

Do Mormon Leaders Receive Financial Support?

By Sandra Tanner

The following statements from LDS leaders explain their disapproval of a paid ministry. Joseph Smith once boasted:

The only principle upon which they judge me is by comparing my acts with the foolish traditions of their fathers and nonsensical teachings of hireling priests, whose object and aim were to keep the people in ignorance for the sake of filthy lucre; or as the prophet says, to feed themselves, not the flock. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 315)

President Brigham Young declared:

How much tithing do you pay? The professing Christians, apostates and others have a great deal to say about the Saints paying tithing. Now let us compare notes. The Elders of this Church travel and preach without purse or scrip, and labor at home as Bishops, Presidents, High Counselors, and Ministers, free of charge. Now take the Christians, how many of their Ministers preach without pay? Go to their meetings, in their churches, halls, schoolhouses, or any of their public gatherings, and you have a box, a plate, or a hat put under your face, and it is, "Give me a sixpence, give me a sixpence, give me a sixpence!" Show me the Elder of this Church that does this? We preach the Gospel without purse or scrip and work for our own bread and butter. Yet the Christian world whine about our paying tithing. The Saints should pay the tenth of their income with glad and thankful hearts, and help to bring home the poor. We have supported and helped the poor to the amount of millions. (Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 16, May 18, 1873, pp. 44-45)

LDS Apostle George A. Smith preached:

While all this has been done for our country, and we have comparatively tamed the savage and held in check his wild and blood-thirsty nature, that the inhabitants of the world could travel across the deserts without being robbed and murdered, we have been the subject of vile scandal, simply because our religious views were different from those of the hireling clergy who occupy the pulpits of Christendom. We taught that men should preach the Gospel without purse or scrip—preach it freely; and a man who depended upon a congregation for a salary by which to obtain his black coat and fit-out, was ready to denounce preaching without purse and scrip as a heresy; why? Because it would reduce him to the necessity of going to some useful calling, instead of making merchandise of the Gospel, which God has

made free." (George Albert Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, October 8, 1865, p. 179)

Elder Joseph A. McRae, speaking at the LDS Conference, October 1902, stated:

A few weeks ago a lady physician came to our office, . . . She said, "Will you be kind enough to have an interview with one of our ministers and tell him how he can work along these lines." I remarked to her that I would willingly do so, but that I was afraid he could not live to it or teach it to his congregation. Why? she asked. My answer was, "He requires a salary to preach the Gospel. Whenever he arises to preach to his congregation and says that which they do not like, they say that he will have to stop preaching that way or they will stop his salary." "Now," said I, "when I preach to the people, I do not care whose toes I tread on; I do not care who I strike; I teach the truth, and no matter where it hits they cannot come to me and say, 'We'll stop your salary' because I haven't any to stop. That is the difference between your minister and me." That is one great difference between the ministers of the world, who are professing to preach the Gospel unto the people, and the Elders of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would sooner be a humble Elder preaching the Gospel unto the people, bearing testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith is a Prophet of God, than to be the greatest "divine" upon the face of the earth. (Joseph A. McRae, *Conference Report*, October 1902, p. 11)

But is this what the Bible teaches? In both the Old and New Testament those who served the Lord full-time were compensated from the tithes and offerings of the people. When the Levitical priesthood was originally set up, God made provision for the support of the priests. In *Halley's Bible Handbook*, page 134, we read:

Levites, one tribe out of the Twelve, were set apart for the work of God. God took them, in lieu of First-Born sons. . . . They were supported by Tithes; and had 48 cities (Numbers 35:7; Joshua 21:19). One Family of Levites, Aaron and Sons, were set apart to be Priests. The Rest of the Levites were to be Assistants to the Priests.

