

CONSERVATION THROUGH CONSECRATION

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Man's relationship with and responsibility to creation is a subject about which God has spoken abundantly. Numerous scriptural passages affirm the intrinsic value and eternal nature of the Lord's creations and instruct us in our stewardship over them. These doctrines culminate in the principle of consecration, the giving of all we have and are to the purposes of the Lord. In Doctrine and Covenants 104:13–18, the Lord clearly outlines the concepts necessary to the es-

tablishment of a system based on consecration: first, the acknowledgment that all things are the Lord's; second, a knowledge of the Lord's purposes; third, an understanding that the Lord has given man agency and made him a steward; and fourth, a recognition that, for the system to work, it must be done in the Lord's way. I will use these four principles as a framework for understanding consecration and related doctrines. I will then explore how application of these principles would alleviate many conservation problems centering around human use of resources. Finally, I will outline how several programs of the Church currently put these doctrines into practice.

Principles of Consecration

1. *All things are the Lord's.* "I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine" (D&C 104:14).

The Prophet Brigham Young stated, "We are not our own, we are bought with a price, we

are the Lord's; our time, our talents, our gold and silver, our wheat and fine flour, our wine and our oil, our cattle, and all there is on this earth that we have in our possession is the Lord's. . . . these mountains are His; the valleys, the timber, the water, the soil; in fine, the earth and its fulness."¹

Even while possessing great power and works without end (see Moses 1:38), our Father is not an indifferent creator. Jesus taught that the Father is aware of and cares for even the lowliest sparrow and the grass of the field (see Luke 12:6, 27–28). The Lord affirmed the intrinsic value of creation as He pronounced it "good" following each major step of Creation (see Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), long before man's advent on the scene. Latter-day Saint doctrine teaches that, like man, plants and animals were created spiritually before they existed physically upon the earth (see Moses 3:5). Furthermore, the earth and all life upon it were not only created by the power of the Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ (see Moses 1:32), but shall also be redeemed from physical death by that same power. In Doctrine and Covenants 29:24–25, we learn that the Lord designs to save all the works of His hands: "All things shall become new, even the heaven and the earth, and all the fulness thereof, both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; and not one hair, neither mote, shall be lost, for it is the workmanship of mine hand." The Prophet Joseph Smith learned that the resurrection will apply to the earth itself, as well as to beasts, "creeping things," and fowls of the air, and that all these will enjoy "eternal felicity" in the kingdom of God (see D&C 77:1–4).

Recognition of all life as sacred and eternal, having God as its author and owner, should evoke in us a deep reverence and humility in our approach to the earth and all upon it. Astonishingly, I have been asked by some why we need to be concerned about our use of resources when we know that the earth will eventually be renewed. Such an attitude, in my opinion, not only abuses the love and generosity with which our

Father lends us His marvelous creation, but also disrespects the power of Christ in providing for its renewal; one may as well ask, "If everyone will be resurrected, then what have we got against murder?" Similarly, interpreting prophecy of natural disturbances prior to the Savior's Second Coming (see Revelation 6:12–14) as justification for contributing to the earth's degradation is as erroneous as assuming that prophecy of increased wickedness in the last days gives us license to be wicked. The fact that something is prophesied does not make it the will of God. "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:7, see also Luke 17:1). The account of the prophet Enoch pleading with the Lord on behalf of the earth is a particularly poignant example of the love and compassion with which true servants of the Lord view the earth (see Moses 7:49, 54, 58).

When we sense the divine love of God for all of His creations and that His plan provides for the eventual immortality of all of it, it is clear why, in the words of the Prophet Joseph F. Smith, "men cannot worship the Creator and look with careless indifference upon his creatures. . . . Love of nature is akin to the love of God; the two are inseparable."²

2. *The purposes of the Lord.* "And it is my purpose to provide. . . . For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare" (D&C 104:15, 17).

