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The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal is an annual publication dealing with Latter Day Saint history. The Journal is published by its parent association as a means of encouraging serious research and exchange of various scholarly viewpoints. The editors attempt to ensure accuracy and high scholarly standards. Authors' viewpoints are not necessarily those of the editors, the Association, Graceland College, or the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
Emma Hale Smith and the Polygamy Question

Emma Hale Smith sat in the audience on April 6, 1860, and heard her son speak for the first time to a group of Latter Day Saints who had banded together in the tiny town of Amboy, Illinois, as part of a new reorganization. Before the day ended Joseph III was ordained president and prophet of that church. In this first speech the new leader faced the problem which had separated most of the members from the larger body of Mormons who had followed Brigham Young to the Rocky Mountains: the practice of plural marriage. "There is but one principle taught by the leaders of any faction of this people that I hold in utter abhorrence," he stated.

That is a principle taught by Brigham Young and those believing in him. I have been told that my father taught such doctrines. I have never believed it and never can believe it. If such things were done, then I believe they never were done by Divine Authority. I believe my father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulgated such doctrines.¹

Ten months later Joseph received a long and thoughtful letter from William McLellin, who had been a member of the Quorum of the Twelve in the Kirtland era, but who had long since become disaffected. He warned the young prophet that the stand he had taken was a dangerous one. Stating that polygamy was not of God was one thing, but believing that Joseph Smith, Jr., had not taught and practiced the doctrine was another. McLellin pleaded with young Joseph to take another course:

I do not wish to say things to You of your Father, but Joseph, if You will only go to your own dear mother, she can tell You that he believed in Polygamy and practiced it long before his violent death! That he delivered a revelation sanctioning, regulating, and establishing it—and that he finally burned the awful document before her eyes. Elder Marks can tell you that (before its conflagration) it was read in the High Council of Nauvoo, over which he presided. Your Mother told me these items when I was in Nauvoo. I am not dealing in fictions, nor in ill founded slanders—and would now feel glad if these things had never been enacted. But Sir, I have felt it a solemn duty to lay these items before You. And Sir, Your Mother (if she feels disposed) can give You a rather black catalogue reaching back as far as the date of your birth. Then, Sir, if you are honest before the Heavens yourself, never, no never proclaim again publicly or privately that "I believe my father was a good man," whilst the means to know his real character lies so near You—even in the bosom & memory of your Mother!²

Thus from the beginning of his ministry Joseph was urged to ask his mother the truth about his father's polygamous activities.

It would soon become clear to other leaders in the Reorganization that, while Joseph III had an abhorrence for polygamy, he had never discussed it in any depth with his mother and she had never divulged to her children their father's role in its development and practice. Emma told Edmund C. Briggs in 1956,

Linda King Newell of Salt Lake City, Utah, is the editor of Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought. This paper was given as part of the Spring 1984 Restoration History Lecture Series. The author is also co-author with Valeen Tippett Avery of the biography, Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith, to be released in the fall of 1984 by Doubleday & Co. Inasmuch as this article is based in part on the research and writing of that book, the author is indebted to Dr. Avery for her contributions through that effort to this article.
I have always avoided talking to my children about having anything to do in the church, for I have suffered so much I have dreaded to have them take any part in it. . . . But I have always believed if God wanted them to do anything in the church, the One who called their father would make it known to them, and it was not necessary for me to talk to them about it. 3

Although Emma had struggled with the acceptance of the practice herself, her final position seems to have been that although her husband had been a prophet, the revelation on plural marriage had not come from God. While the evidence indicates that her conviction came from intimate knowledge of events in both Kirtland and Nauvoo, Joseph III's position stemmed from ignorance of those events. This paper will trace some of that history and Emma Smith's role in, and reaction to, it. 4

Although the Utah church has maintained that the revelation on plural marriage came as early as 1831, some RLDS scholars have rejected that premise. 5 William McLellin in 1875 told a newspaper reporter of Joseph's involvement with Fanny Alger. McLellin informed the reporter

of the spot where the first well authenticated case of polygamy took place, in which Joseph Smith was "sealed" to the hired girl. The "sealing" took place in a barn on the hay mow, and was witnessed by Mrs. Smith through a crack in the door! . . . Long afterwards when he visited Mrs. Emma Smith . . . she then and there declared on her honor that it was a fact—"saw it with her own eyes." 6

In a second letter to Joseph III in 1872 McLellin detailed the story further. He prefaced his remarks with a reminder:

You will probably remember that I visited your Mother and family in 1847, and held a lengthy conversation with her. . . . I did not ask her to tell, but I told her some stories I heard. And she told me whether I was properly informed. . . . I told her I heard one night she missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true. 7

While the term "sealed" was synonymous with marriage for eternity in Mormon circles, Oliver Cowdery chose to give the incident with Fanny Alger another name. In two holograph letters written from Missouri and now housed in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, Oliver Cowdery discussed an argument between himself and Joseph. To Joseph he wrote:

I learn from Kirtland, by the last letters, that you have publicly said, that when you were here I confessed to you that I had willfully lied about you—this compells me to ask you to correct that statement, and give me an explanation—until which you and myself are two [separated]. 8

Cowdery penned a letter to his brother Warren that same day:

When [Joseph] was here we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth in the matter. 9

Two letters from Emma to Joseph during this same period may reflect her anxiety over these disturbing circumstances and the gossip which linked Joseph's name to other women in Kirtland. While Joseph was in hiding in the spring of 1837, she closed a letter to him with "I pray that God will keep you in purity and safety till we all meet again." In another she wrote, "I hope that we shall be so humble and pure before God that he will set us at liberty to be our own masters." 10 (Emphasis added.)

If Joseph taught anyone the full theological backdrop for plural marriage before the Nauvoo period of the church, no record of it is extant. Although Joseph began again to take plural wives early in that period, it would be some time before Emma knew it, and even later before he would fully explain the doctrine to her, but then only after she had confirmed her own suspicions and confronted him. Emma's friends would learn from their husbands that Joseph had a revelation outlining a new order of marriage, but Emma would come to it piecemeal over a number of years through circumstances which hurt and shocked her.

4
In Nauvoo the marriage of Joseph Smith to twenty-six-year-old Louisa Beaman took place on the evening of April 5, 1841, under an elm tree on the banks of the Mississippi River. The bride was disguised in men’s clothing; her sister’s husband, Joseph Noble, performed the ceremony. Noble said Joseph had confided “the principle of celestial marriage” to him the previous fall. LDS accounts of this marriage usually refer to it as the first plural marriage performed in Nauvoo, but evidence links Joseph to at least three earlier brides in the city: Presindia Huntington Buell, Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde, and Clarissa Hancock.\textsuperscript{11}

Rumors linking Joseph with other women were already circulating in Nauvoo by the time the Nauvoo Female Relief Society was organized on March 17, 1842. In the second meeting of the organization Emma reported that a young woman, Clarissa Marvel, “was accused of telling scandalous falsehoods on the character of Prest. Joseph Smith without the least provocation,” and asked that “they would in wisdom, adopt some plan to bring her to repentance,”\textsuperscript{12} Agnes Coolbrith Smith, the widow of Joseph’s brother Don Carlos Smith, came to the accused woman’s defense, apparently unaware that the gossip linked her own name to Joseph’s. “Clarissa Marvel lived with me nearly a year and I saw nothing amiss of her,” she reported.

The women agreed that someone should investigate the charges but no one was eager for the assignment. One woman refused “on the grounds that she was unacquainted with the circumstances.” Emma said, “We intend to look into the morals of each other, and watch over each other.” She asked that the women keep secret within the membership “all proceedings that regard difficulties. . . . None can object to telling the good, but withhold the evil.”\textsuperscript{13}

Emma’s request was impossible for any group, and apparently the word spread that the Relief Society was investigating Clarissa Marvel; the next meeting opened with the upper room of Joseph’s red brick store “full to overflowing.” The prophet was present and addressed the women. He spoke of the society’s purposes. He commended the women’s desire to “purge out iniquity” but cautioned them that “sometimes your zeal is not according to knowledge.” Joseph left the meeting after he had spoken.\textsuperscript{14}

The case of Clarissa Marvel was still pending and two women were assigned to investigate the charges; one of them objected. “We are going to learn new things,” Emma encouraged them. “Our way is straight, we want none in this society but those who [can] and [will] walk straight.” Three days later Clarissa Marvel put an “X” by her name on the following statement:

\begin{center}
\textit{Nauvoo, April 2th, 1842}

This is to certify that I never have at any time or place, seen or heard anything improper or unvirtuous in the conduct or conversation of either President Smith or Mrs. Agnes Smith. I also certify that I never have reported any thing derogatory to the characters of either of them.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{center}

Emma did not know that her sister-in-law Agnes had, in fact, become a plural wife of Joseph. As she put this particular issue to rest—at least in the Relief Society—she lamented that the “disagreeable business of searching out those who were iniquitous seemed to fall on her.”\textsuperscript{16}

One item of business remained after Emma had settled her concern about Clarissa Marvel. She had read to the women a document which Joseph and the church leaders had prepared for the Relief Society. The article informed the sisters that some men were approaching women to “deceive and debauch the innocent” saying they had authority from Joseph or other church leaders.

\begin{center}
We have been informed that some unprincipled men, whose names we will not mention at present, have been guilty of such crimes—We do not mention their names, not knowing but what there may be some among you who are not sufficiently skill’d in Masonry as to keep a secret. . . . Let this epistle be had as a private matter in your Society, and then we shall learn whether you are good masons. We are your humble servants in the Bonds of the New & Everlasting Covenant.
\end{center}

Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, Vinson Knight, and Brigham Young signed their names.\textsuperscript{17}
One of the “unprincipled men” of whom Joseph and the others wrote was John C. Bennett who had come to Nauvoo in 1840. By the spring of 1842 his political power in Nauvoo was almost as great as Joseph’s. His positions included major-general of the Nauvoo Legion, president of the Agriculture and Manufacturing Association, chancellor of the University of Nauvoo, mayor of the city, and de facto counselor to Joseph, as Sidney Rigdon was too ill to function.

Bennett’s fall from grace would be even more rapid than his rise. He most likely learned of plural marriage from Joseph but adapted the practice to his own standards. Bennett approached women with the logic of this argument: where there was no accuser, there was no sin; therefore, if the liaison were kept secret, it would not be sinful. Were a pregnancy to result, Bennett, as a medical doctor, could perform an abortion. When he encountered initial refusals, Bennett stated he came with Joseph’s approval. John C. Bennett taught his method to his close friends and a general pattern emerged. When one man was unsuccessful in seducing a woman, another man began to try. They called their system of seduction “spiritual wifery.”

Observers and writers have speculated at Joseph’s motivation for initiating a practice that violated local laws and went against the prevailing Christian teachings of his time. Some postulated that he was either a brilliant imposter or he suffered from some mental disorder. Many concluded that the practice of polygamy stemmed from an insatiable sexual drive of Joseph’s, fueled by a quest for power. In an effort to defuse that charge somewhat, others have asked if Emma were frigid, implying that if Joseph had a problem it must be Emma’s fault. Intimate details of their married life will remain unknown, for Emma and Joseph were no more likely to reveal their personal intimacies than anyone else; but some aspects of their marital relationship may be worth considering. In 1841 she and Joseph had been married fourteen years and she had given birth to seven children. She would give birth to two more babies in the next three years. From Joseph’s letters to her, his journal entries, Lucy Mack Smith’s history, and other sources, one can conclude that Emma experienced considerable discomfort during her pregnancies which probably ranged from fainting spells to severe morning sickness. These symptoms sometimes lasted throughout her pregnancy, instead of diminishing as other women’s illnesses often do. But, as her mother-in-law indicated, Emma was not one to pamper herself or complain. At times she pushed herself to exhaustion to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother. If Joseph found her unattractive or less desirable in the advanced stages of pregnancy, his own writings give no hint of it. He frequently referred to her as “my affectionate Emma,” an endearment that he used almost exclusively with her, even though he often stated his love for many of his friends and supporters.

