

# *Insights on Church Leadership*

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## Chapter 1

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### *The Call to Leadership*

When we hear the word "leadership," several possible meanings may come to our minds: power, authority, control, and influence. Most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will have at some point in time the opportunity to serve in positions of leadership. Even though these callings entitle us to exercise power, authority, control, and influence, unlike in the world, leadership in the kingdom of God on the earth is exercised under principles derived from the gospel of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Why Leadership?**

Since the early days of this dispensation the Lord revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith that the temporal organization of his Church would have a variety of leadership callings. Even though the Lord did not at first explain why that was so, President John Taylor once explained:

"... this organization is a pattern of things in the heavens, and is the mediums or channels through which the blessings of God flow to his people on the earth, and through which intelligence is communicated concerning all subjects with which the Saints are concerned, whether they relate to this world or to the world which is to come<sup>2</sup>."

Therefore, presidencies and other leadership assignments in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may be seen as imperfect (due to the constraints of mortality) representations of the "heavenly presidency and leadership," composed by the godhead (our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost,) angels, and a still rather unknown variety of heavenly officers, intelligences, potentates, etc. This line of reasoning leads us to consider any calling to serve as a leader, whether on stake or ward<sup>3</sup> auxiliary organizations, quorums, bishoprics, stake presidencies--not only as an enormous responsibility, but also a great honor.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study I will use the term "world" to represent the philosophies or practices of men that disagree either totally or partially with the word of the Lord revealed through his prophets in these latter days. I will also often refer to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the "Church of Christ," or "the Church," or "the kingdom of God on the earth".

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Discourses, Vol.7, p.324, October 7, 1859; from this point on referred to as "JD".

<sup>3</sup> In those places where the Church still does not have stakes and wards, the terms "stake" and "ward" can be replaced by "district" and "branch." The terms "stake presidency" and "bishopric" can be replaced by "district presidency" and "branch presidency." The principles presented throughout the text apply equally to districts and branches.

What does it mean to lead in the kingdom of God on the earth--i.e., the Church of Christ? A kingdom has a geographical area, a people, a government, with laws and institutions aimed at maintaining or perfecting the status of that people. The Heavenly Presidency, then, oversees an eternal kingdom--eternal because its geographical area is unlimited and in their work the eternal presidency organizes worlds (smaller geographical areas), people them with citizens, and give them government (the priesthood), laws (commandments) and institutions (families and the church) aimed at perfecting these citizens and elevating them to higher, glorified stages of existence.

The reality of this eternal kingdom is temporarily hidden from those who live in a fallen and finite stage of existence. Our mortal experience takes place within this eternal kingdom, but our mortal senses can't see nor feel it, unless we are enlightened by that light or spiritual element that permeates eternity<sup>4</sup>. This spiritual element, the light of Christ, gives us faint recollections of eternity. By this means the Lord inspires and instructs his children with knowledge, wisdom and gifts that will enable them to participate in work of the Heavenly Presidency--although in a infinitely limited and imperfect manner because of the natural constraints of mortality.

A call to leadership service is an invitation to join the Lord in building up a rudimentary version of his celestial kingdom on earth, to help prepare our minds and intellect to understand and enjoy celestial glory. No matter what the specific calling--whether on stake or ward organizations like the Relief Society, the Sunday School, the Primary Association, the Young Women or Young Men Organizations, in a quorum or class, the importance of any particular leadership calling in the overall plan is the same.

When we lead others, we assume the position of agents or stewards of the Lord. It is true that we will use our personal skills to perform our duties, but in the end all the glory must be given to Him who blessed us with those skills<sup>5</sup>.

### **Callings by Revelation**

In the world (i.e., outside the Church of Christ) the call to serve in a leadership capacity may be seen as a form of recognition or award. A manager in a large corporation will reach a position in a presidency as result of superior performance or political clout. A politician will be elected or assigned to serve in a leadership position partly based on his or her personal charisma, and on his or her ability to compromise with opposing constituencies.

In the Church of Christ, however, to serve in leadership means to accept a sacred calling, because these presidencies are called by revelation, according to the will of the Lord. A leader in the kingdom of God does not obtain his or her fundamental power and authority in managerial or political skills, neither through charisma. Throughout history, in all dispensations of the gospel, the Lord called to his service several men to serve in capacities comparable to our modern leadership callings. In several cases, the Lord's chosen were far from what the world would consider a perfect choice.

