

Chapter 5 “Do you consecrate everything...?": Mormonism and the Economy

Imagine for a moment a form of government in which every important decision is made at the top. The ultimate source of power in this government resides with a centralized group we'll call the “Politburo.” The government has a Head of State, but the Head of State is chosen by, and largely controlled by the Politburo. The members of the Politburo are “elected,” but it is hardly a democratic election because they usually run unopposed, the voters overwhelmingly support the incumbents, and, besides, only members of the ruling class are allowed to vote anyway.

This government has complete control over the economic life of the community. There is no private property in this community. Everyone in the community works for the government and the government has complete control of one's income, benefits (if any), medical care (if any), housing, and retirement (again, if any). The government decides if you have safe working conditions, tells you what to wear, and even tells you when you can take a potty break.

In this community, all information is controlled by the government. The newspaper is filled with pro-government propaganda, the post office is intended only for official government business, phone conversations are monitored and email is read by agents of the government. The government maintains a well-funded and sophisticated “Ministry of Information” whose purpose is to create a positive, benevolent public image of the government, regardless of the facts.

Periodically the government calls the community together for indoctrination sessions wherein the glories of the government are extolled and community production targets for the next five years are imposed on the workers. Every attempt is made to convince the members of the community that what is good for the government is good for them. They are encouraged to see the government's success as their success.

The government also creates enemies, real or imagined, in order to keep its people loyal through fear. Other governments are seen as competitors who must be crushed. If another government prospers, it must be at our expense, so we must attack them or take them over so that their prosperity becomes ours. The government's list of allies and enemies is constantly shifting as it constantly seeks the competitive advantage to defeat or to absorb other governments. It's appetite for constant expansion is voracious.

This form of government tolerates absolutely no internal dissent. Criticism of the government is seen as heresy. Dissidents are ignored, then lectured, and then isolated. Those who persist in expressing negative opinions are cast out of the community and their names are blotted out of the community's records. They and their children are left to starve unless they can find another community that will take them in.

The nightmarish description above certainly seems unpleasant. At first the reader may have assumed I was describing the former Communist government of Soviet Russia. As one read farther, perhaps images from George Orwell's book *1984* came to mind. These interpretations are apt, but they are not complete. The key to understanding the description above is to change the words “Politburo” to “Board of Directors,” Head of State” to “CEO,” and “Ministry of Information” to “PR Department.” The tyrannical,

totalitarian form of government described above is the modern multi-national corporation.

Modern corporations control every aspect of our lives. They control what we eat, what we drink, what we wear, the music we hear, the entertainment we attend, the toys we buy, the news we receive (and what news we don't receive!), the hours we work, and even the quality of air we breathe. No King, Emperor, Tsar, Dictator, or Commissar in the history of the world has ever had as much centralized control over the daily lives of the general population as a handful of multi-national corporations have over us right now.

The astonishing thing is how we freedom-loving Americans, who believe in democracy and "consent of the governed," can have allowed this to happen. Even more astonishing is how the large majority of people seem to be completely unaware that a coup has taken place, that our inspired, constitutional, elected government is now almost completely under the control of these selfish, corrupt, totalitarian organizations.

The Mahan principle

The "Mahan principle" is a frank recognition that the world's economy is based on the exchange of life for property. This is most apparent, of course, in time of war—a Catch-22. Today the biggest business in the world is the selling of deadly weapons by all to all, with the advantage going to the most efficient killing machines. Not long ago it was drugs, but it is all the same in a descending scale of accountability, where none is free from guilt: the hit man, soldier of fortune, weapons dealer, manufacturer, plundering whole species for raw materials, destroying life in both processing them and getting them (by pollution, dangerous work conditions, and so on), and by distributing them (additives, preservatives). The fearful processes of industry shorten and impoverish life at every level, from forced labor to poisonous air and water. This is the world's economy, for Satan is "the prince of this world."

(Hugh Nibley. "Law of Consecration," *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 9:436-37)

Our modern economy is based upon principles first introduced to Adam by Satan. According to many ancient sources (See *Approaching Zion*, Hugh Nibley, p, 91) when Adam, already cast out of the Garden, was seeking greater light and knowledge from God, Satan showed up and introduced himself as the owner of this world. Satan told Adam that money is the key to obtaining anything in this world.

