are applied or not to **varying degrees and by many different people**. In the scriptures we discover that varying institutional forms, procedures, regulations and ceremonies are utilized, all divinely designed to implement eternal principles. The practices and procedures change; the principles do not.

Through scripture study we may learn eternal principles and how to **distinguish them from and** relate them to institutional resources. As we liken the scriptures unto ourselves we can better utilize the **institutional resources of the modern** restored Church to learn, live and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A favorite scriptural source for me is the Old Testament Book of Leviticus. It is basically a handbook for Hebrew priests and contains many rules, regulations, rituals and ceremonies which seem strange and inapplicable to us. It also contains eternal principles of the gospel which are familiar and very much applicable to everyone.

It is interesting and enlightening to read the 19th chapter of Leviticus, noting both the principles and the rules and practices.

In the first two verses we read, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel. . . ." (Leviticus 19:1- 2.) Here is the principle of revelation. God speaks to his children through prophets. He does so today.

Continuing, the Lord says to Moses, ". . . say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2.) Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48.) Here is an eternal gospel principle.

There follow other eternal principles, some from the Ten Commandments. Also included are rules and programs intended to implement these principles among the

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We see the consequences as *the gospel* is accepted or rejected **by individuals and** as its principles are applied or not.

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There follow other eternal principles, some from the Ten Commandments. Also included are rules and programs intended to implement these principles among the

ancient Hebrews in their particular circumstances.

For example, the divinely directed responsibility to care for the poor is taught. A program is presented, viz. providing food for the poor by leaving the gleanings of the crops and not reaping the corners of the fields. (Leviticus 19:9-10.) Current programs to care for the poor are much different. The divine law is the same. Yet another principle underlies both programs, ancient and modern, i.e. those being assisted are given opportunity to participate in helping themselves to the extent of their capacity.

In verse 13 the principle of honesty is taught accompanied by a rule requiring employers to pay employees for their work at the end of each day. Generally, today that rule is not necessary. The eternal principle of honesty is implemented by other rules and practices.

Verse 27 contains a rule about personal grooming, it is clearly not applicable to us. However, we also have standards of dress and grooming. Neither is an eternal principle; both are intended to help us implement and share gospel principles.

The principle of forgiveness is set forth in the same chapter of Leviticus, verse 18, concluding with the second great commandment, ". . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:" with the added divine imprimatur, ". . . I am the Lord."

Every Church member has **not only** the opportunity, right and privilege to receive a personal witness regarding gospel principles and Church practices, **but has the need and obligation to obtain such assurance by exercising his free agency, thereby fulfilling one purpose of his mortal probation.**

Without such *assurance*, one may feel confused and perhaps even burdened by what may appear to be simply institutional requirements of the Church.

*Indeed, it is not enough that we obey the commandments and counsel of Church leaders. In response to study, prayer and by the influence of the Holy Spirit we may seek and obtain an individual, personal witness that the principle or counsel is correct and divinely inspired. Then we can give enlightened, enthusiastic obedience, utilizing the Church*

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For example, the divinely directed responsibility to care for the poor is taught. A program is presented, *namely*, providing food for the poor by leaving the gleanings of the crops and not reaping the corners of the fields. (See Lev. 19:9-10.) Current programs to care for the poor are much different. The divine law is the same. Yet another principle underlies both programs, ancient and modern: those being assisted are given opportunity to participate in helping themselves to the extent of their capacity.

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Without such a *witness*, one may feel confused and perhaps even burdened by what may appear to be simply institutional requirements of the Church.

*We should obey* the commandments and counsel of Church leaders; *but also through study, through prayer*, and by the influence of the Holy Spirit, *we should seek and obtain an individual, personal witness that the principle or counsel is correct and divinely inspired.* Then we can give enlightened, enthusiastic obedience, utilizing the Church **as a means**

through which to give allegiance, time, talent and other resources without reluctance or resentment.

Happy, fulfilling participation in the Church results when we relate *institutional* goals, programs and policies to gospel principles and to personal eternal goals. When we *understand the difference* between the gospel and the Church **and the appropriate function of each** in our daily lives, we are much more likely to do the right things for the right reasons. *Institutional discipline is replaced by self discipline. Supervision is replaced by righteous initiative* and a sense of divine accountability. The Church aids us in our effort to use our free agency creatively, not to invent our own values **and** principles, *but to discover and adopt* the eternal truths of the gospel. Gospel living is a process of continuous individual renewal and improvement until the person is prepared and qualified to enter comfortably and with confidence into the presence of God.

My brothers and sisters, by inclination, training and experience, most of my life I have sought understanding by the accumulation of facts and the application of reason. I continue to do so. However, that which I know most surely and which has most significantly and positively affected my life I do not know by facts and reason alone, but rather by the comforting, confirming witness of the Holy Spirit.

By that same Spirit I testify that God is our Father, the Jesus of Nazareth is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh and that he is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind and each of us. Through his atoning sacrifice, redemption and exaltation are offered as a free gift to all who will accept by faith, repentance and sacred covenants.

May each of us continue to learn and apply the eternal principles of the gospel, utilizing fully and appropriately the resources of the divine restored Church.

In the words of the Nephite leader Pahoran, "... may (we) rejoice in the great privilege of our church and in the cause of our Redeemer and our God." (Alma 61:14.) In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

through which to give allegiance, time, talent, and other resources without reluctance or resentment.

Happy, fulfilling participation in the Church results when we relate *Church* goals, programs, and policies to gospel principles and to personal eternal goals. When we *see the harmony* between the gospel and the Church

in our daily lives, we are much more likely to do the right things for the right reasons. *We will exercise self discipline and righteous initiative guided by Church leaders* and a sense of divine accountability. The Church aids us in our effort to use our free agency creatively, not to invent our own values, principles, **and interpretations**, *but to learn and live* the eternal truths of the gospel. Gospel living is a process of continuous individual renewal and improvement until the person is prepared and qualified to enter comfortably and with confidence into the presence of God.

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