

# INTERPRETER

— ∞ —  
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 26 · 2017 · Pages 123-226

**Consecration Brings Forth Zion,  
Not Just Disaster Relief:  
An Examination of Scholarly  
and Prophetic Statements  
on the Law of Consecration**

Richard D. Gardner

Offprint Series

© 2017 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)

ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication. Visit us at [MormonInterpreter.com](http://MormonInterpreter.com)

You may subscribe to this journal at [MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription](http://MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription)

# CONSECRATION BRINGS FORTH ZION, NOT JUST DISASTER RELIEF: AN EXAMINATION OF SCHOLARLY AND PROPHETIC STATEMENTS ON THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

---

Richard D. Gardner

**Abstract:** *Active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints covenant to obey the law of consecration, and although I have long felt we discuss it too little, more Saints seem to be taking notice. Various historical and doctrinal opinions have been expressed on the law and on the “united order,” including some insightful and some unusual opinions by Kent W. Huff in his book *Joseph Smith’s United Order*.<sup>1</sup> Using this book along with the contributions of several other scholars and Church leaders as a basis for discussion, I explore the history, meaning, and future of the “united order” as part of the larger law of consecration. Starting as an eleven-man organization in charge of Church business and operating under consecration principles, the united order — actually called the united firm — transformed into the Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to historians, most Church members did not even know of its existence, let alone participate in it. Traditional understanding is that the firm’s consecration model provided the pattern for the Saints to follow. An alternative interpretation, described by Kent Huff, is that the Saints’ only real attempt at a formal consecration effort was for disaster relief. In fact, according to Huff, the Saints in general did not deed their property to the Church as we’ve learned in Church history classes. He further argues that even the former-day Saints in the City of Enoch, the early Christians in Jerusalem, and the Nephites right after Christ’s visit didn’t really have all things in common in the way most of us have imagined. I disagree with this interpretation and provide evidence against it, but I*

*appreciate the historical information and several philosophical insights that Huff provides. Other scholars and historians challenge the widely-held notions that 1) tithing is a lower law, given because the Saints failed to live the full law of consecration, and that 2) a formal form of consecration (the united order) will eventually return. I advocate instead for the traditional understanding of the law of consecration and stewardship as taught by Church leaders, believing it is the path toward both freedom and equality the world is looking for, and I explain why I believe it — or a similar program — will eventually be reinstated.*

Good people around the world want to create a better society, achieve brotherhood, and eliminate poverty. To some, the answer lies in political programs and paradigms. Those on the political right believe capitalism (in spite of its shortcomings) has brought more good to more people than any other economic system. Those on the left feel that government distribution of wealth is at least partially the answer.

Neither the political left nor the political right offers what so many are seeking. Instead, I feel that God's law of consecration offers our best hope. It will not answer the world's problems but uplifts only those who embrace it under godly covenant, for it cannot be enforced. The united order — the organized method of consecration carried out under Joseph Smith — preserves freedom and private ownership but also encourages a more equal society, and its goal is to achieve Zion. While this did not happen in Joseph Smith's time, it has happened in past dispensations.

What is the united order, and how is it related to the law of consecration or to the law of tithing? Some envision communal societies like those in pioneer Utah; indeed, these were called "united orders," but they differed markedly from the system Joseph Smith envisioned. Others believe that Joseph Smith's united order was simply a temporary solution or merely one of many equivalent ways of fulfilling the law of consecration.

In this paper I analyze Kent W. Huff's writings in his book, *Joseph Smith's United Order: A Non-Communalistic Interpretation*, along with writings and teachings of other historians and past and present Church leaders in order to form evidence-based conclusions consistent with teachings of Church leaders. We ought to acknowledge apparent disagreements and semantic misunderstandings between some scholars and Church leaders, but we can find common ground. Anyone can be wrong, even Church leaders, but I feel the safest route is to trust them

first, especially when there is a consensus. The ancient Jews ended up subordinating their priesthood leaders to the scribes; while thankfully there is not such tension today, it is wise to remember that in our theology, prophets and apostles come first.

The goal of *Joseph Smith's United Order* was to detail the history of the united firm, which was also nicknamed the united order, during Joseph Smith's time, using primarily the *History of the Church* in order to show that 1) neither it nor any of Joseph Smith's economic programs were socialistic (and in fact, having "all things common" as described in Acts and 3 Nephi was either foolish or just a temporary emergency measure) and that 2) it was mainly used to help migrating Saints get to Kirtland and then to Zion (Missouri), so it solved a temporary challenge, and that 3) it was not a widespread social movement but instead a "firm" composed of eleven individuals whom most Church members had not heard of. The united firm/order was, according to Huff, the precursor of today's Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and both organizations were formed primarily to conduct the business of the Church. In fact, Huff denies there existed any widespread movement or even real ideal of consecration and stewardship among the Saints generally. Furthermore, 4) tithing represents a "higher law" rather than a lower law when compared to the law of consecration. Finally, 5) "Consecration" ranges from an informal system of donations to the payment of tithes and offerings, but when we pay tithes and offerings, we have fully complied with consecration's requirements.

While there is some truth to some of these statements, I will argue for a "traditional" understanding of the program of formal consecration of property, colloquially known as the "united order," and for a "traditional" understanding of tithing as a "lesser law," although I'll have to explain what this means in order to avoid semantic misunderstandings. After this introduction, I will discuss each of these five theses — and related ideas — in turn. I believe Huff's ideas (at least some of which I believe are shared by others) deserve detailed responses, as well as those of others I will quote or cite.

Before we continue, I need to clarify the terms *united firm* and *united order*. As we'll discuss later, individuals involved in the united firm were given code names when the revelations were first printed in the Doctrine and Covenants, which were finally replaced with their real names in the 1981 edition. But the term *united order* is actually a code name for *united firm*, and it persists in our scriptures to this day, although *united order* was not part of the original text.<sup>2</sup> The united firm

was a business operation formed by revelation and run by a few men, and they were to conduct their business on the principles of consecration and stewardship, and, as we'll see, to be an example to the Saints who were also to consecrate their properties and receive stewardships; this system has been and still is colloquially referred to as the "united order." So the united firm and "united order" share common principles but are not identical. To complicate things further, various more or less communal organizations established in pioneer Utah under Brigham Young were also called "united orders."

Although we will discuss the business firm — the united firm, I'll be commenting heavily on the system of consecration and stewardship said to involve the Saints in general, which most Latter-day Saints and leaders call the "united order," as well as philosophical concepts of equality and having all things common. Because Huff doesn't believe it ever was the intention for the Saints in general to consecrate property and receive stewardships outside of emergency situations, his use of the term *united order* usually means *united firm*, unless he is using *united order* to criticize the common LDS belief in the consecration/stewardship system.

In this article, most often I will use the term *united firm* where appropriate to describe the business operation and terms such as *formal consecration of property* to describe the system the Saints were to follow; this system is referred to in many statements I'll quote as the "united order," and sometimes for convenience I'll also refer to it that way with the quotation marks. Leaders of the Church often use the term *united order* to describe the consecration and stewardship system under Joseph Smith, but sometimes the term is used more loosely to describe any system of economics designed to help the poor and equalize the standard of living, such as those programs in Brigham Young's Utah.

The word *consecration* can have multiple meanings, from small informal donations to tithing, to donating all of one's property, time, or talents (often with the reception of a stewardship). As Stephen C. Harper (a Church historian, former BYU professor of church history and doctrine, and an editor of the Joseph Smith papers) explains, donation is not always implied; the word really means "to make sacred."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, when the word was first introduced in this dispensation (in Doctrine and Covenants 42),<sup>4</sup> it was in the context of a consecration/stewardship system and was often called the Law of Consecration. (However, that phrase is not scriptural; the closest is D&C 105:29 "laws of consecration.") We know today this law encompasses all sorts of consecration, and to avoid misunderstandings it is best to specify how we use the term;

yet, in our temple covenant, we are pointedly reminded of how it was specifically used in the D&C. (Many, if not most D&C scriptures about consecration do involve donating one's money and means.)<sup>5</sup> We'll return to this idea in Sections III and VI.

Huff's interpretations of the law of consecration and the "united order" turn conventional understanding on its head. The practice of all the Saints' consecrating their property and receiving private-property stewardships with the ability to draw from a storehouse — what I call the "traditional" or "conventional" understanding<sup>6</sup> — seems foreign to Huff's interpretation. (I contrast this "traditional" understanding with both Huff's understanding, and with communal united orders like Orderville, in pioneer Utah.) In fact, he disavows any notion that the Saints of former dispensations had all common — including the Nephites after Christ's resurrection, the early New Testament Saints described in the book of Acts, or the residents of the City of Enoch. Instead, to Huff, tithing — which Church members commonly consider to be a lesser law given because the Saints could not live the whole law of consecration — is actually a higher law and represents the highest form of consecration.

Huff seems to go out of his way to hammer home the point that the Church is not socialistic, or at least it was not in Joseph Smith's day. Perhaps we could be forgiven for thinking that Brigham Young's version of the united order (or versions, as he allowed different Utah settlements the freedom to experiment on various united order formats) was socialistic, but Huff is emphatic that we must not think anything of the sort about Joseph Smith's society. Now, most of us who have studied Joseph Smith's limited united firm and his larger system of consecration and stewardship would already claim that private property was their chief feature, and we already know that Joseph condemned the lifestyle of a commune called "The Family," who were already living in Kirtland when the Saints arrived and which some Saints joined. In The Family, everything was literally held in common, including, apparently, clothes.<sup>7</sup> Huff also repeats that any donations to the Church in Joseph's day were voluntary, as if to distinguish this system from the powerful control of the state under socialistic or communistic governments. But of course these donations were voluntary; was Joseph Smith going to execute or imprison non-complying Saints? Of course not, and I don't know any Church members who would even consider the possibility. Likewise, in today's Church, tithe payments and coffee abstinence are commanded but voluntary, in the sense that no one get excommunicated for violations, nor do homes get inspected for contraband coffee or bank

accounts for secret untithed income. So it seems to me that when Huff goes out of his way to distance Joseph Smith's society from such forced socialism, he is really beating down a straw man; "he protests too much."

In spite of what I believe are some interesting but strained interpretations of scriptures and this continual setting up and blasting of straw men, Huff gives us much interesting historical information and helps us envision the early days of this dispensation. He traces the formation of the eleven-man (all Church leaders) united firm as a business partnership tasked with carrying out transactions of the church and the gathering of the Saints, its eventual splitting to form different orders in Kirtland and Missouri, and its demise — at least the demise of its original form. By June 1838, only four of the original eleven men in the united firm were still alive or active Church members — if members at all — and Joseph had had to flee Kirtland for his own safety. With the demise of the firm, and with the growth of the Church, a more advanced business model was needed. Huff therefore describes the original eleven-man united firm partnership's transition to the corporate form. The firm's duties were taken over by the Quorum of the Twelve and the Corporation of the President of the Church. This helped the Quorum of the Twelve rise from its original position of lower authority than the stake high councils to its scriptural position right below the First Presidency. The new corporation (The Corporation of the President of the Church) had none of the debts of the previous organization, although some individuals were still liable for them.<sup>8</sup> On the transition, Huff concludes

To say that the united order ended with the phasing out of the partnership form would probably be inaccurate. The original intention that it be an "everlasting order," D&C 82:20, should lead us to conclude that the order has never ceased since its inception, although the outward legal forms have been adjusted as conditions required.<sup>9</sup>

To say that the united firm is everlasting because it survived the change to the Corporation of the President seems to me a bit of a stretch. "Everlasting" could also mean that it is an eternal method or incorporates eternal principles, although not always directly applied but one the Lord would like to apply when the Saints are ready. In fact, we don't always know just what is meant by "everlasting." Tithing, too, was to be "a standing law unto them [us] forever," as quoted by historian Harper in teaching us that tithing was not meant to temporarily "replace" consecration.<sup>10</sup> The Lord also commanded the ancient Israelites to "keep [the Passover] a feast by an ordinance for ever (Exodus 12:14)." And, the



Day of Atonement was to be “an everlasting statute unto you (Leviticus 16:34).” Circumcision was also to be an “everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:13).” Yet none of these things is now required of us.<sup>11</sup>

Huff and other historians present worthwhile historical information on the economic practices in Joseph Smith’s time, which helps us better understand the conditions and challenges of the early church in this dispensation as well as how the organizational structure of the Church addressed these issues.

Ultimately, however, I believe most Saints would question Huff’s unique interpretation of the system of formal consecration of property and reception of stewardships as described in the Doctrine and Covenants; while he definitely makes good points, contributes new ideas, and has clearly done much research and thinking, several of his overall conclusions are historically controversial and do not seem to match those of numerous general authorities of the Church. This by itself doesn’t mean he is always wrong, but I would advise caution. I agree wholeheartedly with Huff that socialism is a poor economic system, and that neither the united firm nor any other economic program established by Joseph Smith were socialistic, but I think in his effort to eschew socialism, Huff goes too far in disparaging any system that promotes economic equality. I believe, contrary to Huff, that the united firm coupled with a consecration and stewardship program among the Saints generally aimed to produce equality and that it was an economic system that did and will yet affect the lives of the Saints.

The next five sections address Huff’s five theses — along with related ideas — that I mentioned in my fifth paragraph. Each section heading gives one of Huff’s conclusions as well as a bracketed addition of mine, meant to convey my different understanding of the Lord’s ultimate economic and spiritual plan for His Saints. I will also discuss others’ thoughts on these issues.

### **I. First Thesis: Neither The United Firm nor any Church Program is Socialistic [but the Gospel Does Aim to Produce Equality]**

Before discussing the united firm as such, we’ll first address Huff’s goal of emphasizing that nothing in Joseph Smith’s practices or in ancient scripture was socialistic or equality-seeking. We’ll be considering ideas more than history in this section.

Huff cites<sup>12</sup> President J. Reuben Clark’s October 1942 general conference talk, in which he disabused Church members of the notions

that the “united order” was a type of communism and that the worldwide communistic movement was preparing the world to accept the united order.<sup>13</sup> Nowadays, those of us who have not ignored history know the communists in the 1940s-50s (especially Stalin and Mao) caused the deaths of perhaps 70+ million people, and their communism took away freedom, mandated atheism, and did not promote equality (except equality of the form described in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, where all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others). Huff states:

Contrary to traditions stemming from the Brigham Young era, any form of socialism, defined here as centralized or common ownership and/or control of property, was not a part of the teachings or practice of the Joseph Smith era; Joseph Smith and other leaders of that time made strong efforts to counter such teachings and practices.<sup>14</sup>

During the Joseph Smith era, the term consecration did not imply any socialistic mechanism or behavior, but referred only to contributions of the sort commonly made within the church today .... There were also some cooperative business efforts, but they were based on principles of common sense economics, not some intervening religious doctrine.<sup>15</sup>

These statements are true, of course; as we have seen, Joseph Smith did not espouse socialism and in my experience, this is not widely disputed, although Huff takes such pains to refute the socialistic hypothesis that one might think most Latter-day Saints believed it.

Here is a sampling of sources existing before Huff’s book was published that clearly show the Church/“united order” isn’t socialistic. I did not take the time to locate all the old priesthood or Relief Society manuals that might have addressed the subject.

- J. Reuben Clark’s conference talk, quoted above, and also his 1942 *Church News* series; this was reprinted in the appendix of the 1981 *Doctrine and Covenants Institute Instructor’s Manual*.<sup>16</sup>
- The 1981 *Doctrine and Covenants Institute Student Manual*.<sup>17</sup>
- An April 1942 First Presidency message, which is also cited in Elder Victor L. Brown’s 1976 BYU speech.<sup>18</sup>
- Elder Marion G. Romney’s April 1966 conference address.<sup>19</sup>
- William O. Nelson’s 1977 *Ensign* article “To Prepare a People” that also cited Clark’s October 1942 conference

address as well as an anti-socialism statement of Elder Harold B. Lee in his October 1941 conference address and Joseph Smith's anti-socialism statement Huff cites in his book.<sup>20</sup>

- "Communism," in Elder McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*.<sup>21</sup>
- Elder Ezra T. Benson's 1977 BYU speech.<sup>22</sup>
- Marion G. Romney's April 1977 conference talk.<sup>23</sup>

In light of all this and more, I'm not sure why Huff believes people would think Joseph Smith's united firm and/or his consecration/stewardship system were socialist, but Huff does a very thorough job debunking that idea. I believe that most Latter-day Saints who have studied the issue realize that communism is Satan's evil counterpart to the "united order," which is based on free will, charitable/gospel-motivated treatment of others, private property, and certainly denies atheism. So far, so good. The "united order" is not communism or socialism.

President Clark did say something in the same speech that Huff doesn't discuss, that might destroy Huff's narrative. It is that Joseph Smith's "united order" sought to produce equality. Now, this may sound socialistic but need not, as long as it was voluntary. Clark said,

There is continuous reference in the revelations to equality among the brethren, but I think you will find only one place where that equality is really described, though it is referred to in other revelations. That revelation (D&C 51:3) affirms that every man is to be 'equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs.' (See also D&C 82:17; 78:5-6.) Obviously, this is not a case of 'dead level' equality. It is 'equality' that will vary as much as the man's circumstances, his family, his wants and needs, may vary.<sup>24</sup>

Although Huff does mention this scripture (D&C 51) elsewhere, he doesn't really confront it head-on. To me, one of the purposes of a formal consecration system is to make the participants' standards of living about equal but not to specify the type of car each person must drive.<sup>25</sup>

Evidently, Huff is against socialistic governments. I am too. I believe that capitalism, rather than socialism, brings more good to more people and is more likely to raise not only everyone's standard of living but also their freedom and happiness. But the Lord has made clear that equality is also important. I think Huff is so adamant to disavow socialism (and he's right for doing so) that he throws the baby out with the bathwater. Government-forced socialism is bad, but equality on a voluntary nature

is good. The authors of one of my new favorite books, *Working Towards Zion* also make this point.<sup>26</sup>

Here are some examples of Huff's efforts to disavow anything that smacks of socialism:

- In quoting D&C 42, Huff italicizes all those parts he thinks show a non-socialist approach.<sup>27</sup> But those of us who believe in the traditional understanding of the united order agree. He doth protest too much, methinks.
  - 32. A steward over his *own property*.
  - 35. For the purpose of *purchasing lands*. (not living in socialism)
  - 54. *Thou shalt pay for that which thou shalt receive of thy brother*.
- Huff compares the D&C 78 section heading in 1968 to that of the 1981 edition. In 1968, the heading has *Order* capitalized and says it is "for the purpose of establishing the poor." (Recall that the term *order* was not found in the original text of the revelations, but of course the section headings are not part of the original scripture.) But in 1981, *order* is not capitalized, and it is "for the purpose of establishing a storehouse for the poor." I don't see much difference here, but Huff finds it significant: the noncapital "order" indicates "a less formal interpretation of the word" and "Establishing the poor' sounds more like a broad social experiment was in the wind, while 'establishing a storehouse for the poor' sounds like the simpler step of giving aid to the poor was intended. These two differences both imply that a simple solution for a simple problem was all that was to be implemented, rather than *some sweeping doctrinal and sociological revolution*."<sup>28</sup>
- "The Lord's storehouse represents the welfare program of the church. It does not represent *some all-inclusive communal economic system*. It is for exceptions only, not the main-stream economic activity."<sup>29</sup> I don't read the scriptures that way. Surely, the storehouse is for the poor, but anyone looking to expand his or her stewardship might use materials (or money) from the storehouse.
- Referring to a letter by Joseph Smith,<sup>30</sup> "Here we can see that the 'law of the church' or 'law of the Lord' had a welfare clause but not a socialism clause. The poor are to be cared

for, but no other economic requirements are laid down for the bishops to administer.”<sup>31</sup> However, the letter cited didn’t exactly preclude “other economic requirements.”

- “There were a few cooperative business ventures organized by the saints, but they were instigated only for the reason they promised practical economic benefits, not because there were any doctrinal requirements; one could join in the venture or not as his own interest or preferences dictated. Similarly, Joseph Smith’s history mentions no ‘Ordervilles,’ or the communal kitchens, uniformity of clothing, etc., often characteristic of such societies, except to disapprove them.”<sup>32</sup> Of course, nothing is ever forced in the Church anyway. Another straw man.
- Men were contracted to work on the Kirtland temple in the way of doing normal business. But then Huff admits a lot of the work was volunteered.<sup>33</sup>
- Huff relates the story of Orson Hyde’s financial problems. Fellow apostle William Smith had money, but Joseph Smith didn’t intervene, except to tell the store to be laxer about giving Hyde credit. “There was no storehouse to support the able. If a storehouse did exist, it was only for the poor who were without the means to care for themselves.”<sup>34</sup>
- The brethren held a 24-hour meeting in the Kirtland temple and needed food. Instead of using a communal fund, they took up a collection and sent someone for food. The point is that if they were living communally, they would have had a communal fund.<sup>35</sup>
- Joseph Smith condemned the financial speculation occurring in Kirtland. Huff’s point is that in a socialistic society, there could have been no speculation in the first place.<sup>36</sup>
- Joseph Smith was tired of people sending him mail without paying postage, forcing him to pay postage upon delivery. Finally he just stopped accepting such mail. Huff’s point is that people must be responsible instead of being socialistic.<sup>37</sup>
- Huff cites the scripture that “Thou shalt not take thy brother’s garment; thou shalt pay for that which thou shalt receive of thy brother” (D&C 42:54). This obviously contradicts the communal idea of Kirtland’s “Family”

prior to Joseph Smith's arrival but does not contradict the "united order" — a formal consecration/stewardship system — as I know it.<sup>38</sup>

- Huff relates several more events designed to show that Joseph Smith's Church was not socialistic.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of my disagreement with Huff over many issues, here is something Huff and I agree on:

It is important to understand the relationship between the poor and the rich. The principle of justice does not give the poor any enforceable claim on the property of the rich. However, mercy operates such that if the rich do not recognize the needs of the poor and attempt to fulfill them, the rich, in turn, can expect no mercy and help in their own case when the Lord judges them. They may be denied exaltation. But of course, if they did not desire to help others during their mortal life, they would be out of place and would make serious mistakes in a state of exaltation, because helping others is what exaltation is all about.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, the Lord has commanded that "every man esteem his brother as himself" and to "be one," for "if ye are not one ye are not mine." (D&C 38: 25, 27). So I commend Huff for making this point. On the other hand, he quotes a line from *History of the Church*<sup>41</sup> that says, "all members of the united firm are considered one," and infers that this and all D&C exhortations of oneness pertain to a business relationship only.<sup>42</sup> I would be cautious about limiting "oneness" to business.