Adam was not deceived. He knew that all blessings, even the basic necessities for Earthly survival, come as free gifts from God. Rejected by Adam, Satan approached Adam's children. Apparently, he was quite successful because the Book of Moses records that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve "loved Satan more than God" (Moses 5:13).

Satan outlined his plan for this Earth at the time he was being cast out of the Garden. He promised to take the resources of the Earth, especially gold and silver, to influence and corrupt military, political, and even religious leaders. His goal is to reign over a world of "blood and horror" (1 Enoch: 8-9). Anyone who is at all familiar with history should recognize that Satan has been quite successful at this. One purpose of this book is to help Mormons recognize that this is still going on today.

Satan found an especially willing student of his program in Adam's son, Cain. Cain was angry with his brother Abel and jealous of his flocks. Satan offered to give Cain possession of Abel's flocks in exchange for helping to set up Satan's plan for the world. In business terms, they made a contract. In literary terms, this was the classic "pact with the devil." It was the first in history, but certainly not the last.

Now, the arrangement between Satan and Cain had two key components. I am hesitant to even discuss them here because they form the basis of what later prophets call "the secret works of darkness." I will certainly not go into any great detail on the subject. Indeed, I fortunately don't know this topic in great detail and do not wish to study it. However, I do plan to discuss as much as the scriptures already reveal because of the critical need to awaken the Latter-day Saints and warn them about what Satan is up to in our day.

The first thing Satan did was to swear Cain to a blood oath of absolute secrecy.

And Satan said unto Cain: Swear unto me by the throat, and if thou tell it thou shalt die; and swear by thy brethren by their heads, and by the living God, that they tell it not; for if they tell it, they shall surely die; and this that thy father may not know it; and this day I will deliver thy brother Abel into thy hands.

And Satan sware unto Cain that he would do according to his commands. And all these things were done in secret. (Moses 5: 29-30)

Today there are many "secret works of darkness" entered into by "mutually beneficial" contracts. We find it easy to forget or ignore this fact because they are hidden, invisible, "secret." We also tend to diminish the importance of a little corporate corruption here and a little political dishonesty there because we tell ourselves that "after all, no one really got hurt." This is where we are completely wrong. Hurting people is what the game is all about.

The second component of Satan's arrangement with Cain was to teach him the Mahan principle.

And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness. (Moses 5: 31)

The Mahan principle is the art of converting life into property. (Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, p.436) It has many forms. Satan has a complete course of study available for anyone who is interested in cashing in. If the example of Cain killing Abel with his bare hands in cold blood out in the field seems a bit too graphic for our modern tastes, he can provide one with methods and techniques that are much more subtle, much more sophisticated. And the blood doesn't have to spill directly on the perpetrator any more. There are ways to get things done nowadays without getting your hands dirty. You wouldn't want to stain the leather seats of your new Mercedes.

It is immensely sobering, even frightening, to consider how pervasively the Mahan principle is at work in our modern economy because such an analysis inevitably shows that we are all guilty of supporting Satan's kingdom to some degree. Why go to

all the trouble of pondering, analyzing, and praying about topics that will only make us feel guilty and bad about ourselves? It is hard enough work to ignore the scriptures and rationalize our behavior so we can feel good. Why complicate our lives on purpose?

The reason we should work to understand these things, of course, is because, as pointed out in chapter one, the Latter-day Saints are expected to do everything they can to perfect themselves and prepare for the return of Christ. This is not an easy job and we do not have an unlimited amount of time to accomplish the task. We must get busy.

The Mahan principle is perhaps most visible in the war industry (Originally, the United States Department of Defense was actually named the War Department. Such honesty was too uncomfortable to last long). The United States is without peer in providing the tools of death to the world. We often oppose International agreements that would limit or restrict the sale of arms around the world because it would be bad for business. It is sadly ironic how often weapons we have sold to our “friends” on the world arms market are eventually used against our own troops. Clearly, these bombs, bullets, missiles and guns have no purpose other than death. And, just as clearly, the manufacturers of these devices are in it for the money. Converting life into profits is the Mahan principle.

One would think that if the war industry is the quintessential example of Satan’s plan at work, the medical industry would be the polar opposite. Surely, the medical industry is in the business of saving lives. That is a nice idealistic view, but it does not correspond with reality. The medical industry, like all industries, is in business to make money. The first question one is asked upon entering a doctor’s office or a hospital is, “Do you have insurance?” What happens to the person who has to say no to this question?