In order for us to view and treat the earth in a consecrated fashion, we must first understand the purposes of the Lord in creating it. Scripture teaches that man is unique among the creations of God in that our spirits are His children, with the potential to become like our Father (see Romans 8:16–17; D&C 93:20, 23). Through modern revelation, we know of the premortal existence of our spirits and of the necessity of our leaving the Father's presence and coming to this earth in order to obtain bodies, learn through our experiences the difference between good and evil, and progress toward becoming more like our Father (see Abraham 3:22–26). The Lord has revealed

that this is the purpose for which the earth was created and that His work is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

The Lord has told us in Doctrine and Covenants 49:16–17 that the earth will “answer the end [or purpose] of its creation” in being “filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.” What does this mean? We know, from modern revelation describing the premortal battle to preserve man’s agency (see Moses 4:3), that we were allowed to choose whether or not to come to the earth, and that “a third part” of our brothers and sisters, through their rebellion, chose not to come (D&C 29:36). Therefore, the rest of us chose to come and have the right to do so. As stated by Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The scriptures plainly teach that the spirits of mankind are known and numbered unto God before their earthly advent. . . . The population of the earth is fixed according to the number of spirits appointed to take tabernacles of flesh upon this planet; when these have all come forth in the order and time appointed, then, and not till then, shall the end come.”³ The Lord has assured us that His purpose is to provide for His children (see D&C 104:15) and for all His creatures (see v. 13). In order to do so, and with a knowledge of how many of us are coming here, He designed the earth so that there would be “enough and to spare” (see v. 17) if we would do things His way.

Immediately, we will note a contrast between the Lord’s explanation of the earth’s purpose and the beliefs of those who advocate human population control. Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said,

Apparently wise and powerful people blame poverty and famine on there being too many people in some parts of the earth or in all the earth. With great passion they argue for limiting births, as if that would produce human happiness. . . . Heavenly Father would not command men and women to marry and to multiply and replenish the earth if the children they invited

into mortality would deplete the earth. Since there is enough and to spare, the enemy of human happiness as well as the cause of poverty and starvation is not the birth of children. It is the failure of people to do with the earth what God could teach them to do if only they would ask and then obey, for they are agents unto themselves.⁴

Though certainly a minority in the discipline, there are conservationists whose views align with those of Latter-day Saints:

When applied to human problems and institutions and absent its moral dimension, the Malthusian argument becomes absurdly reductionistic: it confuses the biological notion of overpopulation with the political, moral, and social problems of poverty, sustainable food production, or loss of biodiversity. Claiming that there are too many people does not adequately explain all the complexities and agonies of species loss, environmental destruction, global warming, war, poverty, famine or globalization. . . . Increasing human population is not the ultimate cause of the decline of biodiversity. . . . Whether people value and are able to practice biological conservation is of far greater significance than their sheer numbers.⁵

A 2000 report of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development stated, “Even for those environmental problems that are concentrated in countries with rapid population growth, it is not necessarily the case that population increase is the main root cause, nor that halting population growth would resolve the problem.”⁶ Nonetheless, the overriding attitude we will encounter among conservationists is that human population growth is “a root cause of our collective ecological and social disasters,”⁷ and that “the population problem is stunningly clear and ought to be beyond denial.”⁸

Understanding the Lord’s purpose for the earth, we will recognize that the ultimate solution to our environmental problems is to be found in something other than population control. However, Latter-day Saints must be extremely careful not to wrongfully judge those

who have been taught that the environmentally responsible thing to do is to limit births. We would hope that they, in turn, would respect choices that arise from the responsible application of differing beliefs. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Latter-day Saints to exemplify the kind of responsible behavior that would allow the Lord's intended system to work. As stated by Aaron Kelson, "Those of us who believe that the ecological problems caused by people are at least as much the result of what we are rather than how many of us there are, and Latter-day Saints are certainly among this number, have a tremendous responsibility. We have a solemn obligation to distance ourselves from those practices and trends that lead to the destruction of the Creation and to the related suffering of our fellow beings. We have an obligation to show the world that people can live peaceably with the Creation."⁹ It is to this responsibility that we next turn our attention.

3. *Man's agency and stewardship.* "For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures. . . . I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves" (D&C 104:13, 17).

The Lord will not violate our agency and has sent us here for the very purpose of our exercising it, in order that we may progress. In the words of Brigham Young, "Every mortal being must stand up as an intelligent, organized capacity, and choose or refuse the good, and thus act for himself. . . . Man's independence must be held inviolate; it must be reserved to each and every individual: all must have the privilege of acting upon it."¹⁰