Socialism destroys freedom, which is one reason I oppose it and a reason I suspect Huff does too. But a formal consecration system, as advocated by Joseph Smith or even as advocated by Brigham Young, does not destroy freedom, as attested by then-apostles John Taylor and Erastus Snow:

We like freedom, God has put it in our bosoms; and as I said to President George A., the other day, in talking about this matter, in organizing the Order of Enoch, as it may be called, we want on the one hand the most perfect union; and on the other hand the most extended personal liberty that it is possible for men to enjoy consonant with carrying out the principles of unity. Not the liberty to trample on other people's rights; not the liberty to take from people that which belongs to them; not the liberty to infringe upon public interests or

the public benefit, but personal liberty so far as we can enjoy it. These are my ideas and feelings in relation to these matters, based upon the principles of truth and, as it is said, — “If the truth shall make you free, then shall you be free indeed, sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”<sup>43</sup>

Objections arise in the minds of some. “Shall we not by entering into this order, surrender our manhood, our personal liberty, and those rights so dear to every human being?” I answer, no, not in the least. We do no more than what all people do in the formation of government, of every kind, or associations for any purpose, whether charitable, religious or social. All organizations, corporations, and business firms agree to surrender certain personal privileges in order to secure mutual advantages. All governments, societies, corporations and firms are founded upon the principle of mutual concessions to secure mutual advantages. Without this there would be no government, no power to arrest and punish criminals and protect the rights of the citizen and the sanctity of home.<sup>44</sup>

So a consecration/stewardship system aims to combine freedom and equality. Is the aim achievable? Or is this a pipe dream? These apostles, and many others, claimed the former.

### **What does it Mean to have “All Things Common?”**

Were the New Testament or Book of Mormon Saints who had “all things common” socialists? Not necessarily. We need to define socialism. Often, it is used to mean a socialistic structure enforced by the state, in which individual liberty is curtailed. But neither of these scriptural situations describes state control. I believe there are varying ways to interpret the phrase “all things common.” One interpretation would certainly be that they shared their clothes and toothbrushes; this is the way Huff evidently thinks about the phrase. Joseph Smith did too, at least when he was asked: “Do the Mormons believe in having all things common?” Joseph’s answer: “No.”<sup>45</sup>

“Notice here that [Joseph Smith] was refuting the idea expressed in Acts 2:44–45. To him, ‘all things common’ (Acts 2:44–45), ‘common stock,’ (HC 6:37) the Kirtland common stock ‘family,’ (HC 1:124, 146–147), and socialism, and were all the same thing and they are all

wrong or folly no matter where they appear, whether in the scriptures or elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> At other times, Joseph Smith denied believing socialism, as when socialist John Finch visited Nauvoo (cited by Huff,<sup>47</sup> an event commonly discussed in LDS history books.) Furthermore, as other historians attest, the members of the united firm did not hold “property in common,” but when the firm was disbanded, they were to be treated equally.<sup>48</sup> But one might also suppose that “all things common” could mean that each family donated their excess and tried to have a common standard of living in their community, so they didn’t literally have their clothes in common but were willing to share their means. This is my interpretation (and after I wrote this, I found that the *New Testament Institute Manual* agrees<sup>49</sup>), and I favor it because it doesn’t have Joseph Smith thinking the New Testament Saints were in error, but Huff doesn’t hint that this interpretation could exist.

### Is it Unwise to Have “All Things Common?”

Regarding the New Testament Saints (Acts 4) who sold their possessions and laid them at the apostles’ feet for the benefit of the poor and who subsequently had all things in common, Huff explains:

Again, it should be obvious to anyone that the sale of property and the distribution and consumption of the proceeds, if continued for any length of time, would quickly reduce a people to beggary and would lead to the economic self-destruction of the group. The church would become the “have-nots” of their society, and would lose the power to help others. In Joseph Smith’s eyes, such behavior would stop the gathering process and defeat the Lord’s plans for the Church’s growth in this dispensation.<sup>50</sup>

At face value, this is probably correct, but I don’t think it necessary to adopt Huff’s conclusion. People can sell their property but continue to earn money, and if they earn enough, they may have enough left over to continue to help the poor. This criticism of the New Testament Saints closely echoes several statements made by Brigham Young, who is the likely source of Huff’s statement. Brigham Young said:

In the days of the Apostles it was written, “And all that believed were together and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men as every man had need. And they continued daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat



their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, &c.” This was all right in the Apostles, to show a certain principle that was hereafter to be acted upon. *It does not require more than common enlightenment to discover that such an order of things, if persisted in, would result in poverty, hunger, nakedness and destitution.* I say to my brethren and sisters, come let us learn how to gather around us from the elements an abundance of every comfort of life, and convert them to our wants and happiness, filling our storehouses with wheat, wine, and oil, filling our wardrobes with woollen cloth and fine linen, with silks and satins of the finest quality and patterns from the looms of Deseret, going onward and upward until the whole earth is filled with the glory of God. *Let us not remain ignorant with the ignorant, but let us show the ignorant how to be wise.*<sup>51</sup>

Brigham Young was right; if not done wisely, good intentions go awry. The context of his statement shows that he did want everyone to prosper. It looks as if Brigham Young also failed to consider what “all things in common” could mean. In fact, commenting on someone else’s 2004 blog post about this Brigham Young quote, Huff (unless someone is impersonating him) also provides a few references of similar quotes by Brigham Young.<sup>52</sup> I am including them all here because I don’t wish to be accused of hiding any potentially contrary evidence to my own theses, which are, for the most part, that the traditional understanding of Joseph’s “united order” is correct in that it was indeed the plan for the Saints to consecrate their goods, receive stewardships, and donate their excess to the storehouse; that the Lord wants equality among the Saints in many ways including temporal; and that the early Saints were not fools by giving their substance to the apostles.

Although Huff’s book is mainly about practices in Joseph Smith’s day and not about Brigham Young’s practices or ideas, Huff’s argument about the New Testament Saints has strong roots in the Brigham Young statements he cited in the blog post, so they become relevant to our discussion on Huff’s view of “all things common.” Here are the first two:

Those who are in favor of an equality in property say that that is the doctrine taught in the New Testament. True, the Savior said to the young man, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me,” in order to try him and prove whether he had faith or not.

In the days of the Apostles, the brethren sold their possessions and laid them at the Apostles' feet. And where did many of those brethren go to? To naught, to confusion and destruction. Could those Apostles keep the Church together, on those principles? No. Could they build up the kingdom on those principles? No, they never could. Many of those persons were good men, but they were filled with enthusiasm, insomuch that if they owned a little possession they would place it at the feet of the Apostles.

Will such a course sustain the kingdom? No. Did it, in the days of the Apostles? No. Such a policy would be the ruin of this people, and scatter them to the four winds. We are to be guided by superior knowledge, by a higher influence and power.

The superior is not to be directed by the inferior, consequently you need not ask me to throw that which the Lord has put into my hands to the four winds. If, by industrious habits and honorable dealings, you obtain thousands or millions, little or much, it is your duty to use all that is put in your possession, as judiciously as you have knowledge, to build up the kingdom of God on the earth. Let this people equalize their means, and it would be one of the greatest injuries that could be done to them. During the past season, those who lived their religion acted upon the principles thereof by extending the hand of charity and benevolence to the poor, freely distributing their flour and other provisions, yet I am fearful that that mode was an injury instead of a real good, although it was designed for good.<sup>53</sup>

You take some of those characters to whom I have referred to-day, *who want us all to be of one heart and of one mind, and they think we cannot be so unless we all have the same number of houses, farms, carriages, and horses, and the same amount in greenbacks.* There are plenty in this Church who entertain such a notion, and I do not say but there are good men who, if they had the power, would dictate in this manner, and in doing so they would exercise all the judgment they are masters of, but let such characters guide and dictate, and they would soon accomplish the overthrow of this Church and people. *This is not what the Lord meant when He said: "Be ye of one heart and of one mind."* He meant that we must be one in

observing His word and in carrying out His counsel, *and not to divide our worldly substance so that a temporary equality might be made among the rich and the poor.*

But Brigham Young was not against temporal equality, according to some additional Young statements below. See also (below) Orson Pratt explaining how temporal equality could not only be established, but maintained. Continuing this Brigham Young speech:

You take these very characters who are so anxious for the poor, and what would they tell us? Just what they told us back yonder — “Sell your feather beds, your gold rings, ear rings, breast pins, necklaces, your silver tea spoons or table spoons, or anything valuable that you have in the world, to help the poor.” I recollect once the people wanted to sell their jewelry to help the poor; I told them that would not help them. The people wanted to sell such things so that they might be able to bring into camp three, ten, or a hundred bushels of corn meal. Then they would sit down and eat it up, and they would have nothing with which to buy another hundred bushels of meal, and would be just where they started. My advice was for them to keep their jewelry and valuables, and to set the poor to work — setting out orchards, splitting rails, digging ditches, making fences, or anything useful, and so enable them to buy meal and flour and the necessities of life.

Next, Brigham Young decries socialism, contrasting the successful Nauvoo Latter-day Saints with a failed French socialist experiment also in Nauvoo after the Saints left:

There was a certain class of men called Socialists, or Communists, organized, I believe, in France. I remember there was a very smart man, by the name of M. Cabot, came over with a company of several hundreds. When they came to America they found the City of Nauvoo deserted and forsaken by the “Mormons,” who had been driven away. They set themselves down there where we had built our fine houses, and made our farms and gardens, and made ourselves rich by the labor of our own hands, and *they had to send back year by year to France for money to assist them to sustain themselves.* We went there naked and barefoot, and had wisdom enough, under the dictation of the Prophet, to build up a beautiful city

and temple by our own economy and industry without owing a cent for it.<sup>54</sup>

There is a certain wisdom here. People must learn how to be self-sufficient and produce wealth, and this is what a formal consecration/stewardship system aims to teach — it isn't just a handout program. The Lord said, "Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer .... Thou shalt stand in the place of thy stewardship" (D&C 42:42,53). Take home message: socialism doesn't work. I have been against socialism for years but have also advocated the traditionally understood "united order." They are not incompatible. The next Brigham Young speech:

If the poor had all the surplus property of the rich many of them would waste it on the lusts of the flesh, and destroy themselves in using it. For this reason the Lord does not require the rich to give all their substance to the poor. It is true that when the young man came to Jesus to know what he must do to be saved, he told him, finally, "sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me;" and a great many think that he told the young man to give away all that he had, but Jesus did not require any such thing, neither did he say so, but simply, "distribute to the poor." If the poor knew what to do with what they have many, yea very many, in this land would have all that is necessary to make them comfortable. But it is different with the great majority of our friends over the water — they are fettered and bound, and in the prison of poverty, and have not power to extricate themselves from the thralldom and wretchedness they are in, and hence it becomes our duty to lend a helping hand and send for them.

*Many of us may think that we have nothing we can spare; but the providences of God might speedily make us think otherwise.*<sup>55</sup>

One of Brigham Young's themes, permeating the *Journal of Discourses* and exemplified by this italicized statement above, is that we ought to share more with others and become less materialistic. I mention this to balance Young's statements that we ought not to mindlessly redistribute wealth, such as this one:

There is a great deal being said and rumored about what we are teaching the people at the present time with regard to being one in our temporal affairs as we are one in the doctrine

that we have embraced for our salvation. I will say to you that, erroneous traditions at once begin to present themselves. Why we have received these traditions, those who reflect, read and understand can pass their own decision. You cannot find a sect anywhere that strictly believes in the New Testament. Read over the sayings of the Savior to his disciples, those of the disciples one to another, and of the people, with regard to being one; and then bring up the fact that they believed in this doctrine, and that they taught and practiced it so far that the believers sold their possessions and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet. Now, what is the tradition on this point? To sell your houses, your farms, your stores, your cattle, and bring the means and lay it down at the feet of the Apostles, and then live, eat, drink and wear until it is all gone, and then what? Do without? Yes, or be beggars .... To the Latter-day Saints, I say, all this is a mistake; these are false ideas, false conclusions .... *To begin with, we will unitedly labor* to sustain the kingdom of God upon the earth. Shall we sell our possessions, have all things in common, live upon the means until it is gone, and then beg through the country? No, no. Sell nothing of our possessions.<sup>56</sup>

So while Brigham Young is against bad economic policy, the phrase I italicized shows he is still for united labor. And continuing this speech, Brigham Young encourages support of cooperative enterprises. So it is not sharing that he didn't believe in but sharing in unwise ways. Note the parts I have italicized:

The question was asked, "What are you going to do with the co-operative stores?"

"Why, use them up," and some of the brethren got the idea that the destruction of these stores was intended, because, to many, the idea of using a thing up, is to destroy it; but this was not the meaning I wished to convey. But I say swallow them up, or circumscribe them or incorporate them, from time to time, in more extensive co-operative plans .... This is a comparison with regard to our co-operative stores and every co-operative institution we have; *we expect that the whole people will support them and give them their influence; that the whole people will work for the whole, and that all will be for the kingdom of God on the earth.* All that I have is in

that kingdom. I have nothing, only what the Lord has put in my possession. It is his; I am his, and all I ask is for him to tell me what to do with my time, my talents and the means that he puts in my possession. It is to be devoted to his kingdom. Let every other man and woman do the same, and all the surplus we make is in one great amount for accomplishing the purposes of the Lord. He says, "I will make you the richest people on the earth." Now, go to work, Latter-day Saints, and *make yourselves one*, and all needed blessings will follow.<sup>57</sup>

So Brigham Young wants to obey the Lord's command to be one, as he reiterates in this next speech cited in Huff's blog post comment, after advising against a mere division of property:

Supposing that the property of the whole community were divided to-day equally amongst all, what might we expect? Why a year from today we should need another division, for some would waste and squander it away, while others would add, to their portion. The skill of building up and establishing the Zion of our God on the earth is to take the people and teach them how to take care of themselves and that which the Lord has entrusted to their care, and to use all that we command to glorify his holy name. This is the work of regenerating, of elevating mankind to the higher plane of the Gospel; in other words, of simply teaching them their duty. ...

Now, if we could take this people, in their present condition, and teach them how to sustain and maintain themselves and a little more, we would add to that which we already have; but to take what we have and divide amongst or give to people, without teaching them how to earn and produce, would be no more nor less than to introduce the means of reducing them to a state of poverty.

*I do not wish for one moment to recognize the idea that in order to establish the United Order our property has to be divided equally among the people, to let them do what they please with it. But the idea is to get the people into the same state of unity in all things temporal, that we find ourselves in with regard to things spiritual. Then let those who possess the ability and wisdom direct the labors of those not so endowed, until they too develop the talents within them and in time acquire the same degree of ability.*

What would be the first lesson necessary to teach the people, were we to commence to direct their labors to the great end of becoming of one heart and one mind in the Lord, of establishing Zion and being filled with the power of God? It would be to stop expending and lavishing upon our dear selves all needless adornments and to stop purchasing the importations of Babylon.

So Young desires a “state of unity in all things temporal” (in spite of the statement I quoted earlier in which he says that being of one heart and mind does not mean forming a “temporary equality” between rich and poor), which to me means a basically equal standard of living. This is also what the Lord revealed through Joseph Smith! (see for example D&C 38: 25–27; 49:20; 51:3; 70:10,14; 78:5–7) Notice in the next quotation that Brigham Young who has just opposed the idea of simply dividing up assets, next advocates establishing Zion just as the City of Enoch did. This vision of Enoch’s Zion is radically different than Huff’s, as we’ll see later on. Young also clarifies that material things are not evil, if we use them to build God’s kingdom:

We have no business here other than to build up and establish the Zion of God. It must be done according to the will and law of God after that pattern and *order by which Enoch built up and perfected the former-day Zion, which was taken away to heaven, hence the saying went abroad that Zion had fled.* By and by it will come back again, and as Enoch prepared his people to be worthy of translation, so we through our faithfulness must prepare ourselves to meet Zion from above when it shall return to earth, and to abide the brightness and glory of its coming.

When brother George Q. tells us we should not labor for the earth and the things of this world, he means we should not labor with sinful motives, and to gratify the lusts of the flesh. But if we possessed the treasure of the Gentile world, could we not send our Elders to the ends of the earth, bearing the precious Gospel to all living? Could we not sustain their families during their absence? Could we not build Temple after Temple and otherwise hasten on the work of redemption? Yes. But keep the people in poverty and how are we to accomplish this great work? I say, *let us gather and accumulate the things*

*of the earth in the manner indicated by the Lord, and then devote it to God and the building up of his kingdom.*<sup>58</sup>

The final discourse Huff references in the blog comment is *Journal of Discourses* 19:46–47, which does not support his implied thesis that anything that *seems* like socialism is wrong. Instead, Young bemoans the lack of equality in the earth and warns that it must end. Here is what Brigham Young says on page 46:

Now the object is to improve the minds of the inhabitants of the earth, until we learn what we are here for, and become one before the Lord, that we may rejoice together and be equal. Not to make all poor. No. The whole world is before us. The earth is here, and the fullness thereof is here. It was made for man; *and one man was not made to trample his fellow-man under his feet, and enjoy all his heart desires, while the thousands suffer.* We will take a moral view, a political view, and we see the inequality that exists in the human family. We take the inhabitants of the civilized world, and how many laboring men are there in proportion to the inhabitants? About one to every five that are producers, and the supposition is that ten hours work by the one to three persons in the twenty-four hours will support the five. It is an unequal condition of mankind. We see servants that labor early and late, and that have not the opportunity of measuring their hours ten in twenty-four. They cannot go to school, nor hardly get clothing to go to meeting in on the Sabbath. I have seen many cases of this kind in Europe, when the young lady would have to take her clothing on a Saturday night and wash it, in order that she might go to meeting on the Sunday with a clean dress on. Who is she laboring for? For those who, many of them, are living in luxury. And, to serve the classes that are living on them, the poor, laboring men and women are toiling, working their lives out to earn that which will keep a little life within them. *Is this equality? No! What is going to be done? The Latter-day Saints will never accomplish their mission until this inequality shall cease on the earth.*<sup>59</sup>

As I'm sure Huff — who completed a massive work on the united orders under Brigham Young (which orders actually took on several formats, some quite different from what Joseph Smith established) which



I won't comment on — knows, Brigham Young also said this, in *support* of the New Testament Saints' selling their possessions:

The Apostles ... thought they had power to make the people of one heart and one mind with regard to temporal things, and that they could amalgamate the feelings of the people sufficiently to organize them as one family. *And the people sold their possessions and laid the price at the Apostles' feet, and they had all things in common. There is no doubt that this is a correct doctrine, and can be practiced to the benefit of a community at large, if believed and understood.* But who has got the doctrine; who has eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to believe? Who has the authority and the capability to organize such a society? The Apostles thought they had, but when Ananias and Sapphira fell dead because they had lied, not only to man but to the Holy Ghost, in saying they had laid their all at the feet of the Apostles when they had only laid part there, a great fear fell upon the people, and they dispersed. Have we any history that the people ever assembled in a like capacity afterwards? I think you cannot find it.<sup>60</sup>

Also, Brigham Young compared the ancient practice of consecrating all via the apostles to Joseph Smith's practice of consecrating all via the bishop of the Church and did not find fault with Joseph's system, but instead ascribed it to revelation:

Before this the Lord revealed to Joseph, that the people would gather out from Babylon, and establish the kingdom of God upon the principles of heaven. They went up to Jackson County, Mo., with this in their faith, and with the express understanding that when they go there, everything was to be laid at the feet of the Bishop, not at the feet of the Apostles, as they did anciently. *Then, you know, they sold all they had, and brought their substance and laid it at the feet of the Apostles. The revelation given through Joseph was to lay all at the feet of the Bishop, who was to distribute it among the people, according to the revelation given for that purpose, for their benefit.* But they could not bear this, consequently they were driven from Jackson County, and assembled again, some in Caldwell, and some in Davies County, and finally they were driven from the State. This was in the fall of 1838.<sup>61</sup>

John Taylor didn't seem to believe it was wrong of the early Saints to sell what they had, citing *Joseph Smith's* revelations:

The President has said that there are many men in this city and elsewhere who want to know whom they shall place over their affairs; they can not tell. Well, what then? Why those who cannot do that, let them unite together in a united order similar to that which is spoken of, as the Book of Doctrine and Covenants expresses it — though it varies a little from that form here — *and lay it at the Apostles' feet*, and let the Bishop give them their inheritances.<sup>62</sup>

Nor did Lorenzo Snow:

But just so far as this willingness exists in our hearts to appropriate our means that we have accumulated for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God on the earth, and that too without grudging, *even as the former-day Saints laid down theirs at the feet of the Apostles*, so far are we approved and accepted of God. Who, among the Latter-day Saints within the hearing of my voice this day could fail to comprehend this?<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, echoing Brigham Young's plea to build Zion wisely, Lorenzo Snow said,

Now, perhaps I do not believe as some do in regard to the United Order — that everybody is to come together and throw all their substance into a heap, and then come and take of it as they please, or that one man who does not understand temporal affairs at all should be placed as a steward over extensive concerns. I believe that there is an order in these things — a pleasing and an agreeable order — and that these things are arranged by the Lord in such a way that when people properly understand them they will be satisfied and admire them. It is because we do not get to understand the requirements of God that we are dissatisfied. God fixes these matters up and arranges them in such a way as will tend to the exaltation of every Latter-day Saint who is disposed to honor them. It is because of our ignorance that we are displeased with the requirements of the Lord.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, when Zion is done right, it works! To calm the fears of those who worry if a traditionally understood “united order” (in which

all members consecrate all, and receive a stewardship that is their private property) would work, or if it would have nightmarish results (just like today's communist nations!) George Q. Cannon said:

It takes the product of my property managed with care and economy, in addition to my own labor, to enable me to live, and if I put all my property into this Order, how am I to live?" This has been the inquiry more frequently made than another. *It is not the intention, in establishing the United Order, to destroy the productiveness of property; it is not the intention to take property from men who have it and give it to those who have none.* There are two extremes to be avoided, one is the disposition of the rich to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the poor. That is what we are trying, in this United Order, to put a stop to, so that we may prevent the growth of class distinctions, the increase of wealth in a certain class, and that class have interests diverse from and frequently adverse to the rest of the community. That is one extreme. The other is this idea to which I have referred, the anxiety of poor people to get possession of the accumulations of the rich, and to have them divided among them, and a general leveling take place. *There is no such idea connected with this order, such a thing could not stand very long; and let me say to you who find fault with this United Order, ask yourselves when you ever saw anything connected with this Church or its doctrines that was unnatural, that was not consistent with good common sense? Do you think that we can teach and practice anything that will repress people, that will destroy individual effort, that will take away from enterprise its incentive?* No, there is nothing connected with this system of this character, and it is upon this point that men and women are so much deluded by the false and slanderous reports which are circulated. There never was a day since our organization as a people, according to my ideas and my reading of our early history and my subsequent experience, when there were so many falsehoods in circulation about any principle as there have been about this United Order. There is far too much ignorance among us, and men take advantage of this to deceive the people by their falsehoods. It is the intention to preserve that which we have. *If a man is a man of business let him have a chance to show his business capacity, not stop him, not take his property*

*from him and give it to somebody who never had anything.* The intention is to use the skill of the businessman in elevating those who are not business men, to bring up the poor from their level to the broad upper level, not to pull down the upper level to the plane of the lower. That is not the design, but it is that we shall work for each other's good; and where men have property let them take means to preserve it, not to destroy it. It is not the intention for boards of directors to use over men and property.<sup>65</sup>

These italicized portions speak exactly to Huff's legitimate concern: "It often happens that what is of great value in the hands of one person is useless in the hands of another because of a lack of training or concern. For many types of property, a sharing of ownership or control means no one uses it well, and a loss to the individual and to society results."<sup>66</sup> But when people consecrate their wealth and receive a stewardship, under the "united order's" traditional understanding, these problems are avoided.<sup>67</sup>

Orson Pratt explains how equality can be maintained under the traditional "united order," even though as Brigham Young rightly explained above, a mere division of property might equalize things for the moment, but the equality would not last:

What provisions did the Lord make in order to *maintain this equality* among his Saints permanently? He made this arrangement by law — that every man should be considered a steward first, and prove himself a wise steward before he could be entitled to an everlasting inheritance....

