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Where Is the Church?

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Where Is the Church?

JAMES E. FAUST

Some time ago I was walking in the center of Salt Lake City on my way to City Creek Canyon. A car with an out-of-state license plate was driving by. The driver pulled over and asked, “Where is the church of the Mormons?” I assumed that he was thinking of some place or building. I took time to point out the tall Church Office Building, the stately Church Administration Building, the magnificent temple, and the historic tabernacle (the Conference Center had not yet been built). He thanked me and went on his way.

Is It in Our Buildings?

May I now ask you the same question: “Where is the Church?” Is the Church our beautiful chapels, which are well maintained, neat, and clean—of which we are justly proud? The Church cannot be just our chapels because for several years after its organization there were no chapels. We had only a temple. So if you were asked, “Where is the Church?” would you answer, “The temples”?

A few years ago my wife and I were in the temple in Kirtland, Ohio. It was late fall, and the afternoon sun was streaking through the old, wavy, handblown windowpanes. The building was light and airy and magnificent. Since some of my forebears were involved in its construction, I was humbled and honored

to be under its roof. Within its walls and under its spell, I was enchanted by its beauty.

However, as President Boyd K. Packer correctly pointed out, “We do not have that building. When our people left, they took with them that which was important. They preserved the keys of the ordinances, the covenants, and the sealing power. They took with them all the essentials which we have today.”

So the Church cannot, in and of itself, be the temples, magnificent as they are, because the temple buildings alone do not bless. They are the exquisite containers for the pearls of great price administered therein by the priesthood of God.

Thanks to my wonderful wife, the Spirit of the Lord has often been in our various dwelling places. While we have lived within them, each has been a holy place for me. In our married life we have lived in single rooms with bathrooms down the hall and in small apartments. We have also owned three different houses. In a sense the Church has been in each, but I would not want to go back and live in our

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former homes, even though we spent much of our happy lives in them. The kingdom of God is not there.

Is It in Our Families?

Is the Church then in our families? We are getting close to the correct answer here. In a sense a family can foster the teachings of the Savior better than any other institution. In large measure the Church exists to strengthen families. I wish to define *family* very broadly. In the Church we have traditional families and single-parent families. Furthermore, each single member is considered to be, in a sense, a Church family. We also have ward families in which the bishop serves as a spiritual father.

Because of the erosion of family life and family values, we frequently hear urgent pleas requesting the Church as an organization to take over activities formerly considered family activities. I wonder if our maturing youth can hold everything together without family home evening, daily prayer, and daily scripture study. I say this because I am persuaded that family activities can be more effective in fostering the eternal values of love, loyalty, honesty, chastity, industry, self-worth, and personal integrity than any other institution.

Lou Holtz, the successful football coach from Notre Dame, stated:

The family is where our healthy values are formed and shaped. I know no greater challenge or more important role in life than in preparing our children to take their places as contributing citizens. We cannot relinquish this most important responsibility to gang leaders, drug leaders or even our own government. Nothing can destroy individuals or our country as quickly as drugs. It is not confined to a segment of our society, and it has created more damage than anything else I have witnessed in my lifetime. I have never heard a successful man or woman get up and say, "I owe my success to drugs and alcohol." Yet I know thousands of people who have said publicly or in the press that they have

ruined their lives because of drugs and alcohol. Suffice it to say, government can't stop it, police can't, but the family can.

Because of the complexity of the problem of drug and alcohol abuse, some may feel that it is an oversimplification to say that strong family leadership can solve the problem. Certainly not all families can, but I am persuaded that families with enough internal caring, discipline, commitment, and love somehow, some way, can handle the majority of their problems. However strong or weak the family may be, it can usually provide a better solution to most challenges than can any other institution in society or the government no matter how well intentioned it may be.

I believe that the principle reason that a caring family is the best antidote for drug and alcohol abuse and other problems is that unqualified love can flow from kinship relationships. Successful families usually have a strong, caring head. Ideally this would be a holder of the priesthood whose power and influence is maintained "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

Priesthood is desirable because whomsoever is blessed by this power, God will bless. But there have been many successful caring heads of families who are mothers, grandmothers, and others. What seems to distinguish a successful family is that the members of the family continue to care. They don't give up. They never quit. They hang together through hardships and death and other problems.

I know of a close-knit family that is wonderfully successful in keeping everyone together. When the parents feel they are losing influence with teenagers, the help of cousins is enlisted to exert some counter peer pressure.

I would urge members of extended families—grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins—to reach out in concern, to succor. Mostly what is needed

from grandparents, aunts, and uncles is unre-served love manifest as interest and concern. It builds confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth. Repeating and chastening adult family members should be rare indeed. We are told that it should happen only when a person is moved upon by the Holy Ghost. But I have been grateful for those in my family who have loved me enough to give me both the gentle and strong reproof on occasion as needed. We read in Proverbs: "He that refuseth reproof erreth" (Proverbs 10:17).