For example, the Lord called Enoch to be a great prophet and seer, even though at first he was, in his own words, hated by the people<sup>6</sup>. Several centuries later, instead of choosing an experienced and neutral diplomat, the Lord called Moses to deal with the mighty pharaoh of Egypt. Then, in the meridian of times the Lord called Peter, James, and John, fishermen with apparently no formal religious training, to teach the gospel first to the Jews and then to the nations of the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 88:11-13; 88:43-48; from now on referred to as "D&C".

<sup>5</sup> D&C 64:29

<sup>6</sup> Moses 6:31

Analyzing these past callings based on present worldly premises, all these choices would be considered politically illogical. None of those men would be considered as qualified to exercise a presidency under worldly criteria and reasoning. Enoch was a unpopular person; Moses was "persona non grata" in Egypt; Peter, James, and John apparently did not have degrees and prominence, and were not even citizens of a sovereign nation. And if we continue with this worldly analysis, we might see that Isaiah could be considered too literary, at times incomprehensible to the masses; Matthew, as a Publican, exercised a profession that might have made him disliked by the same Jews he had been called to teach. Simon, as a Zealot, probably had political views on Roman dominance that might have been considered far from ideal for an Apostle called to preach to all nations--even to Rome. In modern times, Joseph Smith Jr. also had no academic credentials; a modern-day manager or intellectual would probably not choose a person with his educational background to receive and then publicize the visions of eternity.

However, these men--and all others with comparable callings--were not called based on worldly criteria. They were called because of their faith in the Lord, because they were humble enough to be instructed from on high and thus become wise by receiving eternal truths through the Spirit of the Lord. Eventually, they received the knowledge that makes the "wisdom of their wise and learned ... perish, and the understanding of their prudent ... be hid."<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, we do not receive a calling to serve in leadership because of our professional credentials, neither because of our interpersonal skills, nor our beautiful eyes. We are called "... in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things."<sup>8</sup>

### **The Mission of Church Leaders**

We understand the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as being threefold: to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to perfect the Saints, and to redeem the dead. Everything we do in the Church should be related to this threefold mission.

Still, a number of years ago, in one hot summer afternoon, I found myself in the Bishop's office in my former ward in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, pondering on my responsibilities as a priesthood holder. I asked myself what I was really supposed to do as a Bishop. My counselors and I had so far planned and conducted meetings; had tried to support the work of the full-time missionaries, taken care of the temporal and spiritual needs of the members of the ward, and helped them to receive the temple ordinances and to return to the temple as often as possible. We had also taken care of the ward's finances and prepared all the statistical reports as required. And yet, somehow I wasn't sure of what we had done so far, besides implementing what was written in the church leadership handbooks. I guess I wanted to know what, in spiritual terms, we had been doing.

After much pondering on this subject, I found scriptures that restated the mission of the church in other terms. By studying what the Lord has expressed about His servants' missions in ancient days (throughout the mortal stage of the plan of salvation,) we can have a vision of our own role in His eternal plan. In my current understanding, we may see these steps as the mission of church leaders.

Speaking on the mission of his newly-born son John (later known as John, the Baptist,) Zacharias, the Priest, prophesied the following:

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Nephi 27:26

<sup>8</sup> 2 Nephi 2:24

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins ... To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."<sup>9</sup>

Following the principle of delegation of authority<sup>10</sup>, the Lord restored the Aaronic Priesthood through the instrumentality of the same John the Baptist, and we have received the keys (or specific authorities) of the preparatory gospel: the key of the ministering of angels, the key of the gospel of repentance, and the key of the baptism by immersion for the remission of sins<sup>11</sup>.

Just as Zacharias prophesied about his son, John the Baptist, we were also sent to this earth on a pivotal dispensation of the Gospel. Since the second coming of our Savior Jesus Christ is close at hand, we may also see ourselves as messengers before the face of the Lord. Under this perspective, part of our mission is to teach the knowledge of salvation (preaching the gospel) and to guide the people to receive sacred ordinances that will enable them to receive Christ, the Prince of Peace<sup>12</sup>, and through Him a remission of our sins. We may do these things when we serve either as full-time missionaries or as member-missionaries, and also when we go about our duties as visiting teachers or home teachers.

