



LDS Concept of the Family

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Collegatus Anesthesiologists.

It is with some surprise that this lawyer was asked to contribute his ideas to such an august group of LDS physicians. I still remember the arguments of my old law school dean, William Henry Leary, in the controversy as to whether the medical doctors or the jurists should march first in the University of Utah commencement exercise. "The lawyers were wearing the royal purple of the law when the doctors were wearing bloody bandages."

Whoever marched first then has been forgotten, but it is clear that you physicians have marched first in the hearts—to say nothing of the pocketbooks—of our countrymen since then.

I am pleased with this opportunity to examine the issue of ethics. LDS physicians must develop the ability to see the whole person—the emotional and spiritual as well as the physical needs of those they serve. To do this they should understand the system of moral values of the group they are working with. As I understand ethics it has to do with moral duties and obligations.

I'd like us to consider the moral duties and obligations that grow out of the Latter-day Saint concept of the family.

The helps and governments God gives us in his Church are to serve the individual and the family.

Disclaimer

When Elder Matthew Cowley was in the Quorum of the Twelve, Welfare Committee members sometimes traveled with the Twelve on Church assignments. On a prolonged tour of the South Pacific, Mark Garff was with Elder Cowley. He was pleased that so many persons would come to him and ask doctrinal questions. However, this attention soon grew burdensome. He was told by one of the inquirers that Elder Cowley had suggested that he ask Brother Garff. Brother Garff went to Elder Cowley to say, in essence, "You're the Apostle. Why are you sending the people with gospel questions to a welfare committeeman."

"That's the point," said Elder Cowley, "where I answer the questions it is supposed to mean something. Where you answer the questions it doesn't mean a damn." You asked me, and what you get may be just me.

LDS Concept of the Family

Families had an existence long before there were families on the earth. Mortality is but a phase of immortality. Human beings have no starting place and no stopping place. This God-inspired knowledge brings forth principles of conduct governing the family without which family counseling and individual treatment impinging on the family may be very limited and

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inadequate.

There was a family in heaven that existed before the world was made. In the words of Brigham Young, "The Father actually begot the spirits, and they were brought forth and lived with him" (*Journal of Discourses* 4:218). The Lord said that he "looked upon the wide expanse of eternity, and all the seraphic hosts of heaven, before the world was made" (D&C 38:1).

The First Presidency of the Church wrote of the premortal existence of the spirit children of God the Father, saying: "All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity," the "offspring of celestial parentage" ("The Origin of Man" in *Man, His Origin and Destiny*, 351-355).

These spirit beings, the children of exalted parents, looked like mortal men and women; however, their spirit bodies were made of a more refined substance than the elements of mortal bodies. (See Ether 3:16; D&C 131:7-8.) God the Father begot spirit children in his image and in the image of our Mother in heaven.

Interesting to you is that perhaps the first biblical reference to this expanded knowledge comes from what we could call a medical diagnosis. You will remember Rebekah, Isaac's wife, was having a very difficult time during her first pregnancy.

It is recorded that the Lord told her that "the children struggled together within her" and "two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:22-23). You will recall she subsequently bore twins: Esau and Jacob.

This is a clear reference of the pre-orth existence of Jacob and Esau, and also of foreordination.

Women should note that the voice of God came to Rebekah as she inquired of the Lord.

The more familiar declaration to a recalcitrant Jeremiah clearly refers to

his premortal existence: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

Job tells us that "the sons of God shouted for joy" at a time prior to the creation of the earth (Job 38:7).

The Apostle Paul speaks of "the whole family in heaven" (Eph. 3:15).

The experience we had in our premortal existence made a difference. Our personalities are, in substantial measure, fashioned prior to our births.

"When we come into mortality, we bring the talents, capacities and abilities acquired by obedience to law in our prior existence. Mozart composed and published sonatas when but eight years of age because he was born with musical talent. Melchizedek came into this world with such faith and spiritual capacity that 'when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire'" (Gen. 14:26, Inspired Version) Bruce R. McConkie, *Ensign*, Mar. 1974, p. 73. Mortal birth "is the process by which we bring from premortality to mortality the traits and talents acquired and developed in our long years of spirit existence. It is the process by which a mortal body is created from the dust of the earth to house an eternal spirit offspring of the Father of us all" (ibid.).

Let us pause in our thinking about our family in a premortal state and observe an application in today's world.

Moral Duties Growing Out of Eternal Family Concept

1. Female spirits were born into female bodies. Male spirits were born into male bodies.

To carry forward his own purposes among men and nations, the Lord foreordained chosen spirit children in pre-existence and assigned them to come to earth at particular times and places so that they might aid in furthering the divine will. These pre-existent appointments, made "according to the

foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:2), simply designated certain individuals to perform missions which the Lord in his wisdom knew they had the talents and capacities to do. . . .

"By their foreordination the Lord merely gives them the opportunity to serve him and his purposes if they choose to measure up to the standard he knows they are capable of attaining. . . .