The medical industry literally profits from our suffering, and the profits are enormous. This is not to say that many doctors are not motivated by the desire to help people, but that money has corrupted a potentially noble profession. Does the doctor really need a home five times larger than the schoolteacher?

Directly connected to the medical industry is the insurance industry. This business is literally a legalized form of gambling based on human lives. And the “house” always takes its share up front. Life insurance is a game wherein the company bets it will take in more from your premiums than they will pay out to your beneficiaries. The insured are actually betting against themselves living that long!

Medical insurance is a game wherein the medical costs of the covered group are averaged among everyone in the group and a profit is tacked on top. This appears to be a noble endeavor until one notices that the profit is more important than the coverage. Those who need the coverage the most are labeled “high risk” and become the least likely to get it. The insurance company, to protect their profit, reserves the right to tell you which doctor you can visit, which tests you can have, which medicine you can buy, which procedure you can undergo, how many days you can stay in the hospital, and all too often, whether or not you get the operation that could save your life. Saying “this operation is not covered by your policy” is a nice way of saying that your life is not worth the threat to their profits. This is the Mahan principle.

If you just think a bit you can find the Mahan principle at work in most major industries. Car safety (padded dash, safety glass, seat belts, absorbing bumpers, air bags, etc.) only improves whenever enough people have died from a particular problem that

citizens push Congress into stiffening requirements. Chemical companies poison groundwater and kill and sicken nearby residents. Additives are put into our food in order to improve product appearance and boost sales – not because our bodies need them. The tobacco and alcohol industries (both heavy contributors to the Republican Party) are further obvious examples of profiting from death.

However, the Mahan principle doesn't just apply in situations in which people are directly killed. The principle is also at work wherever the quest for greater profits results in labor abuse, environmental destruction, or increased human misery.

The garment industry is (and has long been) infamous for its abusive labor practices. The sweatshops may have moved overseas, but they are as ugly and dangerous as ever. Long hours, dangerous working conditions, high work quotas, poor ventilation, unsanitary rest rooms (if any), crowded sleeping arrangements, no time off, and ridiculously low pay are common. Yet we Americans encourage and support this exploitation because we want the designer jeans for a few dollars less.

The meat industry has moved from the family farm, where the word “husbandry” actually had real meaning, to huge factory farm complexes. These “meat factories” treat the animals like parts on an assembly line. They are crowded, abused, and artificially forced to grow using chemicals. These operations become breeding grounds for disease, and produce tons of chemically tainted animal waste that is usually left to decay in large open ponds. No wonder these places are known for their stench, which can often be smelled miles away. It is fair to ask if, in exchange for this ugly picture, the consumer got a better price or better quality – or is someone just making a higher profit?

The Mahan principle is everywhere. “Profit,” by definition, is the money that does not go to pay the suppliers, who provided the raw materials, or the workers, who added value to the raw materials by transforming them with their labor. If, as Mormons, we profess to believe that all things belong to God and that we are just temporary stewards on this Earth, then in a very real sense “profit” is a synonym for “theft.” God is the true owner of everything, and he has clearly said that he expects his children to share everything equally.

But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. (Doctrine and Covenants 49:20.)

If the “owner” lives in luxury, while the “worker” can barely feed his family and can't afford medical insurance, then that “owner” is no better than Cain. The only difference is that he is killing his brother more slowly.

The failings of capitalism

Along with American corporate dominance has come a globalization of the ethos of selfishness and materialism that is massively reinforced by the dynamics of the competitive marketplace.

(Rabbi Michael Lerner, Tikkun Magazine, email edition, May/June 2004)

It is important not to confuse economic systems with political systems. The capitalists would have us believe that capitalism and democracy are the same thing. This is because they know that Americans overwhelmingly believe in and support democracy and they want their preferred economic model, unbridled capitalism, to receive the same level of popular support.

However, democracy is a political system, a form of government, whereas capitalism is an economic system, a type of marketplace. It is entirely possible, in fact it is preferable, to have a democratic political system without having an entirely capitalistic economic system.

Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production, transportation, communication, and finance are privately owned. In theory, capitalism extends democracy into economic decision-making. Products and services succeed or fail as consumers “vote” with their pocketbooks. Unfortunately, in practice, capitalism is subject to several failings.