Because of agency, there is necessarily accountability. The Prophet Spencer W. Kimball stated, "Each member of the Church has a sacred spiritual or temporal trust for which there is accountability. Because all things belong to the Lord, we are held responsible for how we . . . use our bodies, minds, and properties."¹¹ Much has

been written in the Church about stewardship over the blessings of the Lord. From the earliest instruction to Adam to "keep" the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15), to modern revelation charging us to use the earth's resources "with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" (D&C 59:20) and pronouncing wo upon those who waste flesh without a need (see D&C 49:21; see also footnote *a*), stewardship has been the guiding principle for our interaction with the Lord's creations. In the words of George B. Handley, "It is not enough to take pleasure and show respect for nature; Latter-day Saint scripture requires us to use its resources wisely and justly."¹²

Our agency affects the earth in less overt ways as well. Throughout ancient and modern scripture, it is clear that the productivity of the earth is tied to the righteousness of its inhabitants. It cannot yield its strength to us when we do not keep the Creator's commandments. Hence, one of the underlying causes of current environmental degradation is undoubtedly that the earth groans under the burden of wickedness upon its face (see Moses 7:48).¹³

In summary, God set the earth up so that it would provide abundantly for all His children who were to come here, if we fulfilled our stewardships properly. However, if we disregard His instructions concerning the earth's resources, we cannot expect the promised abundance for all (see D&C 82:10; see also 130:20–21). The Lord gave us our agency, and we, through wickedness, have crippled the earth in its ability to provide and have, through selfishness, misused that which it does provide. If there is scarcity, it is not because the Lord miscalculated. It is because we have not used our agency to do things in the Lord's way.

4. *In the Lord's Own Way.* "But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low. . . . Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion . . . unto the poor and the

needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (D&C 104:16, 18).

The Lord’s way to ensure that there is enough for all is through equality. Doctrine and Covenants 49, the same section that teaches the purpose of the earth in being filled with the measure of man, reiterates: “The beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance. But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (vv. 19–20).

The Lord has instructed us repeatedly concerning the necessity of equality through consecration, including the voluntary giving of our means, time, and talents for the care of those in need, both spiritually and temporally. In fact, every reference found under “consecration” in the Topical Guide of the Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible deals with equality and imparting to the poor. “For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things” (D&C 78:6); an essential characteristic of a Zion people is that there are “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18; see also 4 Nephi 1:3). Though Latter-day Saints no longer practice a full formal implementation of the law of consecration, such as the united order practiced in the early Church, members still covenant to adhere to the principles of the law of consecration, knowing “we shall one day apply it in its fulness.”¹⁴

If members of the Church properly understood the covenant of consecration, they would feel to say with Brigham Young, “The coat I have on my back is not mine, and never was; the Lord put it in my possession honorably, and I wear it; but if he wishes for it, and all there is under it, he is welcome to the whole. I do not own a house, or a single farm of land, a horse, mule, carriage, or wagon . . . but what the Lord gave me, and if he wants them, he can take them at his pleasure, whether he speaks for them, or takes them without speaking.”¹⁵ The difficulty arises in that for now, He generally does not speak for them, leav-

ing them instead in our stewardship. Hence, Brigham Young observed, the law of consecration “was one of the first commandments or revelations given to this people after they had the privilege of organizing themselves as a Church. . . . I observed then, and I now think, that it will be one of the last revelations which the people will receive into their hearts and understand, of their own free will and choice.”¹⁶ We begin preparing now to give all our worldly possessions by “being less possessed by them.”¹⁷ As we do so, not just in theory, but in deed, we can begin to provide in the Lord’s way. Modest consumption and generous giving, not just benevolent attitudes, activate the Lord’s system of providing for all His children.

Consecration as a Key to Conservation

“We live in a world of waste. Too often our natural resources are squandered. We live in a world of want. Some enjoy the lap of luxury, yet others stare starvation in the face. Food, shelter, clothing, and love are not found by all. . . . We live in a world of wars. Some are political in nature, while others are economic by definition.” – President Thomas S. Monson¹⁸

Would the Lord’s system really provide for all? Further, would it contribute to alleviating the stress humans are putting on the environment? Admittedly, consecration emphasizes the distribution of natural resources to humanity and would only indirectly incorporate conservation of endangered species, wilderness areas, and ecosystem processes. However, a people able to live in a consecrated way would also be capable of applying the same principles and attitudes to the conservation of public lands, species, and ecosystems. A consecrated acknowledgment of all things as the Lord’s, as we take only what we need and share what we have with others, would motivate us to conserve and protect all of God’s creations.