The majority of faithful Mormons would give little consideration to Joseph’s own physical drives or to other charges. With “an almost compulsive emphasis on unquestioning loyalty to Priesthood authority as the cardinal virtue,” they would maintain simply that God commanded plural marriage through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Joseph taught the principle as a commandment of God, and the evidence indicates that he believed it was a commandment.

Over a period of time, the need to warn others of unauthorized practices such as Bennett’s, coupled with the demand for secrecy for their own teachings, led Joseph and the Twelve to develop a system of evasion. By employing what might be termed code words, the practitioners of the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage,” as taught by Joseph, felt they could publicly deny what they privately lived, and do it with a clear conscience. George A. Smith in an 1869 letter to Joseph III identified for his cousin the method they used.

Any one who will read carefully the denials, as they are termed, will see clearly that they denounce adultery, fornication, brutal lust and the teaching of plurality of wives by those who were not commanded to do so; shewing clearly that it was understood that such commandment would be given to others.

An 1886 article in the Deseret News also reflected on this topic, giving a detailed account of specific code words as well as the rationale for their use.
same time avoiding the avowal of such doctrines as were not yet intended for the world. This course which they have taken when necessary, by commandment, is all the ground which their accusers have for charging them with falsehood.

The article detailed the special code words:

**Polygamy,** in the ordinary and Asiatic sense of the term, never was and is not now a tenet of the Latter-day Saints. That which Joseph and Hyrum denounced . . . was altogether different to the order of *celestial marriage* including a plurality of *wives.* . . . Joseph and Hyrum were consistent in their action against the *false doctrines of polygamy and spiritual wifery,* instigated by the devil and advocated by men who did not comprehend sound doctrine nor the purity of the *celestial marriage* which God revealed for the holiest of purposes. [22] (Emphasis added.)

According to the writer, then, the Mormons denied polygamy “in the Asiatic sense,” indicating perhaps that their form was considered a spiritual requirement rather than a cultural practice. They also denied spiritual wifery and other “false doctrines” while they practiced celestial marriage and a plurality of wives. Included in the balance of the article were other acceptable terms synonymous with plurality of wives: “the true and divine order,” “eternal marriage,” and “the Holy order of celestial marriage.” Phrases such as “a man’s privileges,” “new and everlasting covenant,” and “we may have different views of things,” signified to informed listeners that the speakers were denouncing the traditional sins of the world for the benefit of non-Mormons, newspaper reporters, and the uninitiated, but they were supporting a system of plural marriage under the very noses of the suspicious. Perhaps the most confusing of the code words was “spiritual wifery.” Joseph and the Twelve used the term and a few women who were his plural wives later referred to themselves as “spiritual wives,” but when Bennett began to engage in widescale promiscuity while claiming authorization from Joseph, the “spiritual wife” term rapidly fell into disrepute. The leaders of the church began to use it as a means of attacking Bennett while they practiced a tightly regulated system of plurality of wives. Clearly, Emma was not aware of these “code words” when she spoke against iniquity in the Relief Society meetings, and some of the women were confused.

During this time the Relief Society tried to deal with other needs. Joseph attended the April 28 meeting and gave the women some advice: “Let this Society teach how to act towards husbands,” namely to

> treat them with mildness and affection. When a man is borne down with troubles—when he is perplexed, if he can meet a smile, not an argument—if he can meet with mildness it will calm down his soul and soothe his feelings. When the mind is going to despair it needs a solace.

If Joseph’s message was for Emma, events of the following twenty-four hours made her forget about mildness and long suffering. Someone apparently told her about Joseph’s involvement in plural marriage. The day after the Relief Society meeting, the prophet’s history reads:

> A conspiracy against the peace of my family was made manifest, and it gave me some trouble to counteract the design of certain base individuals, and restore peace. The Lord makes manifest to me many things, which it is not wisdom for me to make public, until others can witness the proof of them. [23]

The confrontation between Joseph and Emma was serious. It may have been the reason the Relief Society did not meet the following week. Two weeks after the incident Joseph was present, but the minutes do not mention Emma’s name. Joseph did not elaborate on the process by which he reestablished his peace with Emma, but a clue lies in the recollections of a fifty-four-year-old woman, Vienna Jacques, whose name had been linked with Joseph’s by gossip in Kirtland. Many years later Joseph Smith III interviewed her when she was over ninety. She recalled “the subject of spiritual wifery” was discussed at a Relief Society meeting when Emma was not present. Miss Jacques claimed she did not believe it was being taught as doctrine and said she went to Emma against the protests of some of the women in the group:

> She told me she had asked her husband, the prophet, about the stories which were being circulated among the women concerning such a doctrine being taught, and that
he had told her to tell the sisters of the society that if any man, no matter who he was, undertook to talk such stuff to them in their houses, just to order him out at once, and if he did not go immediately, to take the tongs or the broom and drive him out; for the whole idea was absolutely false and the doctrine an evil and unlawful thing.24

It appears from Emma’s remarks at the next Relief Society meeting she attended that Joseph had deflected her anger by explaining that he had neither sanctioned nor participated in Bennett’s spiritual wife doctrine. Eliza Snow’s minutes state,

Mrs. Prest. said this day was an evil day—that there is as much evil in this as in any other place—said she would that this society were pure before God—that she was afraid that under existing circumstances the sisters were not careful enough to expose iniquity—the time had been when charity had covered a multitude of sins—but now it is necessary that sin should be exposed. . . . [Emma said] that heinous sins were among us—that much of this iniquity was practiced by some in authority, pretending to be sanctioned by Pres. [Joseph] Smith. Mrs. Prest. continued by exhorting all who had erred to repent and forsake their sins—said that Satan’s forces were against this church—that every Saint should be at the post.25

Between December of 1841 and March of 1843 Joseph married at least twelve women: Presindia Huntington (December 11, 1841), Marinda Johnson (May 1843), Louisa Beaman (April 5, 1841), Zina Huntington (October 27, 1841), Mary Rollins (February 1842), Patty Sessions (March 9, 1841), Eliza Snow (June 29, 1842), Sarah Whitney (June 27, 1842), Ruth Vose (February 1843), Lucy Walker (May 1, 1843), Eliza Partridge (March 8, 1843), and her sister, Emily Partridge (March 4, 1843).26

Once Emma knew that Joseph was taking plural wives she steadfastly refused to accept the practice as doctrine. Her refusal was no doubt a source of consternation for Joseph, particularly since some of Emma’s friends, who were married to other church leaders, not only accepted the new doctrine, but had given permission for their husbands to marry other women. In the two months from March to May of 1843 Joseph appears to have talked with Emma about plural marriage during their rides together around the city and through the countryside. Apparently he also used these occasions to teach Emma the necessity of the endowment and sealing. She had accepted other theological practices including her own baptism by immersion, her patriarchal blessing, and baptism for her kindred dead by proxy. There is no indication that she ever opposed him on any doctrine but plural marriage.

The evidence indicates that Joseph was able to convince her that “the new and everlasting covenant” was necessary for salvation and his conversations no doubt included a new theological awareness—that marriage could continue past death. One of the first enunciations of this concept came in 1840. Parley P. Pratt said Joseph talked with him while they were in Philadelphia together early that year. Joseph spoke to him about the “idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes.” Until this time Pratt believed close affections to be “something from which the heart must be entirely weaned,” before one was prepared for heaven.

It was from [Joseph] that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity: . . . while the result of our endless union would be an offspr- ing as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.

Pratt added another significant remark:

Joseph Smith had barely touched a single key; had merely lifted a corner of the veil and given me a single glance into eternity.27

Even Joseph’s early personal letters to Emma refer to a separation at death. In October 1832, when he wrote to her from New York, Joseph signed his letter, “Your affectionate Husband until Death.” Two years later, on May 18, 1834, he addressed her from Richmond, closing with “O may the blessings of God rest upon you is the prayer of your Husband until death.” Then from Philadelphia in January of 1840 he ended his letter to Emma “Yours in the bonds of love, Your Husband until death.” Not until he wrote to Emma from a hiding place within the city of Nauvoo in 1842 did his letters to her hint of marriage for eternity. He said, “Yours in haste, your affectionate husband until death, through all eternity,
and for evermore.” Emma seems to have become convinced that celestial or plural marriage and eternal marriage were indeed inseparably linked. In May 1843 she finally consented to give Joseph other wives if she could choose them herself. Joseph agreed and Emma chose two sisters then living in her house, Emily and Eliza Partridge. Joseph had finally converted Emma to plural marriage, but not so fully that he dared tell her that he had already married the Partridge sisters two months earlier. Emily Partridge said that “to save family trouble Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed.” She further added that Emma “had her feelings, and so we thought there was no use in saying anything about it so long as she had chosen us herself.” Emily also remembered that Emma “helped explain the principles to us.”

On May 23, 1843, Emma stood in her own home and watched Judge James Adams, a high priest in the church visiting from Springfield, marry Joseph for the second time to Emily and Eliza Partridge. About this marriage ceremony, Emily wrote, “We did not make much trouble, but were sealed in her presence” and reiterated her point clearly: “Emma was present. She gave her free and full consent.”

Although Emma’s capitulation was short-lived, she had made the sacrifice, and she finally received her reward: five days later on May 28, 1843, Emma was sealed to Joseph for “time and all eternity.” On this same day she became the first woman admitted into Joseph Smith’s prayer circle where he later initiated her into the endowment.

The atmosphere in the Smith family home was tense during the summer of 1843 as Emma’s regret intensified. July 10 was her thirty-ninth birthday and she and Joseph rode out to their farm. The next day they rode together again. Although there is no record of their conversations on those two occasions, the events of the next day clearly indicate that they discussed plural marriage and Emma voiced her objections. William Clayton’s Nauvoo Diary records that on July 12, at Hyrum’s request, Joseph dictated a revelation “on the order of the priesthood, showing the designs in Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon having many wives & concubines.” In a later statement he gave more details to the diary entry. He said that during a conversation between Hyrum and Joseph, Hyrum told his brother to write the revelation down and he would take it to Emma. “I believe I can convince her of its truth,” he said, “and you will hereafter have peace.”

Joseph replied, “You do not know Emma as well as I do.”

“The doctrine is so plain, I can convince any reasonable man or woman of its truth, purity and heavenly origin,” said Hyrum.

Joseph agreed to write the revelation which he said he had memorized “perfectly from beginning to end.” Clayton acted as scribe while Joseph dictated.

Hyrum took the document to Emma and reported back to Joseph that he had “never received a more severe talking to” and that Emma was “very bitter and full of resentment and anger.” Joseph’s journal entry for the following day was brief: “I was in conversation with Emma most of the day.”

According to William Clayton, Joseph C. Kingsbury copied the revelation and several church leaders heard it read that same day. Joseph apparently took the original back, for Clayton wrote:

Two or three days after the revelation was written Joseph related to me and several others that Emma had so teased and urgently entreated him for the privilege of destroying it, that he became so weary of her teasing, and to get rid of her annoyance, he told her she might destroy it and she had done so, but he had consented to her wish in this matter to pacify her, realizing that he knew the revelation perfectly and could rewrite it at any time if necessary. [Emphasis added.]

Other accounts involve Joseph more directly in the document’s destruction. According to William McLellin’s 1872 letter to Joseph III, Emma said that after she and Joseph discussed the document they retired for the night. Joseph

wished her to get up and burn the revelation. She refused to touch it even with tongues [tongs]. He rose from his bed and pulled open the fire with his fingers, and put the revelation in and burned it up.

Again in an 1856 interview Emma said, “The statement that I burned the original of the copy Brigham Young claimed to have, is false, and made out of whole cloth, and not
true in any particular." But Emma's oldest son pursued the question long after his mother's death. His diary entry for April 20, 1885, reads: Visited James Whitehead had chat with him. He says he saw the Revelation—about 1 page of foolscap paper. Clayton copied it and it was this copy that Mother burned." Apparently the incident was later talked about in the larger Smith family. Samuel Smith's daughter wrote to Don Carlos Smith's daughter:

I suppose you have heard that Aunt Emma burnt the revelation—which I suppose was so—I have heard my Aunt Lucy [Joseph's sister] say that Emma would not touch it with her fingers but took the tongs to put it in the fire.