The next passage of scripture is about Christ and his mission; as church leaders we are servants in the Lord's kingdom, and as servants we represent Christ. Therefore our mission is to be engaged in Christ's own mission. And here is one description of that mission:

"... the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations."<sup>13</sup>

Applying this passage to our several callings, we may understand that first, we have been called "... to preach good tidings unto the meek ...", or to preach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to all those who are His elect, because His elect hearken to His voice and do not harden their hearts<sup>14</sup>. Since we do not know who these elect are, we must preach the gospel to all individuals until we have found all the elect.

Secondly, we have been called "... to bind up the brokenhearted ...", or to congregate (or gather, if you will) those who have accepted the restored gospel and received its ordinances from those with authority to administer them. These are the ones who will have forsaken the world and who will be willing

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 1:76-77,79

<sup>10</sup> For an example of this pattern of delegation, check how the Lord preached the gospel in the spirit world after his crucifixion. Read 1 Peter 3:18-20, and then D&C 138:28-30

<sup>11</sup> D&C 13

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:6; 2 Nephi 19:6

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 61:1-4

<sup>14</sup> D&C 29:7

to offer as a sacrifice "... a broken heart and a contrite spirit ...<sup>15</sup>". To "... bind up the brokenhearted ..." may also mean that we must make sure that these individuals who have been congregated (all of us) are carefully prepared to live higher laws in preparation to live in a higher state of existence among heaven's nobility. This preparation must reach the point at which the Lord will tell to each individual: "... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, in order to enter in this celestial kingdom we must be part of an eternal family. We can take the first steps to assure that we are part of an eternal family by having our earthly family sealed to us in a temple. We must also seek to discover who our ancestors were and perform vicarious ordinances in their behalf. By doing this we will be helping "... to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ..."<sup>17</sup>

Many times I think about my ancestors. I am sure that many of them, if not all, were good people who lived without a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am sure that while in their mortal stage of existence these individuals tried to live the best they could, and surely many of them died with hopes of having an eternal existence in some type of heavenly habitation. I wonder how these good persons must feel now that they are in another dimension of existence, a place where the ruling power is the priesthood of God; a place where they, exactly by not having this priesthood, are left in spiritual darkness, under the influence of those many spirits who, during their mortal existence, strived to exercise dominion over others as tyrants<sup>18</sup>.

I do not want my ancestors to suffer; and just like many others, I also want to have the gospel preached to those who might have accepted it in the flesh<sup>19</sup>, even though some of their actions up to the day of their deaths may not clearly confirm that latent desire<sup>20</sup>. That is why it is so important to us to perform the vicarious ordinances in the House of the Lord in behalf of these individuals; perhaps we can be the means of freeing our loved ones from spiritual bondage.

Fourth, just like Christ, we were also called "... To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ..." This is the day when the Lord himself has started to perform his work again among men; after successive apostasies His kingdom is once more established but this time there will not be another great apostasy. We have been called to participate in a great victory over the powers of darkness.

Fifth, our assignments also involve a call "... to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the

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<sup>15</sup> 3 Nephi 9:20

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 25:21

<sup>17</sup> See also D&C 138:18,50

<sup>18</sup> The Prophet Amulek, in the Book of Mormon, suggested that our desires remain the same after we pass to the spirit world: "... that same spirit which doth possess your bodies ... will have power to possess your body in that eternal world." (Alma 34:34).

<sup>19</sup> See D&C 137:7-8 for a revelation on this topic.

<sup>20</sup> We may find that some of our ancestors may have engaged in actions so sinful that we may doubt that they will ever accept the gospel. However, the Lord will judge those individuals according to the level of knowledge they had during their lives (Romans 4:15; 2 Nephi 9:25). In my personal case, I have so far found some ancestors who were slaves and others who were slaveholders; but I still want all of them to receive the gospel.

spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." This may also mean that as part of this preparation to be accepted by the Lord we must lay aside false doctrines and concepts that do not give us hope of a glorious resurrection, and that affirm that as imperfect humans we cannot rise above the evil and corruption of this fallen state.