*Are they not equal? Yes, and this maintains a permanent equality;* for the man who has gained a hundred thousand in his stewardship consecrates all that he has not used; and the man with a smaller stewardship who in the whole year, has only gained fifty dollars over and above what he has used, consecrates that fifty. *The man who has gained most consecrates most, the man who has gained least consecrates the least. This reduces them yearly to the same position and condition as they were in when they commenced this heavenly order.*<sup>68</sup>

The Lord wishes to put it out of the power of every man to be lifted up above his brother or his sister, so far as wealth or property is concerned, *by making his people equal, keeping them equal; not by a division of property, but upon the principle*

*of stewardships. That keeps them equal.* There is no chance of their becoming unequal. It is out of their power to be unequal. If a man loses all that he has by fire, and all his stock should die, the fact is, he is just as rich as all the others, because he is a steward. He owns nothing, neither do they.<sup>69</sup>

So a formal consecration/stewardship/storehouse system is no socialist spread-the-wealth plan but a divinely inspired method of unity, whereby every able person works but voluntarily adopts a similar standard of living. Below, I'll show that this was Joseph Smith's ideal and not just Brigham Young's.

### **“All Things Common” Among the New Testament Saints, Nephites, and in the City of Enoch**

How does Huff explain the Saints' having all things common in Acts 4 if this is such a bad idea? Were the ancient apostles really wrong?

Acts 8:1 [this is four chapters later in Acts, after the “all things common” phrase of Acts 4] tells us that because of persecution, all the saints except the apostles left Jerusalem. First they fled to other Judean and Samaritan cities, and then on to Cyprus, Antioch, Damascus, and Alexandria. [Huff cites the New Testament Media Kit, Life of Paul Series Kit, PISI0629, March 1980, Filmstrip #3 “Commitment to Christ” frame #10]...

The persecutions would mean that people would have to flee their homes and lands to avoid imprisonment or death. Selling those possessions where possible would be the most sensible thing to do. The money received could be used to help finance a trip to a new location and the establishment of a new home and occupation. Part of those funds could go to assist those who had no means, perhaps because their belongings had been confiscated or destroyed.

In these circumstances it would probably be important to establish some kind of welfare system. If a person were to turn over all his property to the church, he would then have no property and could logically be classified as “poor.” By being a poor person, he could qualify for sharing in the proceeds from other similar donations. Someone such as Joses (Acts 4:36–37) may have set the pattern by donating all his property and then becoming eligible for sharing in the proceeds of other donations.

*Apparently* Annanias and Sapphira decided to take advantage of the system by pretending to give all their property and thus become eligible to be maintained by the church. By secretly keeping back a part of the original sales price, they could have two sources of wealth.<sup>70</sup>

This is an interesting interpretation, but it obviously includes a lot of speculation. Note Huff's use of the word *apparently*, for elsewhere, he accuses B.H. Roberts, the editor of the *History of the Church*, of over-speculating and using the word *apparently*.<sup>71</sup> Huff interprets the Nephite Zion and Enoch's Zion similarly (see below).

Apparently, according to Huff (see, I use the word *apparently* too!) even Joseph Smith didn't believe the Saints described in Acts were living correctly because

During his work on a new translation of the Bible, Joseph Smith made a few changes to the New Testament account of the "all things common" experience of the saints.... This indicates that he was quite aware of the existence of the passage, but, as illustrated in chapter 2, that he interpreted it differently than many do today.<sup>72</sup>

I'm not sure what Huff means here. There is certainly no JST change to this scripture (I even checked the Inspired Version of the Community of Christ [formerly RLDS]<sup>73</sup>). Maybe he means that Joseph Smith implemented a different version of Zion than is described in Acts. Then again, I don't believe that *all things common* has to be taken literally, and I think it could very well describe Joseph Smith's "united order."

What about the Nephites after Christ's visit?

Two other scriptural references to communal situations can be explained in a similar way. The reference in the Book of Mormon to a people with "all things common among them," 4 Nephi 1:3, occurred just after the wholesale destruction of cities in the New World. With supplies and facilities gone, people might well have to band together in a tribal subsistence kind of organization in order to survive. As economic conditions improved through hard work and accumulation of supplies and tools, organization ties could become more casual.

Well, yes, there was destruction, but Christ's visit occurred perhaps a year later,<sup>74</sup> and in any case, I'm sure this emergency housing situation did not last for nearly 200 years, but the scriptures strongly imply the

Nephites had “all things common” for nearly 200 years. So this also strikes me as a strained interpretation. Continuing:

About two hundred years after the gospel-based society originated, the majority of the people rejected the gospel (4 Nephi 1:24, 38, 40), and as a consequence, most of the cooperation they had enjoyed was replaced with contention (4 Nephi 1:25–49). With only a catch-phrase, “all things common,” and a few remarks about the setting to go on, there is little that can be determined about the nature of the society, and we are left almost wholly to speculation. However, it seems clear enough that the peoples’ acceptance of the gospel (4 Nephi 1:15, “no contention ... because of the love of God”) was the factor that made possible whatever cooperation there was, rather than the reverse: *an economic mechanism does not the gospel bring*. In other words, it seems unlikely that the apostasy was a consequence of a change in social structure. It is more likely that the apostasy damaged the social fabric.<sup>75</sup>

I agree that the gospel motivated cooperation, rather than vice versa, and that the apostasy caused the social damage rather than vice versa. This is an important idea, which I’m glad Huff brought up. And now for the City of Enoch:

The phrase “no poor among them,” Moses 7:18, is often assumed to indicate some kind of communal organization. It comes from a time when the armies of the world were attacking the people of Enoch. The Lord protected the people of Enoch through power given to their leader, but they probably found it necessary to help themselves as well by organizing along military lines for defense. This process would include centralized control of many aspects of life, including the army quartermaster functions of acquisition and sharing of supplies, facilities, and equipment.<sup>76</sup>

The military emergency idea might be true, but I read in Moses that when Enoch battled his enemies, mountains were moved, and the enemies feared and were cursed. Zion was feared by its enemies (Moses 7:14–17) and was not attacked. While God often helps those who fight to protect their freedoms, I think in this case that God actually fought their battles.<sup>77</sup> But beyond that, Zion’s people were of one heart and mind (verse 18). Is it that much of a stretch to say they were economically equal and that this is the reason there were “no poor among them”? They were

translated to heaven after all; as Brigham Young asks, do we imagine the angels of heaven speculating?

The doctrine of uniting together in our temporal labors, and all working for the good of all is from the beginning, from everlasting, and it will be for ever and ever. No one supposes for one moment that in heaven the angels are speculating, that they are building railroads and factories, taking advantage one of another, gathering up the substance there is in heaven to aggrandize themselves, and that they live on the same principle that we are in the habit of doing ....No sectarian Christian in the world believes this; they believe that the inhabitants of heaven live as a family, that their faith, interests and pursuits have one end in view — the glory of God and their own salvation, that they may receive more and more ... We all believe this, and suppose we go to work and imitate them as far as we can.<sup>78</sup>

It has been pointed out, quite correctly, by many thoughtful Saints that “no poor among them” doesn’t refer only to money; there are many types of poverty. But this is not an excuse to ignore the financial aspects of “no poor.”

Huff concludes that all three noted scriptural cases of equality are not really what they appear to be at first:

The common thread running through the New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Pearl of Great Price references to communalism is the hostile, primitive, migratory conditions in which the organizations developed and the survival purpose they served.<sup>79</sup>

This certainly is a creative interpretation, but it goes against the teachings of most or all past and present Church leaders who have endeavored to give the Saints a hopeful vision of these ancient Zions.<sup>80</sup> (It also goes against the ideas of many other historians;<sup>81</sup> although I admit that history, like science, is not decided by consensus. Still, radical interpretations ought to be treated cautiously.) Although that by itself doesn’t necessarily make Huff wrong, I don’t buy his conclusion, and I think the evidence behind it is weak — really, just speculation — and frankly, quite a stretch. Instead, the prophetic message is that the Zion society we build on earth is preparation for a similar society in heaven, as I’ll discuss in the next section. The City of Enoch was not taken into heaven just because it had a great disaster-relief program.



In conclusion, the “united order” — a formal system of consecration, stewardship, and storehouses — produces freedom, prosperity, and even equality, while not being socialist.

## **II. Second Thesis: Economic Cooperation Under Joseph Smith was Set Up for Temporary Situations [but Also Fulfills Eternal Goals]**

Not only does Huff correctly refute that Joseph Smith’s economic programs were socialistic, but he endeavors to show that Joseph Smith’s main motivation for implementing mutual welfare assistance was the migration of the Saints, especially trying to get the poor Saints moved to Zion (Missouri).

In short, the evidence of economic cooperation in the Joseph Smith period is all directly associated with the actual migration operations of the saints .... There never was any general involvement of a large number of saints in a structured communalistic society.<sup>82</sup>

By emphasizing the transitory nature of Kirtland, Huff tries to show that all the consecration programs were just to help move Saints west.

It is important to realize that the Kirtland settlement was to be a temporary one, that people were expected to move through it quickly, and that after a limited time, the city was to be abandoned altogether. It makes a great deal of difference in interpreting the revelations whether the society to which they apply is assumed to be static or in turmoil. By becoming aware of the turmoil, we can better appreciate the short-term, limited, and practical purposes of the instructions given.<sup>83</sup>

The scriptures do hint that the Saints will generally end up in Missouri but do not ever say that Kirtland was to be abandoned. If this were the plan, why then would the Saints build the Kirtland temple? Were it not for the Kirtland bank failure and subsequent apostasy, evidence suggests that the Saints would have remained much longer.<sup>84</sup> I don’t know for sure, but neither does Huff. This is one of many examples where Huff goes beyond the evidence in his interpretation. But this interpretation is vital for his thesis.

Speaking of the Kirtland Bank (“Kirtland Safety Society”), historian Mark Staker posits that this bank, which he shows was established on very egalitarian principles and through Joseph Smith’s (unpublished) revelations, was part of the Kirtland consecration effort, meant to help

establish Zion, even after the stewardship system had been suspended. Joseph Smith encouraged all who were able to purchase bank stock (but forced no one). Before its failure, it actually did improve the economy, created jobs, and raised standards of living. Evidence suggests that Joseph Smith prophesied of a great destiny for the bank as long as the people were righteous. Staker states:

It also reflected the interests of the Latter-day Saints in bringing about a millennium through restructuring their economic relationships with one another to help create a Zion people as described in the New Testament (Acts 2; Acts 4:31–33), Book of Mormon (4 Nephi 1:1–5), and revelations of Joseph Smith (Moses 7:17–19; Community of Christ D&C 36:2g–i).<sup>85</sup>

This bank even played a role in establishing equality, as noted by Willard Richards in a letter to his sister at the time: “There is an equality here which exists among no other people; not that they have all things common, but one is not made a king because he is worth more than his neighbor. Is he a righteous man? is the question.”<sup>86</sup> In short, the program of the Church in Joseph Smith’s time really was involved in economics and not just for short-term gathering purposes — but no one was forced to participate.

Huff explains that D&C section 51 — conventionally understood to encourage equality among the Saints — concerns only one branch of the Church moving from New York to Kirtland and how they are to keep their money and possessions within the branch (vs. 6–11). Huff notes that verse 3 on their “wants and needs” applies only to this branch, whereas most Church members have applied it more generally.<sup>87</sup> Then, “There is nothing *mystical or complex* about the suggestion that the members of the traveling branch be made equal according to wants, needs, and circumstances.”<sup>88</sup> In any case, a cooperative movement as part of a system of formal consecration and stewardship could be and usually would be local; it doesn’t have to involve the whole church. The Church could have several local “orders,” just like in pioneer Utah.

Citing D&C 78, where the united firm is first commanded, if not quite established, Huff explains

The new organization was to regulate “the storehouse for the poor of my people” (v. 78:3), both in Kirtland and Zion, and “advance the cause” (v 78:4), that cause being the gathering process. Notice that the poor were to be helped in the context

of the gathering. There is no intimation of any socialistic economic entanglements.<sup>89</sup>

Yes, I'd say the cause *included* the gathering process, but Huff wants to limit it to gathering only — which the scripture itself doesn't say, and neither does the relevant portion of the *History of the Church* (1:255-257) — to support his thesis that Joseph Smith's economic program was formed just to gather Saints but had no permanent function except as the united firm morphed into the Corporation of the President. Huff says more on gathering:

The purpose of the sharing that was suggested was to allow those with more to help those with less complete the move. It was not to create a series of small, *static, inward-turning communities* such as the Hutterites, Mennonites, or other such groups, but rather to get the big job done of moving thousands of people to a frontier location with the minimum of trouble and suffering.<sup>90</sup>

By limiting the function of sharing to enabling the migration effort, Huff has again gone beyond what the scriptures or history actually say, although I'm sure the gathering was a major purpose. Huff goes out of his way to point out the obvious, that the Saints aren't like the Hutterites or Mennonites. At no time did anyone, even Brigham Young with his Utah united orders, suggest setting up "static" and "inward-turning" communities. The Utah Church leaders did encourage economic independence and the ability to supply needs without importing from the East, but they also wanted to export to the East. So this is not, in my opinion, "inward-turning."

Huff has clearly shown that there were poor, migrating Saints who needed special assistance. But I don't think we can conclude that this was the only reason they were to share, cooperate, and consecrate. Goals to ameliorate temporary situations and goals to establish a Zion society do not have to be mutually exclusive. I argue that there are permanent, eternal goals of the consecration and stewardship system. Two of these are equality and stewardship leading to heirship. Our discussion will include some Doctrine and Covenants scriptures, some of which Huff discusses and some of which he does not. We'll focus first on equality, then on stewardship.

## Equality

The Orson Pratt quotation in the previous section reminded us of the Lord's desire for equality among us. Let's look at the traditional understanding of consecration and stewardship with its goal of equality but not by force, as explained by historian Milton V. Backman:

This system not only preserved the essential values of the capitalistic system, such as personal initiative, private ownership, and reward for effort, but it was also designed to eliminate some of the negative aspects of that economic system, including poverty amid plenty, inequalities of wealth, and wasteful competition. The law of consecration promoted economic equality without compromising free agency or excellence. The redistribution of wealth placed all families on essentially the same economic plane and eliminated the need for certain kinds of welfare programs by giving to everyone, including the poor, sufficient property to care for their needs. It was not aimed at establishing complete equality, for members received different kinds and types of inheritances, but it was designed to implement a principle given in such a revelation recorded in Kirtland in March 1831: "It is not given that man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin." (D&C 49:20)<sup>91</sup>

I want to bring special attention to this last scripture that Backman quoted (D&C 49:20), which Huff does not mention in his book — perhaps because it seems too socialistic? The Lord spoke here with especial plainness, which is hard to rationalize, although many try. Nor, speaking of equality, does Huff discuss any of D&C section 70, which includes this verse:

Nevertheless, *in your temporal things you shall be equal*, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld. (D&C 70:14)

Huff does, however, discuss D&C 51:3 and 78:5–6.

Wherefore, let my servant Edward Partridge, and those whom he has chosen, in whom I am well pleased, appoint unto this people their portions, every man equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs. (D&C 51:3)

That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things. (D&C 78:5–6)

We've recently seen some of Huff's comments on section 51 regarding how the scripture applies to just one branch; next he explains that D&C 51:3 only means to help the poor settle along with the rich. While I accept that there were poor migrating Saints who needed help, I don't limit my understanding of the scripture to that situation. Similarly, speaking of D&C 78:5–6, Huff tells us:

Verses 5 and 6 speak of being equal. In theory and in practical application, this meant only that those who were very poor should be assisted so that they could live much like others who were more fortunate. In this particular setting, it meant mostly that those who did not have means to acquire land should be helped by those who did have funds. Any equalization was to be done through the gifts or alms of the rich to the poor. No forced leveling process is implied here.<sup>92</sup>

Once again, Huff protests too much. Of course there was no force. In the Church, there is never force. It seems that Huff is worried someone will accuse the church of being like communist China or Russia.

But my main point here is that all these scriptures give eternal truths. Huff sort of brushes them off, but I think they have far more significance than he gives them. Re-read them; they speak for themselves. As Ezra Taft Benson said,

Much has been written about this law and its attempted implementations in the early history of the Church; and much deception has taken root, even among some of our members, because of misinformed opinion or misguided interpretations. Some view it as merely an economic alternative to capitalism or the free enterprise system, others as an outgrowth of early communal experiments in America. Such a view is not only shortsighted but tends to diminish in importance a binding requirement for entrance into the celestial kingdom. *The law of consecration is a celestial law, not an economic experiment.*<sup>93</sup>

## Stewardship

Now let's move from equality to stewardship. Huff skips these verses when discussing sections 51 and 78:

And whoso is found a faithful, a just, and a wise steward shall enter into the joy of his Lord, and shall inherit eternal life. (D&C 51:19)

And he that is a faithful and wise steward shall inherit all things. Amen. (D&C 78:22)

The Lord gives us several types of stewardships, including our church callings and even our own children, but these do not prohibit the Lord from also assigning “temporal” stewardships. These are not quite as temporal as they sound, however, since “All things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created” (D&C 29:34). What we do in this life prepares us for what comes in the next.

Orson Pratt, from a speech quoted earlier in relation to how the united order not only establishes but maintains equality, next discusses how stewardship leads to eternal inheritance:

If a man loses all that he has by fire, and all his stock should die, the fact is, he is just as rich as all the others, because he is a steward. He owns nothing, neither do they. “But,” inquires one, “shall we never become bona fide possessors?” Yes. As we now see, children may be acting for their father, but still they are considered in the mind of the father as being the inheritors of his property at certain time; so with the Latter-day Saints. *They may be made stewards, but the time will come when they shall be bona fide inheritors.* The revelation tells us when that time shall come. That when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, and after the people have proved themselves in the stewardships, and when Jesus comes in his glory, they shall be made possessors, and be made equal with him.<sup>94</sup>

This italicized sentence is really a profound thought, showing how, in order to be heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ, we must first be stewards over God's property. It explains the temple pairing of consecration and exaltation. If we are faithful and wise stewards, we then can receive our own celestial inheritances. In fact, this idea of consecration and stewardship really is the “law of the celestial kingdom”

(D&C 105:4–5). The late LDS theologian Hyrum Andrus explained that Jesus consecrated everything to the Father, and therefore inherited all that the Father has. This is what all celestial beings do throughout the eternities, and thus, what appears to be a temporal commandment really has eternal consequences.<sup>95</sup> Now, under Joseph Smith's system, it is technically true that each steward owned his stewardship; it was private property according to the laws of the land. If he left the Church, he kept his stewardship. But stewards are supposed to act as if all really belongs to God, for it really does belong to Him.

In conclusion, although Huff limits Joseph Smith's economic system to short term needs and neglects the eternal import of the consecration/stewardship system, the "united order" may unite a people to satisfy both short-term needs, AND eternal goals.

### **III. Third Thesis: The United Firm was Composed of Eleven People and Conducted Church Business [but Provided an Example for the Rest of the Saints to Follow]**

The historical information Huff gives us is valuable. Huff's thesis is that:

the united order was a business unit created by revelation and charged with conducting many of the affairs associated with the gathering of the saints.<sup>96</sup>

This is useful because it reminds us that the Church is not anti-business and that temporal issues must be addressed. The gathering really was a central concern. The order started with nine men in 1832 as a business partnership to conduct church affairs, such as printing or securing land for migrating Saints. Later, its functions were absorbed into the First Presidency, Presiding Bishopric, and Quorum of the Twelve. Huff understands the united firm (he uses the anachronistic term *order*) to have nothing to do with any social or economic organization of the Saints in general, except for their gathering:

The united order organizations of the Joseph Smith era had no elements of socialism, but were simply the administrative forerunners of today's Corporation of the President, with a special function of facilitating the gathering process.<sup>97</sup>

The united order was a small business organization created to assist the gathering of the saints. The unit involved no communalism except to the limited extent common ownership is involved in a partnership. Communalism is here defined as central or common ownership or control of property, especially

when that centralization is doctrinally required. The term socialism is used here as a synonym for communalism.<sup>98</sup>

Once again, we see the desire to avoid the very appearance of socialism.

### Code Names and Confusing References to Enoch

For this firm to function, it was necessary that it be secret, otherwise people would take advantage. For example, the Church bought land for settlement. If everyone knew the Church's plans, the price of land would skyrocket. Or if people knew that various businesses were actually all owned by the Church, they would more easily hound one business if the other were unable to pay its debts. Because once a secret is out, it is too late to put it back into the bottle; the organization must remain secret from most Church members as well as from the world. Hence, the strange code names that existed in editions of the D&C prior to the 1981 edition.