The entire incident raises several questions which remain unanswered. Did Joseph burn the plural marriage revelation or did Emma? When Emma denied burning the revelation, was she denying that she put a paper in the fire at all, or was she saying that she did not believe that the paper which she burned contained an authentic revelation from the Lord?

Periods of calm often followed Emma and Joseph's stormy sessions. One such time came on January 8, 1844. Joseph and Emma celebrated their seventeenth wedding anniversary with a party in the Mansion House. Music and dancing enlivened the occasion. Five days later Joseph leased the Mansion House to Ebenezer Robinson. The Smiths retained several rooms for their own family and Robinson rented the rest to others. One source states that Joseph gave control of the house to Robinson because Emma had insisted that he turn out all his "spiritual wives" who had been living there.

Other evidence suggests that Emma believed that Joseph had abandoned plural marriage. Several months earlier Joseph had told William Clayton that he would eventually have to tell Emma that he would give up his wives, but that he had no intention of actually doing so. A few plural marriages were contracted by others after the first of the year, but apparently Joseph did not take additional wives after November of 1843. Still there is conflicting evidence about whether he actually intended to abandon the practice, as Emma seemed to believe, or whether he only wanted to let his opponents think he was abandoning it. William Marks, who had never embraced the principle, later recalled a conversation he had with Joseph early in June 1843.

Joseph, however, became convinced before his death that he had done wrong; for about three weeks before his death, I met him one morning in the street, and he said to me, Brother Marks, I have something to communicate to you, we retired to a by-place, and set down together, when he said: "We are a ruined people." I asked, how so? he said: "This doctrine of polygamy, or Spiritual-wife system, that has been taught and practiced among us, will prove our destruction and overthrow. I have been deceived," said he, "in reference to its practice; it is wrong; it is a curse to mankind, and we shall have to leave the United States soon, unless it can be put down, and its practice stopped in the church. Now," said he, "Brother Marks, you have not received this doctrine, and how glad I am. I want you to go into the high council, and I will have charges preferred against all who practice this doctrine, and I want you to try them by the laws of the church, and cut them off, if they will not repent, and cease the practice of this doctrine; and" said he, "I will go into the stand, and preach against it, with all my might, and in this way we may rid the church of this damnable heresy." Since Marks did not remember the exact date of his conversation, there is no way to determine if it came before or after the only issue of the Nauvoo Expositor which was published on June 7. Joseph was surely affected by the fevered pitch of his opponents' campaign to expose him and his "unlawful marital practices." In six weeks he and Hyrum would flee across the Mississippi River rather than face arrest and sure death.

Contrary to popular LDS belief, Joseph and his brother planned to seek redress in Washington, D.C., rather than ride west to the mountains. They had discussed the latter option as one of several plans, but a letter that he sent back across the river to two of his plural wives, Sarah and Maria Lawrence, confirms his Eastern plan. But even more interesting, it confirms that he had no intention of abandoning plural marriage. The letter reads:

I take opportunity this morning to communicate to you two some of the peepings of my heart; for you know my thoughts for you. . . . I do not know what I shall do, or where I shall go, but if possible I will try to interview with President Tyler. Perhaps California or Austin will be more sympathetic. . . . Speak of this to no one I want you
two to make arrangements with R. Cahoon for passage at your earliest convenience. I want for you to Tarry in Cincinnati untill you hear from me. Keep all things treasured up in your breasts, burn this letter as you read it. I close in hast. Do not dispair. Pray for me as I bleed my heart for you.\textsuperscript{43}

Joseph had also written a letter to Emma that same morning telling her that he hoped “to get to the city of Washington,” and requested her to let him know by evening if she planned to go to Kirtland or Cincinnati.\textsuperscript{44} Instead Joseph and Hyrum crossed back to Nauvoo and gave themselves up the following day. On June 27 the brothers were dead at the hands of a mob.

Emma believed that Joseph had tried to rid himself and the church of plural marriage before his death. She had witnessed him shaking hands with the Partridge sisters and telling them their marriage was dissolved.\textsuperscript{45} Joseph Coolidge, onetime executor of Joseph’s estate, told Joseph F. Smith that Emma “remarked to him that Joseph had abandoned plurality of wives before his death.”\textsuperscript{46}

Sometime between Joseph’s death and the adulthood of her sons, Emma began to ignore or deny plural marriage in her own life. When she had received her endowments she had taken upon herself covenants and promises that she swore never to reveal. She may have chosen not only to keep the forms and procedures of celestial marriage secret, but its very existence as well. She finally understood the code words the church leaders had used in Nauvoo to protect themselves and continued to use them throughout the remainder of her life to protect herself and her family. Her denials do not refute “the true order of marriage,” the “new and everlasting covenant,” “celestial marriage,” or any of the other recognized terminology. But once Joseph III had firmly decided that his father had nothing to do with polygamy, his position trapped both himself and his mother. He could not bring himself to confront reasonable evidence that his father founded plural marriage, and Emma, isolated in Nauvoo, and unaware of the continuing debate, did not disclose her knowledge of it to her son.

During the 1870s Joseph III began to feel pressure from within the church to ask his mother about plural marriage, something he admitted he had never done. Zenas H. Gurley, Jr., an apostle in the Reorganization, became increasingly impatient with Joseph over this blind spot in his logic.\textsuperscript{47}

William W. Blair who encouraged Joseph III in his pronouncements, had an unsettling conversation with James Whitehead in April 1874. He recorded the conversation in an abbreviated form in his journal. Whitehead told him that

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Blair and others confronted both Joseph and Alexander who stated in the \textit{Saints Advocate} that they had been hounded by statements like: “Ask your mother, she knows.” “Why don’t you ask your mother; she dare not deny these things.” “You do not dare to ask your mother!” The brothers explained, “Our thought was that if we had lacked courage to ask her, because we feared the answers she might give, we would put aside that fear; and, whatever the worst might be, we would hear it.” Early in 1879 Joseph and Alexander met with other leaders of their church in the \textit{Herald} offices to discuss the issue they had so long avoided. They “decided to present to her a few prominent questions, which were penned and agreed upon.”\textsuperscript{49}

In February 1879 Alexander and Joseph Smith traveled to a cold, snowy Nauvoo to interview their mother. Lewis Bidamon was present in the sitting room of the Riverside Mansion for the interview. Although Joseph’s notes on the interview are extant, the source used here is the final published account which appeared six months after Emma’s death.\textsuperscript{50}

Joseph eased into the conversation with the more benign questions, asking about Emma’s marriage to his father—to which she responded with details of her decision to marry Joseph. She discussed with them the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, and her role as scribe, and answered questions about the deaths of her first three children. In all, Emma’s sons asked twenty-six questions; Lewis asked another one. Of those, only six were about plural marriage. Emma’s conflicting loyalties were to the truth and to her sons.
"What about the revelation on polygamy? Did Joseph Smith have anything like it? What of spiritual wifery?"

"There was no revelation on either polygamy or spiritual wives." Emma's reply denounced the old John Bennett term. The question had not been about "patriarchal marriage" or the "new and everlasting covenant" or any of the other code words for the system instigated by early church leaders. Her answer continued,

There were some rumors of something of the sort which I asked my husband. He assured me that all there was of it was, that, in a chat about plural wives, he had said, "Well such a system might possibly be, if everybody was agreed to it, and would behave as they should; but they would not; and, besides, it was contrary to the will of heaven."

It is not inconceivable that in the early process of establishing the doctrine of plural marriage, Joseph tried to calm Emma's fears and deflect her suspicions in such a conversation. Her son's account suggests that they did not ask her if that were the only conversation she ever had with her husband on the subject, and the notes of the interview indicate that she did not volunteer any additional information. She continued,

"No such thing as polygamy, or spiritual wifery, was taught, publicly or privately, before my husband's death, that I have now, or ever had any knowledge of."
"Did he not have other wives than yourself?"
"He had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have."

The first part of that answer is in keeping with Emma's view, if she believed Joseph when he told her he would "forsake all for her." It is also true in a legal sense, for no plural marriage could be seen as legal in the eyes of the law. Even the last half of that answer could be considered true, if looked at in a strict legal form. Joseph pressed her more closely, "Did he not hold marital relations with women other than yourself?"

"He did not have improper relations with any woman that ever came to my knowledge."

Years earlier Emma had established that she did not pretend to have knowledge of anything that she did not witness herself.51 The choice of "improper relations" rather than "marital relations" also indicates that she may have been side-stepping her sons' questions very adeptly.

"Was there nothing about spiritual wives that you recollect?" they asked.

At one time my husband came to me and asked me if I had heard certain rumors about spiritual marriage, or anything of the kind; and assured me that if I had, that they were without foundation; that there was no such doctrine, and never should be with his knowledge, or consent. I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself, in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise."

Joseph III's belief that establishing his father's innocence would clear his own name and that of his mother, and therefore give legitimacy to the RLDS church,52 caused him to disregard testimony that contradicted his own views. William McLellin had warned him not to take that course only months after he was elevated to president and prophet of the Reorganization. As early as 1861 William McLellin had urged him to ask his mother because she would tell him the truth. Yet he refused to ask her until eighteen years later. By this time he had made such an issue of his own denials that Emma could not disclose all she knew without damaging her son's credibility within the Reorganization.

A month after the interview with her sons, the son of Thomas B. Marsh, an early church apostle, visited Emma. When he asked her if Joseph had been a polygamist, Emma "broke down and wept, and excused herself from answering directly, assigning as a reason . . . that her son was the leader of the Re-organized Church." Marsh interpreted Emma's response as "acknowledgement to him that her husband was a polygamist."53

Joseph and Alexander did not publish "Emma Smith's Last Testimony" until six months after her death, and only after pressure to do so from outside as well as inside the church. Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of Joseph Smith, Jr., responded publicly through the Woman's Exponent. She placed the responsibility for the content of the interview on Joseph and Alexander.
I once dearly loved "Sister Emma," and now, for me to believe that she, a once honored woman, should have sunk so low, even in her own estimation, as to deny what she knew to be true, seems a palpable absurdity. . . . Her son has fastened a stigma on the character of his mother, that can never be erased. 34

Ultimately, Joseph III's quest to clear his father's (and thus the family's) name overshadowed the real strength of the RLDS position which he had enunciated in his first speech to the Reorganization on April 6, 1860: "If such things were done they never were done by Divine Authority." 35

ENDNOTES

4. For the purpose of this study I have tried, for the most part, to use either public accounts or documents that are available either in the RLDS Library and Archives or other repositories outside of Utah. These include microfilm copies of the Joseph Smith, Jr., Diaries and "A Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo" (hereafter cited as Relief Society Minutes) which were included in a 1974 exchange of authenticated documents between the RLDS and LDS churches. Only when I have felt it necessary to broaden the context for a clearer understanding of the issue have I used sources that are available exclusively in the various Utah archives.
6. Salt Lake Tribune, October 6, 1875. This newspaper was independent of church control in Utah and was critical of the Mormons there.
7. William McLellin to Joseph Smith III, (no day) July 1872, RLDS Library and Archives.
10. Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, April 25, 1837, and May 3, 1837. Joseph Smith Letterbook, Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, microfilm copy in RLDS Library and Archives.
12. "Relief Society Minutes, 2nd meeting," March 24, 1842, microfilm of original in LDS Archives and RLDS Library and Archives.
13. Ibid., 3rd meeting, March 30, 1842.
14. Ibid., 4th meeting, April 14, 1842.
15. For Clarissa Marvel's statement, see Relief Society Minutes, 18th meeting, September 28, 1842.
16. For Emma's statement see 6th meeting, April 28, 1842. Agnes Coolbith Smith, widow of Don Carlos Smith, is not included on any lists of Joseph's wives. Fawn Brodie in No Man Knows My History, 469, lists a Mrs. A.***S*** and gives John C. Bennett's History of the Saints; or an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston, 1842), as her source. That the woman in question is a Mrs., and the number of asterisks in the name matches "Agnes Smith" suggest that it is she to whom he alluded. Willard Richards and Joseph dined with Agnes Smith January 17, 1842, see Joseph Smith, Jr., Diary, Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Archives, microfilm RLDS Library and Archives, see also D. Michael Quinn, "Latter-day Sact Prayer Circles" Brigham Young University Studies 19, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 79-105.
17. This article does not appear in the March 30 Relief Society minutes, but is inserted after the last meeting of 1842 on September 28. The secretary was absent "at the time of its reading else it would have appeared in its proper place."
18. Joseph presented an elaborate theological framework when he taught the principle of plural marriage to others. The basis for those teachings can be found in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132. Evidence that William Marks and others heard this read as a revelation appears elsewhere in this paper. There is no evidence that Bennett was hampered by either theological or ethical considerations.
20. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality. Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 142-55. Hereafter cited as *Religion and Sexuality*. For evidence that Joseph believed and taught that plural marriage was a commandment of God see LDS Doctrine and Covenants, 132. Also see Danel Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith and the Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1976), hereafter cited as "Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith," available at the RLDS Library and Archives. Bachman has done a remarkable job of pulling together the various accounts of Joseph's teaching the practice to various individuals. Traditionally the RLDS position has been to reject documents in the LDS Archives as being suspect in nature. In light of the additional evidence from the RLDS Library and Archives, that position must be reconsidered.