The fact that some members do not have functioning traditional families is no reason to move in a direction that would diminish or abandon family activities among those who can and should foster them. With the increased onslaught of forces that cause families to dis-integrate, we ought to dig in our heels to pre-serve all that is great and good in the family. We are reminded that in times of tribulations, the Nephites were not fighting for a political cause such as monarchy or power; rather, they "were inspired by a better cause, . . . they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45). Some may find it strong doctrine, but I quote again from Alma in the Book of Mormon: "And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto blood-shed" (Alma 43:47).

As a corollary to defending the family, we have a duty to teach our family members that the commandments of God may not be broken without drawing a penalty.

President Stephen L Richards said: "I want this taught to youth so that they may compre-hend it. It is their due and their right to have these things given to them without dilution or apology. This is justice and mercy. Neither shall rob the other."

President Richards went on to state that it is no "kindness to any youth to whitewash [vari-ous sins such as] lying and deceit," which are

so prevalent today. "Perhaps the greatest of all [is] that robbery which steals virtue from either woman or man" (CR, April 1957, 99).

Is It in Our Hearts?

So the family is and must always be an important part of the Church. But the Lord's kingdom ultimately must be found in our hearts before it can be anywhere else. Paul gave us a key when he said to the Romans: "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" (Romans 8:27). He also said, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

In the story of David, who was called in his youth to be the future king of Israel, we learn how much the Lord judges by what is in the heart. We all remember how the Lord sent the prophet Samuel to the house of Jesse, saying, "For I have provided me a king among his sons" (1 Samuel 16:1). One by one, Jesse had his seven oldest sons pass before Samuel. In considering each one, Samuel was instructed by the Lord to "look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; . . . for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). And so, as the seven sons passed before him, Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord hath not chosen these."

And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. [1 Samuel 16:10–13]

Like Daniel of old, what we do or do not do in life originates in our hearts. As Daniel stood in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon who captured Jerusalem, “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). From then on Daniel held to that purpose. It eventually brought him the highest of heavenly and earthly honors.

The greatness of Willard Richard’s heart was manifest just before the martyrdom of the Prophet:

Joseph said to Dr. Richards, “If we go into the cell, will you go in with us?” The doctor answered, “Brother Joseph you did not ask me to cross the river with you—you did not ask me to come to Carthage—you did not ask me to come to jail with you—and do you think I would forsake you now? But I will tell you what I will do; if you are condemned to be hung for treason, I will be hung in your stead, and you shall go free.” Joseph said, “You cannot.” The doctor replied, “I will.” [HC 6:616]

Alma teaches us the necessity for having the good seed of faith planted in our hearts:

Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me. [Alma 32:28; emphasis added]

Revelation comes to us in our minds, but it also comes in our hearts. In a revelation to Oliver Cowdery in section 8 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord says, “Yea, behold,

I will tell you in your mind and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your *heart*” (D&C 8:2; emphasis added). To me it is very interesting that the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost is in our hearts.

What if the Lord appeared to each of us as He did to Solomon and said, “Ask what I shall give thee”? How would you answer? Would you ask for a new car? A new home? A blessing of health? A station in life? Solomon did not ask for anything like these. Neither did he ask for fame or for fortune. Rather, he responded: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding *heart*.” This reply pleased the Lord.

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. [1 Kings 3:5, 9, 11–13; emphasis added]

There is some strong language in section 64 of the Doctrine and Covenants regarding who has claim upon our hearts: “I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men” (D&C 64:22).

So when the inquirer in the car with the out-of-state license plate asked, “Where is the church of the Mormons?” I could have answered differently. I could have pointed to my chest and said that the Church should be first and foremost in our hearts. Then the traveler would surely have been somewhat bewildered. But that response would have been more accurate than my directing him to our beloved, magnificent, sky-piercing spires; the great majestic dome; and the other world-famous monuments and edifices—

wonderful and unique and great as they are. It would have been more correct because the Lord said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20–21).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be in our hearts, and, when it is in our individual hearts, it will also be in our great buildings of worship, in our lovely educational institutions, and in our magnificent temples, as well as in our homes and families.

But the *keys* of the kingdom rest with the president of the Church. It is that authority that activates and governs all Church activities. Without priesthood keys and authority, there would be no church.

Paul's prayer was that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith (see Ephesians 3:13–19). That is my prayer also. I feel like Peter when some of the early Saints had begun to fall away. The Savior was troubled and said to the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?"

Peter responded for the Twelve by remarking:

Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. [John 6:67–69]

Of that I testify in his sacred name, even Jesus Christ, amen.