The practice of a paid ministry was continued in the New Testament church. Paul instructed Timothy: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward." (1 Timothy 5:17-18) While Paul sometimes labored with

his own hands, he wrote that he had the right to ask for support from the Christians. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (1 Corinthians 9:5-6) Further on in the same letter Paul wrote: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? . . . Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:11, 14)

In Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth he again raises the issue of his support. He states that when he was among them they did not give him financial support, but he received it from other churches: "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service." (2 Corinthians 11:7-9)

When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi he acknowledged their financial support: "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. . . . I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." (Philippians 4:16-18)

The LDS Church boasts of not having a paid clergy. Many of them believe that when a man receives a salary from a particular group it compromises his integrity. Even though their leaders on the local level receive no pay for their services, this is not true of their top leadership. President Gordon B. Hinckley stated: "What of the Mormon clergy? . . . There is no paid or professional ministry. Thirty-two general officers and the presidents of missions are given living allowances." (*What of the Mormons?* 5th ed., 1954, pp. 17-18)

In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* we read:

Because the Church has no professional clergy, it is administered at every level through LAY PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP, and officials other than the General Authorities contribute their time and talents without remuneration. . . . Because the General Authorities are obliged to leave their regular employment for full-time Church service, they receive a modest living allowance provided from income on Church investments. (p. 510)

In 1831 Joseph Smith dictated a revelation instructing the church that he was to be supported by church funds:

12. And if ye desire the glories of the kingdom, appoint ye my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and uphold him before me by the prayer of faith.

13. And again, I say unto you, that if ye desire the mysteries of the kingdom, provide for him food and

raiment, and whatsoever thing he needeth to accomplish the work wherewith I have commanded him. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 43:12-13)

Another revelation given at the same time authorized the support of bishops through church funds.

71. And the elders or high priests who are appointed to assist the bishop as counselors in all things, are to have their families supported out of the property which is consecrated to the bishop, for the good of the poor, and for other purposes, as before mentioned;

72. Or they are to receive a just remuneration for all their services, either a stewardship or otherwise, as may be thought best or decided by the counselors and bishop.

73. And the bishop, also, shall receive his support, or a just remuneration for all his services in the church. (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Sec. 42:71-73)

Since the Mormon Church concedes the right to pay those who serve in a full-time capacity we are left to wonder why they have such strong objections to ministers receiving a "modest living allowance." The claim is made that these funds do not come from tithing but from business investments. Why this should make a difference is not explained. Any money given to or earned by the church should be considered as equally sacred.

The president is also supplied with a home. According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Aug. 27, 1994, p. E1, the president of the LDS Church lives in a "downtown condominium, the official residence of church presidents." In the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1988, we read "The \$1.2 million condominium at 40 N. State that is home to the president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be exempt from property taxes, Salt Lake County commissioners ruled Tuesday."

This would agree with the instructions in the *Doctrine and Covenants* that the church president was to be furnished a home. When the Mormons moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, Smith received a revelation that the church was to build a house for him and his family, and it was to be large enough for boarders:

23. And it shall be for a house for boarding, a house that strangers may come from afar to lodge therein; therefore let it be a good house, worthy of all acceptations.

...

56 And now I say unto you, as pertaining to my boarding house which I have commanded you to build for the boarding of strangers, let it be built unto my name, and let my name be named upon it, and let my servant Joseph and his house have place therein, from generation to generation. (*Doctrine and Covenants* 124: 23, 56)

Also, the LDS Church maintains a general missionary fund. Many missionaries come from either poor countries or their families are not able to contribute to their mission.

Missionary support is primarily a family responsibility . . . However, members are also encouraged to contribute to assist those missionaries who have insufficient finances. (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, p. 508)

Since some LDS missionaries receive support from a general fund why object to missionaries in other churches receiving funds from their church?

Even though Mission Presidents (men who oversee the missionaries in various geographical locations) resign from their secular jobs during their three years of church service, they still receive financial help. In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* we read:

The calling [to be a Mission President] is not a regular remunerative position, . . . The family involved gives of its time and energies without salary, though there is a modest allowance for living expenses. (p. 914)

Again we are left to wonder at the Mormon distinction between “living expenses” and “salary.”

Another puzzling aspect of Mormonism is that there is no accounting to the membership of church funds. They are never informed as to the amount of the “modest living allowance” given to their top leaders. In the *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 9, 1983, the salary given to a Seventy (second tier of LDS General Authorities, lower than an Apostle) was reported to be \$40,000. Obviously, with inflation this salary would be much higher today. If housing is factored in (as in the case of the president of the church) the salary would be quite substantial. When George P. Lee, former Seventy, was terminated in 1989, the LDS Church immediately confiscated his church credit card (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1989). We are left to wonder about what other benefits go with “full-time Church service.” For more information on LDS wealth see *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise*, by Richard and Joan Ostling.

In Christian churches the financial statement is a matter of public record. There is no guesswork as to the amount a church pays its minister.



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