The first of these is the tendency for wealth to accumulate in the hands of the few. In effect, the wealthy have more “economic votes” in a capitalistic system than the average consumer. This causes a misallocation of market resources away from those with the greatest need toward those who have the least need. This is why it is easy for the upper classes to find a wide selection of luxury cars while the lower classes find it difficult to find affordable housing.

Another failing of capitalism is the predisposition of corporations, having found some market success, to want to “consolidate” their market position. This means they work to eliminate their competition through means other than the quality, availability, utility, durability, and value of their own products. Methods to do this can include deception, bribery, espionage, sabotage, blackmail, and buying political favors—all familiar items in Satan’s toolkit.

Companies who succeed in essentially eliminating all their competitors are known as “monopolies” or “trusts.” The law recognizes that such companies are predatory and threats to the free market, but, as a rule, only Democratic administrations are interested in breaking up monopolies. Republicans tend to look up to these companies as examples of success. A recent example of this is the Microsoft case. Under the Clinton justice department, the company was facing a court ordered breakup. Under the Bush 2 administration, the case was “settled” by allowing Microsoft to buy off the plaintiffs and then continue business pretty much as usual.

The third failing of capitalism is the market distortion caused by the pervasiveness of persuasive advertising (see chapter 3). Capitalist theory assumes a rational consumer with the ability to make purchasing decisions in his or her own best interests. However, serving and pleasing intelligent, rational consumers is not the easiest way to make a profit. The purpose of advertising is to subvert one’s intelligent decision making

processes by manipulating emotions and appealing to the baser instincts. This is how advertising can “brainwash” people into buying things that are worthless and even harmful to them.

In times of prosperity it is easy to believe that our capitalistic economic system is responsible for the wealth and power of the United States. Indeed the capitalists themselves and their political party, the Republican Party, are constantly telling us this is true. Yet we conveniently forget the real historical reasons for the material and political strength of our country, and the atrocious human legacy of unbridled capitalism in the world.

America is materially blessed, not because of capitalist economics, but because it is a “promised land,” a “land of milk and honey.” In other words, this continent has been deliberately and abundantly provided with fertile soil, wildlife, rivers and lakes, mineral deposits, a moderate climate, and immense natural beauty by a generous God, and given by Him to particular peoples, at particular times, for specific reasons. Mormon scriptures, especially The Book of Mormon, are very clear about this:

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. (Ether 2:9.)

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written. (Ether 2:12.)

For Republican Mormons to claim that the wealth and power of the United States of America can be attributed to the capitalistic machinations and manipulations of corporate secret combinations, which are motivated only by their desire for power and material gain, is to deny the blessings of God and give the credit to Satan. We are replacing happiness with materialism and confusing wealth for prosperity. Wealth, the selfish possession of mere stuff, is a Satanic counterfeit for happiness. Prosperity, the generous sharing of God’s bounty, is the result of righteousness.

And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments. (Doctrine and Covenants 59:21.)

The history of capitalism is atrocious. It is a history of domination, oppression, slavery, starvation, bondage, rapaciousness, pollution, and materialism. Many, perhaps most, of capitalism’s heroes rise to prominence through a combination of lies, deceit, manipulation, propaganda, labor abuse, and, of course, power politics.

Modern unbridled corporate capitalism represents the final triumph of the aristocrats over the peasants. In the name of “reform” they have eliminated government regulations and oversight, lowered taxes for the rich, and decimated the social safety net for the struggling poor. For the sake of “competition” they have forced developing

countries to lower trade barriers to make it easier for multinational corporations to dominate local economies, they have privatized (ie. “profitized”) government services, and they have allowed huge national chains to crush small local businesses. Using the excuse of “flexibility” they have eliminated worker protections, reduced employee benefits, and eliminated (sometimes through outright pillage!) pension plans.

Clearly this is not a record to be proud of. Satan must be well pleased with how well his kingdom is currently functioning. Human misery is on the increase and those responsible are actually proud of what they have done. It is one thing to tempt people to sin, but it must be even more satisfying for Lucifer to watch his program be proudly presented, and ruthlessly enforced, as the answer to the world’s ills. He must enjoy watching pompous politicians and greedy CEOs build their empires on the backs of others and then congratulate each other for contributing to the “greatness of America.” I can only pray that this book will help my fellow Mormons see through this charade and withdraw their political support from those who are caught up in promoting Satan’s program.