Orson Pratt discusses this nine-man order and its code names and calls it the order of Enoch, in that one of Joseph Smith's code names was Enoch (the other being Gazelum). Pratt calls it a lesser part of the law. (This is important, and later, under the tithing subheading in Section IV, I'll provide more of this discourse, in which Pratt calls tithing another lesser law.) Pratt's quotation below is my input, but backs up Huff's discussion of the code names:

Instead of entirely casting them away, and denouncing them and rejecting them as his people, he still gave ancient Israel a law. *Instead of entirely rejecting us, he gave us another law. One inferior to the celestial law, called the law of Enoch.* The law of Enoch is so named in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, but in other words, it is the law given by Joseph Smith, Jr. The word Enoch did not exist in the original copy; neither did some other names. The names that were incorporated when it was printed, did not exist there when the manuscript revelations were given, for I saw them myself. Some of them I copied. And when the Lord was about to have the Book of Covenants given to the world, it was thought wisdom, in consequence of the persecutions of our enemies in Kirtland and some of the regions around, that some of the names should be changed, and Joseph was called Baurak Ale, which was a Hebrew word; meaning God bless you. He was also called Gazelum, being a person to whom the Lord had given the Urim and Thummim.



*He was also called Enoch. Sidney Rigdon was called Baneemy. And the revelation where it read so many dollars into the treasury was changed to talents. And the City of New York was changed to Cainhannoch. Therefore when I speak of the Order of Enoch, I do not mean the order of ancient Enoch, I mean the Order that was given to Joseph Smith in 1832-34, which is a law inferior to the celestial law, because the celestial law required the consecration of all that a man had. The law of Enoch only required a part. The law of consecration in full required that all the people should consecrate everything that they had; and none were exempt. The law of Enoch called upon certain men only to consecrate.*

Now did the people keep this second law — inferior to the first? The Lord picked out some of the best men in the Church, and tried them if they would keep it. “Now I will,” says he, “try the best men I have in the Church, not with the celestial law, but they shall consecrate in part, and have a common stock property among them.” And in order to stir them up to diligence, he fixed certain penalties to this law, such as, He shall be delivered up to the buffeting of Satan; sins that have been remitted shall return to him and be answered upon his head. How did they get along then? The Lord tells us that the covenant had been broken. And consequently it remained with him to do with them as seemed to him good. Many have apostatized since that day. Sidney Rigdon for one, Oliver Cowdery for another, and John Johnson for another. Why have they apostatized? They did not comply with the *covenant that they made in regard to the law given to Joseph Smith, that was afterwards called the law of Enoch.*<sup>99</sup>

Note how Pratt here explained what he means by the order of Enoch and why it was a lesser law — lesser because it involved a few men (the united firm) consecrating some, rather than all Saints consecrating all. Perhaps this reference to Joseph as Enoch explains this observation of Huff:

As with the headnotes of section 78, the differences between the headnote of Section 82 in the 1968 edition of the D&C and the headnote in the new 1981 edition are of interest here. In the older edition it is asserted that the revelation shows: “the order given to Enoch, and the Church in his day.” The later edition drops that statement and says nothing about events

in Enoch's day. A likely reason is that on a review of pertinent documents from the Joseph Smith period, the scholars preparing the 1981 edition found no evidence to support the statement. According to the title page of the 1968 edition, the headnotes to chapters or sections were added in the 1921 edition, and may have been influenced by the definitions coming from the Brigham Young period ...

*The appearance of the word Enoch in the early editions without the clarifying note that this referred to Joseph Smith, may have caused some ambiguity and confusion which was not corrected until later.*<sup>100</sup>

I agree that Joseph Smith/Enoch's united order became mixed up somewhere with the ancient Enoch, and I thank Huff for enlightening me on this. (For further enlightenment, see Max H Parkin's *BYU Studies* article on the United Firm.<sup>101</sup>) This is one of several cases in which Huff thinks B.H. Roberts was over-influenced in his thinking by the social structure and united orders of the Brigham Young period, some of which tended toward communalism. On the other hand, this "order of Enoch" could have a double meaning, like some of Isaiah's statements had. The two uses don't have to be mutually exclusive.

### **The Eleven-Man United Firm**

The nine united firm members are identified in D&C 82:11 (1981 edition, the first edition of the D&C to replace the code names with real names as far as known) as Alam (the endnote says this was probably Edward Partridge), Newel K. Whitney, Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and three others whose identities were still uncertain, called by code names in the scripture, Mahalaleel, Horah, and Shalemanasseh. In his 1988 book, Huff identifies these as Sidney Gilbert, John Whitmer, and W.W. Phelps, respectively, citing a 1983 *BYU Studies* article.<sup>102</sup> Today's Doctrine and Covenants no longer uses code names in this verse; it confirms Huff's identification of the other three men. Frederick G. Williams and John Johnson were added later, to make a total of eleven (see D&C 92:1 and 96:6–8, respectively). (Huff doesn't mention this, but historians Max H Parkin and Mark L. Staker both inform us that Jesse Gause was listed on the original revelation as a member, but he apostatized, so when the revelation was published, his name didn't appear. Also Martin Harris's name was added to section 82, even though it did not initially appear on the meeting minutes.)<sup>103</sup>

Students of LDS history agree the united firm was in fact a business operation. But it was not a normal business operation; it operated on consecration/stewardship principles.<sup>104</sup> Huff limits those living in this formal consecration/stewardship system to these nine (later eleven) men:

The nine men in attendance at the meeting [described in D&C 82] were already deeply involved in the business of gathering the saints to Kirtland and Missouri .... These nine men were the only members of the order. *There is no indication that any other church members were also to be order member*.<sup>105</sup>

Huff argues that if this “order” meaning those practicing the formal consecration/stewardship/storehouse system — had involved more people, at lower levels of church organization, it would not have received so much attention in the Doctrine and Covenants:

The united order’s purpose was specific and limited only to gathering the saints and other central church matters....

In order to fulfill its mission during this long period, the church requires a central administrative body. A single small-scale, ward-level economic unit of a few men, subject to splits and recombinations based on demographic changes in local church population, would not likely receive the level of concern shown in the scriptures for the unit known as the united order.<sup>106</sup>

The circumstances of the organization of the united order and its first transactions should give us many clues concerning the real nature of the new administrative body. First of all, one might guess that they were primarily a business organization for dealing with central church matters because that is all they discussed for the four days they were meeting in council. Even the fact that they met in council for that length of time and conducted much business shows that they really were a small group, consisting of only nine men, and primarily concerned with specific business matters. If an entire community of saints were involved, no such proceedings would have been possible.<sup>107</sup>

As Max H Parkin points out, the business conducted by the united firm was eventually taken over by the high councils in Kirtland and Missouri;<sup>108</sup> Huff similarly argues that later, the business of the united

firm was taken over by the Corporation of the President of the Church, and in fact, this corporation is really the modern form of the united firm:

It should be noted that today's church business structure is probably much like that of Joseph Smith's united order in that there is a parent organization (Corporation of the President) with many subsidiaries and "doing business as" manifestations to the world. Joseph Smith's united order was concerned with such things as publishing, real estate, and retail operations, and the same is true today. Bonneville International, ZCMI, *Deseret News*, Beneficial Life, Zion's Bank, Deseret Industries, Beehive Clothing Mills, Deseret Book, and Brigham Young University are a few of the "doing business as" names for past or present church associated business units.<sup>109</sup>

I agree it is probably accurate and fair to compare the united firm (the small group) with today's Corporation of the President. However, I would argue that this firm was not the full extent of the Lord's plans for a formal system of consecration and stewardship but rather just a start to it. William O. Nelson (former assistant executive secretary to the Council of the Twelve) describes the nine/eleven-man united order as a "board of directors" to run a larger system (which he is calling the "united order"):

The Prophet convened a general council of the Church in Missouri on 26 April 1832 .... Joseph Smith, Newel K. Whitney, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris were directed 'to manage the affairs of the poor, and all things pertaining to the bishopric both in the land of Zion and in the land of [Kirtland].' (D&C 82) Accordingly, a central council was created (a *board of directors*), which in turn established the united order.<sup>110</sup>

Yes, for this particular small group, Huff's interpretation makes sense, and I enjoyed learning more about this eleven-man body, but this evidence does not show that others were not consecrating their properties, and in fact, we know they were, as we'll discuss shortly. Furthermore, it was the revealed plan for all the Saints, *even if, due to attitudes or circumstances, not all of them actually participated.*

## Is There No Evidence of Widespread Consecration of Property and Reception of Stewardships?

Huff claims there is simply an absence of evidence in the *History of the Church* for the type of “united order” most of us have learned about in Church history courses — in which each family consecrates all they have via the bishop and receives a stewardship — and he can’t prove such an absence unless his readers read the whole *History of the Church*.<sup>111</sup> And, to be fair, I have not read the whole *History of the Church*. On the other hand, the *History of the Church* was not written by today’s historical standards<sup>112</sup> (it isn’t wrong but perhaps is incomplete), and I think certain scriptures — most of which Huff cites — show that such consecration indeed was the plan, however well it turned out in practice. However, Huff argues that scriptures have varying interpretations, and it is only by reading the *History of the Church* that we can get the proper context,<sup>113</sup> although sometimes I find his context a bit embellished. We’ll discuss some of these scriptures below. But rather than citing only negative evidence, Huff asks us to look at his positive evidence. Huff points to Nauvoo. There the Saints had substantial control over the formation of their community; for example, they had a militia and their own city charter, and Joseph Smith was mayor. He says of all places, if there were to be communalism in the Church, it would be here. However, it is my understanding that the Lord suspended the formal consecration system before the Nauvoo period, as we’ll discuss at the end of this section, so that we shouldn’t expect to see it in Nauvoo.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, Huff presents evidence that Joseph Smith encouraged private enterprise and low tax in Nauvoo to encourage capitalism and bring prosperity. But free enterprise doesn’t preclude consecration of property, reception of stewardships, or bishops’ storehouses. In one instance Joseph Smith discussed price controls in a marketplace the city might build,<sup>115</sup> perhaps a farmer’s market, in which the city would provide only the infrastructure, and the farmers would bring their crops to sell. (This wouldn’t be a blanket price control for the whole city, but the vendors in the market would have to agree to charge no more than a given amount, and I’d be willing to bet that amount would be flexible depending on economic circumstances). Huff is “startl[ed]” that the free-market Joseph Smith would propose regulating prices to help the poor.<sup>116</sup>

Could there really be no evidence that the Saints actually consecrated their belongings and then received some back as a stewardship?

## Evidence from the Doctrine and Covenants that Consecration of Property and Reception of Stewardships was the Lord's Plan for His Saints.

In pioneer Utah, Huff notes,

“Consecration” ... was used to describe an act involving the transfer of property as part of joining a communal order. That meaning did not exist at Joseph Smith’s time, and the attempts to give that definition a practical implementation during Brigham Young’s time were often abortive. *Perhaps there has been a tendency to take that definition and apply it retroactively to the time of Joseph Smith to the exclusion of all other meanings.*<sup>117</sup>

This point is also made by other historians; Utah’s united orders color our thinking about what happened during Joseph Smith’s time.<sup>118</sup> But perhaps there is also a tendency to use the word in a historically correct way to describe consecrating property and then receiving a stewardship as private property (not in a communal order, like Kirtland’s Family, or Utah’s Orderville), and then consecrating the excess annually to the storehouse, as described in the Doctrine and Covenants and not to the exclusion of all other meanings. For example, D&C 42:31–33:

31 And inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall appoint or has appointed and set apart for that purpose.

32 And it shall come to pass, that after they are laid before the bishop of my church, and after that he has received these testimonies concerning the consecration of the properties of my church, that they cannot be taken from the church, agreeable to my commandments, *every man shall be made accountable unto me, a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, as much as is sufficient for himself and family.*

33 And again, if there shall be properties in the hands of the church, or any individuals of it, more than is necessary for their support after this first consecration, which is a residue to be consecrated unto the bishop, it shall be kept to administer to

those who have not, from time to time, that every man who has need may be amply supplied and receive according to his wants.

This scripture seems quite clear, but look closely at how Huff interprets verse 32 (noting the portion I've italicized), and this time, it is not so easy to decide if he is right or wrong. Interpretation method #1, the standard approach: Every man is a steward over his own property, or in other words, the property he received by consecration. Interpretation method #2, Huff's approach: Every man is a steward over his own property, the property he already owns, if he were rich enough to own property; OR, he is a steward over property he received by consecration. The first interpretation leads us to believe everyone donated all his property and received some back, but the second leads us to believe that only the poor received an inheritance. Because Huff accepts the second interpretation, he states "*at least as far as section 42 is concerned*, there is no mention of a need to have the two-way deeding of all property which has come to be associated in the public mind with the term 'consecration.' Only the 'residue' is consecrated in a one-way transaction."<sup>119</sup> However, I can see some overlap between these interpretations. If one consecrated his property and received it all back as a stewardship, he could be said to be a steward over it. In any case, consecration is happening and continuing to happen (vs. 33). I do wish this scripture and others were more explicit. Let's look at a couple of other scriptures, however, because we are certainly not limited to section 42. First, D&C 58:

35 It is wisdom in me that my servant Martin Harris should be an *example unto the church*, in laying his moneys before the bishop of the church.

36 And also, this is a law unto every man that cometh unto this land to receive an inheritance; and he shall do with his moneys according as the law directs.

This command is not just to Martin Harris but to all. However, this scripture is not explicit about the amount to be donated — all or part. The "inheritance" would be the stewardship. Next, D&C 72:

15 Thus it cometh out of the church, for according to the law *every man that cometh up to Zion must lay all things before the bishop in Zion*.

16 And now, verily I say unto you, that as every elder in this part of the vineyard must give an account of his stewardship unto the bishop in this part of the vineyard —

17 A certificate from the judge or bishop in this part of the vineyard, unto the bishop in Zion, rendereth every man acceptable, and answereth all things, for an inheritance, and to be received as a wise steward and as a faithful laborer;

This scripture is more explicit. It involves “every man.” “Lay all things before the bishop” sounds like consecrating all of one’s things, including a willingness to part with them. But to Huff, a historical list of Wilford Woodruff’s possessions that he laid before the bishop, as described in his journal, is “merely an inventory.”<sup>120</sup> The journal entry reads

Believing it to be the duty of the Latter-day Saints to consecrate and dedicate all their properties with themselves unto God in order to become lawful heirs to the celestial kingdom of God, it was under such a view of the subject that I consecrated before the Bishop of the church of the latter day saints in Clay county Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 1834 ... [then Wilford Woodruff lists his possessions].<sup>121</sup>

Huff comments, “As evidenced by Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, volume 1, p. 16, this scripture does not mean that all was given to the bishop ... but rather that an inventory of both character and property was to be taken ....”<sup>122</sup> Indeed, Huff may have a point in that the Saints would consecrate all their goods but sometimes would receive them all back again as their stewardship. Thus, “this consecration transaction appears to have had no more temporal effect than the symbolic ordinance of baptism.”<sup>123</sup> I disagree. Woodruff may not have given all to the bishop, but had the bishop needed the possessions, he would have taken them. Therefore, to me and to at least one historian — Steven Harper, who here is discussing Levi Jackman’s consecrations — the willingness to consecrate and perhaps receive less back is highly significant:

Though the personal property Jackman received from the bishop was exactly what he consecrated, the exchange represents more than a technicality. By consecrating his possessions to the Lord, Jackman had placed himself in the capacity of a steward rather than an owner.<sup>124</sup>

Next, D&C 83:2–3

2 Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken; and if they are not found transgressors they shall have fellowship in the church.



3 And if they are not faithful they shall not have fellowship in the church; yet they may remain upon their inheritances according to the laws of the land.

Huff applies this scripture only to the poor and widows.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, verse 2 speaks of widowhood. But many widows were not widows at the time they would have made their consecration and received an inheritance. In other words, inheritances were for everyone, not just widows.

I'm not sure how Huff could say people were not to consecrate all and receive stewardships because he also cites<sup>126</sup> section 85, including verse 1:

It is the duty of the Lord's clerk, whom he has appointed, to keep a history, and a general church record of all things that transpire in Zion, and of all those who consecrate properties, and receive inheritances legally from the bishop.

All this is consistent with the idea that the original, nine- (or eleven-) man order is but an example to the rest of the Church, as described by Lorenzo Snow<sup>127</sup> who quoted D&C 70:

1 Behold, and hearken, O ye inhabitants of Zion, *and all ye people of my church* who are afar off, and hear the word of the Lord which I give unto my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and also unto my servant Martin Harris, and also unto my servant Oliver Cowdery, and also unto my servant John Whitmer, and also unto my servant Sidney Rigdon, and also unto my servant William W. Phelps, by the way of commandment unto them.

2 For I give unto them a commandment; wherefore hearken and hear, for thus saith the Lord unto them —

3 I, the Lord, have appointed them, and ordained them to be *stewards* over the revelations and commandments which I have given unto them, and which I shall hereafter give unto them;

4 And an account of this stewardship will I require of them in the day of judgment.

5 Wherefore, I have appointed unto them, and this is their business in the church of God, to manage them and the concerns thereof, yea, the benefits thereof.

6 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto them, that they shall not give these things unto the church, neither unto the world;

7 Nevertheless, *inasmuch as they receive more than is needful for their necessities and their wants, it shall be given into my storehouse;*

8 *And the benefits shall be consecrated unto the inhabitants of Zion, and unto their generations, inasmuch as they become heirs according to the laws of the kingdom.*

This seems to be the beginning of the nine-man united order, here consisting of only six men.<sup>128</sup> But they are to form an organization for printing and to put their excess into the storehouse. This revelation, however, is not limited to these six. Look again at verse 1. It was actually addressed to “all ye people of my church.” Now, let’s continue with verse 9:

9 Behold, this is what the Lord requires of *every man in his stewardship*, even as I, the Lord, have appointed or shall hereafter appoint unto any man.

10 And behold, *none are exempt* from this law who belong to the church of the living God.

So what the Lord told the six men to do was really just what all of us are to do; they were just the example.

I found it interesting that Huff, who quotes many Doctrine and Covenants sections in his book, does not quote D&C 70. This scripture would seem to undermine his claim that the “united order” is just for a few select individuals. True, D&C 70 was given before the “official” start of the united firm in D&C 82, but it seems to capture the spirit. As Elder Snow says about D&C 70 in this same discourse I have referenced,

In giving his revelations to us in regard to these matters the Lord took certain individuals and made them examples to the Saints, and he wished the Saints to look upon these individuals and follow their examples.<sup>129</sup>

Also by neglecting section 70, Huff avoids discussing verse 14 about equality (discussed in Section II), which could be viewed as socialistic, but I argue it need not.

So even if not practiced by every Saint, this system was the Lord’s plan for all.

## Common Historical Evidence of Significant Consecration of Property and Reception of Stewardships

Now, let's look at some historical evidence regarding how consecration was practiced in the 1830s. Huff considers any such non-*History of the Church* evidence suspect,<sup>130</sup> especially if it consists of anything written during the Brigham Young era, when it would have been tainted by Brigham Young's ideas. (To be sure, Huff and all mortal human beings, including scientists and historians, see through the lens of our own ideologies and experiences; we're all tainted.) I cited Orson Pratt earlier in this section, on his memories of the code names and the order of Enoch. But here is what else Orson Pratt recalls — he was there, after all — showing that Joseph's formal system of consecration/stewardships extended way beyond nine individuals (although this was spoken during the Brigham Young era, so Huff might suggest that Pratt's memories were tainted):

*Has God ever revealed to the Latter-day Saints the necessity of entering into this heavenly order in regard to their wealth? He has. When? When we gathered up to Jackson County in the State of Missouri. In the year 1831, the land was consecrated and set apart by revelation for the erection thereon of a great and heavenly city unto the Most High God. Not the old Jerusalem, but a new Jerusalem, a city of Zion. God, by the mouth of his servant Joseph, who for a short space of time dwelt in the midst of the people there, revealed the law of consecration, not the law of tithing, but the law of consecration. Let me repeat that law, Latter-day Saints, for as it is a law which will come in force at some future period of our history, it will not be amiss for us to understand its nature and to prepare to approximate to its requirements, so that when it is introduced amongst us we may take hold of it with all our hearts. When we went up to that country in 1831, the commandment of the Most High to the Saints was that they should consecrate all that they had. Not one-tenth merely, not the surplus of their property, but all that they had, whether it was gold, silver, household furniture, wearing apparel, jewelry, horses, cattle, wagons, mechanical tools, machinery, or whatever wealth or property they possessed, they were to consecrate the whole and deliver it unto the Lord's judge in the midst of Zion. Who was he? The Bishop.... This made them all equal, every person stood upon*

the same platform, possessing nothing to begin with. All was consecrated and became the common property of the Church.

Now how was this common property to be used? First, the Saints needed land, they needed means to build habitations; they needed farming utensils; they needed flocks and herds; they needed manufacturing establishments; they needed mercantile and all kinds of mechanical business to be introduced into their midst, just as fast as they procured means sufficient. By whom were the stewardship of the Saints laid off? The Lord's judge or bishop in Zion purchased land from the United States, and then laid off to each man his stewardship according to the number of his family. Those who were mechanics received the tools necessary to work with; those who were called upon to engage in some business wherein a greater amount of capital was needed had a capital accordingly. That is, that was the intention as the common property of the Church should increase.

*Perhaps the question may be asked could this equality be maintained from that time, henceforth and forever? If there had been no law given instructing us how this equality could be maintained the people, before twelve month had passed away, would have been unequal again. Why? Because a man, perhaps of small talent of ability, might mismanage his stewardship or inheritance, and instead of gaining anything he would lose. Another man, having a little more talent and industry, and perhaps a little more wisdom, would gain a little. Another man's business tact and knowledge were perhaps such that he could carry on a large manufacturing establishment, and in a short time he would gain his thousands, and thus in the course of a year we would again have had rich and poor if God had not provided against it.<sup>131</sup>*

So Pratt confirms the traditional interpretation of Joseph Smith's system of consecration and stewardship. George A. Smith (member of the First Presidency, namesake of St. George, Utah, and grandfather of our eighth church president with the same name) agreed, and confirms that the formal consecration system under Joseph Smith was more extensive than nine men:

The settlements in Jackson county were commenced on the principle of the law of consecration. If you read the revelations

that were given, and the manner in which they were acted upon, you will find that the brethren brought, before the Bishop and his counselors, their property and consecrated it, and with the money and means thus consecrated lands were purchased, and inheritances and stewardships distributed among the people, all of whom regarded their property as the property of the Lord.<sup>132</sup>

Did Joseph Smith himself have anything to say outside the canon? In an 1832 letter to W.W. Phelps, Joseph Smith wrote,

Brother Wm W Phelps I say brother because I feel so from the heart and altho it is not long since I wrote a letter unto you yet I feel as though you would excuse me for writing this as I have many things which I wish to communicate some things which I will mention in this letter which are laying great with weight upon my mind I inform you I am well and family God grant that you may enjoy the same and yours and all the brethren and sisters who remember to enquire after the commandments of the Lord and the welfare of Zion and such a being as me and *while I dictate this letter I fancy to myself that you are saying or thinking something simmiler to these words my God great and mighty art thou therefore shew unto thy servant what shall becom of all these who are assaying to come up unto Zion in order to keep the commandments of God and yet receive not there inhertance by consecration by order or deed from the bishop the man that God has appointed in a legal way agreeable to the law given to organize and regulate the church and all the affairs of the same; Bro Wmin the love of God having the most implicit confidence in you as a man of God having obtained this confidence by a vision of heavn therefore I will procede to unfold to you some of the feelings of my heart and procede to answer the question. firstly, it is the duty of the lord's clerk whom he has appointed to keep a hystory and a general church reccord of all things that transpire in Zion and of all those who consecrate properties and receive inhertances legally from the bishop and also there manner of life and the faith and works and also of all the apostates who apostatize after receiving ther inhertances.*

secondly it is conterary to the will and commandment of God that those who receive not the inheritance by consecration

agreeable to his law which he has given that he may tithe his people to prepare them against the day of vengence and burning should have there names enrolled with the people of God, neither is the geneology to be kept or to be had where it may be found on any of the reccords or hystory of the church there names shall not be found neither the names of ther fathers or the names of the children written in the book of the Law of God saith.<sup>133</sup>

While not detailed, this statement of the Prophet supports the historical interpretation that general consecration and reception of stewardships was at least the goal.