21. George A. Smith to Joseph Smith III, October 9, 1869, RLDS Library and Archives.


23. Relief Society Minutes, 6th meeting, April 28, 1842.

24. Vienna Jacques, whom Joseph III had heard was a plural wife of his father, told her story when he visited her in the Utah territory in 1876. Joseph III said of that interview, "I need not attempt to relate all the communication which passed between us," then proceeded with the parts of the conversation that supported his position of his father's innocence in the practice of plural marriage.

25. Relief Society Minutes, 8th meeting, n.d., 1842.

26. Danel Bachman in "Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith," Appendix C, 333-36, lists forty-eight women who were possibly married to Joseph Smith. Although Bachman says that some of these are questionable, most can be documented. The marriages listed here are only those with a known date. Bachman also included a Mrs. A.S. with no known date. This is Agnes Coolbrith Smith, widow of Joseph's brother Don Carlos. She became Joseph's plural wife early in 1842. Bachman named twelve more women who were presumed to have been married to Joseph by the spring of 1843: Fanny Alger, Lucinda Morgan, Delcena Johnson, Mrs. Durlee, Sally Fuller, Sarah Cleveland, Flora Woodworth, Hanna Ellis, Olive G. Frost, Sylvia Sessions, Sarah Lawrence and her lawrence (listed as Mona Lawrence). The rest of the forty-eight he lists were either married after the spring of 1843, or their date of marriage is not known, or they have questionable documentation as plural wives of Joseph Smith. For short biographical sketches of most of the above women, see Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, Appendix C, 457-88. To date the best discussion of children fathered by Joseph Smith, Jr., through his plural wives can be found in Bachman's thesis, 136-42. See also Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 156-59.


28. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, October 13, 1832, RLDS Library and Archives; Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, May 18, 1834, RLDS Library and Archives; Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, January 20, 1840, Chicago Historical Society: Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, August 16, 1842, *History of the Church* 5:103.


30. The three short quotations in this paragraph come from Andrew Jensen, comp., *Historical Record* 6:240: U.S. Circuit Court, Testimony, 241 (answers to question 31); and Emily D. P. Young, "Incidents in the Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge," typescript, 5, University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.


32. For Emma and Joseph's sealing date, see Diary of Joseph Smith, May 28, 1843, LDS Archives, microfilm of original in RLDS Library and Archives. Part of this entry is written in the now discontinued Taylor shorthand. La Jene Purcell, Harold B. Lee Library, aided Andrew F. Ehat in transcribing portions of the shorthand, thus revealing the sealing date for Emma and Joseph. Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 61-62.


35. Ibid.

36. Diary of Joseph Smith, July 13, 1843.

37. William Clayton Statement, Jensen, *Historical Record*, 226. Isaac Sheen, who later became editor of the Saints' *Herald*, discussed the doctrine of plural marriage in the March 1860 issue of that publication, then wrote that Joseph "caused the revelation on that subject to be burned."


39. Diary of Joseph III, April 20, 1885, RLDS Library and Archives.

40. Mary Bailey Norman to Ina Coolbrith, March 27, 1908, RLDS Library and Archives.


42. William Marks, "Epistle of Wm. Marks. ..." Zion's Harbinger and Baneemey's Organ, July 1853, p. 53. There are at least two similar accounts by Marks. They are William Marks to Isaac Sheen, October 23, 1859, published in the *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 1 (January 1860):22,23; and William Marks to Hiram Falk and Josiah Butterfield, October 1, 1865, RLDS Library and Archives.

43. Joseph Smith, Jr., to Sarah and Maria Lawrence, June 23, 1844, LDS Archives. Mark Hofman found this document in the same papers in which he found the transcript of Joseph Smith, Jr.'s blessing of Joseph III.

44. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, June 23, 1844, RLDS Library and Archives.

45. Emily D. P. Young, "Incidents in the Early Life of Emily Dow Partridge." December 1876, p. 5, University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections.


48. Journal of W. W. Blair, June 13 and 17, 1874, RLDS Library and Archives. Only five years earlier on June 16, 1869, Hyrum Smith's daughter in Utah signed an affidavit that Emma had discussed the marriage of the Lawrence and Partridge sisters with her. It states: "I Lovina Walker hereby certify, that while I was living with Aunt Emma Smith, in Fulton City, Fulton Co., Illinois, in the year 1846, that she told me, that she, Emma Smith was present and witnessed the marrying or sealing of Eliza Partridge, Emily Partridge, Maria Lawrence, and Sarah Lawrence to her husband, Joseph Smith, and that she gave her consent thereto." Joseph F. Smith Affidavit book No. 1, vault, LDS Archives.

49. Saints' Advocate 2, no. 4 (October 1879):49-52.

50. Ibid., Saints' Herald 26:289-90. All questions and answers quoted directly or paraphrased during this interview are as they appear in these sources.

51. Emma Smith to Mr. Gregg, April 21, 1846, Buddy Youngreen collection. Used with permission. In this letter Emma responded to questions about historical events in Nauvoo, "Everything that has not come within my immediate observation remains doubtful in my mind until some circumstance occurs to prove the report either true or false."


53. Marsh's conversation with Emma is related in a letter from Lorenzo Snow to Francis M. Lyman, August 10, 1901, "Correspondence to the First Presidency, January 1901—May 1902," vol. 36, LDS Church Archives.

54. Woman's Exponent 8 (November 1, 1896): 85.

55. Amboy Times, Illinois, April 12, 1860.
Imogene Goodyear

Joseph Smith and Polygamy: An Alternative View

For RLDS members, historical inquiry can be described as a "continual going out of Egypt"—a constant freeing process. At its best it is approached with confidence in ourselves and a mature response to the scriptural injunction to "seek knowledge" which is in the best tradition of our forebears. Richard Howard, in his paper "The Changing RLDS Response to Mormon Polygamy: A Preliminary Analysis," has used both in his research and conclusions and should be commended for providing a crack through which we may be delivered out of our bondage of institutional illusion and selectivity of historical data from which we have formed our sense of identity.

The "crack" to some will represent danger—the beginnings of a flaw in the structure of the RLDS religious tradition which could widen and destroy what is now a fortress of strength and security surrounding them. To others it is a long overdue official breakthrough which will allow the light of scholarship to illuminate the tradition, its material, and construction.

"All true knowledge is inherently hazardous," Michael Polanyi tells us, "just as all true faith is a leap into the unknown."3 A more comprehensive look at our history will, however, allow us the freedom to travel through it and experience the power which Sterling McMurrin sees as a significantly liberalizing force.

There is no intellectual pursuit more calculated to make a free person of an ordinary person. . . . The study of history profoundly, in its depth and breadth . . . provides insight into the predicaments that we are in and how we come to be in them.2

He adds that those who are aware of history are freed from the blinders imposed by their own time. This allows them to know more about themselves and their "world by knowing more of others and their world."3

McMurrin admits, however, that the impact of such inquiry into the history of religion gives the believer a rough time:

The experience of coming face-to-face with the past of [our] religion may radically change [our] religious views and commitments, but in the process [our] faith in God may become even stronger and [our] religious ideas more profound and more meaningful.4

I believe that this can be the positive result of our search for historical knowledge about Joseph Smith and polygamy. Our church historian has had the courage to risk that this will happen. Discretion is indeed, however, the better part of valor, and to describe his paper as "A Preliminary Analysis" was certainly a discretionary precaution which could serve to help protect him from attack from many sides.

The paper begins with an overview of Joseph III's tenacious stance proclaiming his father's noninvolvement in polygamy despite strong evidence to the contrary. In the second part of the paper the argument is developed that "Mormon polygamy's inception came during the Nauvoo era, and was an outgrowth of the emerging system of temple rituals at
Nauvoo from 1840 to 1844." The third part is a review of the early responses of certain Nauvoo personalities to the fact of polygamy among them. Nine points of summary and conclusion follow.

To me the theory proposed in this paper constitutes too easy an answer for so complex an issue as the introduction of polygamy into the Mormon church. The author narrowed his use of sources—none of them are from Utah Mormon data—and those he chose allow him to build a theory which is politically expedient. This weakens his argument considerably as it imposes constraints which result in a limited view and analysis of the lives and relationships of people in the early church, and diminishes the quality of scholarship.

A major flaw is the absence of any reference to the humanness of Joseph Smith who enjoyed immense power as the head of a male-dominated hierarchical priesthood system which had unquestioned authority over the members. What effect did this unrestricted power have on his reasoning and judgments? It would be naive to assume that he was immune to the corruption that such power brings. Lawrence Foster suggests that the Mormon movement fits into a pattern consistent with new radical movements that pass through three "rites of passage":

1. A breakdown of an old order
2. An intermediary or a "liminal" period when neither the old nor the new standards are in effect
3. A reaggregation or establishment of a new order

According to Foster, the "liminal" phase is especially applicable to the Mormons:

In such an intermediary state, an individual is suspended between two worlds, between an old order that is dying and a new order that is yet to be born. A person's position is then ambiguous: "he [or she] passes through the cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." A feeling of intense comradeship ... and exhilaration is experienced. ... Men and women become malleable, capable of being molded by their leaders into new cultural forms. ... This intense sense of camaraderie, combined with an implicit trust in the authority of their leaders, is clearly indicated [in Nauvoo].

How was the total personality of Joseph involved in his leadership style and his thinking as he attempted to mold his followers into the perfect society? Howard's picture leaves out some commonly known facts about Joseph: his authoritarianism, his propensity to use prophecy as a manipulative tool, his extraordinary power over people, his charisma. In the paper, Joseph is seen as rational, compassionate, and nonsexual. Heilbroner has pointed out that

a complete vision of human nature demands thoughtful consideration of mountains of evidence that [persons] do not spontaneously do what is considered good and just, once they are freed from certain restrictions. ... The deepest weakness of the vision of transcendent society propounded by Utopian socialists is the failure to formulate a conception of human behavior in all its historical, sociological, sexual, and ideational complexity, a conception that would present [human beings] as being at once biologic as well as social, tragic as well as heroic, limited as well as plastic.

The image of the church as nonpolygamous has too long replaced responsible inquiry into the political and personal relationships between men and women in Nauvoo. Howard's paper introduces the subject but doesn't take us very far. His conclusion that the introduction of polygamy into Nauvoo was "accidental" is simplistic and serves as a "stopper" in our efforts to understand and learn from what happened in Nauvoo.