A role for the government

Given the inherent corruption and excesses of capitalism, what type of economy should Latter-day Saints support? Given that corporate power is single-mindedly focused on the Mahan principle and will continue to grow and kill for the sake of profits, what can be done to minimize, if not reverse, the damage? The answer is that government must play an important role in the economy – and the only level of government that is potentially strong enough to counter the power of large multi-national corporations (whose budgets are larger than many countries!) is the Federal government.

The period around the late 1800’s was dubbed “the Gilded Age” by Mark Twain. His phrase was a sarcastic play upon the phrase “golden age” because while the wealthy classes were enjoying what they called “an American Renaissance,” the working classes were suffering the unemployment and low wages of the Second Industrial Revolution. Like our own recent history, this period was also known for its unprecedented transfer of wealth from the middle and lower classes to the upper classes. Men such as John D. Rockefeller, J.P Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt were known as “robber barons” because of their ruthless business practices and enormous wealth. Their supporters, on the other hand, celebrated them as “captains of industry.”

Interestingly, the robber barons often got ahead of their competition by forging secret deals with their suppliers and distributors, and by forming “combinations” (their term!) with like-minded partners to eliminate competition and dominate a given industry. This technique should sound very familiar to Mormons because the Book of Mormon warns repeatedly against the dangers of “secret combinations.” In fact, the prophet Moroni, in transcribing the record of the ancient Jaredites, mentions in his account that the same type of secret combinations that destroyed the Jaredites also destroyed his own people, the Nephites.

Then Moroni writes something that ought to really stand out to my Mormon readers. He addresses his future audience, us, directly and warns us that if we allow

secret combinations, whose purpose is power and money, to be built up in our day, we will be destroyed by the justice of God.

Wherefore, O ye Gentiles, it is wisdom in God that these things should be shown unto you, that thereby ye may repent of your sins, and suffer not that these murderous combinations shall get above you, which are built up to get power and gain—and the work, yea, even the work of destruction come upon you, yea, even the sword of the justice of the Eternal God shall fall upon you, to your overthrow and destruction if ye shall suffer these things to be. (Ether 8:23.)

The Federal government of the United States eventually stepped in to protect its citizens from some of the worst excesses of the Gilded Age. In 1890, the Sherman Antitrust Act passed Congress overwhelmingly. This set the stage for greater Federal regulation and oversight of commerce. The Federal Trade Commission was set up in 1914 to protect consumers and to help prevent anticompetitive business practices.

In 1911, the Supreme Court of the United States held that Standard Oil, which by then still held a 64% market share, originated in illegal monopoly practices and ordered it to be broken up into 34 new companies. These included, among many others, Continental Oil, which became Conoco; Standard of Indiana, which became Amoco; Standard of California, which became Chevron; Standard of New Jersey, which became Esso (and later, Exxon); Standard of New York, which became Mobil; and Standard of Ohio, which became Sohio. Rockefeller, who had rarely sold shares, owned stock in all of them. (*John D. Rockefeller*, Wikipedia)

Sadly, in our day, the oil monopolies are back and they are bigger than ever. Conoco and Philips66 have merged and become ConocoPhillips. Sohio and Amoco are now part of British Petroleum (BP). Chevron has gobbled up Gulf, Texaco, and Unocal. And the recently merged ExxonMobil is the 6th largest company in the world. It is fair to ask, what has changed since 1911? Are the oil companies better behaved now? Is competition less important now? Are prices now lower after the mergers than they were before the mergers? Or is it just that the Federal government has abdicated its responsibility to regulate these guys? And, of course, which political party has the most friends of Big Oil?

Another example where the federal government ordered the breakup of an entrenched monopoly is the 1984 breakup of the phone company into AT&T, the long distance company, and seven regional “Baby Bell” companies. This controversial “intrusion of the government into the free marketplace” was very successful for us consumers. The increased competition led to improved quality, a wider range of services, and lower prices – just as free market theory would have predicted. Unfortunately, just like the oil companies, the telecommunications companies have spent the past decade consolidating, rather than competing, and we are nearly back to square one again.

The point here is that when the Federal government is an active participant in the economy, overseeing and regulating the market to insure honesty and fair play, the public is well-served. Democrats are not “anti-business” or “anti-free markets” because they

typically advocate for government oversight of the marketplace. They are, rather, pro-honesty, pro-fairness, and pro-consumer.

