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Education: Moving Toward and Under the Law of Consecration*

PRESIDENT ALVIN R. DYER
OF
THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

Question: What are some of the basic problems that need to be solved to improve the effectiveness of teaching religion to the members of the Church?

Answer: This problem has been a deep concern of mine for a long time and I know it has all of the brethren. In order for us to more effectively teach the gospel to the members of the Church, we must first go to the home or the family. Where the gospel is effectively taught to children in the home, it serves as a background for all spiritual education. Children from active homes more readily accept the teachings that come in seminaries, institutes, and other auxiliary classes. This suggests, I believe, the need for greater stability in our LDS homes.

Here is a statistic that is very alarming. It reports that for every 100 fathers in the Church who normally preside over their own families by virtue of the priesthood and in accordance with gospel law, there are only 43 percent of them who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. In other words, 57 out of 100 either hold no priesthood or are Senior Aaronic Priesthood holders. In addition at least a third of the 43 Melchizedek Priesthood holders are inactive. This gives a realistic picture of the lack of stability, gospelwise, in the families of the Church.

In Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord instructed the brethren that the first thing to be done was to put

*This is a telelecture discussion arranged as part of a pilot research project cosponsored by the College of Religion and the Department of Seminaries and Institutes. Involving some twenty doctoral candidates under the direction of Dr. Neil J. Flinders, the project was designed to explore the issues relating to improving the effectiveness of religious education at the practical level. President Dyer was one of the resource personnel contacted in this research program.

their own homes in order, and that if this were done the power of evil would have no hold over the family. Normally this is not done until the father is worthy to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. This condition leads to the conclusion that there needs to be a concentration throughout the Church on getting these men who hold no priesthood or who are Senior Aaronic ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood so they can worthily take their place at the head of their families. I think this is the number one challenge in improving religious education in a general sense. This is also, I believe, our biggest problem in the Church today.

Question: How might the role of the educator fit into the Church program as the time is approached when the saints will live the law of consecration?

Answer: I think this is a very good question. Those who go to the temple now enter into a covenant to live the law of consecration, which concerns their time and talents. While this law is not completely placed upon us at the present time, the time will come when those chosen will be called upon to do so, as we come closer to the redemption of Zion, wherein we will be called upon to give of our time and talents for the building up of the kingdom of God. This will, of course, apply to the educator the same as the farmer, the doctor, and the industrialist. He will have a place as a part of the cross section of the type of society that will be established. For instance, the first city of Zion which will be established as a pattern will thereafter affect all of the cities of Zion that will come under that same pattern. This concept might raise some additional questions in your minds.

Question: Will there be a formal education system under the law of consecration and what might it be like? How would one envision or describe it?

Answer: In this regard I suppose many have heard me talk about the city of the New Jerusalem and its temple complex composed of 24 temples—buildings which will house various orders of the priesthood. This complex will no doubt be erected to serve administrative purposes in the governing of the earth during the period of the millennium. It is to be noted that in the Plat Plan that was submitted by Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the city of Zion there were no separate school buildings. This means, and it is suggested too by other writings,

that the schools will be in the temples. There are no separate places of worship either, so the temple becomes the house of worship, the school, and the temple. This is the facility through which the teacher will function in teaching the principles of the gospel and also such things as will need to be taught during the period of the millennium.

Now there will be a vast broadcasting system. Three of the temples have been noted to be the media through which the laws will go forth unto all quarters of the earth. Undoubtedly there will be many principles and laws of the millennial reign that will be broadcast to people all over the earth that they may conform to the same things that are being conformed to in this city. So three of these buildings will be dedicated to an order of priesthood that will broadcast unto the world so that all people will hear the voice at the same time. This will be a marvelous method of teaching. There's the initial thought on these three questions.

Question: Since the temple is going to be used for both a school and a worship center and other places of education are apparently not envisioned in this plan, is it likely that in the city of Zion a good deal of the teaching will be done right in the home as some modern educators are now suggesting? Will there be a teaching function over some instruments that could tune into these broadcast centers? Will the home become a place where the child will learn? Some educators even now are beginning to say the school as a building is really becoming outmoded, and we are going to be able to let the child learn most of what he needs to know right at home. What are your thoughts on these concepts?

