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Elder Stephen B. Oveson and Dixie Randall Oveson

Appropriating Our Lives to Sacred Uses: Observations on Personal Consecration

Elder Stephen B. Oveson and Dixie Randall Oveson

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A story has been told about a chicken and a pig who found themselves discussing their relative contributions to the farmer's breakfast table. The hen bemoaned having to donate her eggs for the breakfast. The pig replied, "Yes, but for you, it's just a sacrifice; for me, it's a total commitment!"

This little anecdote reflects obvious lessons that are applicable to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We might ask ourselves whether we are the kind of people who feel that giving an occasional "egg or two" toward the building of the kingdom is sufficient or whether we want to be categorized among those who consecrate their all in this endeavor.

We can logically assume that true conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ will have outward manifestations in the actions of members of the Church. That is to say, those who have received a spiritual witness resulting in strong testimonies of the truthfulness of gospel principles normally desire to strengthen that knowledge by living those principles to the fullest. They will be found doing whatever is necessary to magnify their callings, serve in their communities, pay a full tithe and generous fast offering, keep the Sabbath day holy, hold family home evenings, study the scriptures, be honest in their dealings, sustain the leadership of the Church, live the Word of Wisdom, be good neighbors, pray sincerely, spread the gospel to others, attend the temple, and keep the sacred covenants made

there. All these worthy acts, along with almost countless others, constitute personal efforts by those who are consecrated members of the Church.

Disciplining our spirits step-by-step to this higher order is a process that prepares us for celestial living. The Lord tells us in Doctrine and Covenants 88:22, “He who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.” Hugh Nibley taught: “The main purpose of the Doctrine and Covenants, you will find, is to implement the Law of Consecration. . . . This law, the consummation of the laws of obedience and sacrifice, is the threshold of the celestial kingdom, the last and hardest requirement made of men [and women] in this life.”¹

When we discuss the subject of consecration, the first thing that often comes to mind is our temporal means. Admittedly, this is an important part of the law of consecration. What is currently required of the main body of the Church in this regard is to pay our tithes and offerings as a preparatory step in learning to return to the Father a portion of what He has given us, His stewards.

However, equally important to monetary donations is the giving of time, talents, and personal abilities—even to the submission of our very will. We might be under the impression that the law of consecration is held temporarily in suspension at the present time, having been replaced by the law of tithing.

A careful study of the Doctrine and Covenants shows that references to consecrate and consecration generally deal with material things associated with monies and properties but also accommodate other aspects of life (see D&C 82:19, 64:34; 88:67–68, 98:12–14). Those of us who attend the temple for the purpose of making sacred covenants with the Lord in His holy house understand that the law of consecration goes beyond the mere payment of tithes and offerings or the consecration of monies and properties to the Lord. “The law of consecration,” said Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “is that we consecrate our time, our talents, and our money and property to the cause of the Church: such are to be available to the extent they are needed to further the Lord’s interests on earth.”²

In the 1830s, consecrate as a verb was defined as follows: “To make or declare to be sacred, by certain ceremonies or rites; to appropriate to sacred uses; to set apart, dedicate, or devote, to the service and worship of God.” As a noun, consecration was defined as “the act or ceremony of separating from a common to a sacred use, or of devoting and dedicating a person or thing to the service

and worship of God, by certain rites or solemnities. Consecration does not make a person or thing really holy, but declares it to be sacred, that is, devoted to God or to divine service.”³

As a reflection of those definitions, members of the Church today, in living the law of consecration, are expected to “appropriate themselves to sacred uses.” Doing so requires them to dedicate all their time, talents, and possessions to the Church of Jesus Christ and its purposes.

⁴ Perhaps we may never be asked or required to give all, but our willingness to put everything on the altar is a sign between us and God that we submit to His will in all things.

As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Consecration is . . . both a principle and a process, and it is not tied to a single moment. Instead, it is freely given, drop by drop, until the cup of consecration brims and finally runs over. . . . The submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar. The many other things we ‘give’ . . . are actually the things He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God’s will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give!”⁵

While we have served the Church in South America for almost six years, first under call as mission president and companion in the Argentina Buenos Aires South Mission and then in the presidency of the Chile Area, we have personally observed many acts that we consider to be true examples of consecrated service to our Heavenly Father and to His children. We will share a few of these experiences to illustrate what we consider to be latter-day forms of living the law of consecration—of members’ actions that truly reflect their appropriating themselves to sacred uses.