Republicans proudly point to our national Constitution and the “balance of power” it created between the three branches of our government. It is inconsistent and illogical for them to believe that unbridled power is dangerous when used by governments but not dangerous when wielded by corporations. Every time the government abdicates its responsibility to oversee and regulate the marketplace (generally under Republican administrations), widespread abuses inevitably occur. Our economic system functions best when corporate power is balanced by government power.

Another view of “socialism”

Republicans often oppose government participation in the economy by saying that such participation is “socialist.” This is a rhetorical trick by which they hope to associate any type of governmental regulation of the market with the discredited and convenient bogeyman of communism. They often succeed in this word game because they never bother to define socialism. They just use the word as an implied synonym for “un-American.”

Socialism is an economic system (not a political system) in which the means of production, transportation, communication, and finance are collectively owned, generally by some level of government. The United States has traditionally had a “mixed economy” in which the economy is partly free and partly regulated by government. That is to say that the success of the U.S. economy to date can be attributed to the fact that it has been partly capitalistic and partly socialist. Truth be told, there are some things that government does better than private industry. As a general rule, Democrats understand this.

On the other hand, this idea is considered a heresy to all capitalists and most Republicans. The capitalist propaganda machine has worked very hard for decades to convince the American people that all government intervention in the economy is bad. That everything the government touches is slow, inefficient, and expensive. That many, if not most, of the functions of government should be privatized. That the market creates prosperity and the government creates poverty.

To those who believe this propaganda I offer the following story:

As our story opens we see the leader of a right-wing organization driving downtown to give a talk. As he drives along in his comfortable automobile we notice that he is driving on a socialist freeway which is owned and controlled by the government. He passes several socialist schools and a socialist university. He takes great pride in the schools. He sees an educated public as the real safeguard of democracy and freedom. He also passes a socialist Church which is owned by its members collectively and supported by the entire community through a tax shelter. He sees a police officer in a socialist squad car protecting his safety.

When he arrives at the socialist (municipal) auditorium he notices that he is a little nervous. He takes a pill that has been cleared by the Pure Food and Drug

Administration and drinks from a socialist water fountain. The excess water goes down a socialist sewer system. He then sits at the head table next to a medical doctor who was trained in a socialist medical school at public expense. His doctor friend is now practicing at the socialist (county) hospital.

As our friend is waiting to give his speech he glances toward the back of the room and sees a large picture of a national (socialist) park. This gives him a warm feeling. There is nothing he enjoys more than catching socialist fish and hunting socialist deer.

He feels safe in this building because it was designed by a licensed architect, built by a licensed contractor, examined by government inspectors, and protected by a socialist fire department. He also feels safe and secure because his country is being protected by the socialist armed forces.

Then he stands and gives his fiery talk on the evils of socialism. Perhaps we could understand if his talks were on the evils of too much socialism. Too much socialism, like too much capitalism, can kill freedom and initiative among selfish, lazy, and evil people.

(Arza C. Evans. *Mormonism, Capitalism, Communism*, p. 97-98. Quoted with permission of the author.)

Steal from the poor and give to the rich

America is the richest nation in a world in which one out of every three people lives on less than \$2 a day, and 1.3 billion live on less than \$1 a day. Many of these people are near starvation. The U.S. has organized global trade agreements that work to enrich the rich and to further impoverish the poor. Millions of people around the world have demonstrated against these global pacts, but they do not have the power to effectively challenge the impact of American corporations backed by the army of the U.S. (Rabbi Michael Lerner. *Tikkun Magazine*, email edition, May/June 2004.)

Unfortunately, the last few decades have seen the United States move decisively from a “mixed economy” model to a “state capitalism” model in which corporations regulate the government rather than the other way around. At the present time the government of the United States is essentially a mechanism by which money flows from the poor to the rich.

Every time Congress passes another “tax cut,” the super rich get richer and everyone else (not just the poor) gets reduced government services at a higher price. Every time taxes are cut, the “hidden taxes” (bus fares, water and garbage fees, school registration costs, public land “user fees,” etc.), which hit the lower and middle classes far more than the rich, go up significantly. And, although the out of pocket cost is higher, bus routes are eliminated, the garbage is picked up less often, the school is more crowded, and public facilities are in worse repair.