What were the political relationships between men and women in Nauvoo? What were the dynamics of the social situation? Foster sees the Nauvoo period as a time when the Mormons were

attempting to overcome the ... Jacksonian individualism which surrounded them. They were seeking a total solution ... in which religious and social life were inextricably intertwined, and the good of the community took precedence over ... self-interest. ... In some respects, plural marriage may be seen as an outgrowth of characteristic American values, in particular, an attempt to restore earlier patriarchal patterns in marriage that were under attack.
Joseph Smith could have been aware of the women's movement which had its beginnings in the same "burned-over district" where he first began his own search for truth, and this could have influenced his thinking. According to Foster,

Joseph Smith's driving concern to overcome the religious confusion both within and outside himself must almost certainly have led to reflections on the family and sexual disharmony prevalent in the socially troubled region of western New York in which he grew up in the 1820s. The problems associated with rapid economic expansion, mobility, and competing value systems had already produced widespread marriage experimentation in this region. Such movements as the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists were only the tip of the iceberg of dissatisfaction with prevailing marriage, family, and sex roles. . . . Joseph Smith, with his wide-ranging interests and travel . . . must have been familiar with both the problems and the experimentation, and . . . thought about the way in which personal relationships between men and women should be handled.11

The view of women in the early history of our country as it came to us from English common law saw women as having "many duties, but few rights."

Married women in particular suffered "civil death," having no right to property and no legal entity or existence apart from their husbands. . . . Next to common law, the most potent force in maintaining women's subordinate position was religion. . . . The "Lady's Books" of colonial days spelled out in detail a woman's responsibilities—and limitations; they also dwelt on the desirability of her virtue, in contrast to the latitude permitted her husband. She was advised to keep any knowledge she might have of his extramarital activities to herself.12

The issue of women's subordination was raised early in our history, and by the early part of the nineteenth century the spirit of equality for women, particularly for educational opportunities and legal and property rights, was strong. The women who were active in the movement—feeling an emotional connection with the oppressed—were also active in the anti-slavery movement. Resistance to women's involvement in the abolition movement was particularly strong in the religious world. A pastoral letter from the Council of Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts denounced their behavior as "un-Christian and unwomanly."

We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury. . . . When woman assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer . . . she yields the power which God has given her for her protection. . . . If the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean on the trellis-work . . . thinks to assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but will fall in shame and dishonor into the dust.13

The "cult of true womanhood" became a principle from which women were to form their identity and fulfill their roles in social relationships.

We do not know how the women at Nauvoo felt or what they might have been thinking about these issues. I believe we can assume, however, that there was little consciousness of what this radical movement might mean in their lives. If they felt restless and had questions about their role or the sexual injustice that was being challenged in the larger society, these were no doubt quieted by the trust they had in their leaders. It seems reasonable to assume that the women might have had some response to this social issue, however, and that as a result Joseph might have felt some threat to his ideas of male supremacy in his new order. Foster cites a pamphlet defending polygamy printed by the Mormon press in 1842, titled The Peace Maker, or the Doctrine of the Millenium, as evidence of Joseph's reaction to the women's movement.

The pamphlet seems deliberately vague concerning its authorship. An "Udney Hay Jacob" is indicated as the author. The "Preface" . . . states: "the author of this work is not a Mormon, although he is printed by their press. . . . But the public will soon find
out what he is, by his work.” On the title page, however, Jacob was identified as “an Israelite, and a Shepherd of Israel”—implying a leadership position in the Church. Beneath that was a note: “J. Smith, Printer.”

Although Joseph disclaimed authorship, the pamphlet contained ideas “strikingly similar to those Smith was formulating at the time as the rationale for temple sealing ceremonies connected in part with polygamy.”

Foster sees this pamphlet as a significant resource “providing an insight into some of the larger social purposes which underlay the attempt to introduce Mormon plural marriage.” He summarizes the contents under three primary assertions:

1. Patriarchal authority and related patterns of male-female roles in the home and in society must be restored if social chaos is to be avoided.
2. To establish patriarchal authority and end this social disorder, a true or “biblical” standard of divorce must be re instituted. It would allow women whose affections had become irrevocably alienated from their husbands to be divorced by them. Thus the atmosphere of the home would not become poisoned because women were held in wedlock against their will.
3. As a counterpart to restoring the supposedly “biblical” standard of divorce, polygamy, the “biblical” form of marriage, must be re instituted. Polygamy would allow men to reassert their proper authority and leadership.

Underlying this three-fold argument is the assumption that only by the reestablishment of such a patriarchal basis for social authority can the true order of Christ’s church on earth be realized. Foster reasons that “whatever the origin of this argument, it is a coherent theory which plausibly suggests some possible reasons for the preoccupation of Mormon leadership with introducing polygamy, the ‘patriarchal family system’ in Nauvoo.”

According to Howard, emphasis “on the exaltation of the priesthood with its exclusive authority” was a prominent feature of Joseph’s theory. Under this principle, women had to be sealed to men to be saved. In this Joseph revealed his view of women as property which was similar to the Old Testament view. A statement by Joseph in 1838 further establishes him in the biblical patriarchal tradition:

“On the Duty of Husband and Wife”
It is the duty of a husband to love, cherish, and nourish his wife, and cleave unto her and none else; he ought to honor her as himself, and he ought to regard her feelings with tenderness, for she is his flesh, and his bone, designed to be an help unto him, both in temporal and spiritual things; one into whose bosom he can pour all his complaints without reserve, who is willing (being designed) to take part of his burden, to soothe and encourage his feelings by her gentle voice. It is the place of the man, to stand at the head of his family, and be lord of his own house, not to rule over his wife as a tyrant, neither as one who is fearful or jealous that his wife will get out of her place, and prevent him from exercising his authority. It is his duty to be a man of God (for a man of God is a man of wisdom) ready at all times to obtain from the scriptures, the revelations, and from on high, such instructions as are necessary for the edification and salvation of his household. And on the other hand, it is the duty of the wife to be in subjection to her husband at all times, not as a servant, neither as one who fears a tyrant, or a master, but as one, who, in meekness, and the love of God, regards the laws and institutions of Heaven, looks up to her husband for instruction, edification and comfort. “Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”

—First Peter, 3rd 6th.

This concept of patriarchy espoused by Joseph Smith certainly must be considered as a significant aspect of the relationships between men and women in Mormonism.

Howard in his paper, though it is named “Changing RLDS Response,” evidences a reluctance to change our image of our founder—a tendency to keep Joseph, as it were, “pure.” He concedes that polygamy originated with Joseph, but calls it “an accident” of history, thus continuing the Joseph III rhetoric of his father’s innocence. Who can be blamed for an accident? So, what is changing? Joseph is still blameless—a victim of circumstances beyond his control.
How strong was the influence of Emma's feelings on Joseph? It appears that he loved her and felt internal conflict about his introduction of polygamy. If he did indeed repent of this action, did she have anything to do with it? Her strong resistance to it is well-known in our folklore. Whatever happened, Emma steadfastly opposed polygamy with its humiliation of women, and successfully instilled in her sons a sense of outrage about it. I believe we should acknowledge that the Mormons are the true successors of Joseph's theological and societal framework and, in a sense, he belongs to them, not us. It would be more logical for us to claim our faith as it comes down to us through Emma's son.

What is our faith? What is it based on? Joseph III's passion to prove his father's innocence gave the Reorganization an identity crisis. We have confused that struggle with our faith, making it the basis of our commitment. We have been captive to a history of distortion which has kept us from embracing the realities of our story in all its pain—thus preventing our growth. Frederick Buechner reminds us how important it is to hear God's voice in every detail of our history:

*If God speaks to us at all in this world . . . it is into our personal lives . . . God speaks through events in all their complexity and variety through the harmonies and disharmonies and counterpoint of all that happens.*

What is God saying to us in our exploration? Our history is not our faith; it is our story. It is an integral part of us, embedded in our bones, and it comes forth in our emotions both painful and joyous, and in our knowledge of truth, both simple and profound. It is the basis on which we make moral judgments as we attempt to form a workable theology for our living.

If our faith is based on our commitments within our system of moral judgments, it is important to understand how those judgments are made. Lawrence Kohlberg uses a classic moral dilemma to test children's moral development. Children were told the story of Heinz who considers whether or not to steal a drug, which he cannot afford to buy, in order to save his wife. The dilemma set up as a conflict between the values of property and life was responded to by boys who brought deductive logic to the problem of the differentiation of morality from law.

Carol Gilligan, in her book *In a Different Voice,* discusses the differences between the boys' and girls' responses to the dilemma. (These girls were rated less morally mature than the boys by Kohlberg.) Amy's response was to analyze the problem in terms of relationships. The problem, for Amy, arises not from the druggist's assertion of his right to be paid, but his failure to respond to human need. Amy asserts that if the druggist knew the situation, a way would be worked out for the wife to receive the drug.

The responses to Kohlberg's dilemma illustrate the difference in moral judgment as a dichotomy of right and wrong, from judgment that

- *sees in the dilemma not a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships that extends over time.*
- *Amy sees a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules.*

In other words, the dilemma was not right to property versus right to life, but "actual consequences that the violation of these rights will have in the lives of the people involved."

It is this type of judgment we must use to examine polygamy in our church's history. We know little about the conditions of life in Nauvoo. We know little about the consequences of the doctrine of polygamy for the everyday lives of men and women in Nauvoo. Despite our best historical efforts we are detached from Nauvoo and Joseph Smith's mind and soul. What we do know is a son's desire to clear his father's name against damaging historical evidence. What we must acknowledge is the destructiveness of manipulating history to emphasize what we are against instead of what we are for.

The polygamy in our history *does* make a difference. We must not make the answers to the hard questions too easy. Using systems of logic alone to interpret our story keeps us detached from the perplexities in our history and causes us to miss the real questions—and the pursuit of answers. Writing history for the faithful which does not sacrifice truth requires a special kind of courage. May that standard continue to be upheld as we delve into the story of our particular sacred journey.
ENDNOTES

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 166, 167.
10. Foster, 139.
11. Ibid., 131.
13. The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. 1, p. 61, as quoted in Flexner, 46.
14. Foster, 174, 175.
15. Ibid., 175.
16. Ibid., 176.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 177.
23. Ibid., 95.
Outstanding among my early memories are those of my family sitting around the dinner table, evenings or on Sundays, listening to my father tell stories. He was a wonderful teller of tales and in those days I believed them all. He would tell us about homesteading in Canada when he was eighteen: the winters were so cold that he and his older brother, Albert, slept between two mattresses; the mosquitos were so huge in the summer that they flew away with clothes from the line and food from the cooking pots. He told us about growing up in a sod house in Nebraska and wanting to go to school so bad that he would hang onto the back of the teacher’s little one-seat buggy and half-run, half-ride the five miles to school. He also told us his parents found him in a watermelon, which made me realize his stories were definitely suspect.

My father told other wonderful stories about his grandfather and great uncle, George and Charles Derry, early English converts to Mormonism who later immigrated to the United States. There were tales of the seemingly endless ocean voyage and the overland trek West, tales of Uncle Charles and his family living in Utah and fleeing “that terrible place” to George’s homestead in Fontenelle, Nebraska; there were tales of Uncle Charles going back to England as the first Reorganite missionary and pawning his overcoat in order to receive his mail, including the Saints’ Herald, from home. (Interestingly, I never found this account in any of Derry’s diaries or journals.) And, finally, there were tales of Grandfather George coming to Lamoni and opening the harness shop on Main Street, which also offered Lamoni’s first bicycles for rent. My father’s charisma, coupled with his capacity to tell fascinating tales, enabled me to believe his stories, and I was sure both Uncle Charles and Grandfather George were “great”!

As my personal metamorphosis concerning the church, its beliefs, and leadership evolved, I began to struggle more nearly toward truth. It became important for me to find out if the stories I had heard and read about early church leaders, there really was nothing particularly great or unusual about them.

As an adult and a historian, I became interested in knowing more about who Charles Derry—this early church leader and relative of mine—really was. While doing some work in the RLDS Archives on Joseph Smith III, I discovered a good deal of prime source information (diaries, journals, letters, and poetry) written by Charles Derry with which no one had
spent much time. People generally seemed content to read the autobiographical material that had been generated through church publications such as Autumn Leaves, Sunday school quarterlies, and Herald articles.

