

My Understanding of the Role Money Plays in My Religion

Your original speaker today was to have been a young man by the name of Michael O'Neil. Unexpectedly, one of his daughters recently announced that she was engaged and wanted to bring her fiancé home to meet her parents this very weekend and make all of the preparations for their future wedding. So, we are happy for him and his family that their daughter has found her sweetheart, but I am sorry for you that you will not get to hear him speak.

I appreciate Dr. Rahman allowing me to speak to you in Michael's place, and I acknowledge that I have drawn heavily upon materials he gathered.

Dr. Rahman has suggested I should speak to the question: **What does The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teach about the role or place of money in our lives?**

In 1995 the leadership of my church issued a proclamation to the world about the family, which reads in part as follows: "By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families" (*The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, September 23, 1995, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles).

So, it is my faith and belief that as a parent I have a divine obligation to not only preside over my family in love and righteousness, but I am also responsible to provide the necessities of life for them and to protect them. This means that money plays an important role in my life.

We might ask ourselves, is this a teaching unique to today or have others from the past taught this same principle?

I notice a similar thought was expressed by Paul, the Apostle, in his letter to his younger co-worker, Timothy (1 Timothy 5:8), when he said:

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

Also, when our primeval parents, Adam and Eve, were in the Garden of Eden, after they had partaken of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and brought mortality upon mankind, and after they were cast out of the Garden into the lone and dreary world, the Lord said, in part, unto Adam:

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:17-19).

I take that to mean that Adam, and therefore all mankind, was to work to provide

for himself and his family from the time he was old enough to work until he died. Rightly looked upon, work is a blessing and a necessity for a healthy and happy life. Adam was also told that the ground was cursed “for thy sake,” that is for the sake of man. The Creator knew what he was doing and work is an important element in achieving happiness in this life.

You might ask: **Are there any restrictions placed upon what I can or should do with my earnings?**

In the Old Testament, the ancient prophet Malachi, in speaking on behalf of the Lord to the children of Israel, said:

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

“ . . .

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and 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” (Malachi 3: 8, 10).

This same principle of tithing was reintroduced by Joseph Smith when this church was restored in the early 1800s. And so from my youth up, I was taught the principle of tithing. I even remember when I was a child I learned this little rhyme:

“I can tell you what tithing is,
I can tell you every time.
Ten cents of every dollar,
And a penny of every dime.”

By the time I reached adulthood, the principle of paying tithing was second nature. I can honestly say that the blessings promised by Malachi have been answered upon my head. I have always had enough to meet the legitimate needs of myself and my family. It is a principle of faith. The payment of tithes does not mean that a person will necessarily be wealthy, but it does bring a certain discipline in money matters with it, and brings me peace of mind to know that I am square with the Lord and that I am helping to further the building of His kingdom, as I see it. Tithing has been referred to as the Lord’s law of finance.

You might ask a further question of me, then: **What if, through your own industry or through inheritance, you acquire more money than you need for your own basic needs or those of your family? Are you free to use that surplus in any way you choose?**

An ancient American prophet answered these questions in this wise:

“ . . . ye . . . will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish. . . .

“ . . .
“And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation for withholding your substance, *which doth not belong to you but to God* to whom also your life belongeth and yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

“I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, *I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world*” (Italics added) (Mosiah 4:16-18, 22, 23).

Well, that’s pretty direct and blunt, isn’t it. For me, that says that all that I have by way of worldly goods or wealth is really a gift from God, a stewardship, if you will, and that one day I will have to account to God for how I have used it.

You might then ask me, **how do you as a member of your church meet this obligation to assist your fellow-men?**

Well, in several ways.

“The first Sunday of each month is designated as a Fast Sunday, and Latter-day Saints are asked to fast for twenty-four hours and donate at least the value of the meals not eaten as fast offerings. Fast offerings are cash or in-kind donations given to the BISHOP [who is the local ecclesiastical authority] to help the needy. . . .

“ . . .

“Special fasts are occasionally proclaimed by the [leaders of our Church] when urgent needs arise. . . . [For example] in 1985, Church members observed two special fast days and donated \$10,465,000 to hunger relief and community development projects in Africa, South America, and elsewhere. . . .

“Historically, fast offerings have seldom been sufficient to provide for all the welfare needs of the Church, and shortages have been met from general Church funds. . . . (CR [Apr. 1974], p. 184).” (FAST OFFERINGS, pp. 501-2, Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Macmillan Publishing Company, Vol. 2, 1992).

In the early 1930s the entire world was engulfed in an economic depression. In the United States the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, and on that day desperate speculators sold 16,400,000 shares of stocks. When the year ended, the government estimated that the stock-market crash had cost investors 40 billion dollars. That doesn’t sound like much today, but back then, it was catastrophic. As a youth, I can remember unemployed men coming

to our front door and asking for food. My mother never turned anyone away. She would invite them to wait outside the back door while she fixed a sandwich and other things for them. Members of my own faith were suffering along with everyone else.