Answer: I think that during the millennium we will evolve to that situation. I think that by the end of the millennium, for those who will occupy the celestial kingdom, the home will be the only media of teaching children. Teaching will be through the family. You may note that Jeremiah said that the time will come when no man will teach his neighbor. To me this means the teachings will come fundamentally through the unit of the family. But I think there will be central places where instruction will go forth, directed to the family level. Thus there will no doubt be sources of information for the family. In the family it will be the father and the father's father who will be doing the teaching. In ancient times the fathers were the instructors, meaning the patriarchal fathers—it will be the same during the

millennium. We have learned of Abraham's sojourn into Egypt where he became an instructor to the people of Egypt. And this is true in the ancient patriarchal order, as I understand it. We will come back to that same method of receiving instruction.

Question: When we get this vision of what it is going to be like during the millennium, then we take a look at where we are today, it doesn't appear we can make that transition all at once.

Answer: Yes, it will be a slow transition; but you see, the revelations of the Lord already are teaching us these principles over and over again. For example, the statement that it is the duty of the parents to teach their children to walk uprightly before the Lord is taught to us over and over again. This was the inspiration behind the family home evening. The family home evening, of course, in and of itself, is not the answer; it is merely another medium to get the family on the basis of communicating with each other, so that family matters of vital importance can register on the family level. The family home evening is an instrument to bring this about as are other approaches.

Question: Is it logical for a teacher, such as a seminary or institute teacher, to consider that he is just temporarily standing in the place of the parents?

Answer: I think this is true. Now look at it from this viewpoint. When a man is called to be a bishop, he becomes the father over multiple families. The basic responsibility of the bishop is to work through the Church system which we now have, the priesthood, auxiliaries, and so forth, to see to it that every family is placed in order. He is the father over many families, but fundamentally the father who presides over his own home is the key person, with his wife, who holds the primary responsibility to train their children in righteousness.

You will notice that when Moroni appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith, he said that the priesthood of Elijah would be revealed which would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers. Now, if you want to take time to analyze that prophecy in Malachi, it is precisely the very thing we are talking about. We will become associated with the teachings of all the fathers from the beginning. Now how does that apply? Well, for example, take the law of consecration. The prophet and the one who holds the keys to this law is Enoch, and in order for us to be sealed to Enoch

we would have to become involved in the law of consecration. That is what father (Enoch) would teach us. In other words we would become bound to the patriarch Enoch through the involvement of the law of consecration. Take for further example the keys given to Abraham, which have to do with receiving the gospel and having the leaven of the house of Israel spread unto other people, and particularly unto the Gentiles. We see the progress of this in the Church today by virtue of the missionary system. This is the day of Gentiles. Now the term "Gentile" does not mean what people usually refer to as the Gentiles. The Jew, for example, says those that are not Jewish are Gentile, and some Mormons say if you are not a Mormon you are a Gentile. Specifically speaking, the Gentiles are the descendants of Japheth, who was the oldest son of Noah. These, therefore, are the ones that the gospel is being carried to, and so we become *involved* in the covenant of Abraham by actually carrying on the missionary work of the Church. This is true with every law given to prophets. The keys of salvation which Adam holds, for example, require us to understand and be obedient in order to be sealed to Adam. Sealing means involvement, or living by or making a covenant concerning the laws or principles which he taught or was called upon to give unto his children. So when you say that the children will be turned to the fathers and the fathers to the children, you see, it is more than just a direct blood-line descent. It means all of the fathers in the priesthood and involvement with various keys and powers of the patriarchal order as I understand it.

Question: President Dyer, we go through a lot of intensive training to become professional educators. We study various disciplines in an effort to find answers to the practical problems of how one gets a person to learn the things which are considered important. We are trying to learn how to teach them more effectively. Is there any place for all of this study in moving this program forth?

Answer: I don't think there is any question about that. While the home may become the medium through which these things are taught, there will still have to be sources, and the home will draw upon these sources and upon the information which they provide. What happens now is that teachers teach children based upon textbooks provided for them to use in the classroom. Who provides the textbooks? Teachers do—that is, the professionals do. The only difference in the future is the

fathers will provide the fathers with this information rather than teachers in the classroom. There are numerous categories into which will fit divine information on various subjects. These will concern all the categories that a man would need to know to become perfect.

Question: Is this why the Church places so much stress on general education? Are they trying to find where we have a talent and then utilize that talent to discover some truth?