I have learned a great deal about Charles Derry—perhaps more than I ever wanted to know. In some ways I feel so akin to him that it startles me. In other ways, I do not like him very much. As a twentieth-century woman, I recognize that many of my values will necessarily clash with those of a nineteenth-century man. Understanding this, and knowing that my view of him is palimpsestic—that is, it has been written and erased and written again, with some of the earlier details still showing through—I want to share a bit of Charles Derry with you.

After searching through almost fifty years (1864-1911) of yearly diaries, volumes of letters, four journals written in longhand, and more than two hundred poems, I have chosen to include some general biographical information about Derry which is pertinent to understanding the kind of man he was. In addition, I will explore three specific areas which seem to me to be primary to his ministry and his impact on the Reorganization. These include his opposition to Joseph III's push to have delegates elected to represent members at Conference, his stance in favor of the First Presidency and the High Priests Quorum in their struggle for power and position with the Quorum of Twelve, and his opposition to the Women's Prayer Union.

As a tiny infant, Charles Derry was dedicated to the service of God by his mother, Amelia, who was then a member of the Church of England. That commitment seemed to have pervasive effect on the serious but gentle oldest son of Charles and Amelia Derry. For reasons which Derry never seemed quite able to explain, he grew up with the conviction that he was, in some way, to serve God. Raised in the Church of England, he joined the Baptist church at the age of eighteen and in 1847, when he was twenty-one, he was baptized a Mormon. Just three months later he was ordained an elder and sent out as a traveling missionary, beginning a lifelong career of devotion to God and service, first to the Mormon church, and later to the Reorganized church.

I believe Charles Derry's conversion to the Latter Day Saint church typifies the experience of many nineteenth-century Britains and Europeans as they encountered Mormonism. I was drawn almost immediately to the question as to why he was converted to Mormonism.

As early as 1837 in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith, Jr., determined to send all of the twelve apostles on missions. Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde, along with five elders, were sent to England. M. Hamlin Cannon, in the American Historical Review, suggests that Joseph's decision was a pragmatic cover for the financial chaos which struck after the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Co. The missionaries were to preach five basic points which would focus on the advantages of Mormonism to Britains.

The prospective convert would gain (1) Zion, a sanctuary from the desolation which was sure to sweep over the ungodly world in the last day, (2) all the land one could reasonably cultivate, (3) a guarantee of gainful employment, (4) association with fellow-believers, and (5) equal opportunity with "the best people." This appeal was made at the same time that many British working-class families were being drawn into the fold of Chartism, a movement which marked the beginning of social reform in industrial England. The message of the Mormon missionaries was one which many lower- and middle-class English families were eager to hear and accept. "The British working class were primarily illiterate and underprivileged"; they readily accepted the Mormon message of "good cheer." The missionaries spoke their language, labored with them, lived with them, and their appeal was phrased in familiar homilies and generously interlaced with scriptural authority. Within a few months, Heber C. Kimball and his co-workers had converted nearly fifteen hundred individuals. P.A.M. Taylor writes of the early Mormon message:

Much of the preaching by Mormon missionaries in Britain was to repeat Parley Pratt's statements, "The Sects were false. A true church now again existed, which had all the proofs of apostolic power. It would survive the doom which would soon fall upon the unredeemed world. It would rescue from the destruction all who accepted the true gospel and this in a quite literal way, by organizing their migration to a place of safety. A place of divine order."
It was from a climate of expectation for service to God and the poverty and hopelessness of their position in Staffordshire, that Charles Derry and his family embraced the promises and opportunities offered by Mormonism. It seems to have been the perfect solution for all of his needs and ambitions. A greater-than-self goal!

In 1853 Derry and his family immigrated to Utah. His years there, 1854-59, were ones of hardship and disillusionment with the glorious expectations he had carried with him on the trip to “Zion.” He suffered personal tragedies. The death of his young wife left him alone with two tiny children. He experienced extreme poverty, as well as an increasing disenchantment with the leadership in Utah. During the winter of 1856 he served in the Nauvoo Legion in Cache Valley, and it was during these months that he decided to leave Utah. “My mind was now made up,” he wrote, “to make one more move as soon as I could, for I was satisfied that Brigham and his colleagues had departed from the truth and that the whole system was corrupt.”

Charles Derry, his new wife, and two children left Utah in June of 1859 and traveled to his brother’s homestead in Fontenelle, Nebraska. Of this event Derry wrote, “Here we found my mother and my bro. George, whom my letters had prevented going further west, and with them we had a temporary home.” He rather cryptically described their situation further by writing,

We squatted on a piece of land on Maple Creek and my bro. and I together put in a crop. The season was dry so we did not raise much grain. No team to take the grain to mill, so we ground it in a coffee mill, later borrowed a larger hand mill. No door or floor in the cabin. Wolves howled at night and Indians sometimes prowled around. The situation was anything but pleasant.

It was from Maple Creek, Nebraska, that Charles Derry walked the forty some miles to Council Bluffs, to learn more about the Reorganization. He was baptized on March 3, 1861, ordained an elder, and immediately sent out as a traveling missionary to St. Louis and Utah. In 1863 Derry went to Nauvoo for the first time to meet with Joseph Smith III before being sent on a mission to England. Almost from their first meeting, Joseph and Derry seemed to have a special friendship and unusual closeness. Their correspondence, which spans the long years of their ministry together, suggests the warp and woof of the early Reorganization. They did not always agree on issues, but their esteem for and understanding of one another somehow bridged the difficult times. Charles Derry returned from England and in 1865 was ordained an apostle in the Quorum of Twelve. On his return, he often served as Joseph’s spokesperson; he would be asked to write in support of a favorite cause for the Herald or lend his support to a specific issue raised on the Conference floor. Joseph was extremely upset by Derry’s adamant decision to resign from the Quorum of Twelve: however, he gallantly fought and won the battle of legitimacy for the Quorum of High Priests in Derry’s behalf. Perhaps their relationship is best characterized by two letters written by Joseph III to Charles Derry. The first was written on June 10, 1868, in response to Derry’s concern over a recent Conference and his repeated urgings to Joseph to infuse tighter censorship on articles appearing in the Herald. Joseph explained to Derry why he felt he could not do this and closed his letter by writing,

For your kind assurances of brotherly support I feel most truly thankful. I have found so few men in my life of whom I could say, "I know where he stands" that I the more prize the true and tried. Not many among the Saints seem to know or care the extent of my cares or the solitude of my position, fewer still afford to me that which I have often felt was my due to make me a successful man. . . . The dreariness of being daily misunderstood, you, yourself have felt. I am misunderstood.

On May 27, 1911, Joseph dictated a letter to be sent to Derry and closed it by expressing his feelings of closeness.

We again agree as we did when we trudged our way to Keokuk, Nashville, Montrose, and other places in those days of 1864-65. What blessed memories crowd in upon me these days! I remember one trip especially from Keokuk, in which we made twelve and one-half miles in six hours, whiling away our time in conversation, sometimes grave, sometimes cheerful, but what a day that was—a day of blessed memory.

For almost fifty years, Charles Derry was involved in most of the major decision making, doctrinal and procedural changes, quorum realignments, and editorial policies that were at
Charles Derry and wife, Eliza, circa 1857.

Charles Derry.
issue in the Reorganization. Woven in and around all of these issues and struggles were his daily routine and duties as a traveling missionary in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska. Derry early settled his family in Magnolia, Iowa; having a permanent home for his beloved family was of primary importance to him, and its comfort and cleanliness was a pervasive topic in his diaries. His years of work are probably best described in a single diary entry of December 31, 1882.

During this year, I have preached one hundred twenty-two discourses, baptized ten persons, delivered my exhortations in public and private. Have visited widows and others. Administered to the sick by night and by day. Have used my influence on behalf of Sabbath Schools and Camp Meetings. Have written various articles for the Herald, also private letters on doctrine to strengthen members in the church as well as ordaining men to the ministry and have tried to be in harmony with my Brethren without compromising principles.

In addition to his daily ministerial duties, Derry was involved in the shifting policies which characterized the early Reorganization. There seem to have been three basic issues which emerged during the years of his ministry and the presidency of Joseph Smith III which have had far-reaching effects on the character and personality of the Reorganized church. The first of these was a procedural struggle brought into focus by Joseph III’s determination to have elected delegates represent church members at Conference, rather than the officers and traveling ministry automatically filling that role. Charles Derry was firmly opposed to electing local delegates to represent congregations at Conference. His opposition was strong despite the affirmative stand which Joseph took on this issue, and Derry was never fully convinced that Joseph’s plan was legal or workable.

As early as the spring of 1881, Derry was writing in the Herald voicing his opposition to the concept of representation by delegation and urging the deferment of the question until the next semi-annual Conference. In April of that year he wrote,

I learn that General Conference adopted The Report of Committee on Representation. This excludes high priests from a voice in General Conference unless they are on a General Mission or are sent as a delegate. To me, this seems unjust. . . . I fear that Joseph, as Chairman, of the above committee has cut off his firmest supporters in excluding high priests from Conference as Ex-Officio members.

By July the controversy had widened and there appears to have been a good deal of local resentment because Joseph had refused to publish an article which Derry had written for the Herald in defense of his position. Derry recorded,

Some of the bro. want me to publish my protest against the action of the Gen. Conf. on Representation in the county paper. I am not anxious to give the world a chance to laugh at the church. I believe we can right all wrongs within the church without publishing our weaknesses to the world. There is strong feeling about Joseph not publishing my article. I wrote to Joseph.

Despite the protests of Derry and many others, the Conference of 1881 began the painful process of approving the elected delegates. Derry reported that the first three afternoons were spent in “contention about the admission of delegates.” It was during this Conference that Zenas Gurley, Jr., presented an amendment that high priests should be allowed as ex-officio delegates at Conference. Days of discussion followed. Charles Derry wrote on September 8 that “eight sessions of about six hours each were spent on contentions. Those opposed to Gurley’s amendment had blacked the wheels all they could. I was disgusted.” And, on September 10, he recorded in his diary,

I returned home tired and dispirited. The first time in 34 years. I felt like weeping to see the valuable time of conference wasted in quibbling and strife for mastery. . . . Four of the Twelve voted for high priests and two for Elders to be admitted as members, ex-officio to General Conference and thank God we gained the day.

This was a conflict in which Derry appears to have won the battle but lost the war. From time to time he wrote of the inefficiency and difficulties involved in having elected delegates to conferences, and as late as the April Conference of 1886 he still yearned for the “old methods used before the Rules of Order and the Rules of Representation” came into effect.
The second controversy in which Charles Derry was deeply involved was his effort to win a place of recognition and power for the Quorum of High Priests, a body of which he was elected president in 1871. This resulted in an ongoing struggle with the Quorum of Twelve concerning their power. From the time he resigned from the Quorum of Twelve in 1869, Derry seemed to be at odds with what he often called "that illustrious group." His quarrel with the Twelve probably had something to do with his personal reasons for leaving that body. In his letter of resignation, written to Joseph in the spring of 1869, Derry stated,

I think I have good evidence that God did not call me to be an apostle from the fact that I have not and never did have any evidence that He called me to that high position. Other's claim that they have evidence that I was called of God, but Apostle's go not by other men's evidence. They must have it for themselves.

Though Derry never spoke publicly against individuals in the Quorum of Twelve, he inferred in much of his writing that he believed the Twelve constantly usurped power which really belonged to the First Presidency. The struggle for legitimacy for the High Priests Quorum, and Derry's desire for it to be under the direct supervision of the First Presidency, surfaced openly in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Derry received a long letter from W. W. Blair of the First Presidency in June of 1893. Blair wrote,

Since 1884 and the Stewartsville Conference many doubts and fears and evil forebodings have forced themselves upon my mind. To my mind, that conf. or the illegal motion of the Twelve did more to confuse, distract and hinder the work of the church, than all else put together in the last twenty years. God revealed to me in June of 1885 (I think), that the Twelve were out of their place in respect to their Epistle of 1884. In our conferences important question of law and doctrine and church government are raised and inexperienced ministers and lay delegates are invited and urged to vote down the advice and counsel and instructions of the First Presidency on said matters and when the vote is put we see the votes of the presidency killed by two votes of Lay Delegates (perhaps women) from Illinois, Nebraska or Canada! Is that God's order of Gov't! Nay—the Lord has ordained that his people shall hearken to his voice and the voice of his servants whom I have appointed! God has ordained that the presidency and its counsellors are of such authority and power in church affairs that their decisions are final!