"Moses taught that the whole host of spirits born in the lineage of Jacob were before appointed to come through that chosen line. (Deut. 32:7-8.) Mary, the mother of our Lord, was before named for her sacred mission" (1 Ne. 11:15-20; Mosiah 3:8; Isa. 7:14) Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 200-201).

There are inherent characteristics born into men and women. Men beget and women bear children, for instance.

In our day there are medical procedures that would change or modify all this.

In my opinion, LDS physicians should shun this type of meddling. In the event of psychological disorders among patients you have a moral duty to seek other solutions to the problems.

There is a Church policy that bears on this.

"The Church counsels against transsexual operations, and members who undergo such procedures require disciplinary action. Church members who are doctors who perform such operations may also require disciplinary action. Investigators who are considering transsexual operations should not be baptized. Investigators who have already undergone transsexual operations may be baptized if otherwise worthy on condition that an appropriate notice be made on the membership record so as to preclude such individuals from either receiving the priesthood or temple recommend. Members contemplating transsexual operations should be informed that the Church counsels against such procedures, but any disciplinary action is deferred until the individual has made a decision whether to undergo the operation. Members who

have undergone transsexual operations must be excommunicated. After excommunication such a person is not eligible again for baptism. Questions on difficult cases can be forwarded by local priesthood leaders to the Office of the First Presidency" (General Handbook of Instructions, 1983, 52-53).

2. Family Governance.

LDS missionaries often quote Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians to demonstrate that there is one true Church.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: *That we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:5-6, 11-13).

From this quotation it is clear that the helps and governments God has given his Church and kingdom are to bring us to "the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God." It is temporary. It is not the eternal scheme of things.

We believe the family is the eternal unit; it is the family unit that exists "for time and for all eternity" (D&C 132:7).

The helps and governments God gives us in his Church are to serve the individual and the family. The Church is a service unit. It is to serve the fundamental unit of society—the family—in the matters of salvation. The family will exist after we have come to a measure of the stature of Christ, and the Church organization will no longer be needed.

In righteousness there is no conflict. The grand pattern is "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). I think it is safe to look at our celestial parents as the perfect example. It is the Father's system of things.

We worship and adore God the Eternal Father. He begot us as his children. He is our perfect prototype. He

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has shown us how to become like him. His Son said first "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) and then, after the Son achieved that goal, he said, "Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (1 Ne. 12:48).

In my judgment we will never earn perfection in the eternal sphere until we learn proximate perfections here and now. Noah was "perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9) notwithstanding his shortcomings. He simply repented on a day to day basis.

Husbands Love Wives

LDS physicians are husbands before they are physicians. This is a moral duty. He is to leave father and mother, test tubes and patients, and cleave unto his wife (Gen. 2:24). His first obligation is to his wife. He is to love her "with all (his) heart" (D&C 42:22). She is not merely a close second to his medical practice. His second obligation is to see that his family is saved. The sins are on his head if his children are not properly taught (D&C 68:25).

As president of the Church, Joseph F. Smith taught that the first duty that developed upon him was to see to it that his family was saved.

Eli was deposed as a prophet, as it is recorded, "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3:13).

The physician should not be advising wives in secret from their husbands and certainly not contrary to their husbands.

Wives Respect Husbands

Wives should hold their husbands in "reverence" (Eph. 5:33). The Christian way is for wives to submit themselves to their husbands (Eph. 5:22).

When working with patients, an LDS physician is under obligation to help implement the true nature of the family. He should not be advising wives in secret from their husbands and certainly not contrary to their husbands. You may have two patients when you thought you only had one.

Divorce

The marriage union was meant to be permanent. Jesus said "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:5-6).

We believe, as Joseph Smith stated it, "marriage was an institution of heaven" (*Doctrines of Salvation* 2:20).

In God's system of things there should be no divorce. If people were living the colonial law there would be no divorce.

Stephen L. Richards' counsel to the Church in the General Priesthood Meeting assembled was: "The remedy for domestic problems and irritations is not divorce, but repentance" (*Conf. Report*, Oct. 1954, p. 80).

In my judgment you should be counseling character modifications. The Church accepts divorce in some circumstances because we are living a law

or law. Great caution should be exercised in this area.

Abortion

Simply because the United States Supreme Court has made up the doctrine that a woman has a right to privacy, derived from the U.S. Constitution, and thus the legal right to have an abortion during the first trimester of her pregnancy, does not make abortion moral.

LDS physicians have the moral duty to counsel with a female patient—using his expanded knowledge—about abortions. The husband or natural father should be included in the counseling. They should have an interest. LDS physicians should counsel against voluntary aborting of a fetus except where the health of the mother otherwise dictates, or in the case of rape or incest.