Answer: Yes. You will notice the scriptures say that the glory of God is intelligence. We have learned of the contrasting words of knowledge and intelligence. I suppose you could interconnect them. But I have always thought that knowledge could be had with the powers of evil, but evil cannot have intelligence. The Lord indicates this is true because he said the evil ones forsake the light and intelligence. Lucifer had great knowledge, but he lacked the light of intelligence. Let me explain that in other terms. A teacher may be a very skilled teacher and teach the law of tithing, but that teacher may not keep the law of tithing. A teacher may very skillfully teach the Word of Wisdom in an academic sense, but still may not keep the Word of Wisdom. So you see the light of the Word of Wisdom would be neglected. So it is the light of intelligence which will lead people to perfection, and not just knowledge. The powers of evil have knowledge, but they do not have intelligence. Lucifer has knowledge, but his knowledge is devoid of the light of intelligence; therefore, he failed. And this will be true in all educational fields—there must be a light that goes with that which comes to serve some useful means or purpose. This is the type of teaching, I think, that the Lord is trying to convey to us. The glory of God is intelligence, or the light of truth.

Question: It seems that the correlation program is tending more and more to put the primary responsibility of teaching on the priesthood, and I am wondering as to the importance of the auxiliaries in the long run in really directing the teaching function in the Church.

Answer: The idea of correlation has not fully entered into education yet. I think it will, and I will tell you why it will. The Lord has given us only one organization for instructional purposes—that is the priesthood. Everything, therefore, becomes auxiliary to it, and for the time being until we get into a final preparation for a celestial period there is a tremendous need for the expansion of this to lead us to that preparation

period. As you know now, the manuals, in other words the blue book structure, has been set up. And the four fundamentals with which we are concerned and ought to teach all age levels are the following: 1) What is my relationship to God the Father? 2) What is my relationship to Jesus Christ, his son? 3) What is my relationship to the Holy Ghost? 4) And what is my relationship to the Church, or the kingdom of God? Now out of these premises, you see, will come the gospel teachings at every level. There will be a correlation of those subjects so that you won't go to Sunday School one day and hear it and go to seminary the next morning and hear the same subject. The need of correlation is so that the members of the Church from childhood up can gain a more complete understanding of the gospel to be accomplished by correlating the subjects to the proper age grouping.

Textbook materials are continually in process now, and this will continue until complete correlation is accomplished in our educational system.

Question: Do you see a number of problems associated in implementing that idea?

Answer: It won't be done overnight. Our best thinking is the inspiration of the Lord, but it has to come, you see, because the Lord has given us no organization other than the Priesthood in the Church to work through. We must tie everything into that, through the stake, ward, and family organization. I think that this is the one big challenge in teaching before us right now.

Question: President Dyer, how would you suggest that we who are fathers in our homes as well as educators guide our thinking and our efforts in trying to further this program of religious education as we move toward the millennium?

Answer: Consider Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord says to seek knowledge and improve our understanding. Now this was not just given to the teacher; this was given to the men of the priesthood, and for the sake of our discussion, let us say that this is for fathers. When you talk about the priesthood, you talk about fathers. And if we could always remember that, we would get a better relationship with the scriptures.

When you read of the descent of the priesthood, the priesthood came down from the fathers. The priesthood is the basic unit, and the father of the home will be called upon to be the

teacher with such guidance and helps that he can receive from other teachers, or more particularly from other fathers. The Lord has said, "Therefore verily, I say unto you, my friends, call your solemn assembly as I have commanded you." This as you recall was in the Kirtland Temple. "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom, for the purposes of inducing faith. Yea, out of the best books seek ye words of wisdom, seek learning by study and even by faith." Now this is a direct commandment of the Lord to the priesthood. The priesthood in its truest sense involves the fathers and that is the purpose of the priesthood. Now I would say that the inspiration of the Lord would be a very definite part of a man's effort to teach the gospel. I have preached over many continents to many thousands of missionaries, and to many investigators, that a sense of conviction in our teaching is a very, very important thing. Just to go through the mechanics of teaching, from my viewpoint, lacks the light of truth or that spark of conviction that is needed to make our teaching effective and worthwhile. I think if you can have a teacher who is informed correctly, not slanted in his opinions, but who is really informed, and who has the spirit of the gospel, then he has the necessary qualifications to be an effective teacher. I refer to the 11th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants which I think is the best resumé of this wherein the Lord is speaking to those who would have the desire to bring forth and expand the kingdom. "And you remember," he said, "inasmuch as ye have asked, behold I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion." Then, for the purpose of establishing the cause of Zion, he gives four or five basic conditions under which the teacher or the leader can function, and one of them was this: "Seek not to declare my word." In other words, seek not to teach, but first to obtain information. Then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, shall you have my Spirit and my word. Yea, these two (I am paraphrasing) are the power of God unto the convincing of man. So the teacher in the Church, to me, means one who is informed in spiritual matters and who is without prejudice, and who has the spirit of the Lord with him, that these two attributes are the greatest powers that any teacher can have.