Huff does cite<sup>134</sup> Joseph's well-known letter to Bishop Edward Partridge about how the bishop and member must mutually agree about how much gets consecrated:

First, it is not right to condescend to very great particulars in taking inventories. The fact is this, a man is bound by the law of the Church, to consecrate to the Bishop, before he can be considered a legal heir to the kingdom of Zion; and this, too, without constraint; and unless he does this, he cannot be acknowledged before the Lord on the Church books: therefore, to condescend to particulars, I will tell you that every man must be his own judge how much he should receive and how much he should suffer to remain in the hands of the Bishop. I speak of those who consecrate more than they need for the support of themselves and their families.

The matter of consecration must be done by the mutual consent of both parties; for to give the Bishop power to say how much every man shall have, and he be obliged to comply with the Bishop's judgment, is giving to the Bishop more power than a king has; and upon the other hand, to let every man say how much he needs, and the Bishop be obliged to comply with his judgment, is to throw Zion into confusion, and make a slave of the Bishop. The fact is, there must be a balance or equilibrium of power, between the Bishop and the people, and thus harmony and goodwill may be preserved among you.<sup>135</sup>

Huff uses this letter to show that the Church cannot take people's property by force like the communists do, but if Huff knows about this letter, how can he say that it was not the policy of the Church for

members (in addition to the eleven leaders) to consecrate their substance via the bishop?

Now, Huff also cites<sup>136</sup> the well-known Titus Billing deed (an example of such a consecration through the bishop) but says that first, if this really happened, why don't more of these deeds survive? He claims the only surviving deeds (late 1980s) are those that bought property in the "normal" (*i.e.*, capitalist) way.<sup>137</sup> And second, this deed was all wrong anyway, in that Bishop Partridge was leasing the land, not giving it as stewardship involving legal private ownership. (Partridge's error is cited in J. Reuben Clark's 1942 conference talk mentioned in the beginning of this article.) Well, just because Bishop Partridge did it wrong does not negate the principle, and just because few consecration deeds have been found does not mean more did not exist, or that this wasn't the plan even if it did not come to fruition, else where did Joseph Smith's statement about cooperation with the bishop come from? Nevertheless, Huff does raise a good point: where are all these deeds? I'll provide evidence for the existence of a few of these deeds shortly.

We've already discussed that Huff acknowledges Wilford Woodruff's consecrations through the bishop but downplays their significance. Since I'm admittedly a biologist, not a historian, I'll mention that esteemed LDS historian Richard L. Bushman accepts the "traditional" understanding, even though "the system never worked properly" but also confirms the basic nine-man structure of the united firm.<sup>138</sup> Accomplished LDS historians Milton V. Backman, Max H Parkin, Steven C. Harper, and Mark Lyman Staker, among others, confirm the consecration effort through Bishop Partridge.<sup>139</sup>

### **More Historical Evidence of Significant Consecration of Property and Reception of Stewardships**

Since 1988, when Huff asked where all the deeds were — except for the Titus Billing deed, which was apparently the only known extant deed<sup>140</sup> — the World Wide Web was born, and the Church History Library and Joseph Smith Papers project have made more information not only available but accessible on the web, although Huff's point about limited historical evidence on consecration practices remains valid. Here are a few additional pieces of evidence that might have been harder to find in the late 1980s.

The Edward Partridge papers, 1818–1839, include a letter to his family members relating church history, but according to the Church History website, the draft of the letter was written on the backs of consecration/

stewardship deeds of Titus Billing (already discussed), George Pitkin, Stephen Chase, Benjamin Eames, James Lee, and Sanford Porter.<sup>141</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot find the deeds themselves online.

There is also a scanned deed, by which Bishop Partridge leased land to Joseph Knight Junior (true, this was an incorrect practice, but at least it was an attempt at consecration):

Be it known that I, Edward Partridge, Of Jackson county, and state of Missouri, bishop of the church of Christ, organized according to law, and established by the revelations of the Lord, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1830, have leased, and by these presents to lease unto Joseph Knight Jun of Jackson county, and state of Missouri, a member of said church, the following described piece or parcel of land ...<sup>142</sup>

And the Church History Library personnel were recently kind enough to digitize, at my request, a similar deed of consecration and stewardship by one Levi Jackman (which was described above by Steven Harper as being “more than a technicality”) and Bishop Partridge. It is now available to the public to read online. The first page reads like the Joseph Knight deed above, but subsequent pages also show Brother Jackman’s list of consecrated items. It is evident, as in other cases we’ve discussed, that Brother Jackman “leased back” the same items he consecrated — furniture, two beds, bedding, and tools.<sup>143</sup> Huff would have said that this had no temporal effect (based on his statement on Wilford Woodruff’s consecrations mentioned earlier) — and I agree that it might not have — but it could also be deeply meaningful and have real effect.

In a book chapter published in 2008, Harper puts the number of extant consecration/stewardship deeds from the 1830s at “less than a dozen,” including Levi Jackman’s.<sup>144</sup>

John Corrill, later excommunicated, wrote *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, in 1839. I wish it were more detailed, but it contains these statements:

In a short time after this, Smith received the Revelation called the Law, which contained several good moral precepts; it also required a consecration of property, and commanded the elders to go west and preach, two by two. ...

Some time in May following a Church was organized in Thompson, a township a few miles from Kirtland, at which time Isaac Morley and myself were chosen counsellors



to the Bishop to assist him in his business, which was to receive consecrations of property, and attend to the temporal concerns of the Church.<sup>145</sup>

It is believed by them that the Church ought to act in concert, and feel one general interest in building up the “great cause;” and that every man ought to consider his property as consecrated to the Lord for that purpose; yet their law gives every man the privilege of managing his own concerns, and provides against taking each other’s property without paying for it; and if a man gives for the benefit of the Church, it is considered a voluntary offering. Yet the law requires or enjoins a consecration of the overplus, after reserving for himself and family, and to carry on his business. ...

Much has been said, and great exertions used, at times, to inspire the members of the Church with a spirit of consecration and voluntary offering. Some have thus been led to give up all, while others have been backward, which has caused the leaders, at times, to resort to other means of obtaining money to carry on their operations. ...

Shortly after the Danites became organized, they set out to enforce the law of consecration; but this did not amount to much. Then they undertook another plan, in which Doctor Arverd Sampson Avard was very officious and forward, viz.: to constitute large firms, so that every male member of the Church could become a member of the firm. Every man was to put in all his property by leasing it to the firm for a term of years; overseers or managers were to be chosen from time to time, by the members of the firm, to manage the concerns of the same, and the rest were to labor under their direction. In the division of the profits, more regard was to be paid towards the needs and wants of the members, than to the amount of stock put in. Many joined these firms, while many others were much dissatisfied with them, which caused considerable feeling and excitement in the Church. Smith said every man must act his own feelings, whether to join or not, yet great exertions were used, and especially by Doctor Arverd, to persuade all to join.<sup>146</sup>

This history tends to support the idea that consecration of property was the goal for all and in fact was actually practiced, even if not by all.

From the “Minutes of a general Conference held at the dwelling of Brother Serenes Burnett in the Town of Orange, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, October 25, 1831” we get reports of several brethren who are willing to consecrate all:

Br. Orson Hyde said that he covenanted to give all to the Lord and be for his glory and as to all his works his heart responded a hearty. Amen.

Br. Hyrum Smith said that all he had was the Lord’s and he was ready to do his will continually

Br. Frederick G. Williams said that he renewed again the covenant before the Lord to give all to him.

Br. Wm. E. McLellin said that he had the greatest reason to rejoice of any present and that he also would be subject to the will of God even unto death.

Br. Silvester Smith said that he had the testimony that it was the will of the Lord to seal his Saints, and also covenanted to give all to the Lord. ...

Br. Martin Harris said that he was anxious that all should be saved &c. also read two verses in the book of Revelations, also covenanted to give all for Christ’s sake.

Br. John Smith said that he felt through grace to do the will of the Lord notwithstanding his extreme old age, also felt to covenant to give all to the Lord.

Br. Daniel Stanton said that he had a long time since covenanted to do the will of God in all things, and also said that it was his desire to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Br. David Whitmer said that he felt to declare to this conference that he had consecrated all that was his to the Lord, and also was desirous to do all for the glory of God. ...

Br. Joseph Brackenberry said that he blessed the name of the Lord that he could bear testimony of the truth of the Book of Mormon, and also consecrated all to God before he was baptized, he was also determined to go on to the end of his life

Br. Levi Jackman said he gave all his ability to do the work of the Lord. ...

Br. Joel Johnson said that he had professed religion for a number of years, also felt to bear testimony of the goodness of God, and to consecrate all to the Lord.

These covenants of consecration do not spell out temporal consecrations in detail, but they do show that many Saints besides the eleven men were consecrating.<sup>147</sup> So while not all Saints entered the consecration/stewardship system, and no one was forced, more of this happened than Huff acknowledged; and it was still the hope/plan for all.

### **D&C 105 and The End of the General System of Formal Consecration and Stewardship**

In 1834 the united firm dissolved into its Kirtland and Missouri parts, as described in D&C 104, but what concerns me in this section is what is described in D&C 105. Conventional LDS understanding is that the Lord allowed the Saints to be persecuted in Missouri because of their failure to live His law, in particular their failure to have charity for each other. I am no judge of the Saints' failures; here is Huff's take on the issue:

Joseph also said that although the Lord did express displeasure with some behavior of the Saints, the Lord refused to say why the Saints were ejected from Missouri or when they would be able to return. There was no hint that a failure to observe some communal mechanism was any part of the reason for the saints being forced to leave ....

A legacy from the Brigham Young period is the tendency to assign the cause of the expulsion from Missouri to a failure to "live the united order." It assumes a definition of the united order and its history from the Brigham Young period which bears little relation to the practices or beliefs of Joseph Smith's day. There is a possibility that a general lack of righteousness kept the Lord from unsheathing his sword on behalf of the Saints, but that is a far different thing than punishing them for failure to live a specific commandment.<sup>148</sup>

Joseph Smith explained in a letter<sup>149</sup> that he could not understand why the Missouri Saints must suffer so and implied that perhaps the Lord wasn't punishing the Saints but allowed the persecution because they had forfeited God's protection. Joseph Smith and I agree that the Saints certainly didn't deserve that type of treatment from their enemies. Here is what the Lord says, in D&C 105:

2 Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now.

3 But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them;

4 And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom;

5 And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself.

So they did not share with the poor and were not united according to the “law of the celestial kingdom” — the same law that establishes Zion (v.5), and we know that in Zion, there “were no poor among them,” (see Moses 7:18, which specifically describes the City of Enoch) unless you accept Huff’s alternative explanation that “no poor among them” was only a temporary fix while Zion was under siege. While this doesn’t prove the Lord allowed the Saints’ persecution for failing, in Huff’s words above, “to live the united order,” — in other words, living the law of consecration, particularly in a formal sense — it certainly seems plausible to me (inasmuch as I believe that only through an economic organization can we truly achieve no poor among us) — much more plausible than it seems to Huff, who says “D&C 105:3–5 mentions the need for obedience, righteousness, charity, and unity, but says nothing about the necessity of an economic organization.”<sup>150</sup> In any case, I find it odd that this is all Huff’s book says about D&C 105, even though traditional understanding is that this section (see verse 34) marked the suspension of the formal consecration/stewardship system — not the law of consecration *per se*! — as generally applied to the Saints.<sup>151</sup> As I pointed out in the introduction, verse 29 comes as close as any in scripture to the phrase *law of consecration*:

For it is my will that these lands should be purchased; and after they are purchased that my saints should possess them according to the *laws of consecration* which I have given. (D&C 105:29)

Coupled with verse 34, on the redemption of Zion, this implies that once that happens, we can expect a return to the formal consecration system as outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Is it odd that God withdrew the formal application of the law based on the disobedience of the Saints? Does God give commandments according to the likelihood of our obeying them? He might not revoke basic laws such as, say, chastity, based on our likelihood of obedience, but He did take away the full gospel and leave the Israelites with a lower law in Moses's day, based on their disobedience (JST Exodus 33:20 and 34:1–2 ; Galatians 3:19, 24; Mosiah 13:29–30; and D&C 84: 23–27). (And with the restoration of the higher law, even the law of chastity was upgraded from “Thou shalt not commit adultery” to “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”) Similarly, God did not “revoke” the law of consecration but did take away for a time its “higher” form (see references in endnote 151 and statements in sections IV and VI), although there are alternative opinions.<sup>152</sup>

In summary, the history Huff gives us is correct and enlightening but incomplete. The eleven-man united order was only an example to the rest of the Church.

#### **IV. Fourth Thesis: Tithing Represents A “Higher Law” [Not!]**

Huff presents<sup>153</sup> several interesting points on tithing, giving us a more overarching view of possible variations to the tithing program. First, people have paid tithing in many different ways, compared to the standard way most of us pay it now. Huff quite reasonably speculates that sometimes the word *tithing* meant a one-time offering, such as when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek; Abraham couldn't always be sending animals to Melchizedek. (Although I agree with this speculation, Huff sometimes shows what I would call overconfidence in his assumptions.) Not only was tithing paid in kind, but it wasn't always sent to “church headquarters” in former dispensations, since the in-kind tithing was often perishable and not transportable. In this dispensation — within the last century, in fact — Harold B. Lee as a stake president during the depression got permission to keep tithing in his stake for relief of the stake's poor. And even in the Church today, in places without access to banks or mail systems, tithing might be paid in kind and kept within the country. In the beginning of our dispensation, tithing was collected by any traveling missionary, but in the Nauvoo period, that function was assigned exclusively to the Twelve. In early LDS history, many members' contributions were earmarked for certain purposes, unlike today, when

the leaders of the church decide how to spend tithing (however, some of our contributions today are also earmarked, in various other funds). In Orderville, Utah, the tithing was paid not by the individuals but by the community as a whole, since they had pooled their resources.

Second, tithing existed since the start of this dispensation, even before D&C 119 — the main revelation on tithing — was given. Of course, Joseph Smith knew about the Malachi chapter 3 tithing scripture, from both the Bible and Book of Mormon. The word *tithing*, however, was used in different ways. Sometimes it meant any donation — not necessarily one-tenth — and could include one-time gifts, but in other uses, it specifically meant one-tenth, given in an ongoing basis. The word *tithing* was often used interchangeably with the word *consecration* (see, for example, D&C 85:3). Indeed, Huff and Harper<sup>154</sup> argue that tithing is a form of consecration. I agree.

Third, it took several years after D&C sections 119 (the “tithing” section) and 120 (on the council of the disposition of tithes) to get the system up and running; the Church was operating in the early 1800s without national currency, reliable mail, or banks, etc. Section 119 was addressed to the Missouri Saints (first verse), but the last verse says that this is an ensample, or example, for all stakes too. Before this revelation, the Saints offered contributions, called tithing, but it was not a standardized system. Huff restates D&C 119:3 like this: “And this shall be the beginning of the tithing of my people as it relates to using the new more centralized and regularized plan, and it will begin with the people in Far West, and be spread as conditions permit.”<sup>155</sup> Later in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith asked that all funds come through the First Presidency before being dispersed to, for example, the temple construction committee.

The historical information Huff presents is enlightening, and I’ve only hit the main points. But Huff’s goal is to convince us that tithing is the higher law and “consecration” the lower.

Here are some of his take-away points designed to disabuse us of the notion that obeying the law of consecration today involves more than paying tithing:

The topics of ‘united order’ and ‘consecration’ are sometimes said to be ‘higher law’ alternatives to the ‘lesser’ law of tithing. The goal ... is to overcome and dissolve this false dichotomy by providing a better understanding of the history of tithing.<sup>156</sup>

Huff presents this statement of Joseph F. Smith, with which he disagrees (but at least, he acknowledges his disagreement):

The Lord revealed to his people in the incipency of his work a law which was more perfect than the law of tithing. It comprehended larger things, greater power, and a more speedy accomplishment of the purposes of the Lord. But the people were unprepared to live by it, and the Lord, out of mercy to the people, suspended the more perfect law, and gave the law of tithing, in order that there might be means in the storehouse of the lord for the carrying out of the purposes he had in view; for the gathering of the poor, for the spreading of the gospel to the nations of the earth, for the maintenance of those who were required to give their constant attention, day in and day out, to the work of the Lord, and for whom it was necessary to make some provision. Without this law these things could not be done, neither could temples be built and maintained, nor the poor fed and clothed. Therefore the law of tithing is necessary for the church, so much so that the Lord has laid great stress upon it.<sup>157</sup>

To this, Huff asks why have the “higher law” of consecration (that he doesn’t believe really exists in a formal way) when tithing so well accomplishes all these purposes that Joseph F. Smith outlined. But Huff does not address what tithing is not accomplishing: the equality spelled out in the Doctrine and Covenants. True, the poor are cared for through the welfare system/fast offering funds, and the Perpetual Education Fund (which of course did not exist in the late 1980s) is an inspired program that together with Church employment specialists helps Saints get better jobs. Still, many beneficiaries are only helped at a basic level. We care for the poor, and that is the first level, but the ultimate goal is to ensure “no poor among [us].” The ideas provided by James W. Lucas and Warner P. Woodworth in *Working Toward Zion*<sup>158</sup> of setting up cooperative enterprises show that a modern “united order” system or its equivalent could employ many more.

As further evidence that tithing is not a “lower law,” Huff cites President Hinckley, who said in the April 1984 general conference, “The Church has never taken a backward step since it was organized in 1830 — and never will.” However, Huff admits that the exact meaning of this statement is unsure because the Church has had some known setbacks.<sup>159</sup> Next, Huff explains why tithing is not only not a lower law but a *higher* law than consecration:

If we describe what came before 1838 as “consecration” and what came after as “tithing,” then, by almost any objective

performance standards, we should call the “consecration” period the lesser law and “tithing” the greater law. The earlier situation could be better described as a non-system rather than any kind of system. Temporal questions were handled on an ad hoc basis, the brethren and the Lord requesting funds as circumstances seemed to require and from whomever was at hand....

One might observe that *spontaneity is often associated with spirituality, and bureaucracy is often associated with the stifling letter of the law. However, spontaneous gestures will generally only solve small or short-lived problems; major or long-term problems require more planning and organization....*

In contrast to the earlier “consecration,” the later “tithing” system was on the way to becoming a regularized and dependable system which produced more revenue and could support a more extensive program. There was a clarification of the law rather than a replacement....

Tithing is a “higher” law because under it the members are asked to make a long term commitment of support and to have faith in their leaders concerning projects about which the members know very little. Under the pre-1838 program or so-called “consecration,” only one-time or short term commitments had to be made, and only to specific visible projects.<sup>160</sup>

I could not agree more with the value of organization, and I appreciate this insightful thought (italicized portion above)! This is why I disagree with some in the Church who have proposed that we — as a church — are living the *full* law of consecration today when we pay tithing and make donations when led by the Spirit, but feel no yearning to consecrate all in a meaningful — not just lip-service — way and who believe that, as opposed to a past formal system of consecration, that now and in the future, consecration beyond tithing and other donation-slip offerings should be entirely informal — no organized system. However, I absolutely agree that we can and should live the entire *spirit* of the law of consecration today through our generosity and that in a sense we can live the law fully as now practiced. R. Quinn Gardner (no known relation to me), former managing director of the Church Welfare Services Department, seems to agree both on what we should do now, and what we expect in the future (note his use of the word *formal*):



When many members use the word consecration, they think only of the temporarily suspended law of consecration — the Lord’s formal and legally binding economic order. They therefore assume that none of the principles of consecration apply today. This is not true. While the formal law of consecration will be reinstated in the Lord’s own time, through his prophets, the Lord has not repealed the covenant of consecration made during the temple endowment. This covenant is in full force and should be actively applied by Latter-day Saints. Only by living it now can we merit the Lord’s future reestablishment of the law of consecration.<sup>161</sup>

I believe that only through a formal system, such as the consecration, stewardship, and storehouse program outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants, can the Lord’s purposes be fully realized. Only in this way will there be “no poor among us.” Without an organized storehouse system, even if every member consecrated his or her excess to the needy, some who are needy would still fall through the cracks, and others would receive too much. (By analogy, imagine if home teaching were not organized, and every man decided whom to visit. Some might never get visited, while others would never get any peace!) Here is where Huff and I disagree: he obviously denies the existence of a historical formal consecration system in Joseph Smith’s time, beyond that of a united firm of eleven men. He insists that before tithing was formally instituted in 1838, donations were ad hoc and that individuals were not really asked to consecrate all they had, as most of us have been taught in Church history classes. (But in the previous section, I’ve shown that this was the plan, at least, even if didn’t always work out.) And while he understands the importance of the formal system of tithe payment, he does not seem to appreciate our opportunity to live in a class-less society like that of the city of Enoch.