Some days later, Derry responded in his diary, "To all that Bro. Blair has written, I heartily subscribe. . . . It grieves my heart to see the presidency treated as they have been both at conferences and in the Herald." And, finally, on a lighter note, Derry wrote that he had just received a letter from his "bro. George" telling him of a sermon that had been preached in Lamoni. The minister had suggested in the course of his sermon that he could see no use for the High Priests Quorum, whose main function was to preside and minister in the stakes of Zion. Since the church had no stakes, there was really no reason to have high priests. Derry responded by writing,

If we follow this line of reasoning then I might suggest that the function of the Quorum of Twelve is to minister to missions abroad and since we have no overseas missions, then obviously we have no need for the Quorum of Twelve!

Seeming to cement his feelings on this issue was a diary entry written on March 22, 1893. "I firmly believe it to be the duty of the Twelve to preside over the work in the world but not over the church in its gathered condition."

The third divisive issue in which Charles Derry took a firm stance was his opposition to the Women's Prayer Union. This organization was begun in 1886 by Eleanor Keeney and was supported and publicized by Marietta Walker through the Mother's Home Column in the Saints' Herald. The purpose of the Prayer Union was to strengthen and link the women of the church together through meetings and prayer groups. On July 21, 1891, Derry made a diary entry concerning an article which he had written titled "God's Means of Grace." "It's object," he stated, "was to show that God had provided every means of grace necessary for our progress and perfection, hence we did not need any further organized means for that purpose." Derry wrote that the more he read and re-read the article, and shared it with others, the more determined he felt about sending it to the Herald. "It's publication," he wrote later, "caused quite a flutter in the Prayer Union and many letters were written on both sides." However, with President Smith's public endorsement of Derry's article, the
Prayer Union began to encounter stiff resistance on many sides. In his article, Derry expressed his opposition to women meeting together in what he termed “unauthorized meetings and organizations that are independent of the order which God had given.” He also wrote, “The Prayer Union, with President, Secretary and Treasurer, panders to the spirit which is so blatant about Women’s Rights and is likely to create a thirst for power and place!”

It has been observed that the women who attend the Prayer Union meetings and are particularly active, very often absent themselves from the regular branch meetings. The women often even boast of the superiority of the Prayer Union meetings over the Branch meetings. We only oppose them drawing off in secret organizations by themselves and appointing officers, independent of those whom God has provided and assuming to act by themselves independent and to the exclusion of Male Member Officials, because in doing so we felt they were exposing themselves to danger from false spiritual influences and thereby endangering the Church at Large.

At the conclusion of this lengthy diary entry, Charles Derry wrote,

*I wish to record here that I am glad that I wrote and sent the article, “God’s Means Of Grace” to the Herald, for it has caused many to consider what they are doing and opened their eyes to evils that were budding forth unobserved and it placed many on their guard.*

This official opposition, led by Charles Derry and supported by Joseph III, and the resulting demise of the Women’s Prayer Union, established a role for women in the Reorganized church which remains essentially unchanged today.

And now, after spending so many hours and so much energy getting to know Charles Derry through his writings, I am left with such a mixture of information and frustrations that it is hard to find a place to put him. For instance, I am appalled by his simplistic views toward right and wrong. Here was a man who represented himself as a minister and a member of the body of Christ and yet felt completely comfortable explaining the deaths of two young twin sisters as having been caused “because they went to dances and parties.” Here was a man who, on the one hand, refused to administer to a woman dying of cancer because she had “left the faith,” and who, on the other hand, spent hours of his time reading to people who could not read and giving comfort and love to many who were ill or dying or simply seeking his advice and counsel.

I cannot help but wonder if I had known Charles Derry as my father did, would I have loved him too? If my world had been nineteenth-century western Iowa, realizing how restrictive and small that world really was, would he have represented “the church” to me? When I struggle toward the Reorganite mind-set of one hundred years ago, I begin to believe that Derry was indeed the quintessential traveling missionary. He did represent the attitudes, ideas, and ideals of his generation of church members. In many ways he was their spokesperson. He involved himself in all the realities of their lives, and he lovingly cared for or rebuked them as the circumstances demanded. He had the answers for all of their problems, and thus represented to them a base of security which is fundamental to many. It was only in his diary, in his private moments, that he expressed his own doubts and fears and agonies. In his diary on January 21, 1892, Charles Derry wrote, “I find it is quite a task for me to conquer the evils of my nature: envy and jealousies would destroy me but I seek God’s help to overcome.”

I believe that although Charles Derry was not “great,” he was beloved by many.

Often people are only “great” during their own generation—in their own time frame. Later generations can love, admire, or hate them; they can prod and probe into events and decisions, but they can never really understand. The reality can only be dimly perceived as it shows through from a previous generation. Each new generation writes and erases and writes again over the one which came before. The influence of Charles Derry on the Reorganization, and the events of his life, may best be described by the closing scene from Camelot. In despair, Arthur prepares for the last great battle of his life when he suddenly encounters a young lad, Tom, who offers to him one remaining hope for the future. Arthur realizes that if he can keep Tom safe and alive, for as long as he lives, Tom can tell Arthur’s story. The next generation will know “that once there was a spot—for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.” An aide, Pellinore, reminds Arthur that he must
hurry on because they have a battle to fight and Arthur responds, radiantly, "Battle? I've won my battle, Pelly. Here's my victory!" He sends Tom running to safety behind the lines. In response to Pellinore's inquiry of, "Who is that?" Arthur replies, "One of what we all are, Pelly. Less than a drop in the great blue motion of the sunlit sea. But it seems that some of the drops sparkle, Pelly. Some of them do sparkle."  

ENDNOTES

1. Charles Derry, "History of Charles Derry, September 1874-December 1883." P9, No. 43, Charles Derry Journals and Papers, RLDS Library and Archives, The Auditorium, Independence, MO. All manuscript sources cited herein are housed in the RLDS Library and Archives, and unless otherwise noted are in P9, Charles Derry Journals and Papers.


3. Ibid.


7. A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City, 1930). Presidents of British missions during these early years were Parley Pratt, April, 1841-1843; Thomas Ward, October, 1842-1843; Reuben Hedlock, November, 1843-1845; Wilford Woodruff, February, 1845-1846; Orson Hyde, October, 1846-1847; ad interim—Franklin D. Richards, January, 1847-February, 1847; Orson Spencer, February, 1847-1852.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Joseph Smith III to Charles Derry, June 10, 1868, P15 f4, Joseph Smith III Papers; Joseph Smith III to Charles Derry, August 20, 1866, No. 36.


15. May 22, 1870, June 15, 1870, July 31, 1882, November 15, 1882, November 16, 1882, December 1, 1882, and February 9, 1883, diary entries.

16. January 1, 1887 diary entry, No. 1; July 25, 1887 diary entry, No. 8.

17. July 25, 1887 diary entry, No. 8.

18. March 4, 1887, diary entry, No. 4.

19. April 17, 1887, diary entry, No. 4.

20. July, 1881, diary entry, No. 4.

21. September 2, 1881, diary entry, No. 4.

22. September 8, 1881, diary entry, No. 4.

23. September 10, 1881, diary entry, No. 4; December 25, 1892, diary entry (Views on Rep. to Conf.), No. 10.

24. April 9, 1883, diary entry, No. 10; April 19, 1886, diary entry, No. 10.

25. Charles Derry to Joseph Smith III, March 21, 1869, No. 36.

26. January 1, 1885, and April 1, 1888, diary entries, No. 44.

27. W. W. Blair to Charles Derry, June 6, 1893, No. 10; Charles Derry, History of 1874-1883, No. 43; General Conference Resolutions, 1852-1907, No. 278, No. 279, 74-76. Lamoni, Iowa, Published by Board of Publications.


29. George Derry to Charles Derry, November 17, 1889, No. 9.

30. March 22, 1893, diary entry, No. 10.


32. July 21, 1891, diary entry, No. 9.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. March 22, 1893, diary entry, No. 10.

36. Ibid.

37. May 18, 1893, diary entry, No. 10; for cause and effect attitudes, see June 7, 1892, diary entry, No. 9.

38. February 4, 1889, diary entry, No. 8.


40. January 21, 1892, diary entry, No. 9; December 1876, No. 43 and February 14, 1892, No. 9.

41. January 6, 1904, diary entry, No. 10; January 1, 1899, No. 44; May 1-2, 1916, No. 36; May 17, 1916, No. 36.

His father was Hyrum Smith. This meant that his childhood would be exceptional. On the one hand his father was a prophet, beloved by thousands of followers; it would likely follow that the son would also be beloved—and a leader. On the other hand, because his father was a prophet, he was hated, envied, imprisoned, and driven, until finally he was assassinated when the boy was only five. He would know his father primarily as an ideal—a legend.

The father, Hyrum, had grown up on farms in Vermont and upstate New York, shortly after the Revolutionary War in which two of his grandfathers had participated. When his fifteen-year-old brother Joseph told his parents and brothers and sisters of a special visitation from heaven which called him to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ, Hyrum, five years older than Joseph, believed, and for the remainder of his life was the closest companion, confidante, and counselor of Joseph. Himself heir-apparent of Joseph's prophethood, Hyrum performed missions for the infant church, directed the construction of its first two temples—those at Kirtland and Nauvoo—and assisted in the governance of the Saints in their settlements in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. For his wisdom, his devotion to the cause, his leadership, he was a special object of affection of the Saints—and for the same reason, a special object of malevolence of the Saints' detractors and persecutors.

Hyrum married Jerusha Barden in 1826, just before his younger brother received the gold plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon. During the next eleven years they had six children: Lovina, Mary, John, Hyrum, Jerusha, and Sarah. Then tragedy struck as the young mother died while Hyrum was away on church business. A few months later, on December 24, 1837, after four days of urgent courtship, and prompted by Joseph's declaration that it was the Lord's will, Hyrum married an English convert to the faith, Mary Fielding. Mary was “cultured, refined, educated, a splendid companion for Hyrum, and fully able and qualified to take care of his motherless children.”

In October 1838, less than a year after their marriage, while Mary Fielding Smith was in advanced pregnancy, the colony of Saints in Missouri was set upon by hostile mobs. Seventeen Saints were murdered at Haun's mill, near the location of Hyrum and Mary's home. On October 30, a mob of two thousand Missourians demanded that certain Mormon leaders be turned over to them in return for an agreement that they would not harm the rest of the members. On that day and the next, Hyrum, his brother Joseph, and five others were imprisoned in Far West. Denied their judicial rights, sentenced by a secret tribunal to be shot, their lives saved only by the courageous intransigence of General Alexander Doniphan, the seven prisoners were moved to Independence, Missouri, then to Richmond, Missouri, and finally to Liberty, Missouri, where they were imprisoned for approximately five months. At times chained together, most of the time in the dungeon of Liberty Jail, they were occa-
sionally permitted to climb out of their dark and loathsome quarters to receive a visitor, read letters, write letters, and study the scriptures.

On November 13, 1838, under the necessity of being father and mother to Hyrum’s children while he and his associates languished in Liberty Jail, Mary Fielding Smith gave birth to her first child, Joseph Fielding Smith. Directly after the delivery Mary became ill. Her sister, Mercy Fielding, who had married the church clerk and historian, Robert B. Thompson, just a few months before the marriage of Hyrum and Mary, was able to stay with Mary during that period of illness. Mercy had a five-month-old baby, and so was able to nurse young Joseph F. along with her own child. Through the arrangements of Mercy and Robert, and no doubt others, Mary and little Joseph F. were taken on a bed to visit Hyrum while he was in Liberty Jail. It must have been a nightmare in the Hyrum Smith home, with his six children by Jerusha, the debilitated Mary and little Joseph, Mercy and her child and husband, plus the members of the church who came to the Smith home during that tempestuous period of expulsion and extermination.