It was in this environment that the Church developed a plan to assist the unemployed which is referred to as the Welfare Plan. The basis of Church welfare programs is individual self-reliance, not a handout that might rob the receiver of self-respect. Members are encouraged to provide for themselves before calling on others for help. Those needing additional help turn first to their families. When members and their families have done all they can and still have welfare needs, the Church provides *temporary, life-sustaining* help so that the family can get back on its feet.

Local leaders determine needs by consulting with the individual or family. The bishop, who is the leader of the local congregation and who knows his people best, asks those who need help to accept a work assignment tailored to their abilities. They may be asked to work in a Church welfare operation, beautify the grounds of the local church, or give service to other needy members. Whatever the assignment, the Church believes that people who work for what they receive are more likely to preserve their self-respect and maintain their self-reliance.

Financing for Church welfare programs comes from fast offerings just mentioned. In addition, volunteers provide a substantial amount of the work on Church welfare farms, in canneries, dairy ranches and in other facilities. During 2001, volunteers gave over 400,000 man-days of labor. As a young man I well remember while I was still in school and later after I started full-time employment, working at a cannery owned and operated by the Church every month, first while I was in school in the Palo Alto area and then later after I moved back to L.A., in the Inglewood area, and sometimes we volunteered once a week during the peak canning periods for certain fruit. We thought it was great fun and there was wonderful sociality and at the end of the evening we felt like not only had we learned something, but we had helped someone who was not able to help him- or herself at that moment of time. It gave us a wonderful feeling.

When I moved my family to the Pasadena area, several times a year we would also work on a dairy and poultry ranch the Church owns in Chino.

In addition to trying to take care of our own people at home, humanitarian assistance rendered by the Church has now reached 47 countries and is valued at tens of millions of dollars annually. Since 1985, supplies that have been distributed include 38,833 tons of food, 4,435 tons of medical equipment, 42,972 tons of surplus clothing and 3, 312 tons of educational supplies. The Church has established Latter-day Saint Charities, an organization that distributes food, offers assistance during times of disaster, funds and encourages projects that benefit stricken communities, teaches self-reliance and helps people begin small business enterprises in their own homes.

Last year Dr. Rahman and his wife heard President Gordon B. Hinckley, the

present president of the Church, describe a program designed to help those in third-world countries who do not have the funds to obtain an education. It is dubbed the Perpetual Education Fund. About 300,000 people from throughout the church have contributed to the Fund thus far. Nearly all the countries of Latin America, the Philippines and several countries in Asia and Africa have been benefitted by the 6,000 loans granted so far. Imagine the difference in the life of a young lady in Mexico who worked in a restaurant making \$130 a month. After a loan of \$600 that paid for a year of schooling, she now works in a dental office and has a monthly income of \$660. After they are on their feet and working, such individuals then repay over time what they have borrowed so that others can then be offered assistance.

Question: What further teachings do you give to your people concerning the use of money?

We are taught to keep our needs simple; to always spend less than we earn; to avoid taking unnecessary risks financially; to avoid debt like a plague and only borrow when absolutely necessary, such as for the purchase of a home, the gaining of an education, or the purchase of a car. We also teach people to save, even if it is just a small amount, each month. Listen to the teachings of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the current president of the Church:

In October of 1998, he said in a special meeting with only the men of the church, world-wide: “I wish to speak to you about temporal matters.” He reviewed the experiences referred to in the Old Testament of Joseph in Egypt and the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine. Then he said this:

“I am suggesting that the time has come to get our houses in order.

“So many of our people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings.”

He continued:

“We have witnessed in recent weeks wide and fearsome swings in the markets of the world. The economy is a fragile thing. A stumble in the economy in Jakarta or Moscow can immediately affect the entire world. It can eventually reach down to each of us as individuals. There is a portent of stormy weather ahead to which we had better give heed.

“I am troubled by the huge consumer installment debt which hangs over the people of the nation, including our own people. . . .

“I recognize that it may be necessary to borrow to get a home, of course. But let us buy a home that we can afford and thus ease the payments which will constantly hang over our heads without mercy or respite for as long as 30 years. . . .

He concluded: “I urge you, brethren to look to the condition of your finances. I urge you to be modest in your expenditures, discipline yourselves in your purchases to avoid

debt to the extent possible. Pay off debt as quickly as you can and free yourselves from bondage.

“This is part of the temporal gospel in which we believe. May the Lord bless you, my beloved brethren, to set your houses in order.” (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 51).

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks. I hope I have shared something that might be of interest to you. I feel that I have received far more than I have been able to give. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and to get better acquainted with so many distinguished people of good will in our community.

For those of you that counsel with new young couples getting married, I brought a few copies of a talk given by Marvin J. Ashton, in April of 1975, entitled *One for the Money: Guide to Family Finance*, which you may find of interest and assistance. Thank you, and may God bless each of you in your ongoing efforts to improve the lot of men and women in the world!