The traditional thinking is that tithing is the lower law that replaced the formal enactment of the law of consecration, at least for a period because the Saints couldn’t keep the higher law, but Huff refutes that idea:

In trying to construct a definition of the word consecration, it would be helpful to know during what periods of the church’s history the law has been said to be in effect. It is the position of this book that it has never ceased to be in effect since the beginning of the church in this dispensation, and that those who tie the practice of the law or doctrine of consecration to a particular social or economic organization simply do not

understand the law. The following entry from the history should shed some further light on that question by showing that the law was in full effect a substantial time after many would say it ceased: [quotes the Iowa High Council in *History of the Church* 4:93, from March 1840]: ... “The law of consecration could not be kept here, and that it was the will of the Lord that we should desist from trying to keep it; and if persisted in, it would produce a perfect defeat of its object, and that he [Joseph Smith] assumed the whole responsibility of not keeping it until proposed by himself.”<sup>162</sup>

Huff uses this to show that even two years after D&C 119 was revealed, when consecration was supposedly ended — replaced with tithing — consecration is still a “live topic.” However, the actual text he quotes seems to be Joseph Smith saying NOT to do consecration! But Huff is saying the Saints were already living it, otherwise how could they desist? I agree that the law of consecration has never ceased to be in effect, and that we ought to live it right now, but by *law of consecration* we can mean the informal form or the formal form. Sometimes it is confusing, since the term is used both ways. Perhaps they weren’t really keeping the *full* law — the formal form (see Sections V and VI below, including explanations by Church leaders of the “full” law of consecration), but some of them were trying to resume this practice, and this was what Joseph Smith advised against.

### **As Part of Consecration, Tithing is Lesser than the Whole Law**

Huff quoted President Joseph F. Smith (above) as calling tithing a lesser law but disagrees. Harper has also emphasized that tithing is not a lesser law but rather is part of the law of consecration and was not given to “replace” the law, which he says is longstanding LDS “folk history.”<sup>163</sup> I’ll come back to this point, but first I provide more evidence that President Smith was correct, or at least he wasn’t wrong. Here is more of an Orson Pratt discourse I quoted before. It started by comparing “united order(s)” that involved most or all Saints with a limited firm of a few brethren, the “order of Enoch,” (referring to Joseph Smith, whose code name was Enoch), and ends with a discussion of tithing as a *lower law*. Pratt also notes that the tithing revelation (D&C 119:1) asks for members to first consecrate or donate all their surplus property to the bishop, *prior* to paying tithing on their increase. Although Huff discusses D&C 119, he never really addresses this, nor do most Mormons today. Huff is usually pretty thorough but this is a major omission.

Did the Lord forsake us then? No, he had compassion upon us — still looked upon us as the latter-day kingdom — did not take the kingdom from our midst, but continued to plead with us and bear with the infirmities of the people. “Now I will, says he, “try them with another law.” So in the year 1838, he gave us another law, called the law of Tithing. Let me name now some of the conditions of Tithing, according to that law. The Lord gave a commandment that the people that came up — gathered with the Saints — should consecrate, not all their property, *but all their surplus property, and after they had consecrated all their surplus property*, there should be a certain portion, not called surplus, which they should retain; and out of this that is not called surplus property, they should try to make an income, they should consecrate one-tenth part of that income. ...

This is the law of Tithing, *inferior to the full law of consecration*, and also inferior to the *law of Enoch*.<sup>164</sup>

The fact that we no longer obey the letter of D&C 119 by first donating our surplus calls into question the meaning of this revelation as a “standing law unto [us] forever,” as discussed in this article’s introduction. Perhaps “forever” simply meant “from now on” but changes could be made. Or, like the united firm, which was also “everlasting,” it may simply refer to the eternal nature of the principles involved, so that we might expect an eventual return to the practice outlined in verse 1.

Notice Pratt’s phrase *full law of consecration*. To me and apparently to several Church leaders whom I will quote below in Section VI, that means the *formal* law of consecration, such as the system of consecration and stewardship as outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants. The law of Enoch mentioned by Pratt refers, as we’ve seen, to the united firm under Joseph Smith, who was also known as Enoch.

Lorenzo Snow agreed that tithing is the inferior law:

And so far as the law of tithing is concerned, there is about it something that is not of the same nature and character as the law of the United Order. It was added because the people were not willing to comply with this noble and high celestial law, whereby they could act according to the light that is in them, and the power of the Almighty, by which they should be inspired.<sup>165</sup>

To me, the feeling that paying tithing is all the consecration we need to do does injustice to the idea of consecration. Continuing, Elder Lorenzo Snow explained why tithing is a lower law — citing the Doctrine and Covenants, or in other words, Joseph Smith’s revelations — and why we should not be satisfied with only paying tithing:

The Latter-day Saints at the present day, are very united in reference to their spiritual principles and doctrines. We see eye to eye in regard to principles that pertain to the doctrinal portion of the religion we have espoused; *but when it comes to our temporal, our earthly possessions, and our conduct in relation to them, we seem to be little confused in reference to what is right and wrong*, and more or less, we feel disposed to pursue our own course in regard to these matters and, as in the days of judges, “Every man is doing what seems right in his own eyes.” We seem to forget that the Lord has distinctly pointed out our duties, and that there is a little book, Doctrine and Covenants, that God has given by direct revelation in regard to these matters, by which we should be governed; we forget these things as it is natural for us to forget the things of God. *We sometimes think of the many good things that we do, and imagine, perhaps, that because of these good acts, we are excusable in not bothering ourselves in reference to some other things that we do not perform. ...*

*The law of tithing is a lower law, and was given of God. But the law of tithing does not forbid us obeying a higher law, the law of celestial union in earthly things. And the fact that we do not feel satisfied in simply obeying the law of tithing shows that it is a lesser law.* Do you feel justified simply in obeying the law of tithing? Why, then, do you contribute to our temples and to bringing the people from the old countries, and to this object, and that, in thousands of ways, after you have properly and justly complied with the law of tithing? The fact that you do these things shows that you are not satisfied in merely obeying the law of tithing. In these contributions you are acting just as God designed you should act — by the light of the Holy Ghost that is in you.<sup>166</sup>

So if we’re wrong in calling tithing a lesser law, it is because we are only following the likes of Smith, Pratt and Snow as well as more recent Church leaders; here is what some of them have said:

**James E. Talmage** (See also the James E. Talmage statement in section VI.)

The law of tithing, as observed by the Church today, is after all but a lesser law, given by the Lord in consequence of human weaknesses, selfishness, covetousness and greed, which prevented the Saints from accepting the higher principles, according to which the Lord would have them live.<sup>167</sup>

**Orson F. Whitney**

The law of tithing was given to supersede, for the time being, a greater law known as the law of consecration.<sup>168</sup>

**Marion G. Romney**

The requirement to live the united order at that time was then withdrawn. The lesser law of tithing was revealed, which, with the law of the fast, has prevailed and persisted in the Church until now.<sup>169</sup>

**Dallin H. Oaks**

Tithe paying is evidence that we accept the law of sacrifice. It also prepares us for the law of consecration and the other higher laws of the celestial kingdom.<sup>170</sup>

**Henry B. Eyring**

One of the blessings that comes from paying a full tithing is developing faith to live an even higher law. To live in the celestial kingdom, we must live the law of consecration.<sup>171</sup>

(Also, see statements by Ezra Taft Benson, Robert D. Hales, and Bruce R. McConkie in section VI.)

So is tithing *not* a lesser law, as some say, or is it indeed a lesser law, as these leaders say? Church leaders are not infallible, but when several agree I believe that we ought to pay attention, and address any disagreements (as Huff did with his disagreement of Joseph F. Smith, above), rather than sweep them under the rug. Is there a way to understand tithing that satisfies everyone?

At the very least, it behooves us to eliminate semantic misunderstandings from our discussions. First, in asking if tithing is a “lower” or “lesser” law than consecration, we must define what we mean by consecration: consecrating some or consecrating all. If we mean all, then tithing, which as now practiced involves only 10% (and we no longer donate our surplus prior to our 10% annual donations as detailed

in D&C 119:1), is clearly lesser. (However, to be fair, and speaking of material things, a very poor person consecrating all in a formal system and then receiving a stewardship might end up much better off than if he were to donate 10% of his income. More on this below.)

But as Harper points out, we don't need to have an either/or dichotomy. Tithing is *part of* the law of consecration. By my analogy, the Aaronic priesthood is the "lesser" priesthood. And yet, it is *part of* the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 107:14). The Israelites lost the Melchizedek priesthood (together with the higher law, as we've already discussed at the end of section III) but retained that *part of it* (heretofore without its own name, but it existed nevertheless) dealing with carnal/outward/temporal matters and ordinances (D&C 84:27; 107: 14, 68). When Christ restored the Melchizedek priesthood to Israel, he did not eliminate the Aaronic priesthood, for it is but part of the Melchizedek, and ordinations to it continued, as they do today. Likewise, the formal aspects of the law of consecration were suspended in our dispensation, and according to Church leaders (cited later in section VI), those aspects will return again, but this won't necessarily eliminate tithing. In the meantime, we are fully justified as we consecrate our time, talents, and means as directed by the living prophet and the spirit. (One might also consider that sacrifice is *part of* consecration, as suggested in the temple and relate sacrifice to a lower, or Aaronic order, and consecration to a higher, or Melchizedek order, as perhaps also suggested in the temple.)

For years I've been bothered when people say that tithing hits us all equally; it is ten percent for everyone, rich or poor. But I know by experience that for a not-so-rich person supporting a large family, who has had various setbacks, paying tithing can make the difference between being able to buy groceries, having to charge them to a credit card, or asking for Church assistance. (And while some people are financially blessed for tithe payment, some aren't.) Lorenzo Snow hits this point exactly:

But as regards the law of tithing, it is in force upon the poor as well as the rich, and it seems that it acts almost unequally in some respects. There is a widow, whose income is ten dollars; she pays one for tithing, and then has to appeal to the Bishop for support. Here is a rich man who has an income of one hundred thousand dollars, and pays ten thousand for his tithing. There remains ninety thousand, and he does not need it, but the poor widow requires much more than she had before complying with the law of tithing.

Now what would be the operation of the celestial law? The widow has not enough for her support, therefore nothing is required of her by the celestial law, or the law of the United Order. This rich man, with his ninety thousand dollars, continues to increase his riches, *pays his tithing fully, and yet wholly disregards the law of stewardship, or the law of temporal union. I cannot believe that a Latter-day Saint is justified in ignoring the higher law.* For, as we have read, “Behold none are exempt from this law who belong to the Church of the living God.” There is not a man within the sound of my voice who is exempt from this law, nor will he ever be until Jesus, the Son of God, comes in the clouds of heaven to set all things right.<sup>172</sup>

So, here is a disagreement between Huff, who says (below) that we can be perfectly satisfied paying tithing and other ordinary offerings, and Lorenzo Snow, who says we cannot. In my current position at Southern Virginia University (private, but LDS-oriented), I am surrounded by faculty and staff who have sacrificed and consecrated heavily to build up this corner of Zion, reminding me of the widow in Lorenzo Snow’s story, or the widow of mite fame (Luke 21:1–4). Some of them would likely be materially benefited under a formal consecration system; perhaps in that case, tithing really is more of a sacrifice than deeding all possessions.

In conclusion, I agree with Huff in the value of an organized donation program, over an ad hoc system, but disagree that tithing is the higher law. This brings us to the issue of consecration. Inasmuch as Huff denies that the Saints in Joseph Smith’s day practiced any formal consecration efforts beyond temporary ones, or beyond the eleven businessmen, I feel the need to show the centrality of a formal consecration system for all of God’s Saints.

### **V. Fifth Thesis: By Paying Tithing We’re Already Living The Law Of Consecration [In Part]**

In this section, we will discuss Huff’s thesis that regular payment of tithes and offerings, as we know them today, makes one fully participant in consecration. We must understand that the law of consecration has always been in effect, but there are varying levels to which it may be kept. We may consecrate some or all. Both are consecration. Sometimes, however, the word implies “all” without saying so, and sometimes it only implies “some.” The word can also be understood formally or informally. Often only by context can we understand which sense of the word is meant. Huff would agree, I think, at least somewhat with my point about

the varied uses of the term: He agrees that donations are consecrations but quotes Joseph Smith as saying that when we consecrate our children to the Lord, we don't actually give them away; Huff's lesson is that if we don't transfer our property either unless we give it and that one may consecrate something by dedicating it for a specific use, even if he retains ownership.<sup>173</sup> Harper makes the same point.<sup>174</sup> I don't need convincing of this. Huff emphasizes that consecrating often just means giving "regular" donations.

I agree with Huff that "Consecration" consisted of tithes and other ordinary offerings to the church to support its building and other programs and to help the poor." But then, *To the people of Joseph Smith's time, the term "consecration" had no effect on economic organization.*<sup>175</sup> This is a bold statement. But is it true? It certainly seems to contradict the D&C scriptures and historical statements quoted in Section III. (Not to mention the Kirtland Safety Society, which as we've seen in Section II might be considered both a method of consecration as well one of economic organization.)

To further demonstrate that consecration is really nothing more than tithing and a few other easy donations, Huff relates these stories and lessons, which provide a basis for thought and discussion:

- Joseph Smith once taught a member in Nauvoo about consecration, and all Joseph asked is that the member pay \$300 in back tithing. Huff says, "This should give the modern Saints reason to believe that, by similar simple compliance with church donation programs, they can feel the same joy of acknowledged obedience to an important principle."<sup>176</sup> Well, OK, but that doesn't mean that we as a church are living the "full law." (Compare this with Lorenzo Snow's statement, quoted earlier, about how we are not quite satisfied with paying only tithing. And for those who say that we as a Church are already living the "full law" of consecration see the Church leader statements in Section VI "Will the Church Someday Re-Adopt a Formal System of Consecration and Stewardship?") Nor does this one anecdote imply that this is all that consecration means, but that for this one individual, this is where Joseph Smith asked him to start.
- Huff strongly emphasizes that *consecrate* often means the same as *donate*, or *contribute* and describes those who helped build the Kirtland temple. And thus, "consecrate"



did not imply a long-term absorption of self and property into a centralized organization. It simply meant the uncoerced, spontaneous donation of means as any church member might do today through the many programs available, including contributions for temple building.”<sup>17</sup>

- Those that built the Kirtland temple had a share in it, as opposed to “the common practice in the world of declaring and making the ‘state’ the only legitimate owner and controller of property and the product of men’s labor.”<sup>178</sup> Here is the straw man again, because no one ever suggested that the Church coerced anyone. In reminding us that the Church doesn’t act like socialist country, he protests too much.
- “There was no room in the true and complete law of the Lord for the common ownership of property.”<sup>179</sup> Well, Joseph Smith opposed the common ownership of property, and he said as much, but even if you believe that Joseph Smith’s economic system involved people consecrating their property and receiving a stewardship, with surpluses to be given to the storehouse, this system still did not include “common ownership of property.” On the other hand, Brigham Young didn’t seem to have a problem with “common ownership of property.” Could there be some flexibility here? Perhaps conditions in Deseret were different than conditions in Missouri or Ohio, and the Lord approved of different types of “united orders,” or *at least in the ability of Saints to experiment with them*.<sup>180</sup> Speaking of such flexibility — but also referring to the Doctrine and Covenants — Orson Pratt said

There has been a great deal said at different times upon the subject of families being united as one, — eating at the same table, for instance, and having one large field, where their farming operations might be carried on, all who are farmers going forth into the same field to labor; and the same principle carried out in regard to other branches, all taking hold unitedly, having the common interest at heart. Is there anything in the revelations given in these Latter-days requiring this order of things, or is it something we ourselves have considered as being a little ahead of

what our fathers have been practicing? I do not know anything laid down in the revelations, requiring us to take this particular method. Yet is it right? Yes. Why it is right according to the circumstances with which they are surrounded; it points forward to unity and tends to instruct us in the preliminary ideas of being united together. And hence, those that can enter into this order, who are willing to unite in this way, are doing well and will be blessed for it. But let no person set any stakes, in regard to this matter, that because he may have entered into a special order, introduced in one settlement, that all others are wrong because they do not do likewise; they should not find fault with their brethren, neither be discouraged in well-doing.

There are a great many different ideas among the Latter-day Saints, in relation to these matters. *But then, we have a standard given in the Book of Covenants, by which we should be governed.* By and bye, I expect we will be in different circumstances, in which stewardships or inheritances can be issued for all families of the Saints, some in one kind or branch of business, and some in another; and the full law of consecration will take place.<sup>181</sup>

Huff rightly, in my opinion, applies “consecration” to Mosiah 18:27–29, where people were asked to give as much as they could.<sup>182</sup> And again, Huff explains that all this is without coercion. But whoever said it was coerced?

- “The law of consecration as outlined in the D&C section 42 is essentially the equivalent of today’s welfare plan. Its purpose was to provide for the poor rather than to fulfill some abstract leveling purpose.”<sup>183</sup> Indeed, in several instances<sup>184</sup> general authorities have said that the welfare system is a good *start* towards the full law of consecration, but that there is more to come (see Section VI). At best, this ignores or even contradicts several scriptures about equality (D&C 38:25–27; 51:3; 70:14; 78:5–7).
- Huff points out that section 42 says to consecrate “*of* thy properties (vs. 30)” and “*of* your substance (vs. 31,

emphasis added), instead of consecrate “thy properties.” The “of” means only some, and this could mean nothing beyond regular donations. Although Huff admits that some pre-1835 documents lacked the “of,” he claims that this only means the “of” was added back on purpose, which strengthens his case.<sup>185</sup> This brings up the question: are we required to consecrate some, or all? I will discuss this in Section VI.

- Huff discusses D&C 42:33 (quoted earlier in Section III), in which people will *continue* to consecrate. “This implies either that all was not consecrated the first time [I don’t favor this explanation because perhaps all was consecrated the first time, but the person made money in the meantime, so now has excess again] or that consecration is a repetitive and ongoing process, just like our normal present-day contributions.... Verse 33 also says that ‘this ... consecration ... is a residue,’ an amount over and above the needs of the original owner. The amount of the surplus or residue was completely determined by the donor.”<sup>186</sup>
- Huff tries to equate ongoing donations, like tithing, with this ongoing donation of surpluses. But tithing is only one-tenth; surpluses can be any amount, depending on circumstances. However, to be honest with the Lord, “surpluses” ought to be what we don’t actually need or *reasonably* want. Those who have hundreds of millions of dollars might therefore donate much more than one-tenth because they have millions more than they really need. Yes, we each get to decide what is surplus, but hopefully we don’t claim to *need* super-expensive cars, multiple homes, yachts, etc. Because if anyone *needed* those things, most of us would be dead. On this subject, Huff quotes Joseph Smith: “Let them be the judges themselves, for I care not if they do not give a single dime.”<sup>187</sup> In context, Joseph Smith was not saying it was not important if they donated their surplus or not but that he was not to be the judge. In that sense, he “didn’t care.” And, as Steven Harper points out, this is what stewardship, agency, and accountability are all about; as free agents, we decide what is “surplus,” but we are accountable to the Lord for our decisions.<sup>188</sup> So Joseph Smith rightly “didn’t care.” But certainly, the Lord

cares. (And Huff agrees that the Lord cares; he said so himself in his statement about the poor and rich I quoted in Section I.)

### Consecrating *All* to the *Church* to Establish Zion

Going back to our original question, does consecration mean all or some, although it can mean both of these, ultimately I believe we must consecrate all — or be willing to — and not grudgingly (D&C 70:14), but if we are willing and eager to consecrate our all someday, we can hardly enjoy great wealth while others are needy today. I believe our temple covenant implies a total consecration and that ideally, it would be in a formal setting. It is to consecrate *all* of what we have and not just to give away to whom we choose but to consecrate it *to the Church*. Rather than quote any sacred phrasing, I'll just encourage endowed readers to ponder the words of the covenant they have made. As William O. Nelson explained, "The law of consecration is a law of the celestial kingdom, requiring that all members of the Church shall consecrate their property (including time, talents, and material wealth) *to the Church* for the building of the kingdom of God and the establishment of Zion."<sup>189</sup> In Zion, as we've seen, there are no poor (in any sense of the word, including financially.) I can't see this situation achieved without a formal system that is more encompassing than that which we now practice. Furthermore, this covenant is based on the Doctrine and Covenants, so the principles and formal plan contained therein should guide our thoughts. I hasten to add that while we are not living, as a church, a formal consecration system, this does not prevent us in the least from living the spirit of the law, as Hugh Nibley continually urged.<sup>190</sup> Consecration doesn't always mean "giving away," but if we claim to consecrate while retaining, while those who need the resources which the Lord has lent us go without, our consecration is really just lip service.

Consecration is related to sacrifice, so perhaps a good way to evaluate our consecration efforts, and if they are more than just lip service, is if they hurt a bit. C. S. Lewis (admittedly not an expert on LDS doctrine, but a very wise man) said

If our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to

do and cannot because our charitable expenditure excludes them.<sup>191</sup>

In conclusion, the Lord absolutely appreciates the sacrifice and consecration of tithe payers and those who make other contributions. But the evidence in Section IV and the temple covenant as discussed above show that the full law of consecration is more encompassing than that.

## VI. Will the Church Someday Re-Adopt a Formal Consecration/Stewardship System?

Are we as a church ever going to readopt a formal system of consecration and stewardship? I believe Huff, as well as many Church members and scholars, would say no, but I say yes for these reasons:

First, this type of economic system isn't confined to Church members living in LDS communities like those in Kirtland, Zion/Missouri, or pioneer Utah. *Working Towards Zion* is a wonderful book that gives great ideas for "united order" and "pre-united order" business models designed to work in today's world.<sup>192</sup> It is not necessary that in every detail it must be exactly like the model of the early 1830s.

Second, our temple covenant. I already discussed how this covenant concerns consecration to the Church (not just directly to needy individuals, although that certainly falls within the spirit of the law and is welcomed by them and by the Lord, but as we discussed already, consecration to the Church helps ensure that no needy person falls through the cracks), so it implies a formal system. It aims to establish Zion. It is related to sacrifice, and Joseph Smith famously told us how the sacrifice of *all things* is important.<sup>193</sup> That is one reason why I believe our covenant involves a consecration of all (and not just money, but certainly including money and temporal things).