Focusing on conservation issues relating directly to human use of resources, is there really enough and to spare? Could we actually feed the world now and in the future? According to

a 2000 report of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, "World food production has increased at a faster rate than population and more food per capita is available now than ever before in world history."¹⁹ A number of studies have attempted to estimate what it will take to feed the projected population of the earth in the future. One such study concludes:

Anticipated advances in biotechnology and sustainable land management, in combination with the availability of high-quality lands, suggest a level of food production that will sustain twice the current global population. . . . From a global land-productivity point of view, the specter of Malthusian scenarios seems unwarranted. . . . Famine and starvation of people of some countries are not the result of the innate inability of global land resources to produce the necessary food, but are the result of an absence of political will in most countries.²⁰

Despite the fact that global per capita income at the close of the century was 2.6 times what it was in 1950,²¹ poverty persists for a large portion of humanity. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), one fifth of the world's population accounts for 86 percent of the world's expenditure on consumption and consumes sixteen times more than the poorest one fifth of the world's population.²² Gross inequality occurs within as well as among nations.

Certainly the law of consecration would enable us to relieve economic inequality and feed the world, but would it reduce pressures on the environment? It appears that poverty and environmental damage go hand in hand, as "many people living in subsistence economies have few alternatives to depleting their natural resources. . . . At the same time, rapid urbanization and industrialization in many developing countries are creating high levels of air and water pollution, which often hit the poor hardest."²³ Various studies have identified poverty, as well as wealth and greed, as root causes or proximate causes of

environmental degradation.²⁴ A 1999 UNEP report concluded, "The continued poverty of the majority of the planet's inhabitants and excessive consumption by the minority are the two major causes of environmental degradation."²⁵ Others who note that the link between poverty and environmental degradation is complex and still indeterminate, nonetheless conclude: "The key issue . . . for sustainable development in general, is one of *equity*—equity as a major requirement (and a necessary component of a sustainable future) internationally, nationally, and intergenerationally. . . . The inequitable distribution of income, natural resources, and power, is a major cause of both the continued impoverishment of populations and the degradation of the natural environment."²⁶ Another scholar states:

Greed and egocentrism are the root causes of social and ecological unsustainability. . . . Sustainability becomes possible only when we realize that the Planet Earth has "*just enough resources to satisfy everybody's needs but not everybody's greeds.*" . . . Equity in resource distribution . . . is in fact an essential requirement for sustainable development in Third World countries. Implicit in this concept is a belief that improvement and maintenance of ecosystem health and integrity also requires a parallel improvement in the health and life of the rural poor.²⁷

While totalitarian enforcement of equity is not justifiable, it appears that equity is an ecological necessity.

Because the health of the global environment hinges upon the consumption patterns of humanity, the potential benefits to the earth of the law of consecration are profound. George B. Handley writes, "With greater awareness of the environmental consequences of our economic choices, Mormons may sense a greater urgency to devote themselves religiously to the covenant of consecration."²⁸ It is time for Latter-day Saints to take stock. Our individual performance is for each of us to evaluate and improve upon individually; just as Christ replaced the micromanagement of the Pharisees with the motivations of

a higher law, similarly, the Church does not dictate in matters of conscience and personal spirituality. Rather, as explained by the Prophet Joseph Smith, we teach correct principles and then allow people to govern themselves.²⁹ However, as with other principles, the Church has provided numerous programs, which will help us along our way to becoming a consecrated people.

Church Programs Embodying Consecration

“It has always been a cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints that a religion which has not the power to save people temporally and make them prosperous and happy here, cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually, to exalt them in the life to come.” – Joseph F. Smith³⁰

In the early days of the Church, the law of consecration was fully implemented as the united order, with members consecrating their properties to the Church and receiving in return a stewardship appropriate to their needs (see D&C 42:30–34). But, as explained by Brigham Young, “through the selfishness of some, which is idolatry, through their covetousness, which is the same, and the lustful desire of their minds,”³¹ they were unable to establish a Zion society. Just as the idolatry of Moses’s people caused them to receive the Ten Commandments instead of the higher law (see Joseph Smith Translation, Exodus 34:1–2), the latter-day Church received the law of tithing in place of the fullness of the law of consecration (see the historical introduction to D&C 119). In addition to tithing, a number of other programs and practices of the Church are based upon the principle of consecration.