While the middle and lower classes are told to “tighten their belts,” Federal aid to the rich includes tax breaks, subsidies, grants, publicly financed research, and the giving away of public resources for private profit. Increasingly, government support of the rich is taking the form of direct payments. Most of this money is funneled through the Pentagon, which has long been a major channel for taxpayer money to be sent to the rich for essentially non-productive uses.

The most revealing and insidious form of cash transfer from the middle and lower classes to the upper class comes in the form of the “bail out.” Essentially what happens in the bail out is that investors in a given company or industry, who supposedly support and are participating in a free market activity, find that they have made a bad investment. Rather than lose money, which is supposed to be the consequence of a bad investment in a free market, they marshal their political clout and get the government to save them from themselves.

Of course, the rhetoric they use is that their industry must be bailed out in order to “save jobs,” but that is the most transparent of lies. Good capitalists never flinch at firing people if it improves the bottom line. Government bailouts are done to protect profits – pure and simple. And they are usually the profits of those people who helped elect the politicians who vote for the bail out.

In other words, “free market” capitalists don’t really believe in or want free markets. What they want, and pretty much what they currently have in the United States, is a system that privatizes profit, while using public funds to indemnify them against any real risk. And it is not unfair to point out that most (sadly not all) of the “pro-business” politicians who promote this charade are Republicans.

Mormons ought to know better. This type of behavior is soundly condemned in the Book of Mormon. As discussed in the previous chapter, The Gadianton robbers seduced the Nephites with promises of riches until they completely took over the government and turned their backs on the poor. This cautionary tale bears a frightening resemblance to the events of our own day. What will it take to help the Saints see that we, too, are “ripening for an everlasting destruction?” (Helaman 6:40.)

Capitalism vs. the United Order

Satan specifically said that his plan to rule the Earth was based on money. The Apostle Paul warns us that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6: 10), and the Savior himself said, “You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24). How clearly do we need to be told? Money is dangerous. Money is a seductive mistress that will lead you away from God. Money is Satan’s most useful tool for corrupting us. At best, like the old joke, money is like manure. It’s no good unless it is spread around helping things grow.

As we have seen, the history of Capitalism is essentially a story about the rich robbing the poor. As a people charged with the responsibility of building the heavenly city of Zion upon the Earth, the Latter-day Saints need to become much better acquainted with the type of economic system the Lord wants us to have.

But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low.

For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.

Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment.
(Doctrine and Covenants 104:16-18).

The scriptures are very clear about who “owns” the Earth and how He wants to see its resources used. The central principal of the Lord’s economy is that there should be no poor people. All material wealth is shared equally. This point is absolutely clear and non-debatable.

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.)

Not only do the scriptures state this point explicitly and repeatedly, but it is the only consistent position logically. What kind of theology would teach that God plays favorites among His children, or that He deliberately planned for this Earth experience to favor the few over the many? No. Material inequality in this world is Satan’s plan and the fact that inequality exists proves that we need to repent.

But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. (Doctrine and Covenants 49:20.)

The Lord’s economic plan for His Saints is called the United Order. It requires those who wish to enter into it to deed all of their property into the hands of the Bishop and to then receive back a portion in stewardship for the maintenance of one’s family and for the betterment of the entire community. As one gains “increase” through the wise management of one’s stewardship, further contributions are made to the Bishop’s “storehouse” for the benefit of the needy.

This type of economic arrangement has been tried repeatedly in the history of Mormonism and in various “communal” experiments throughout the world. Except for the ancient example of Enoch’s city of Zion, such experiments invariably have had, at best, only limited success, in limited areas, for limited lengths of time. The amount of faith, good will, cooperation, and hard work necessary for such a society to exist is tremendous and generally beyond the ability of most people to sustain.

Yet, we Mormon people call ourselves the “Latter-day Saints.” What manner of people should we be to truly call ourselves “Saints?” And, given that we take the “Latter-day” part of our name seriously, isn’t the scriptural example of the City of Enoch

exactly the model we are expected to follow? Are we not called to “build up Zion” in precisely the same way that Enoch and his people did?

If so, then I suggest an obvious starting point is for us, as a people, to withdraw our support from political philosophies, and politicians, which abuse people for the sake of profit. There is absolutely no question which political party in the United States at the present time serves the needs of unbridled corporate capitalism at the expense of the poor, the needy, the elderly, and the young. Indeed, the Republicans are even proud of their record. The question here is which political party good Mormons should support. I believe the facts are so clear as to leave no doubt. Good Mormons must be Democrats.