Early in our 1996–99 mission experience, we learned of a group of Cambodian immigrants who lived in Longchamps near Buenos Aires, Argentina. One family was being taught the discussions by a companionship of our missionaries. As the missionaries came to the fourth discussion that included the law of the fast, they explained fasting in about the following way: “Fasting constitutes a twenty-four-hour period in which we do not eat or drink anything, putting our bodies in submission to our spirits. We use the time to read the scriptures, pray, and engage in other uplifting activities, culminating in attending fast and testimony meeting, where we then give to the bishop of our ward the monetary equivalent of the food from which

we have abstained, in order that he may distribute it among the poor and needy.”

After this explanation, the missionaries suggested that because the following Sunday was the first Sunday of the month, the family might like to try fasting. The father agreed, and the missionaries left the home. The following Monday evening, the elders returned to give another discussion, at which time they asked for a report on the family’s experience with fasting. The father rather apologetically explained that they had tried and would surely try again. He said, “We began our fast in the afternoon with a prayer, followed by scripture reading and a discussion. We continued in this way until early the following morning. I regret to say that some of the younger children fell asleep during the night. We were very tired but showered in the morning and prepared to go to church, where our spirits were revived and filled with the beautiful testimonies that were given. Perhaps next time we’ll do better and the children will be able to stay awake with us all night.”

The missionaries were astounded. “You mean you didn’t go to sleep during this whole twenty-four-hour period?”

“No,” replied the father, “you didn’t mention sleeping.”

As you might imagine, the members of this wonderful, humble family were soon baptized members of the Church. They brought several other families to hear the missionaries, and other conversions resulted. Whenever we think of this incident, it reminds us of how much there is to be learned about consecration from people who humbly seek to be obedient.

We also learned a beautiful lesson about consecration from Elder Jon Jones, one of the assistants to the president in our mission. At that particular time, the decision had been made that one of our missionaries needed to be sent home from his mission early as a disciplinary action. He had been disobedient on several occasions despite counseling, contracts, and repeated warnings. The plane ticket had been purchased, and permission had been given by the presidency of the South America South Area to send this missionary home.

When the assistants brought the missionary in for his final interview, he protested loudly and tearfully that he did not want to go home. He promised to improve and said he would sign yet another contract in his determination to stay and finish his mission. In desperation, the two assistants and Sister Oveson were called into the office, and the elder was asked to wait outside while the possible

courses of action were discussed. Sister Oveson, somewhat out of patience with the whole situation, was resigned to the fact that sending him home was the only reasonable thing to do. "If he is allowed to stay," she maintained, "the other missionaries might think that obedience is not important in the mission."

One of the assistants said, "I have to agree with Hermana Oveson. I don't think we really have a choice."

When the other assistant, Elder Jones, was asked his opinion, he said, "I see much good in this elder. President, if you will let me go back out into the field, I will take him for my companion for the rest of my mission. I will take responsibility for him and help him to become a loving and obedient missionary."

We all had tears in our eyes by the time Elder Jones finished his remarks about this offer. We could not believe that anyone could be so loving and caring, especially a twenty-year-old missionary. The decision was made to do as Elder Jones requested. He found it exceedingly difficult at first, but slowly his junior companion learned a great deal from him and became a trustworthy missionary. When Elder Jones went home, his companion stayed to finish his mission, becoming in time a senior companion and a trainer before he was honorably released. The follow-up to this true experience is that this elder has since married and is sealed in the temple to his wife and son. They are active in the Church and are helping to build the kingdom. What a difference a consecrated and Christlike person made in the life of this missionary and his future family.

Nearly every day we see examples of consecration in the lives of the missionary couples who come to serve in the temple or to be area welfare agents, area medical advisers, executive secretaries to the area presidency, or family history missionaries, many of whom are serving their fifth, sixth, or seventh missions. Couple missionaries, in whatever capacity, are as precious as gold. We had the great blessing of having several couple missionaries who served with us in the Buenos Aires South Mission. Typical examples are Bob and Glenell Fuller, who activated members, taught music, helped repair homes, and gave many hours of devoted service. When we recently returned for a visit to the district where they labored most of their eighteen months, everyone asked about Hermano and Hermana Fuller. Their example reflects the potential value of couple missionaries who understand the law of consecration and the need to appropriate our lives to sacred purposes.