Tithing. Tithing, the giving of one tenth of our increase, “teaches us to control our desires and passions for the things of this world. . . . The law of tithing prepares us to live the higher law of consecration.”³² Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Twelve urges, “Pay your tithing as a declaration that possession of material goods and the accumulation of worldly wealth are *not* the uppermost goals of your existence.”³³

Fast offerings. Along with the law of tithing, Latter-day Saints observe a monthly fast on behalf of the poor. As explained by President Spencer W. Kimball, “Each member should contribute a generous fast offering for the care of the poor and the needy. This offering should at least be the value of the two meals not eaten while fasting. . . . I think that when we are affluent, as many of us are, that we ought to be very, very generous. . . . I think we should . . . give, instead of the amount saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more when we are in a position to do it.”³⁴ President Gordon B. Hinckley, while serving as the First Counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, noted, “Think, my brethren, of what would happen if the principles of fast day and the fast offering were observed throughout the world. The hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. . . . A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere.”³⁵

Welfare system. Fast offerings support the welfare system of the Church. As explained by Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Lord’s way consists of helping people help themselves. The poor are exalted because they work for the temporary assistance they receive, they are taught correct principles, and they are able to lift themselves from poverty to self-reliance. The rich are made low because they humble themselves to give generously of their means to those in need.” Elder Wirthlin continues, describing the welfare efforts of the Church in 1999: “In North America today, 80 Church farms produce nutritious food for the needy. Eighty cannery facilities preserve and package this life-sustaining food. More than 100 bishops’ storehouses stand ready to assist more than 10,000 bishops and branch presidents as they carry out their sacred obligation to seek out and assist the poor and needy in their wards and branches. Fifty Deseret Industries operations offer work and training to thousands. Worldwide, 160 employment centers help more than

78,000 people find jobs each year.”³⁶ These facilities are staffed largely by volunteers and missionaries. (In reference to sound stewardship practices on Church-owned lands, this statement by then Elder Ezra Taft Benson is also of interest: “May I remind you that it generally takes several times as much land to produce a given amount of food when grains are fed to livestock and we consume the meat. Let us be careful not to overdo beef cattle and other livestock projects on our welfare farms.”³⁷)

A few years following the introduction of the welfare program, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., of the First Presidency, said of it:

When the Welfare Plan gets thoroughly into operation . . . we shall not be so very far from carrying out the great fundamentals of the United Order. . . . In lieu of residues and surpluses which were accumulated and built up under the United Order, we, today, have our fast offerings, our Welfare donations, and our tithing, all of which may be devoted to the care of the poor . . . Furthermore, we had under the United Order a bishop’s storehouse in which were collected the materials from which to supply the needs and the wants of the poor. We have a bishop’s storehouse under the Welfare Plan, used for the same purpose. . . . Thus you will see, brethren, that in many of its great essentials, we have, as the Welfare Plan has now developed, the broad essentials of the United Order.³⁸

President Spencer W. Kimball said further, “Welfare Services is not a program, but the essence of the gospel. *It is the gospel in action.* It is the crowning principle of a Christian life.”³⁹

Humanitarian services. In addition to the welfare system, the Church also carries out a humanitarian aid program. Again, Elder Wirthlin summarizes: “In a little over a decade, the Church has shipped more than 27,000 tons of clothing, 16,000 tons of food, and 3,000 tons of medical and educational supplies and equipment to relieve the suffering of millions of God’s children in 146 countries in many parts of the world.”⁴⁰ Materials

are routinely donated and packaged for distribution by volunteers.

Deseret Industries. Members of the community may donate used clothing and other items to Deseret Industries, the Church-owned thrift stores and vocational rehabilitation facilities.

Benson Institute. “The Ezra Taft Benson Agriculture and Food Institute seeks to raise the quality of life through improved nutrition and enlightened agricultural practices.”⁴¹ The Institute educates rural families in developing countries about becoming more self-sufficient in their native environments. Workers at the Institute are compiling a comprehensive database of information about organic farming and are writing a manual on soil conservation, organic fertilizers, and rotational cropping.

Perpetual Education Fund. In April of 2001, President Gordon B. Hinckley introduced the Perpetual Education Fund, designed to equip young people with employment skills and lift them from poverty through education. President Hinckley explained, “Where there is widespread poverty among our people, we must do all we can to help them to lift themselves, to establish their lives upon a foundation of self-reliance that can come of training. . . . This training must be done in the areas where they live. It will then be suited to the opportunities of those areas.”⁴² He spoke again of the fund in the following October general conference: “We need to care for one another more diligently. We need to make a little more effort to assist those who are down at the bottom of the ladder. . . . Let us open our hearts, let us reach down and lift up, let us open our purses, let us show a greater love for our fellowmen. The Lord has blessed us so abundantly. And the needs are so great.”⁴³ One year after the announcement of the fund, member donations were assisting 2,400 individuals.⁴⁴

Literacy program. The literacy program of the Church likewise assists in elevating the poor. Overseeing literacy is one of the responsibilities of the Relief Society, the charitable organization for women in the Church.