Third, statements of LDS leaders — mostly in the twentieth century — who have said that we are preparing for a formal system. I should re-clarify that consecration is the general law, and the "united order," or similar organization involving consecration and stewardship, is the method for living it. In many of these statements, however, this distinction is not made, but when they speak of the "full law" of consecration or even "the law" of consecration, I believe this means a formal system. I don't fault them for this wording because after all, the consecration spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants is a formal method. While consecration doesn't always mean donating/giving, this is how the term is mainly used in that book of scripture, as we've seen. Furthermore, the donations it mentions are to the Church through the bishop; it does

not speak of donating when the mood strikes you, to whom you feel like. Nevertheless, I emphasize that we can and should live the law of consecration right now, in monetary and nonmonetary ways, even while eagerly awaiting a formal system. As Gordon B. Hinckley said,

The law of sacrifice and the law of consecration have not been done away with and are still in effect.<sup>194</sup>

The current prophet helps us know how to live the law right now. In an analogy I can take only partial credit for, we look to the prophet for current direction in keeping the Word of Wisdom. Keeping it today requires abstinence from illegal drugs, although these are not mentioned in D&C 89. On the other hand, we can get a temple recommend even if we consume too much meat, which *is* discouraged in D&C 89. However, in our lessons and study of the Word of Wisdom, we do not confine ourselves to the *Handbook of Instructions*; we still study D&C 89. Likewise, while living the law of consecration right now, we learn in the Doctrine and Covenants about its formal application and prepare ourselves to live it.

There are two possible meanings to the “full law” of consecration. First, many Church leaders cited below and I have used it to mean the formal/organized implementation of the law — deeds, stewardships, and a storehouse. This is the way I have used the term throughout this article. Second, even without such a system, we can still fully keep our consecration covenants, be fully committed to consecration, and be fully approved of God right now.

I hope that those who believe that we as a church are living the *full* law of consecration mean it in the second sense of the term. Those who deny the existence of the full law in the first sense of the term will have a hard time explaining the statements below.<sup>195</sup> I think this subject is important enough to include several such statements, by several leaders, to show consensus and consistency. So here are several such statements — in addition to several statements I’ve already quoted — in alphabetical order by their authors’ names. (I’ve also provided footnote examples of additional but subtler references, that have been made.<sup>196</sup>)

### **Ezra Taft Benson**

The vehicle for implementing the law of consecration is the united order. ...

I repeat and emphasize that the law of consecration is a law for an inheritance in the celestial kingdom. God, the Eternal

Father, his Son Jesus Christ, and all holy beings abide by this law. It is an eternal law. It is a revelation by God to his Church in this dispensation. *Though not in full operation today*, it will be mandatory for all Saints to live the law in its fulness to receive celestial inheritance. You young people today abide a *portion* of this higher law as you tithe, pay a generous fast offering, go on missions, and make other contributions of money, service, and time.<sup>197</sup>

We must not lose sight of the fact that all that we are doing now is but a prelude to the establishment of the united order, and living the law of consecration. The individual Saints must understand this.<sup>198</sup>

When Zion is fully redeemed it will be “by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom,” or in other words the living of the united order (D&C 105:5). The principles which underlie the united order are consecration and stewardship and the contribution of one’s surpluses into the bishop’s storehouse.<sup>199</sup>

### **Victor L. Brown**

As we prepare to live this law, we will look forward with great anticipation to the day when the call will come. If, on the other hand, we hope it can be delayed so we can have the pleasure of accumulating material things, we are on the wrong path.<sup>200</sup>

### **F. Enzo Busche**

Thus, how beautiful is the revelation of the welfare plan, presently established in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a preparatory step toward living the law of consecration.<sup>201</sup>

### **George Q. Cannon**

The time must come when we must obey that which has been revealed to us as the Order of Enoch, when there shall be no rich and no poor among the Latter-day Saints; when wealth will not be a temptation; when every man will love his neighbor as he does himself; when every man and woman will labor for the good of all as much as for self. That day must come, and we may as well prepare our hearts for it, brethren, for as wealth increases I see more and more a necessity for the institution of such an order. As wealth increases, luxury and

extravagance have more power over us. The necessity for such an order is very great, and God, undoubtedly, in his own time and way, will inspire his servant [the prophet] to introduce it among the people.<sup>202</sup>

### **Loren C. Dunn**

We do not practice parts of the Doctrine and Covenants today. The law of consecration is not lived today in its fulness.<sup>203</sup>

### **Henry B. Eyring**

It becomes easier to see that consecration simply recognizes the truth that all of God's creations are His. It makes us feel gratitude that He asks only 10 percent of what He has already given us. *So we are better prepared to live the law of consecration when it will be asked of us.*<sup>204</sup>

### **Vaughn J. Featherstone**

A good start has been made; yet much remains to be done in alleviating sorrow and suffering and in making the Saints self-sustaining and able to share with others, preparatory to living the full law of consecration.<sup>205</sup>

### **Robert D. Hales**

The law of consecration was then withdrawn. In its place the Lord revealed the law of tithing for the whole Church. ...

The law of tithing prepares us to live the higher law of consecration — to dedicate and give all our time, talents, and resources to the work of the Lord. *Until the day when we are required to live this higher law*, we are commanded to live the law of the tithe, which is to freely give one-tenth of our income annually.<sup>206</sup>

### **Harold B. Lee**

Our present welfare plan could well be the “setting-up” exercises to see how prepared this church is to live this plan, so that, as was the joyous realization of a people on this continent, as recorded in an ancient scripture we call the Book of Mormon, after they were all converted to the Lord, “there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all ... partakers of the heavenly gift” and “surely there could not



be a happier people” on the face of the earth (4 Ne. 1:3, 16), by living *fully* the law of sacrifice and consecration.<sup>207</sup>

### Neal A. Maxwell

Thus we are often confronted with situations in which certain things will be — someday, but not now. For instance, the coming of consecration with its own laws and economic system has been foretold, but the implementation is not yet. Meanwhile, we are to pay our tithes and offerings in what is yet another example of things as they will become but are not yet.<sup>208</sup>

### Bruce R. McConkie

That the *full law of consecration* will yet again be practiced is well known. It is a celestial law [quotes D&C 105:5]<sup>209</sup>

Early attempts to operate various united orders failed, but the law of consecration must yet be put into full force, and so the United Order or its equivalent must again be brought into being. It appears that operation of the present Church Welfare Plan may be the beginning of this.<sup>210</sup>

We are not always called upon to live the *whole law of consecration* and give all of our time, talents, and means to the building up of the Lord’s earthly kingdom. Few of us are called upon to sacrifice much of what we possess, and at the moment there is only an occasional martyr in the cause of revealed religion.

But what the scriptural account means is that to gain celestial salvation we must be able to *live these laws to the full* if we are called upon to do so. Implicit in this is the reality that we must in fact live them to the extent we are called upon so to do.<sup>211</sup>

In March 1832 the Lord said this about the United Order, the order through which the divine principle of consecration was and is destined to operate: [quotes D&C 78:3]. As is well known, the saints attempted to live in the United Order and failed. That it will yet be operated in its fulness among the Latter-day Saints is also well known. ...

And up to this point in time we are living only the lesser law of tithing, though some of the principles of consecration are found in the Church Welfare Program.<sup>212</sup>

### David O. McKay

Communists cannot establish the united order, nor will communism bring it about. The united order will be established by the Lord in his own due time and in accordance with the regular prescribed order of the Church.<sup>213</sup>

### Keith B. McMullin

“Zion cannot be built up,” the Lord said, “unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom.” [D&C 105:5.] The covenant of consecration is central to this law. We shall one day apply it in its fulness.<sup>214</sup>

### Marion G. Romney

Further implementation of the order must therefore await the redemption of Zion. Here Zion means Jackson County, Missouri. When Zion is redeemed, as it most certainly shall be, it will be redeemed under a government and by a people strictly observing those “just and holy principles” of the Constitution that accord to men their God-given moral agency, *including the right to private property. If, in the meantime, socialism takes over in America, it will have to be displaced*, if need be, by the power of God, because the United Order can never function under socialism or “the welfare state,” for the good and sufficient reason that the principles upon which socialism and the United Order are conceived and operated are inimical.

In the meantime, while we await the redemption of Zion and the earth and the establishment of the United Order, we as bearers of the priesthood should live strictly by the principles of the United Order insofar as they are embodied in present church practices, such as the fast offering, tithing, and the welfare activities. Through these practices we could as individuals, if we were of a mind to do so, implement in our own lives all the basic principles of the United Order.<sup>215</sup>

Almost from the beginning of my services in Church welfare I have had the conviction that what we are doing in this welfare work is preliminary to the *reestablishment of the law of consecration and stewardship* as required under the united order. If we could always remember the goal toward which we are working, we would never lose our bearings in this great

work. What we are about is not new. It is as old as the gospel itself. Whenever the Lord has had a people who would accept and live the gospel, He has established the united order.<sup>216</sup>

Except for those duties which are unique to the Presiding Bishopric of the Church and those which were made inoperative at the time the *formal law of consecration was suspended*, the role of the bishop today is essentially the same as was defined in these early revelations.<sup>217</sup>

Since this revelation [D&C 105] was received, Church members have not been required to live the law of consecration. There were, however, a few short-lived attempts to establish united order communities in the West.

In the 1930s our present welfare program, which embodies some phases of the law of consecration, was inaugurated.

As to the question, “Will the righteous members of the Church be asked to live the law of consecration?” — my answer is yes. I believe that the righteous members of the Church will, in time, become “united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom” and that the law of consecration will be lived by them during the Millennium.<sup>218</sup>

### **Lorenzo Snow**

Now, here is one of the first principles of the United Order, and it was made and ordained a law by every person, and everyone was required to observe it, who should be privileged to go to the land of Missouri to receive an inheritance. But this, I think, will apply, not only to those who should go to the land of Missouri, but to the people of God in every land. Wherever there is a people of God, the principles of the United Order are applicable if they would receive and obey them. Some have thought that the United Order was to be kept only by the people who should go up to the land of Missouri. Now this, I believe, is incorrect. It would seem very singular that the Latter-day Saints, when they receive the Gospel, should not have the privilege of uniting themselves, according to the principles of the celestial law, and that Jackson County should be the only place where this law might be observed.<sup>219</sup>

**James E. Talmage**

A system of unity in temporal matters has been revealed to the Church in this day; such is currently known as the Order of Enoch, or the United Order, and is founded on the law of consecration. As already stated, in the early days of the latter-day Church the people demonstrated their inability to abide this law in its fulness, and, in consequence, the lesser law of tithing was given; but the saints confidently await the day in which they will devote not merely a tithe of their substance but all that they have and all that they are, to the service of their God; a day in which no man will speak of mine and thine, but all things shall be the Lord's and theirs.

In this expectation they indulge no vague dream of communism, encouraging individual irresponsibility and giving the idler an excuse for hoping to live at the expense of the thrifty; but rather, a calm trust that in the promised social order, such as God can approve, every man will be a steward in the full enjoyment of liberty to do as he will with the talents committed to his care; but with the sure knowledge that an account of his stewardship shall be required at his hands.<sup>220</sup>

**Orson F. Whitney**

A brave attempt to practice it was made by the Latter-day Saints, soon after this Church was organized. But they lacked experience, and did not completely rise to the occasion. Selfishness within, and persecution without, prevented a perfect achievement. So the Lord withdrew the Law of Consecration and gave to his people a lesser law, one easier to live, but pointing forward, like the other, to something grand and glorious in the future. That lesser law, the Law of Tithing, is as a schoolmaster, a disciplinary agent, to bring the Saints eventually up to the practice of the higher law, and meanwhile to keep their hearts open for its reception when it returns.<sup>221</sup>

**John A. Widtsoe**

For the general support, therefore, of the Church and of the poor who are unable to provide for themselves, a fund has been provided by the tithing of the people. This is a preparation for the united order, and some day will be replaced by the more complete system.<sup>222</sup>

These statements leave little doubt that several Church leaders, including apostles, expect the united order or a similar organization to be reinstated. Such reinstatement will come at a time and in a manner as the Lord directs through His prophet.

## VII. Conclusion

I have provided substantial evidence (Section III) that it really was Joseph Smith's (and God's) plan that the Saints in general live in a special economic system of consecration, stewardship, and donation of surpluses to the storehouse. It is also clear that this system is at least as much spiritual as temporal; it has eternal significance. I'll re-emphasize that it is more or less well known in the Church that this system is not socialistic, like the communal experiments Huff brings up, although perhaps there are some who believe otherwise. Huff is certainly not wrong in saying so, but it seems he is overeager to avoid any appearance of socialism and so may overlook the Lord's plea for equality or not accept the idea of consecrating one's excess. Here is an excerpt from a readily accessible *Ensign* article (published nine years before Huff's book) agreeing that the "united order" is not socialistic while at the same time giving the "traditional understanding," that I adhere to, and emphasizing that the united order is not a "supplemental assistance program":

The vision of a modern Zion was not a fanciful Utopian scheme, nor one of the contemporary communal experiments. The Prophet's vision came by revelation, making him intimately familiar with the glory of Enoch's Zion. He sought for the Saints of this dispensation the same approbation which the Lord had given to the Saints of Enoch's day: "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." (Moses 7:18) ...

1. Entrance into the united order is *wholly voluntary*, as evidenced by a consecration of all one's property to the Church.

2. *The united order is not a supplemental assistance program*; it is the economic system in Zion. It provides a standard of living commensurate to one's needs, wants, circumstances, and ability to expand one's stewardship.

3. The united order operates under the principle of *private ownership* and individual management. It is neither communal

nor communistic. Each man owns his own property with an absolute title. The individual family is preserved. There is no common table.<sup>223</sup>

However, in the Utah pioneer period, some united orders did have a “common table.” See the Orson Pratt speech excerpt I presented earlier about whether this was “right,” “wrong,” or up to the choice of individuals.

Compared to most Americans, perhaps I have an unusual outlook but one I hope I share with many other Latter-day Saints: I am politically conservative and do not agree with socialism; it doesn’t work. But I believe in the “united order” — a formal consecration/stewardship system as a way to ensure both freedom and equality and to bring prosperity. I think it is what liberals yearn for, although they don’t always realize it. But it will only work with a covenant people and cannot be applied to a whole nation, especially one that is becoming more and more secular. So I understand when my fellow conservatives and anyone who is against socialism would be suspicious of the “united order” as traditionally understood. Brigham Young described this suspicion:

It seems to be objectionable to some, for the Latter-day Saints to enter into a self-sustaining system, and the probability of our doing so causes a great deal of talk. If we were infidels, any other sect of Christians, or neither Christians nor infidels, but mere worldlings, seeking only to amass the wealth of this world, nothing would be thought or said against it. But for the Latter-day Saints to make a move to the right or to the left, to the front or to the rear, *a suspicion arises directly in the minds of the people.*<sup>224</sup>

I think Kent Huff and others share this suspicion and therefore work hard to deny that anything that resembles socialism, even superficially, could exist in the Church. This is unfortunate because by rightly disavowing socialism, which the 1942 First Presidency has described as a counterfeit united order,<sup>225</sup> Huff also disavows the real thing — he effectively throws the baby out with the bathwater.

I agree with many of Huff’s conclusions as well as those of other scholars and enjoyed learning fascinating history from their published works. Scholars differ in their opinions; some are undoubtedly frustrated at what they consider myths about consecration that persist in the Church. But I will stick to the traditional understanding that the revealed economic system involved more than an eleven-man firm to

handle temporary situations (which firm was an example to the rest of the Church) and that God's plan is for all Saints to consecrate their all, right now, but also in a more formal sense someday — and not just by lip service. Church leaders often speak their personal opinions,<sup>226</sup> and the statements I've cited have not been officially canonized. However, with so many Church leaders in the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries who have voiced opinions (several of which were quoted in sections IV and VI) in support of a traditional understanding of the law of consecration and the united order — and in agreement with the most straightforward reading of the scriptures and the temple covenants — I will choose their interpretation.

**Richard D. Gardner** is originally from Logan, Utah, but grew up in several states, mainly Hawaii. He has taught biology at Southern Virginia University (a private four-year liberal arts institution catering to LDS students) since 2004. He earned a BA in biology from Utah State University (1991), a PhD in molecular and cellular biology from the University of Arizona (1998), and did post-doctoral work at the University of Virginia for six years prior to his current appointment. He served a mission in Curitiba, Brazil in the late 1980s. In addition to scientific publications, he is the author of *The Heart of the Gospel: Explorations into the Workings of the Atonement*, and its sequel, *God's Organizing Power: Explorations into the Power and Blessings of the Priesthood*, and was quoted extensively in a July 2016 New Era article on science and religion. Richard is married to Naomi Blair Gardner, and both have been active in the BSA at the district level (Naomi received a Silver Beaver). They have six children (5 living).

### Endnotes

1. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order: A Non-Communalistic Interpretation*. (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1988).
2. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church's First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832–1834," *BYU Studies* 46/3, 2007, 13, 58–59.
3. Steven C. Harper, " 'All Things Are the Lord's': The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants," in

Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill, eds. *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2008), 212–28. This chapter is also available at <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/selected-articles/all-things-are-lord-s-law-consecration-doctrine-and-covenants>. I appreciate the discussion of our ability to consecrate our surpluses now in living the law of consecration. I agree that consecration has never been “revoked” although clearly we are not doing it the same way. However, while Harper opines that paying tithing is the current method of consecration, I’d argue that giving ten percent is part of consecration but not equivalent to deeding all of one’s property. However, this does not prevent us from consecrating our excess even now.

4. That D&C 42 contained the first official use of the word *consecration* in this dispensation, see Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 228.
5. See for example D&C 58:35–36, 85:1 and the original law itself, D&C 42:30–33. Of course, Steven Harper — whom I just cited as teaching that *consecrate* means to make holy — is correct that to consecrate doesn’t necessarily mean to give away. He makes that point in the following oral statement, which I feel goes too far in denying that consecration can also involve giving away things. “So first we have to obliterate our false understanding of what consecration means. If, in your mind, consecration means that’s when I give all my stuff away, never have any joy after that, that’s not consecration. That was never, ever, ever intended or taught or commanded. [I agree that it was never intended that we lose our joy.] If we would think of consecration as making ourselves holy and as part of that, making anything we have stewardship over holy and available to God for his purposes, including feeding my children or getting me to church or getting me to work ... then we have consecration.” (Steven C. Harper, “Tithing and the Law of Consecration” podcast, <http://www.ldsperspectives.com/2017/04/12/tithing-law-consecration/>, 18:20) Yet, Harper also agrees that tithing, in which we give money away, is a form of consecration. (Podcast, 18:00). Elsewhere, however, he gave this gem: “Possessions, time, and spiritual gifts can be made sacred by offering them, but philanthropy is not consecration, nor is



making a token offering of one's abundance, as illustrated by the Gospel of Luke's account of the Savior distinguishing between the rich men who cast gifts into the treasury and the widow who offered all (see Luke 21:1–4)." ("All Things Are the Lord's: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants.") And Gordon B. Hinckley said, "Consecration, which is associated with [sacrifice], a willingness to *give everything*, if need be, to help in the on-rolling of this great work." Gordon B. Hinckley, Meeting with General Authorities and wives, April 10, 1996. In Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 147, emphasis added.

6. Here are two summaries of this "traditional" interpretation by LDS historians. Bishop Partridge "knew through additional revelation that members were to impart of their 'substance unto the poor' by laying it before the bishop. Under Bishop Partridge's direction, the law of consecration and stewardship developed in Missouri where members contributed all their resources to the bishop and received a stewardship back. He retained excess land, food, and equipment for the poor and spent all of his time helping to manage and direct the distribution of these resources." Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 241.

And

"Members were asked to deed all their property to the bishop of the Church. They then received title to a stewardship — a means of production or support for the family. This inheritance was based on the wants (inasmuch as the wants were just), needs, circumstances (including the size of the family), and abilities of the stewards. At the appointed times, surplus production and increase beyond the needs of the family were to be given into the bishop's storehouse for Church projects, including the care of the poor. Should anyone leave the order, he was to receive his inheritance but not the surplus he had given to the Church. Families were to live separately, and business relations were to be conducted under a system in which stewards owned or held title to their property. Saints who entered this order were placed on essentially the same economic level. This basic equality was to be retained by their giving periodically their surplus to the Church." Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heaven's Resound: A history of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830–1838*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 75.

7. A fascinating history of “The Family” is contained in Chapter 6 of Mark L. Staker’s *Hearken O Ye People*.
8. Chapter 10 (The United Order Firms are Replaced by the Corporate Trustee-In-Trust)
9. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 212.
10. Steven C. Harper, “The tithing of my people,” in *Revelations in Context* at <https://history.lds.org/article/the-tithing-of-my-people?lang=eng>.
11. These scriptures are cited in Iba, Stephen. Answer to “Why does D&C 104:1 say that the united order was an everlasting order until the Lord comes, yet it is not practiced today?” In “I have a question,” *Ensign*, June 1986, 27.
12. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 1, 119–120.
13. J. Reuben Clark, *Conference Report*, October 1942, 54–59.
14. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 6.
15. *Ibid.*, 7.
16. *Doctrine and Covenants Instructor Manual* (Institute) Appendix, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 115, 117. Available on lds.org.
17. *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, (Institute) Enrichment L, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 425. Available on lds.org.
18. Victor L. Brown, “The Law of Consecration,” BYU speech on 7 November 1976, available at [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
19. Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report*, April 1966, 95–101.
20. William O. Nelson, “To Prepare a People,” *Ensign*, January 1979, 18–22. (Nelson was the assistant executive secretary to the Council of the Twelve.)
21. Bruce R. McConkie, “Communism” in *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 151–152.
22. Ezra Taft Benson, “A Vision and Hope for the Youth of Zion,” BYU Speech 12 April 1977, available at [speeches.byu.edu](http://speeches.byu.edu).
23. Marion G. Romney, “The Purpose of Church Welfare Services,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 92–95.

24. Clark, *Conference Report*, October 1942, 55.
25. See Milton Backman's statement in Section II, which I believe supports my idea of roughly equal standards of living.
26. James W. Lucas and Warner P. Woodworth, *Working Toward Zion: Principles of the United Order for the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1996).
27. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 54–55.
28. *Ibid.*, 86–87, emphasis added.
29. *Ibid.*, 100, emphasis added.
30. *History of the Church* 1: 364–365.
31. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 111.
32. *Ibid.*, 235–236.
33. *Ibid.*, 246.
34. *Ibid.*, 249–253; quote is on p. 253.
35. *Ibid.*, 254–255.
36. *Ibid.*, 256–257.
37. *Ibid.*, 258–259.
38. *Ibid.*, 351–352.
39. Here are some other examples (with my comments) Kent W. Huff gives us in *Joseph Smith's United Order* designed to show that the “united order” was not socialistic. Page numbers refer to Huff's book:

“Verse 55 [of section 42] should also be examined. It says ‘and if thou obtainest more than that which would be for thy support, thou shalt give it into my storehouse, that all things may be done according to that which I have said.’ Note that this is a command direct from the Lord to each individual, and that each is admonished to ‘give’ to support the various purposes mentioned earlier. This command from the Lord is not to be enforced by local administrators” (p. 352–353). How could it be “enforced”? Shall church leaders throw people in jail?