Another example that stands out in our minds is the story of

Casey and Kitty Golightly, who recently finished their year and a half of service as missionaries in the Santiago Chile Temple. During their missionary experience, Elder Golightly, a temple sealer, had diabetes, stomach ulcers, a heart attack, skin cancer that necessitated the removal of part of his ear, and a broken leg from a fall he sustained on the stairs of the temple housing. Kitty celebrated her eightieth birthday during the time of their service, rarely missing her daily shifts at the temple, where she served as a trainer for other workers in addition to fulfilling her regular duties. During the final week of their mission, they celebrated their fifty-eighth wedding anniversary. As they bore their testimonies in the final sacrament meeting before their departure, Elder Golightly said, "While I was recuperating from one of my many procedures at the hospital, I conversed with the Lord, telling Him of my desire to stay and complete this mission, even if it meant returning home in a box!" Through every trial, these two had smiles on their faces and good humor to share with everyone. Their service reflects the actions of truly consecrated souls who understand the blessings of dedicating themselves to building the Lord's kingdom on the earth.

An excursion group from Punta Arenas recently came to the Santiago Chile Temple. This trip requires some eighty hours by bus and often uses up the only vacation time these people have during the year. One member of this group is a little lady named Hermana Alvarez, who is less than four feet tall and is somewhat crippled. She carried with her some twenty-seven family names for whom she wanted to do the vicarious work. What a thrill it was to be able to help her fulfill her worthy dream and to realize the extent to which so many Saints in faraway countries dedicate themselves to living and defending the principles of the gospel as a reflection of the law of consecration.

Gordon and Catherine Thomas are another couple who reflect consecrated living. They served as president and companion of the Argentina Mendoza Mission from 1996 to 1999. After returning home for a short while, where they were living their dream retirement in the Lake District of England, they looked at each other one day and said, "What are we doing here? We both know how to speak Spanish. We need to be serving a mission where we can use that gift to benefit others."

Within months, they were back in South America, this time serving as the Chile Area welfare agents for two years, where their influence for good was incalculable. During one of our visits with

the Thomases, they asked a very thought-provoking question, one we hardly knew how to answer at the time. They wondered whether we would voluntarily go and do what other missionary couples were doing if we were not under call from the prophet. That question caused a great deal of introspection on our parts as we thought about dedicating ourselves to sacred uses following our present service to the Lord. By the time we finish our present calling, we will have served for nine years in countries far distant from our family members and friends. Should we apply for voluntary missionary service when we finish our present calling? That could prove to be another step in our lives reflecting the process of appropriating ourselves to sacred uses. Perhaps this is a consecration question that others may want to answer for themselves.

For some, proving themselves truly dedicated to the Lord's work might be demonstrated in their unfailing faithfulness in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversities. "God hath said that He would have a tried people, that He would purge them as gold."⁶ We have known amazing parents who have remained steadfast as they learned of the death of their missionary son or daughter. When we think of consecration, we think of another set of parents who have spent countless hours in the rehabilitation efforts of a son who was critically wounded while serving in the mission field. We also think of those who draw ever closer to the Lord as they are faced with the loss of a spouse to death or divorce or those who must deal with unemployment or the heartbreak of a wayward child. Others may find that caring for aging parents or less-able children is the path they currently follow on the road to consecration. Certainly, there are times and seasons in our lives that permit us more or less personal time to donate to this lifelong quest, always keeping in remembrance that consecration is a sacred covenant offering a multitude of ways of appropriating ourselves to sacred uses.

Whenever scriptural reference is made to those who, as a society, have learned to live the law of consecration to the fullest, we read about a pure and peaceful people, devoid of strife and contention, a Zion people. The people of Enoch became such a people. We read in Moses 7:18, "And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them." After the appearance of Christ to the Nephites on the American continent, they also developed such a consecrated society: "And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand

of God” (4 Nephi 1:16). Surely, when we have the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ restored to the earth through the Prophet Joseph Smith, our purpose should be to build another group of consecrated people—Saints of the latter days. Individually and collectively, it will not happen with one single act; it cannot be a one-time offer. In this endeavor, those who willingly accept calls to be nursery leaders, Cub Scout den mothers, early-morning seminary teachers, Scoutmasters, or other exceedingly time-consuming but sometimes low-profile callings in the Church will surely be the examples of what true consecration is all about.

In the long run, offering ourselves for sacred uses might simply be shown through a consistent attitude of meek willingness to offer all we are capable of giving at any given time while we help those about us do the same. Consecration seems to be a day-to-day process of dedication, humility, refinement, and purification as we follow the example of the most consecrated person of all time—our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. The LDS Speaker’s Sourcebook (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1991), 76.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, “Obedience, Consecration, and Sacrifice,” Ensign, May 1975, 50.
3. Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “consecrate” and “consecration.”
4. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., Encyclopedia of Mormonism (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:313, s.v. “consecration.” See also D&C 82:19; 64:34; 88:67–68; 98:12–14.
5. Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” Ensign, November 1995, 24.
6. Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 135.