Question: The teacher then ought to allow his priesthood to be expressed and experienced by his students? He ought to

be guided by inspiration and teach the fundamental principles of the gospel without being slanted? Is that what you are saying?

Answer: Yes, I think that there are more people who are led to a testimony of the gospel by the power of the Spirit than any other way. This pertains especially to young people. I served in a bishopric in two wards, and as a bishop where the membership reached 1600 members. This of course was a large ward. We had 114 Aaronic Priesthood boys and nearly 100 girls of the same age. Attendance at sacrament meeting was 56 percent, and we had no marriages outside of the temple for 4½ years, and we lost no boys to the Senior Aaronic Priesthood during that period. Everyone was ordained as he became of age, every young man filled a mission. There was not a single boy who did not fill a mission. Now the point was that we encouraged our teachers to teach them by the Spirit, completely oriented to the gospel, to provide them with information that was unbiased, unprejudiced, and to teach them so that a true sense of conviction could develop. Young people react to this. Other people of all ages react to it, but particularly youth. They react to it very strongly, as is evidenced by the percentages referred to.

Question: President Dyer, could you make a comment on the role you see the behavioral sciences playing in this latter-day work?

Answer: I wrote an article about that in a book called the *Meaning of Truth*. A professor recently called me and asked me for permission to use a section of it in a book he was having published.

In connection with a facsimile of the Pearl of Great Price, that there are many figures on the facsimile that referred to areas of learning, concerning which the Lord said, "let science find these things out if they can." Now that is the way I looked at it, and I think science is finding things out. Whenever science establishes a fundamental truth, it will always be compatible with the gospel, and where it is not compatible today, then that which they have found is not yet complete or is untrue. This has proven a fact over so many years, for when any concept evolves to a complete truth it harmonizes with the gospel. It would have to be that way because there can be no devious patterns of truth. Truth is the same forever, and this is the point I think the professor wanted. I think this will be

found to be true with the age of the earth, the creation periods, etc. I have before me right now a paper written by a very wonderful Latter-day Saint, a scientist, who is discussing the creation periods of the earth. And as I read this I thought, well, when we know all that we can know, from a scientific approach, then we will find that it will harmonize with gospel teachings that have been issued on that same subject.

Gospel statements are not the same as scientific statements only as they involve certain principles, such as the elements are eternal. The prophet spoke of that as a principle of creation. Science is developing and finding this to be true. The elements may change, they may vary, but they are eternal. They cannot be destroyed. They exist in some form. This is what I mean. The Prophet Joseph Smith did not attempt to make scientific statements, but when he did as it pertained to the gospel, those statements have held up, and scientists, as they develop their truths, are finding this out.

Question: Do you see, then, President Dyer, that one of the functions of the Latter-day Saint student as he pursues his graduate work in these behavioral sciences is to screen them according to the theology of the Church?

Answer: I think this is right. This is absolutely true. I have talked a great deal about this and so have others. I think that what we know about the behavioral sciences in all phases is incomplete. We need to keep ourselves in the frame of mind, as once expressed by Sir Arthur Keith of England on another subject, of course, but who said, "I learn more and more every day that my profession is not complete, that I am only on the threshold of what I know." He is supposed to be one of the great men in his field in the world today, but he regards his knowledge as so incomplete that he would not dare to make a positive statement. Now if we approach scientific knowledge this way, then we keep the door open for the harmony of it with the gospel principles. If this were not true, then there is no God, there is no system of truth, you see. This has to be so because it is fundamental. We adjust to that to keep from getting prejudiced in our search for truth. A problem exists when we feel that the acquisition of one truth or partial acquisition of others completes our knowledge on the subject. We think we know all we need to know about our subject and that we are going to go the rest of the way with what we know, instead of keeping our minds open.