Once again, there is Church policy on this:

"Abortion is a most serious transgression. Priesthood leaders should carefully review the circumstances of members involved in abortions to determine whether or not to bring them before a Church court. Except in those cases where the life or health of the mother is at stake, or where the pregnancy resulted from forcible rape or incest, those who engage in abortions, or Church members who are doctors who perform abortions, may be brought before a Church court where the facts can be weighed. Questions on difficult cases can be forwarded by local priesthood leaders to the Office of the First Presidency, setting forth the facts in detail" (*General Handbook of Instructions*, p. 52).

Family Planning

Latter-day Saints have been given considerably more insight to the eternal scheme of things than heretofore suggested by biblical quotes. The third chapter of Abraham in *The Pearl of Great Price* tells us of the huge expenditure of time and energy that our Father

in Heaven invested in us as his spirit children in a pre-Earth life. We learn of our being identifiable and developing persons, some preordained to be leaders. Alma teaches us that all who are called to the Melchizedek Priesthood were preordained to that calling (Alma 13).

We are thus given to understand that there were covenants made in pre-Earth life that have application here. My Aunt Emma, my father's sister, was sick, nigh unto death, the day she was married in the Salt Lake Temple. She went from the temple to the Holy Cross Hospital. She experienced her spirit leaving her body. From that vantage point she watched the physicians laboring over her body. Under these circumstances she was given certain choices with reference to her eternal existence. As a part of all of this she was shown each of the children who had been assigned to come to earth through her. Subsequently, as she bore her children, she recognized each of them as those previously shown to her.

Now, I understand we are talking about personal matters of faith. But it was real to Aunt Emma. It was real to her children, and it is real to me. If an LDS physician treating Aunt Emma in family planning matters did not take this reality into account, a fundamental equation would be left out of the formula. Whether the physician understands or believes doesn't have anything to do with the reality of it.

Brigham Young stated it about as well as anyone:

"There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty? To prepare tabernacles for them; to take a course that will not tend to drive these spirits into families of the wicked where they will be trained in wickedness, debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can . . . that the noble spirits which are waiting for tabernacles might be brought forth" (*Journal of Discourses* 4:56).

Healthy married couples have the

moral obligation to "be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Children are a part of your immortality and exaltation.

However, I know of no commandment that we should have children every nine months and twenty minutes. It well may be that we may better fulfill our obligation to be fruitful by deliberately spacing our children.

This is the husband's and the wife's prerogative. They head the basic unit of the Church—the family. When they make this determination no other officer of the Church has the prerogative to override their decision.

"Dear Brethren:

The First Presidency is being asked from time to time as to what the attitude of the Church is regarding birth control. In order that you may be informed on this subject and that you may be prepared to convey the proper information to the members of the Church under your jurisdiction, we have decided to give you the following statement:

"We seriously regret that there should exist a sentiment or feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. We have been commanded to multiply and replenish the earth that we may have joy and rejoicing in our posterity.

"Where husband and wife enjoy health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity, it is contrary to the teachings of the Church artificially to curtail or prevent the birth of children. We believe that those who practice birth control will reap disappointment by and by.

"However, we feel that men must be considerate of their wives who bear the greater responsibility not only of bearing children, but of caring for them through childhood. To this end the mother's health and strength should be conserved and the husband's consideration for his wife is his first duty, and self-control a dominant factor in all their relationships.

"It is our further feeling that married couples should seek inspiration and wisdom from the Lord that they may

exercise discretion in solving their marital problems, and that they may be permitted to rear their children in accordance with the teachings of the gospel" (*Letter of the First Presidency*, April 14, 1960).

Note: "the mother's health and strength should be preserved"; the bodies of the children should not be "entailed" with physical impurities; the husband's consideration for his wife is his first duty; and finally, the couple is to "seek inspiration" and is allowed "discretion in solving their marital problems."

I only know of one means of birth control that is explicitly forbidden in the scriptures. That is abstinence from sexual relations within marriage. In the Old Testament, Israel was censured, but only as part of a short fast, not to lay themselves up against one another; likewise, the New Testament states:

"Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency" (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

Our eight children were planned. They were spaced to meet our hopes and aspirations. My wife, Judy, talked me into the last child. I thought she was operating on the outside limit of her health and strength. She said she wanted the eighth child.

We are honored by our children. I know a little of what the First Presidency counsel means when it says we would be sorry not to have all the children we should have had.

Wise physicians, as wise Church leaders, will not seek to answer all questions put to them.

As a young bishop I was asked by a lovely young lady in the ward whether she should tell her fiancé—who was returning from a mission and wanted her to meet him at the plane in a well-

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ding dress—about a prior sexual transgression. I did not know the answer. I went to my mentor, Elder Harold B. Lee for counsel. He said "Oscar, the best advice you will ever give as a bishop is no advice at all."

This is a good point to leave this discussion.

LDS physicians are Church people. They each have the gift of the Holy Ghost. They should be living to enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Don't be timid in attempting to utilize this wondrous source of counsel.

I think your patients should feel blessed by you, as well as examined. **I**