In addition to the above programs, the Church teaches the importance of financial planning and preparedness. A web site operated by the Church, www.providentliving.org, teaches and assists with these principles. From the early days of the Church to the present, there has been an emphasis on self-sufficiency, thrift, living within our means, gardening and home production, avoidance of waste, modest use of resources, and rejection of materialism. Again, Brigham Young's counsel to the early pioneers serves as an example: "Ye Latter-day Saints, learn to sustain yourselves. . . . Learn to do without that which you cannot purchase and pay for; and bring your minds into subjection that you must and will live within your means."⁴⁵ "Never let anything go to waste. . . . And what you get more than you can take care of yourselves, ask your neighbors to help you consume. . . . If a man is worth millions of bushels of wheat and corn, he is not wealthy enough to . . . sweep a single kernel of it into the fire; let it be eaten by something and pass again into the earth, and thus fulfill the purpose for which it grew."⁴⁶ Since that time, "We have been counseled again and again concerning self-reliance, concerning debt, concerning thrift," said President Hinckley in the October 2001 general conference.⁴⁷ Perhaps the relative frequency with which the Church leadership speaks of such topics is an indication of how much of the membership is still struggling with these first steps to consecration.

I do not wish to imply, in reviewing the above Church programs, that "all is well in Zion" (2 Nephi 28:21) or contribute to a complacent assumption that we have done enough. Certainly, the programs of the Church have accomplished much toward providing in the Lord's way, but these are only a framework and springboard for the membership of the Church to put true principles into practice more fully in their individual lives. If we are to fundamentally change consumption patterns and thus lessen our impact on the environment, we have barely commenced. The cycle of prosperity, pride, and destruction

recorded repeatedly in the Book of Mormon is a compelling warning to us not to fall into the same trap of materialism and incorrect views about prosperity. Said candid Brigham Young, "The worst fear that I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and His people, wax fat and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell."⁴⁸ Less bluntly, President Hinckley admonishes, "We must set aside our consuming selfishness. We must rise above our love for comfort and ease."⁴⁹

Conclusion

"All good causes are actually subsets of God's great cause – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." – Elder Neal A. Maxwell⁵⁰

I have heard The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints criticized for not actively preaching conservation over the pulpit. None of the programs or concepts discussed above are labeled "conservation," and they are generally not going to be recognized as such by the world. But these programs all have to do with the use and distribution of resources, which are at the root of many conservation issues. Furthermore, with principles of consecration firmly in place, only slothful servants wait to be commanded in every detail (see D&C 58:26). The prophets shouldn't have to tell us to recycle any more than they tell us to floss our teeth—society and common sense already teach us some things. Even so, we can find information and practical advice on environmental issues in Church publications; a search with the word "recycle" on the Church's Web site, www.lds.org, locates over a dozen such articles.

We must also remember that "all things unto [the Lord] are spiritual" (D&C 29:34; see also v. 35). The fact that so many of His commandments deal with the physical care of people and resources, issues we might first think of as temporal, emphasizes the importance He places on the practical aspects of discipleship. However, the gospel of Christ encompasses much more than just these practical elements, and its

primary concern is with the spiritual ramifications of gospel laws. Hence, the principles of conservation arise naturally out of more all-encompassing doctrines about the Creation, our responsibilities as the children of God, and the eternal destiny of our souls and the earth that supports them.

If all of God's children understood and governed themselves by the scriptural doctrines of stewardship and consecration, conservation problems centering around distribution of goods would dissipate. Additionally, we would have the doctrinal motivation and cooperative disposition to work across disciplines to resolve other pressing conservation issues and treat this beautiful planet Earth as the sacred place it is. The gospel of Jesus Christ is comprehensive in its scope and limitless in its application. We must therefore focus on teaching the consummate, undiluted, and unabridged doctrines of salvation, while encouraging people to govern themselves in accordance with correct principles in their daily use of the Lord's gifts.



Notes

1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 156, 160; hereafter cited as Young, *Teachings*.
2. Joseph F. Smith, cited in George B. Handley, "The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 201.
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