

The Value of Home Life

Neal A. Maxwell



When Jesus' followers faced a moment of truth in responding to the Master's teachings, John records, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Jesus turned to the remainder and queried them, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:66-67.) The topics discussed by Jesus included the reality of his Godhood and of the resurrection, which shook then-prevailing beliefs. As we face the peer-group pain of pursuing life-styles that differ increasingly from those of the world, we may also come to know what Jesus meant when he said of his followers, "Blessed are ye, when men shall . . . separate you from their company. . . ." (Luke 6:22.)

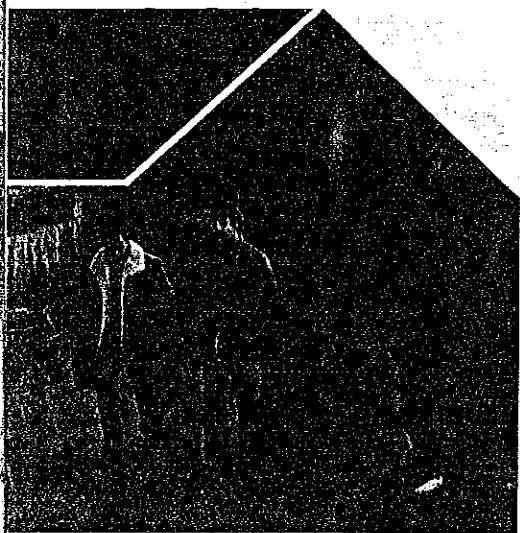
The full implications of "hard doctrines" heralded by Jesus will require us to put forth different solutions to the proximate problems of mankind—solutions and prescriptions that are so different that some will question whether or not we really care about the issues. Neither the sincere but cosmetic changes proffered by the world nor a too Jonah-like investment in cataclysm that causes one to leave his post in Nineveh are good models for us!

The basic choice to be made will frame itself in many individual ways with many ironies, but at the testing point it will often take the form of this question: Do I have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his modern prophets? If one's answer is affirmative, then he can get special help—the divine help—needed to serve his fellow-

Dr. Maxwell is Commissioner of Education for the Church Educational System and a Regional Representative of the Council of the Twelve. He resides in the Monument Park Second Ward, Monument Park Stake.

men as did Joseph in Egypt. Joseph lived most of his life in an alien culture that did not share his beliefs, and yet he kept those beliefs operative in his life—in order to serve the Egyptian better. Without Joseph's faith, his chastity, his courage, his refusal to give up when falsely accused, and his refusal to become bitter, he would have been just one more hungry mouth to feed when famine came. Indeed, the cataclysmic content of the scriptures, instead of causing us to pull away, ought to keep us at our posts in our "Ninevehs" as long as we can help to save a single soul.

We need to make allowance for the role of irony in our individual lives and as a people. The same God who "improbably" had his Only Begotten Son born in a manger, reared in despised Nazareth—as the least appreciated individual but the most beneficial



in human history—also "improbably" chose Moses, who was "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (see Exod. 4:10) to lead one of the greatest migrations in history, perhaps because Moses

"was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). God also chose shepherds and fishermen; sent a boy to face Goliath; chose Paul, a persecutor of Christians, as an apostle; and chose an obscure boy to receive the theophany at Palmyra. This same God has said that he will bring The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints forth out of obscurity to bring his message to an insensitive world as the "only true and living Church upon the face of the earth." Thus, God's divine style is different from mortal ways; the wisdom of the wise is foolishness, comparatively; and God's ways are not man's ways; God does use the weak things of the world "to confound the wise."

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1 Cor. 1:26.)

All of this is not a way of saying others don't count; it is not to caress our egos; it is not because God enjoys tricking the mortal establishment, but because life in the world is too compromising, too corrosive for most, and because to march to the cadence of a Divine Drummer requires us to have the meekness of Moses. We may need to keep those special sayings about being chosen in our hearts, with Mary-like wonderment.

The ironies of life are not all collective, but some will be seen in our personal lives. There is no way to have an arm's length relationship with God.

C. S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity*, describes our relationship with God in a special way that can help us to appreciate



how submitting ourselves to his will is the only way that spiritual growth can occur:

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage; but He is building a palace. . . ." (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952, p. 160.)

It is not just a matter of our getting comfortable in the role we have as people with special

responsibilities, so far as our personal adequacies are concerned, but rather of accepting the reality of our role, even though we know our inadequacies.

While the paths of Christ and the world were always divergent, this divergence is more pronounced now than it was fifty to one hundred years ago, when there was some kind of loose Christian consensus about identity, immortality, the divinity of Jesus, and his second coming.