I think, really, in a sense here is the true principle of repentance. We teach repentance to the world today as a principle of conversion, but I think it is more than that, it is a principle of regeneration, and I think repentance will obtain in the next world—not the repentance from sin, but repentance from the need of change, the need of regeneration. The person who is not regenerating will never reach perfection. And to regenerate you have to change. In other words, if you learn the higher law, you learn then to adjust the lesser law to the higher law, otherwise there is no complete acceptance of the higher law. Now that is what I think repentance means. That is why the Lord says we need continuing revelations. In the early days of the Church as the revelations were evolving, we find this recorded often—the thing that is of the most worth is to teach repentance. I think that this is the greatest principle. It has to do with the exercise of agency. And it is so fundamental for growth that we must look at it just as a principle of conversion. It is a principle of regeneration.

Question: We have talked about teaching by the Spirit and being sufficiently prepared to effectively teach the word with the Spirit and therefore have a powerful effect on our students. In our class, it seems that we have had some disagreement as to the importance of teaching methods, techniques, or approach. Some felt that the thing we ought to emphasize is to gain a knowledge of the gospel and then seek the Spirit and that should be the ultimate thing in bringing about the greatest effect in our classes, while others felt that this was necessary, but that we needed to also emphasize the importance of learning different approaches and techniques which appear to be successful. Now could you give us some thoughts on the balance between those? What are your feelings concerning techniques particularly?

Answer: When I first went into the mission field in the Central States to preside over that mission, they had not had very much success there. I determined on a course, what I called a convert survey, and I prepared this survey. Every time a person was baptized into the Church, I sent him a letter welcoming him into the Church and telling him that our great desire was to expand the gospel to everyone, which was the commission to the Church from the Lord. I suggested that perhaps he could help by telling of the motivation that prompted him to come into the Church. I asked that each prepare the survey sheet

without the assistance of anyone. I didn't want the missionaries telling them what to put on it. Well, I followed that procedure for about 8 years, until I had obtained more than 10,000 replies from 20 different countries, so I would say that this was a reasonably good survey. One of the questions we asked was, "What impressed you most about the missionaries who baptized you into the Church?" The answer was unanimous—the thing that impressed them about the missionary was his sincerity. Now here is a significant guideline for proselyting. Out of this survey came a procedure in contacting nonmembers of the Church which led to an approach method which we called the "Manner of Conversion." From this approach we determined the motivation that caused people to come into the Church. As a result of this we saw many, many thousands of people respond to the gospel. We learned that the missionary, in order to be effective, had to be converted to what he was trying to say. And after *he* had a sense of conviction, and made the initial contact by proper orientation, he was to seek to teach the gospel in a simple way by the Spirit. But in order to get people to listen to him, it required more than just work, if you see what I mean. This borders on the same thing you are talking about. We can attract the attention of people, we can get their interest through our sincerity and through our desire to help them, but what then? Now, we must teach them. So it resolves itself then as to how we should teach them, and this brings in the matter of methods and procedures in order to get into their consciousness a knowledge and understanding of the gospel, but that is separate and distinct from conviction, see what I mean? The converting to the gospel may not include those things, but a knowledge of the gospel does. I am still studying the gospel myself, and I try to do it in a methodical way based on principles that I've read of and know of myself. But our sense of testimony comes from an inward conviction which the power of the Holy Ghost dictates to us. People are led to the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost; it is the calling of a missionary to work in this channel. But thereafter, if we are going to learn to accumulate knowledge, we have to resort to the kind of thing you are talking about: the methods, the procedures, the teachings. I think that is my distinction of the two.

Question: Then one of our great contributions would be to find better ways of how to do it?

Answer: Better ways as to how people can achieve greater security. Now, a person may get the inspiration of something, you see, but in our changing way of life he will have to build his stability to back that up. Many people will get up in testimony meeting and bear their testimony, but they don't follow it up with something concrete.

Someone has said that if a man ever had an inspirational feeling and he refused then to do something about it in a concrete way, he would be dishonest with himself. In other words, if I had an overpowering urge that something was right, and I did nothing about it, you see, I would be morally dishonest. You see what I mean, if a person gets by testimony a sense of conviction, and then that person does nothing about it, he will lose it. This is precisely what the Prophet Joseph Smith said. But when a person is awakened to the spirit of the gospel, then the Holy Ghost testifies to him. But if he does not go ahead and prepare himself for baptism, that would mean such as repentance and faith and so on, then the Holy Ghost will leave him. This is precisely what he said. The same thing is true with us, but to open the door requires this power and inspiration, or the awakening of the innate instinct which causes us or motivates us to do something. If we don't do something realistic thereafter to safeguard it and to build it up, then we could lose it. That's where the teacher comes in, I think . . . to make clear these reactionary principles.