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The United Order, Part II

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Abstract: Discusses the determination of the people of Ammon not to defend themselves against the Lamanite attack. Some Indian traditions reflect this peaceful approach to war. The united order was practiced among the Nephites after the Savior's visit. Indian traditions hold to many of the principles of the united order.

The United Order

Part II.

By J. M. Sjodahl

No less remarkable than the peace doctrine in the Book of Mormon is the exemplification in that record, on a somewhat large scale, of the United Order. The story of this feature of American life—the rise and fall of an American Millennium—is recorded in IV Nephi 2-4 and 24-6:

“And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.

“And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.

“And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.”

“And now, in this two hundred and first year there began to be among them those who were lifted up in pride, such as the wearing of costly apparel, and all manner of fine pearls, and of the fine things of the world.

“And from that time forth they did have their goods and their substance no more common among them.

“And they began to be divided into classes; and they began to build up churches unto themselves to get gain, and began to deny the true church of Christ.”

Millennium in America. We are here informed that the people who were converted and accepted the gospel of Christ, as a consequence were filled with the spirit of love and unity, and they had all things common. Peace prevailed. As Elder George Reynolds expresses it: “Indeed, it may be said that a type, a fore-shadowing of the Millennium for once found place among the erring sons of humanity.” And this wonderful condition lasted for 150 years.

Another Evidence for the Book of Mormon. This is one more remarkable evidence of the agreement of the Book of Mormon with the teachings of the New Testament, even when these teachings are concealed instead of revealed as in the authorized Bible translation.

In the New Testament we read that the converts on the day of Pentecost, whom the Spirit filled with power from on high, “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42.)

The word translated *fellowship* is *koinonia*, which really means a great deal more than fellowship in the abstract. It means, as in verse 44, an arrangement whereby things were held

in common. It means, practically, what among the Latter-day Saints is known as the United Order; so that a faithful translation might be: "They continued steadfastly in the teachings of the apostles, and the united order, and the breaking of the bread, and the prayers." We see here that the *koinonia*, the united order, was part of the teaching of the apostles, as was the sacrament and the prayers. It was not clumsy, impractical communism, but some wise, practical arrangement, entirely voluntary, whereby every member was provided for in "all things" both temporal and spiritual.

Nor was this a purely Pentecostal condition born of the first enthusiasm of faith. It was part of the Christianity of the New Testament. For a long time after Pentecost, Paul wrote to his beloved Timothy: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they * * * do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." (I Tim. 6:17-19.) The word translated "willing to communicate" is *koinoni-kous* which might better be rendered, "actively interested in the united order," thereby "laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." That was the doctrine of Paul to the end of his earthly mission. This *koinonia*, or united order, is, in the New Testament, especially ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Paul says: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the *koinonia* of the Holy Ghost be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14.) That accounts for 2 Peter 1:4, where the apostle says the divine promise is that those who escape the corruption of the world may be "partakers" *koinon-oi* of divine nature. It also explains the fact that whenever the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the believers, there is a union of interests, both temporal and spiritual, comes into existence, as naturally as order out of chaos. And so we have a united order in the New Testament, and also in the Book of Mormon. In the Doctrine and Covenants, too, the doctrine of the United Order is taught.* That it is also taught in the Book of Mormon is strong proof of the divine inspiration of that volume. Joseph Smith could not, from his knowledge of the New Testament, have invented the story in Fourth Nephi; nor could anyone else.

Community of Interests Among Indians. Again the question arises whether Indian culture as recorded knows any community of interests— a *koinonia*—such as that described in the fourth book of Nephi. And again the answer is a wonderful confirmation of the Book of Mormon; for, in fact, the very foundation of the highest Indian social structure is community of interests.

Construction of Indian Society. Unlike civilized society in our day, Indian society was made up of gentes, totems, or

*Secs. 51:3; 9; 70; 78:5; 82:17; 72:11; 82:20; 104:1; 104:68; 105:34,

clans, and not of families. The gens is a body of "consanguineal kindred," whether by birth or adoption. They all live together in one house or lodge, and are under obligation to assist one another. Each gens is self-governing. It elects its own chieftain and decides on all questions of property within its own limits. Marriage within the gens is prohibited, and descent is, in many instances, traced, and property descends in the female line only.

When descent was reckoned through the female line, the husband joined through marriage the gens of the wife. Property, with the exception of a few articles of personal necessity, belonged to the wife, and the husband had no claim on it. The price of a man, if killed, was only three-fourths that of a woman, among the Hurons.

This social arrangement seems very strange to us, but it was similar to that which prevailed among the Semites in the days of Abraham. Sarah was the "princess," as the name implies. That is, she was the chieftainess, and her position went by inheritance to her successors, Rebekah, Leah, Dinah, and Sarah, the daughter of Asher, the son of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid. (Num. 26:46.)

In Egypt, too, in those days, the woman was the mistress of the house. She held the property, and inheritance was through the female line.

This social feature was preserved among the American Indians, as it is to this day, to some extent, among the Arabs of the desert.

A group of gentes or clans formed a phratry or brotherhood, generally for religious purposes, and a group of phratries constituted a tribe. The tribe was governed by a council. The chief was elected by that body, and his authority was limited to affairs of peace. For war, a war chief was elected by the council, and he was supreme while there was war.

The Long House. The Long House of the Iroquois Indians illustrates the principle of a united order. This habitation was from fifty to a hundred feet long. The interior was divided off in compartments, six or eight feet each, and open towards a passageway or aisle which ran through the center of the house. There was one fire-place to each four rooms, and this was used by the four families occupying the rooms nearest. "Thus a house with five fires would contain twenty apartments and accommodate twenty families, unless some apartments were reserved for storage. They were warm, roomy, and tidily-kept habitations. Raised bunks were constructed around the walls of each apartment for beds. * * * Whatever was taken in the hunt or raised by cultivation by any

member of the household * * * was for the common benefit. Provisions were made a common stock within the household."

To that extent they had preserved the principle of the "United Order," which was practiced by the Nephites as related in the Book of Mormon.

This was, as Dr. Brinton says, the ideal theory of the American tribal organization. And we may recognize its outlines almost anywhere on the continent, although it was carried out sometimes with more, sometimes with less, faithfulness to the perfect pattern. In Peru the principles of the United Order were applied on a larger scale and more in detail than anywhere else.

There is a striking similarity between the ideals and aims of these Iroquois reformers and those of the Peruvian Incas. The rulers of Peru also aimed at the unification of the nations under one divinely appointed head, and, although their power was that of absolute despotism, they generally sought to overcome opposition by the exercise of paternal benevolence.

Where, then, we may ask, did the prehistoric inhabitants of America obtain their ideas of a "Millennial" kingdom on this earth? Whence came their inspiration?

There is, as far as I know, only one answer to that question. The marvelous light which their ancestors once enjoyed, as related in the Book of Mormon, was never entirely extinguished. Here and there a spark from the divine fire was glowing, dimly, uncertainly, but yet perceptible to men and women who had the gift to see and to reflect. In others words, they had traditions, in more or less imperfect form, of the institutions and teaching of their ancestors, and of the gospel that promises a reign of peace on earth. And they were endeavoring, in their imperfect way, to follow the dim light, in the hope of finally reaching the goal—the "golden age" of which prophets and poets in all ages have spoken.

Prayer

By Christie Lund

Lord, in this hour of night
 Show us the way;
 Give us again the light
 Of happy day.

Lord, in this dark despair
 Teach us to feel
 That thou canst hear our prayer
 Tho' mute we kneel.

Strengthen our wayward feet
 To firmly stand;
 Down in this darkness deep,
 Give us thy hand.