No matter who we are, no matter where we live, no matter what racial or cultural background we have, as children of Heavenly Parents we have all been endowed with the possibility of reaching divinity, holiness, excellence, and perfection; and as surely as the Lord lives, with his guidance and our obedience to his laws and ordinances we can overcome all the evils of this world, and "... inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths ... [and become] gods ..."<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, we are called to "... build the old wastes, [to] raise up the former desolations, and [to] repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations ...". We are called to build the Zion of our Lord; first by "building" ourselves as pure individuals, "for this is Zion--THE PURE IN HEART ..."<sup>22</sup>; secondly, by physically transforming this world into a better place and--in the future--by building holy cities unto the Lord.

Part of our work in the Church is--at least temporarily--not visible. Since we are in a mortal and fallen stage of life, the reality of the spirit world is beyond the reach of our mortal bodies' limited senses. We cannot see or hear the spirit world with our mortal sight and hearing. However, modern prophets have testified that the work we perform in behalf to deceased persons in our temples is part of an organized effort carried out in the spirit world<sup>23</sup>. President John Taylor taught the following about this organized effort: "And are the priesthood operating behind the veil? Yes, and we are operating here. And we have a priesthood here, and they have one there. Have we a presidency? They have one there. Have we a twelve? So they have there. Have we seventies here? They have there. Have we high priests here? They have there. Have we various quorums? Yes, and we operate in them; and when we get through we join our quorums above."<sup>24</sup>

Thus we can see that the organization found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is part of an eternal program, the plan of salvation. We can also see that the several presidencies and offices on local (wards and stakes, or branches and districts,) regional, or worldwide level (the First Presidency, The Quorum of the Twelve, and other General Authorities and officers) are counterparts to similar presidencies and offices on the other side of the veil.

President John Taylor further explained how broad is the influence of the kingdom of God restored on earth:

"What else did the Lord do through Joseph Smith? He restored the holy Priesthood. And what is that? It is the government of God, whether in the heavens or on the earth,--the principle and power by which he regulates, controls, dictates, and manages his affairs, his worlds, his kingdoms, his principalities, his powers, his intelligences, and all things that are underneath him and above him, and with which he has to do; ... [the] restoration of that Priesthood necessarily implies a restoration of ... an organization of his kingdom and government on the earth. This, therefore, is that kingdom, and is organized according to the revelations, wisdom,

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<sup>21</sup> D&C 132:19-20; brackets added.

<sup>22</sup> D&C 97:21; brackets added.

<sup>23</sup> D&C 138:29-31,33,57-58

<sup>24</sup> JD, Vol. 22 p.308, August 28, 1881

communications, or order of God: hence it has its First Presidency, its Prophets and Apostles, its Seventies and High Priests, its Bishops, Teachers, and Deacons, and every appendage that is necessary to completeness, and to promote the happiness and welfare of the human family, and for all purposes of government on this earth and in the heavens.<sup>25</sup>"

### **Requirements for Leaders**

The Lord promised: " ... I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."<sup>26</sup> By this we realize how great an honor it is to receive a call to leadership. It is a proof of the Lord's trust in us, and we ought to do our best to not disappoint him. Therefore, we must:

- ◆ study and emulate Christian qualities and virtues until they become part of our own character;
- ◆ understand and avoid the weaknesses that would disqualify us to be instruments in the Lord's hands;
- ◆ learn the true doctrine of Christ, because this is the knowledge that Christ himself practiced while fulfilling his mission in the flesh;
- ◆ realize that we cannot perform this work alone, that we need to be counseled in order to gain wisdom; and then,
- ◆ exercise our faculties to realize our potential, to become that which the Lord expects us to become.

The following sections of this study will deal with each of these requirements. While you read the ideas presented there, please keep in mind what President Brigham Young explained about our mission in these latter days:

"We are here to live to spread intelligence and knowledge among the people. I am here to school my brethren, to teach my family the way of life, to propagate my species, and to live, if in my power, until sin, iniquity, corruption, hell, the Devil, and all classes and grades of abominations are driven from the earth. That is my religion and the object of my existence. We are not here merely to prepare to die, and then die; but we are here to live and build up the kingdom of God on the earth--to promote the Priesthood overcome the powers of Satan, and teach the children of men what they are created for--that in them is concealed the germ of all intelligence."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> JD, Vol.7, p.324, October 7, 1859; brackets added.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremiah 3:14-15

<sup>27</sup> JD, Vol.8, p.282, June 7, 1860. Also found in "Discourses of Brigham Young," p.88.

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## *About the Author*



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master's degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor's in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, Ricks College, and currently serves as chair of the department of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.