A church member named Isaac McWithy was tried for his fellowship for not being helpful in the migration effort and for accepting \$500 that Joseph Smith gave him for moving expenses

but not using it for that purpose. “The procedure followed by Joseph Smith with regard to Isaac McWithy is consistent with the highest regard for private property, and inconsistent with any church-required transfer of property. The cooperation of McWithy was certainly being sought, but *it was not to become part of a life-long involvement in a static, confining “share the wealth” scheme* (as most socialist communities were), but rather a short-term, hopefully one-time, large-scale relocation of the body of the Saints, the involvement determined and limited by the practical needs of such a migration” (p. 168–169, emphasis added).

“This excerpt [of the minutes of the Missouri High Council, April 7, 1837] shows that real estate development went ahead very much as it would today, with lots identified, priced, and sold in an orderly and businesslike way” (p. 179–180), as opposed to some socialistic way.

Huff cites the 11 June 1837 minutes of a meeting of the Missouri high council, which resolved not to trade with non-Mormons. Huff is worried: “This may have seemed necessary to keep out ‘enemies,’ but its anti-freedom aspect is disturbing and may well have backfired on them later” (p. 184).

“The few fragments presented here of united order and other economic activities in Missouri seem sufficient to show that business transactions were carried on in fairly ordinary ways. There is evidence of natural cooperation, but not of any formal communalism” (p. 184).

Oliver Cowdery was tried for his membership on several counts, one of which was “declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority or revelations whatever, in his temporal affairs” and for “selling his lands in Jackson county, contrary to the revelations” (p. 194, citing *History of the Church* 3:16) However, Cowdery argued back about the value of freedom under our US government, and these particular charges were dropped. Huff uses this to show, once again, that the Church won’t interfere with our economic decisions.

40. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 352.

41. *History of the Church* 1: 365.

42. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 110–111.

43. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:48 (19 April 1874).

44. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:75 (8 May 1874).
45. *History of the Church* 3: 28, 8 May 1838. Huff cites this on p. 26 of *Joseph Smith's United Order*.
46. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 28.
47. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
48. Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 235, and Max H Parkin, *Joseph Smith and the United Firm*, 15.
49. “‘They had all things common’ (Acts 4:32) probably does not mean that they pooled all of their resources and then divided up equal portions among believers. Rather they used their excess resources to care for the poor and needy among them.” *New Testament Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2014), 286.
50. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 29.
51. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:6, emphasis added (28 September 1862).
52. See Nate Oman, “Brigham Young’s Attack on Communal Economics,” *Times and Seasons*, 24 March 2004. Scroll down to comment #7 by “Kent W. Huff” posted on 27 March 2004. It is the same Kent W. Huff because he writes of having authored *Joseph Smith's United Order*. <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2004/03/brighams-attack-on-communal-economics/>. Nate Oman is a professor of law in Virginia.
53. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:29–30 (17 Aug 1856).
54. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:60–61, emphasis added (16 June 1867).
55. *Ibid.*, 13:302, emphasis added (13 Nov 1870).
56. *Ibid.*, 17:52–53 (3 May 1874).
57. *Ibid.*, 17:54, emphasis added (3 May 1874).
58. *Ibid.*, 18:354–356, emphasis added (6 April 1877).
59. *Ibid.*, 19:46–47, emphasis added (27 May 1877).
60. *Ibid.*, 12:64–65, emphasis added (23 June 1867).
61. *Ibid.*, 18:242, emphasis added (23 June 1874).

62. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:81, emphasis added (31 August 1875).
63. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:373, emphasis added (5 April 1877).
64. Ibid., 20:366–367 (19 October 1879).
65. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:240–241, emphasis added (8 October 1874).
66. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 266.
67. James E. Talmage explains, "In this expectation they indulge no vague dream of communism, encouraging individual irresponsibility and giving the idler an excuse for hoping to live at the expense of the thrifty; but rather, a calm trust that in the promised social order, such as God can approve, every man will be a steward in the full enjoyment of liberty to do as he will with the talents committed to his care; but with the sure knowledge that an account of his stewardship will be required at his hands." *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 398.
68. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:4–5, emphasis added (7 April 1873).
69. Ibid., 16:159, emphasis added (16 August 1873).
70. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 42–43. Portions in [brackets] are my additions, as are the italics.
71. Ibid., 34.
72. Ibid., 323–324.
73. Just to rule out any changes to Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible that did not make it into the LDS-published Bible, I compared the last few verses of Acts 4 in the Inspired Version (published by the Community of Christ/former RLDS Church) and King James Version. Inspired Version of the Bible, Independence, Missouri: Herald House Publishing, 1944. There were no differences.
74. [https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon/when-did-jesus-visit#\\_ednref4](https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon/when-did-jesus-visit#_ednref4)
75. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 44–45, emphasis added.
76. Ibid., 45.

77. See the discussion on how the Lord fights the battles of the righteous in Duane Boyce, *Even Unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 94–99.
78. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:117–118 (28 June 1874).
79. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 45.
80. For example, Elder Neal A. Maxwell called the City of Enoch a “utopia” due to the observance of consecration. (Neal A. Maxwell, “Called and prepared from the foundation of the world.” *Ensign*, May 1986, 34–36). President Marion G. Romney linked the law of consecration to each of these Zion societies (Marion G Romney, “The Purpose of Church Welfare Services,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 92–95; “Living Welfare Principles,” *Ensign*, November 1981, 92–93; “Unity,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 17–18). James E. Talmage also ascribed Enoch’s and the Nephite Zion to the formal law of consecration (*The Articles of Faith*, 397.)
81. For example, historian Mark L. Staker cites D&C 78:5 (“That you may be equal in the bands of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things.”) and comments: “It appears that Joseph sought to create in both Kirtland and Missouri a city where the inhabitants were of “one heart and one mind” and “there was no poor among them” as were found in Enoch’s city (Moses 7:17–19; Community of Christ D&C 36:2g–i) or, as the Book of Mormon described it, a people where “there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.” (4 Ne. 1:2–3) Early converts arriving in Kirtland desired to achieve the unity and equality described in scripture.” *Hearken O Ye People*, 408.
82. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 5.
83. *Ibid.*, 51.
84. While the Lord did give the Kirtland to the Saints “for a little season” (D&C 51:16), He nevertheless commanded them to act like it was “for years” (vs. 17). And we don’t always know what “a little season” really means. Here is some historical evidence that Kirtland was meant to be a lasting center of the Church. Joseph Young said, admittedly decades later, “I will refer once more

to the statement of the Prophet Joseph in regard to the Stake at Kirtland. I will repeat that he said, it would be one of the principle ones of Zion and that the faithful saints who then occupied it should be among the principle ones, and their posterity of the inhabitants that should compose that City. I have heard Brother Brigham make similar statements.” Joseph Young, letter to Lewis Harvey, November 16, 1880. Cited in Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 540. Also Staker points out that Orson Hyde encouraged migration to Kirtland in 1836 by describing its industries. (p. 444.) Finally, Staker cites a sermon given by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1837 (as noted by Wilford Woodruff), about the Kirtland bank and Kirtland’s glorious future. (p. 521.)

85. Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, chapters 33–35; quotation is on p. 519.
86. Willard Richards, Letter to Hepsibah Richards, January 20, 1837, as cited in Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 484.
87. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 65.
88. *Ibid.*, 66, emphasis added. Again, Huff protests too much (“mystical”).
89. *Ibid.*, 85.
90. *Ibid.*, 126–127, emphasis added.
91. Milton V. Backman, *The Heavens Resound*, 77.
92. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 86.
93. Ezra Taft Benson, “A Vision and Hope for the Youth of Zion,” emphasis added. To show that he means the formal consecration and stewardship system, he next says, “The vehicle for implementing the law of consecration is the united order.”
94. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:159, emphasis added (16 August 1873).
95. Hyrum Andrus, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 504.
96. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 52.
97. *Ibid.*, 6.
98. *Ibid.*, 235.



99. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:156, emphasis added (16 August 1873).
100. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 89, emphasis added. Huff repeats this point on p. 148. Huff cites *History of the Church* 1:365 where editor B.H. Roberts uses the term "order of Enoch."
101. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 58–60.
102. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 90.
103. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 14, and Mark L. Staker, *Hearken O Ye People*, 231.
104. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 5, 66.
105. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 90, emphasis added.
106. *Ibid.*, 94.
107. *Ibid.*, 97, citing *History of the Church* 1:270.
108. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 33–34.
109. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 117.
110. William O. Nelson, "To Prepare a People."
111. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 236.
112. See, for example, Howard C. Searle, "Authorship of the History of Joseph Smith: A Review Essay," *BYU Studies* 21/1, 1981. However, Huff defends his heavy reliance on the *History of the Church* by citing Joseph Smith scholar Dean Jesse ("I have a question," *Ensign*, July 1985, p. 15) as explaining that the *History of the Church* is our most important historical source (Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 16).
113. "Some of those who have written on the topic of the united order during the Joseph Smith times, and have argued for or assumed the communalistic nature of the united order have perhaps inadvertently shown the weakness of their position by failing to cite examples from the *History* that confirm the communalistic interpretations. Geddes in his work *The United Order Among The Mormons*, in which he expounds on the social policies of the united order, cites no examples from the history, but uses only verses from the Doctrine and Covenants ... The D&C verses are subject to other interpretations as shown in other chapters of this book." Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 260.

114. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 142–143.
115. Joseph Smith is quoted on p. 240 of Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*.
116. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 242.
117. Ibid., 337, emphasis added.
118. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 65.
119. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 351, emphasis added.
120. Ibid., 142–144.
121. Wilford Woodruff's journal, vol 1 page 16, photocopy of transcribed journal I obtained from the Church History Library. I have standardized most of the spelling.
122. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 269.
123. Ibid., 144.
124. Steven C. Harper, 'All Things Are the Lord's': The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants."
125. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 96, 100.
126. Ibid., 122.
127. Lorenzo Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:362 (19 October 1879).
128. That this literary firm is an early version ("antecedent") to the united firm is confirmed by Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm," 11.
129. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:365 (19 October 1879).
130. "Some may contend that searching only the *History* is inadequate and that until every journal, newspaper article, or other piece of information from the era has been examined, it cannot be said that the search is conclusive .... If no evidence of doctrinally required communalism appears in the main stream materials, we can safely assume that the omission was intentional and therefore conclusive. This is true regardless of the contrasting Brigham Young era materials." Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 261.
131. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:3–4, emphasis added (7 April 1873).

132. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:59 (7 May 1874).
133. Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832. Original spelling, emphasis added. Dean Jesse, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 259–260. Also available in Joseph Smith Papers, published by The Church Historian’s Press, an imprint of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-to-william-w-phelps-27-november-1832?p=#/paperSummary/letter-to-william-w-phelps-27-november-1832&p=2>
134. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 123.
135. *History of the Church* 1:364–65 — this is from 25 June 1833.
136. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 141–142.
137. *Ibid.*, 14.
138. Richard L. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 182–183. Quote on p. 183.
139. I’ve already quoted Milton Backman twice, in the sixth endnote and in Section II. I’ve also quoted Mark Staker in the sixth endnote. See Harper’s “‘All Things Are the Lord’s’: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants.” After describing revealed requirements of Zion, Max Parkin says, “The plan directed the faithful who would gather to Zion — soon to be identified as being in western Missouri — to consecrate or grant their property by certificate to Bishop Partridge .... Then, Bishop Partridge would return to them as stewards their personal property ... ” (Parkin, “Joseph Smith and the United Firm,” 8).
140. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 119.
141. Edward Partridge papers: Edward Partridge letter, 1834 October 22. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. <https://eadview.lds.org/findingaid/000104518/> then click on “Edward Partridge Letter, 1834 October 22.”
142. Edward Partridge papers: Deed of Stewardship, 1832 October 12. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE4277947](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE4277947)

143. Levi Jackman deeds of consecration and stewardship, circa 1833. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. It was not actually signed, but my point is that it exists. [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE9090103](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9090103)
144. Steven C. Harper, “All Things Are the Lord’s.”
145. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, in 1839, 17–18. Available in the Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/john-corrill-a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-christ-of-latter-day-saints-1839?p=1&highlight=john%20corrill>
146. Corrill, *A Brief History*, 45–46.
147. Available in the Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minutes-25-26-october-1831?p=4&highlight=minutes%20october%201831>
148. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 119–120.
149. Huff did not quote this letter but did cite it. It was dated 10 December 1833, addressed to E. Partridge, W.W. Phelps, J. Whitmer, A.S. Gilbert, J. Carrrel, I. Morley, and “all the saints whom it may concern.” Joseph Smith says “those who are innocent are compelled to suffer for the iniquities of the guilty; and I cannot account for this, only on this wise, that the saying of the savior has not been strictly observed: If thy right eye offend thee pluck it out ... Now the fact is, if any of the members of our body are disordered, the rest of our body will be effected with them and then all is brought into bondage together.” Dean Jesse, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 308–309.
150. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 19.
151. Here are some sources that ascribe the suspension of this formal consecration system to D&C section 105: Victor L. Brown, “The Law of Consecration”; J. Reuben Clark, “The United Order and Law of Consecration as Set Out in the Revelations of the Lord.” From a 1942 *Church News* series (as reprinted in the appendix of the 1981 Doctrine and Covenants Institute Instructor’s Manual); Marion G. Romney, “Living the Principles of the Law of Consecration” *Ensign*, February 1979, 3–4 ; Marion G. Romney,

- Conference Report*, April 1966, 100; Marion G. Romney, “The Purpose of Church Welfare Services”; William O. Nelson, “To Prepare a People.”
152. “I don’t think God gives laws based on the percentage of the people that are going to be true and faithful to it. That seems odd to me.” Steven C. Harper, “Tithing and the Law of Consecration” podcast 7:30–9:00. In this podcast Harper also makes the point (7:00 to 7:30) that the law of consecration was not revoked or suspended, which I agree is absolutely true, but obviously the formal application was indeed suspended, or else we’d be deeding all of our possessions to the Church through the bishop today. Once again, it is important to avoid semantic misunderstandings.
  153. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, chapters 13–15. Unless otherwise stated, the historical information about tithing in this and the next two paragraphs comes from these chapters.
  154. Steven C. Harper, “Tithing and the Law of Consecration” podcast 23:06; “The Tithing of my people,” *Revelations in Context*, and “ ‘All Things Are the Lord’s’: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants.”
  155. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 301.
  156. *Ibid.*, 270.
  157. (*Gospel Doctrine* 1977 edition p. 225, April Conference report, 1900 p. 47). Cited on p. 317–318 of Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*.
  158. Lucas and Woodworth, *Working Toward Zion*.
  159. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 316, 318.
  160. *Ibid.*, 313–314, emphasis added.
  161. R. Quinn Gardner, “Becoming a Zion Society: Six Principles,” *Ensign*, February 1979, 30–35.
  162. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 30–31.
  163. Steven C. Harper, “Tithing and the Law of Consecration” podcast 17:00 to 18:00. See also “ ‘All Things Are the Lord’s’: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants.” I agree that tithing didn’t “replace” consecration because tithing is indeed a part of consecration. But it may well have replaced the *formal* law of consecration for a time. It is crucial to avoid

semantic misunderstandings between *consecration* and the *law of consecration*, and to specify if we are referring to its “full” or “formal” application. These terms, “full” and “formal” are not mine; see section VI for their use by Church leaders. But clearly, paying ten percent is not the same as deeding all of one’s property.

164. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 16:156–157, emphasis added (16 August 1873).
165. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:367 (19 October 1879).
166. Ibid., 20:365, 368, emphasis added (19 October 1879).
167. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 396.
168. Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Reports*, April 1931, 65.
169. Marion G. Romney, “Welfare Services,” *Ensign* November 1975, 124–128.
170. Dallin H. Oaks, “Tithing,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 33–35.
171. Henry B. Eyring “The Blessings of Tithing,” First Presidency Message, *Ensign*, June 2011, 4–6 .
172. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:368–369, emphasis added (19 October 1879).
173. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 21.
174. Steven C. Harper, “Tithing and the Law of Consecration” podcast 12:00 to 12:20.
175. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 35, emphasis added.
176. Ibid., 36–37.
177. Ibid., 248.
178. Ibid., 249.
179. Ibid., 323.
180. I’m skeptical of Huff’s reasons for Brigham Young’s different ideas about the “united order” compared to those Joseph Smith had: Brigham Young was away from Nauvoo when Joseph Smith described his negative views on socialism (September and October 1843), and he did not experience the Kirtland “Family” because he hadn’t yet joined the Church (Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith’s United Order*, 41). I doubt that despite their close association, their

- differences all boil down to Brigham Young's absences on two occasions.
181. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 21:148–149 (1 November 1879), emphasis added.
  182. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 342.
  183. *Ibid.*, 343.
  184. See for example, Marion G. Romney, "The Purpose of Church Welfare Services"; Victor L. Brown, "The Law of Consecration"; and McConkie, Bruce R., "United Order," in *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 814.
  185. Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, 344.
  186. *Ibid.*, 346.
  187. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* 2:306 (3 June 1855). Brigham Young was quoting Joseph Smith. Cited on p. 347 of Kent W. Huff, *Joseph Smith's United Order*.
  188. See Steven C. Harper, "All Things Are the Lord's," for an excellent discussion of agency, stewardship, and accountability.
  189. William O. Nelson, "To Prepare a People," emphasis added.
  190. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989).
  191. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001 (original copyright 1952), 86.
  192. Lucas and Woodworth, *Working Toward Zion*.
  193. "Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation." Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* 6:7. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2000, 66.
  194. Gordon B. Hinckley, Logan Temple Workers Devotional, as quoted in Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 639. This statement was also quoted in Steven C. Harper, "The Law," in *Revelations in Context*, at <https://history.lds.org/article/revelations-in-context-the-law?lang=eng>.

195. A BYU religion professor related in an inspiring talk I attended that he gives his students a “quiz” on the law of consecration (3:53 to 6:20). Possible answers (my summary): A, it is not practiced today. B, it is not practiced but will be brought back in the millennium. C, it is practiced in part but not in full. D, it is practiced in full today. Of course, the “correct” answer was D, and that we are not living a lesser form of the law today (14:50–15:00, and 18:45–19:20). (Anthony Sweat, “Consecration is in full effect,” Southern Virginia Education Conference, June 12, 2015, Buena Vista, VA. Audio at <https://soundcloud.com/svuedu/sets>, select “playlists” and scroll down to Education Conference 2015. Or, <https://soundcloud.com/svuedu/anthony-sweat-consecration-is-in-full-effect-june-12-2015?in=svuedu/sets/education-conference-2015>.) I agree completely that the law of consecration never went away, but I would choose answer C, because the “full” or “formal” law was indeed suspended, as these Church leaders have taught. Nevertheless, a different sense of the word “full” might mean that we can fully keep our covenant by being fully committed to consecration in our lives, and thus, fully approved of God. There may still be disagreements but we can lessen them if we eliminate semantic misunderstandings.
196. Spencer W. Kimball: “In the earliest years of this dispensation the people faltered in attempting to live the *full plan* of Zion.” “Becoming the Pure in Heart.” *Ensign*, March 1985, 2–5, emphasis added. Dallin H. Oaks: “Tithe paying is evidence that we accept the law of sacrifice. It also prepares us for the law of consecration and the other higher laws of the celestial kingdom.” “Tithing,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 33–35. If we were already living the full law of consecration, tithing couldn’t “prepare” us for it.
197. Ezra Taft Benson, “A Vision and a Hope for the Youth of Zion,” emphasis added.
198. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Training Challenge,” General Welfare Services Committee, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2 February 1977, cited in *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 123.
199. Ezra Taft Benson, Logan, Utah, 6 December 1975, cited in *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p123.
200. Victor L. Brown, “The Law of Consecration.”



201. F. Enzo Busche, "How Beautiful to Live in These Times and Be Prepared!," *Ensign*, June 1982, 16–23.
202. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses* 15:207 (8 October 1872).
203. Loren C. Dunn, "The Doctrine and Covenants — A Scripture for All Seasons," BYU speech, 12 March 1985. Available on speeches. byu.edu.
204. Henry B. Eyring, "The Blessings of Tithing," emphasis added.
205. Vaughn J. Featherstone, "The Developing Welfare Services Department," General Conference Welfare session, *Ensign* November 1975, 118–120.
206. Robert D. Hales, "Tithing: A Test of Faith with Eternal Blessings," emphasis added.
207. Harold B. Lee, "Teach the Gospel of Salvation" *Ensign*, January 1973, 60–63, emphasis added.
208. Neal A. Maxwell, *Things As They Really Are* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 39.
209. Bruce R. McConkie, "Consecration," in *Mormon Doctrine*, 158, emphasis added.
210. Bruce R. McConkie, "United Order," in *Mormon Doctrine*, 813.
211. Bruce R. McConkie, "Obedience, Consecration, and Sacrifice," *Ensign*, May 1975, 50–52, emphasis added.
212. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 600, 618.
213. David O. McKay, Excerpt from a discussion on Communism with members of the Council of the Twelve, 24 August 1961, McKay Scrapbook, no. 54, as cited in Mary Jane Woodger, *The Teachings of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 140.
214. Keith B. McMullin, "Come to Zion! Come to Zion!," *Ensign*, November 2002, 94–96.
215. Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report*, April 1966, 100, emphasis added.
216. Marion G. Romney, "The Purpose of Church Welfare Services," emphasis added.
217. Marion G. Romney, "The Role of a Bishop in the Church Welfare Program," *Ensign* November 1979, 94–96.

218. Marion G. Romney, "Q&A: Questions and Answers: Will the Righteous Members of the Church be asked to Live the Law of Consecration?" *New Era*, May 1979, 38–41.
219. Lorenzo Snow, in *Journal of Discourses* 19:343, emphasis added (21 April 1878). Note that the George Q. Cannon and Lorenzo Snow quotes are also cited in *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* Enrichment L "The Law of Consecration and Stewardship."
220. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 398.
221. Orson F. Whitney, *Conference Reports*, April 1931, 65.
222. John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology as taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. This was the Melchizedek priesthood manual, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, 139.
223. William O. Nelson, "To Prepare a People."
224. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 17:57, emphasis added (7 May 1874).
225. Messages of the First Presidency (delivered by President J. Reuben Clark), April 1942 *Conference Report*, 90.
226. For example, several Church leaders' statements on blacks and the priesthood have been shown in hindsight to be their personal opinions; and of course some topics emphasized in earlier decades, such as abstinence from cola drinks or playing cards, are rarely heard today. Nevertheless, the safest course is to assume the leaders are right, until shown otherwise, and to seek spiritual confirmation in the meantime.