So far as contemporary American society is concerned, it is



difficult to conceive of any issues around which there could be such profound separation as between gospel insights and conventional wisdom as those that now exist around the role and mission of home and family, the importance of chastity, the spiritual necessity of work, the solution to the problems of poverty, the nature of human brotherhood. Is it biological and transitory, or is man's relationship to his fellowmen a continuum, with both pre-

mortal and postmortal dimensions? The differing approaches to such issues are not casual differences!

Taking just one of these issues, the role of family and home, for discussion can help us realize the implications of the differences. The current attacks, or at least the downplaying of the home, subscribe to such often sincere assertions as these:

1. The family is no longer vital because it is not an effective economic unit.

2. The family is irrelevant because it cannot meet our changing human needs. One human being cannot really meet the needs of another human being, especially in a situation in which authority is vested in imperfect individuals, such as parents who often seek to meet their own needs rather than those of their children.

3. The family and marriage are not so crucial because we must get used to more ever-changing, temporary relationships with other humans, rather than those that make continuing demands of us, such as the family.

It may strike you as peculiar, as it does me, that some of the advocates of such a change in perspective about the family get so upset with some of us because we are not enthralled with their new labels for old and unwise practices, or because we withhold endorsement of those who are anti-family simply because they have relabeled sexual freedom as a chance for "meaningful relationships," which is just a cover for fornication or adultery. Perhaps in a society given over to so much rhetoric that becomes a substitute for real reform, we

should not be surprised at rhetorical rationalization.

It strikes me as odd too that in a culture in which alienation is at plague levels, some would have us cut away the final moorings of family; or that, in a society in danger of anarchy, we should seek to depose one last source



of authority—parents; or that, in a society that seeks to have the unborn pay the price of lack of self-discipline on the part of the living, a society in which we plead for more outer controls to compensate for our unwillingness to discipline ourselves, we should now attack the home, where there is still the best chance to learn self-discipline.

We understand, by contrast, that while the family and home also served as an economic unit in times past, this was not a primary purpose any more than one should describe the home only, as Frost suggested, as a place where, when you go there, they have to take you in, a terminal stop with guaranteed access.

Note how the home is the one place where one should experience

love and regard because he exists!

Where better than in family life can one develop his capacity to love, while he is, hopefully, being loved unconditionally?

The best place for procreation is still the family, which, while made up of imperfect people, can offer a child love and a sense of belonging. The state may want children for its own purposes, but the state will never pray for children to be born, as many parents do.

And don't we have enough data to tell us about the extra perils of children born out of wedlock, who never know their fathers, to make us wonder about deliberately single mothers who are described as courageous, when it is really their children who will have to be extra brave?

The home is still the place (though not the only place) to learn how vital work is. Gibran said that "work is love made visible," and the interplay of love and work learned in a family can affect one's whole life-style and the quality of his subsequent service to mankind.

The best place to struggle with the need for each of us, individually, to establish a balance between our need for freedom and our need for order is in the context of other humans who can help us with our failures—the family.

The family is the best place for us to acquire beliefs and values with which to cope with life, just as home is the best place for sanctuary and for renewal.

The ecology of effectiveness in human affairs shouts to us how vital the home is if we are to raise the quality of life on this planet. Real security and safety,

to use an analogy from the world of air flight, are facilitated more by preparatory and maintenance work in the hangar and in pilot training than by the emergency practice of spreading foam on the runway, though the latter is needed at times.

A good member of the Church must understand the implications of his beliefs with regard to the home. This different commitment will mean, among many things, knowing—

—that because the home is so crucial, it will be the source of our greatest failures as well as our greatest joys.

—that home is the one place we will be in that will require us to practice every major gospel principle and not just a few, as may be the case in some temporary relationships.

—that the pressures of life in a family will mean that we shall be known as we are, that our frailties will be exposed and, hopefully, we shall then work on them.

—that the love and thoughtfulness required in the home are no abstract exercise in love. *They are real.* It is no mere rhetoric concerning some distant human cause; it is an encounter with raw selfishness, with the need for civility and taking turns, of being hurt and yet forgiving, of being at the mercy of others' moods and yet understanding, in part, why we sometimes inflict pain on each other.

—that family life is a constant challenge, not a periodic performance we can render on a stage quickly and run for the privacy of a "dressing room" to be alone with ourselves, for the home gives us a great chance to align our

public and private behavior, to reduce the hypocrisy in our lives, to be more congruent with Christ.

Thus, to commit oneself to home and family is to do a wondrous thing. It is a high adventure. It is not a task for those who wish to run away, nor for those whose human causes are chosen because the cause is distant and makes no real demands of them. It is the same for all the basic teachings of Jesus that constitute that solitary path to salvation.

In this sense, the straight and narrow way is a path only for the brave!

Of course, commitment to principles with a divine difference—hard doctrines that produce significant modifications in life-styles—means involvement and occasional disappointment in a divine church full of imperfect people; it means getting banged about a bit, but it also means joy now and everlastingly in a church that is divinely managed on the things that matter most. □