One day when little Joseph had been laid on a bed and left to his own devices, a mob led by a Methodist preacher Samuel Bogart entered the home and began ransacking the place for important papers and other valuables. When the mobbers entered the room where Joseph had been left, they remained quite unaware of his presence, throwing a mattress on the bed where he lay. They continued their search and then left. Amid the pandemonium that followed, a few more minutes elapsed before Joseph was discovered. He had almost smothered to death.

Along with the body of the church, Mary Fielding moved with her family and dependents to Quincy, Illinois, in March 1839.

The recently uncovered letters of Hyrum Smith from Liberty Jail contain his plaintive inquiries about his new-born son and his ailing wife. Read and reread by the son and his family in later years, these letters tell a story of sorrow and despair: they suggest the bitterness that must have welled up in Joseph F. as he contemplated the monstrous cruelty that prevented his father from being with his wife and children, and during most of the period even prevented him from communicating with them. “When I think of your trouble,” Hyrum wrote Mary on March 16, 1839,

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\text{my heart is weighed down with sorrow—to think that I cannot render you any assistance. . . . But what can I do, or what can I say? O God, how long shall we suffer these things? Will not thou deliver us and make us free? . . . O Lord God, will thou hear the prayer of your servant? Wilt thou, O God, in the name of thy Son, preserve the life and breath of my bosom companion and may she be precious in thy sight, and all the little children [in] my family, and hasten the time when we shall meet in each other's embrace.}^* 
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“Could [you] send or cause to be sent some information concerning the little babe and those little children that lie near my heart,” Hyrum wrote on March 28. “My heart is tender like that of a child’s, notwithstanding my experience, manhood, and age. The tears obstruct my writing.” Not until April 11, almost five months after his imprisonment, was Mary able to get her husband a letter pouring forth her joy at Joseph’s birth and her sorrow at not being able to communicate with Hyrum. “Little Sarah,” she wrote,

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\text{has a severe cold and cough. . . . She calls the baby Jacob. . . . She and all the children seem very fond of him [little Joseph]. He grows fast and is very strong. He had two teeth when a little more than three months old. You may not think him handsome, but intelligence seems to beam forth in his eye and countenance, for he begins to show signs of a good mind, which in my estimation is of much greater importance than beauty.}
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And indeed, he did prove to be an extremely intelligent boy. After Hyrum’s release, and the establishment of a new home in Nauvoo, a little sister, Martha Ann, was born.

Because Mary Fielding Smith was the strongest influence on her son Joseph F., it is important to realize that she was a person of stalwart faith. Even before she had become a Latter-day Saint she had expressed her firmly rooted belief in God in a letter from her new home in Canada to her sister Mercy and brother Joseph in England:

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\text{I believe both you and me shall have many more [difficulties and trials] to encounter but blessed be God he has promised that his grace shall be sufficient for us and we have}
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This conviction was magnified upon her conversion to Mormonism. “I have called upon the Lord for direction and trust He will open my way,” she wrote in the spring of 1837. That fall she wrote, “I know not where my next home, or what my next circumstances will be, but as I have said before I will endeavour to trust in the Lord for all that’s to come.” Again in 1837, she wrote to Mercy from Kirtland: “Tell them [all my inquiring friends] that notwithstanding all our defects this is the only Church of Christ.” This unassailable faith was passed on to her son Joseph.

One experience was imprinted indelibly on the memory of little Joseph in June of 1844, at the time when he was only five years old. In the afternoon of June 24, little Joseph was playing on the bank of the river when his Uncle Joseph and his patriarch father returned from the Iowa side of the river, preparatory to going to Carthage Jail. When they had landed, little Joseph took his father’s hand and went with the prophet and patriarch to Hyrum’s house. There, while the patriarch was washing and shaving, Joseph the prophet took little Joseph F. upon his knee and trotted him. Suddenly the prophet said, “Hyrum, what’s the matter with little Joseph F.; he seems so white?” “Oh,” answered the father, joking about the poverty of the family, “he lives on skim milk.” Four days later, late in the night of June 27, 1844, little Joseph heard knocking outside his mother’s window. Then he heard a man’s voice say, “Sister Smith, your husband has been killed.” Joseph never forgot the fear he felt as he lay in his little bed while his mother moaned and cried through the night. When the caskets were brought to Nauvoo, Joseph was lifted up by his mother so he could see the bodies of his father and uncle.

There followed two tormented years in Nauvoo, the harried crossing of the Mississippi on a flatboat in 1846, waiting for a wagon at Montrose from which point they could hear the shots and see the flames that signaled the destruction of the City of Joseph.

Subsequently Mary made a trip to Keokuk, Iowa, where she purchased some wagons, oxen, and other supplies in exchange for some real estate, returned to Montrose, and prepared her family for their trip to Winter Quarters. Joseph was one of the youngest teamsters in the Camp of Israel when he drove part of his family the three hundred miles from Montrose to Winter Quarters.

One unforgettable incident in the latter location occurred while eight-year-old Joseph F. was herding cattle in a region abounding in Indians. Some Omahas, with the obvious intention of stealing cattle, surprised Joseph and his companions. In the resulting chase, two Indians rode up to Joseph, one on either side of him, and proceeded to lift him from the saddle. He thought they were going to scalp him, but a number of the brethren suddenly appeared on their way to a hayfield. The Indians dropped him to the ground and rode quickly away, with neither the scalp nor the cattle.

Mary and the children were not able to make the trek West from Winter Quarters in 1847, but devoted their efforts to becoming prepared for the migration of 1848. Not yet ten years of age, Joseph F. drove two yoke of oxen the entire distance from Winter Quarters to the Salt Lake Valley in the summer of 1848. Also accompanying the wagon were three of the children of Hyrum and Jerusha: John, Jerusha, and Sarah. Here is proof of Mary’s great faith and determination. When the captain of the group she planned to go West with told her she should not go with them because she would be a burden to the rest, she informed the captain she would ask no special favors, would get to their destination without any help from him, and would even beat him to the valley. She lived up to this promise. At one point in the journey occurred the well-remembered incident in which one of their best oxen laid down and appeared to be in the throes of death. Mary asked her brother and another man to administer to the animal. Her wish was complied with and the ox arose and continued on the journey.

During the crossing, time was used profitably, as Mary taught Joseph to read and write. On reaching the Great Basin, Joseph continued as a herd boy. Once one of the cows in Joseph’s herd calved out on the range toward evening. Rather than leaving the cow alone,
Joseph stayed until the calf was born and then pushed mother and calf toward the settlement during the dark hours of the night. He remembered hearing the howls of a pack of wolves following behind them in the darkness. President Smith recalled that during the years from 1846 to 1854 he was "teamster, herd boy, plowboy, irrigator, harvester, with scythe or cradle," operator of a fanning mill, logger, and "general roustabout"—and always, he recalls, penniless.  

Mary died in 1852, leaving Joseph and his sister Martha orphans when he was less than fourteen and she less than twelve. They were "taken over" by Joseph's father's cousin, LDS Apostle George A. Smith. The first important episode after Mary's death shows the kind of tensions which Joseph F. 's experiences produced.

At the insistence of George A. Smith, Joseph and his sister Martha were attending school in Salt Lake City. Their teacher, D. M. Merrick, was a hard schoolmaster who practiced corporal punishment. One day Martha did something that displeased the teacher, so he brought out his leather strap and told Martha to hold out her hand. Joseph F., naturally protective of his sister, would not stand for it. He spoke up loudly and said, "Don't you whip her with that!" The teacher looked up and then moved over to Joseph F. as if to whip him. But Joseph F. was not acquiescent to that idea either: "I licked him, good and plenty," Joseph F. said. This made it necessary for him to quit school.

Joseph F. 's future seemed bleak indeed. His father had been murdered by an angry mob. He had been uprooted with his mother from his Nauvoo home, possessing little education, and trained in the ways of the frontier. Now his mother was dead and he had no uncles, aunts, or grandparents to care for him. What kind of a man would he turn out to be? Would the bitterness in his soul cause him to be impulsive, quick to anger, impatient, morose, cynical, and rigid in his responses, as the experience with the schoolmaster portended? Would pride in his birth and youthful accomplishments turn him into a self-righteous bigot, spouting scripture and dogma as answers to life's complex problems? Would the difficulty of his early years make him an introverted mystic who appealed to heaven and spurned association with humans and their evil ways?

There was clearly a basis for each of these expectations in Joseph's background and boyhood experiences. But he was, as his mother saw when he was only six months old, intelligent. He was also loyal to his father and mother. He had witnessed his father serving as a peacemaker; he had seen his mother's capacity to endure adversity with intrepidity. He had a faith that all would turn out for the best. Finally, there was the discipline of the frontier itself. A mistake in judgment or the failure to execute an assignment could be disastrous, to him and to others. He strained to keep himself under such a regime of discipline and although it was an uphill struggle, he won out. The impatient, pugnacious youth, eager to take up the cudgel against evil and injustice, developed into the patient, understanding, grandfatherly prophet of several hundred thousand Latter-day Saints. His memory is still beloved today, for he was a tender father figure for a whole generation of Western Latter-day Saints that grew up in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Let us follow this evolution during the first decade after his mother's death in 1852. His school career ended by his own impetuosity in the schoolmaster-whipping incident, Joseph F. was preparing to earn his living and to assume responsibility for his sister when he was called, as a fifteen-year-old, on a full-time proselyting mission. His call was unusual but a brilliant plan. On the one hand it would offer wholesome sublimation of his impulsive bitterness; on the other hand only one missionary among the many sent to Hawaii had been a success—eighteen-year-old George Q. Cannon; perhaps another teenager could learn the language and attract the interest and support of the people there. Joseph remained in Hawaii for almost four years. He learned the language in an incredible three months and, along with George Q. Cannon, was perhaps the most successful Latter-day Saint missionary ever to work in the islands. More important to Joseph's welfare, it was in Hawaii that he realized his self-identity. True to his family heritage, he found his true self, not in sterile dogma and dead scripture, but in the healthy practice and enjoyment of religious devotion—in church service. There he developed his sense of humor, his healthy sense of moderation and perspective, his understanding of people and their ways. It was this healthy naturalness of his religious
leadership rather than his having been "born to the purple," which propelled him to become an apostle, a member of the First Presidency under three presidents, and eventually president of the church. "I know that the work in which I am engaged is the work of the living and true God," he wrote his cousin Apostle George A. Smith from Maui when he had been in Hawaii only four months, "and I am ready to bear my testimony of the same, at any time, or at any place, or in whatsoever circumstances I may be placed." 17

It was while he was on the island of Lanai that Joseph F. and his fellow missionaries stored their trunks in a warehouse that caught fire. All of their clothing except what they were wearing was destroyed. For a period Joseph and his companion had only one respectable suit between them, so one of them remained in bed while the other put on the suit and went to meeting.18 Earthy and humorous as such experiences had to be, Joseph F. also received in the island the gift of healing, the gift of casting out evil spirits, and the gift of being healed.

An experience with the latter is worth mentioning for the tempering influence on his life. During the trip from Honolulu to Maui at the very inception of his missionary work, he became ill with what is referred to as Panama fever (possibly yellow fever). Alone, and just a boy of fifteen, he was taken in and cared for by a Hawaiian woman. Years later, when he returned to Hawaii, he was greeted by a crowd of loving Hawaiians. In the middle of this crowd, a blind woman came forth with a bunch of bananas in her hand to give to him. She was calling out, "Iosepa, Iosepa" (for Joseph). Joseph F. took this woman in his arms and kissed her, calling her Mama. He later told a close friend with tears in his eyes that when he was sick with a fever and had nowhere to go, that woman had taken him in, fed him, and nursed him back to health.19

Upon his return from Hawaii, a return which was hastened by the impending invasion of Mormon country by the Utah Expedition (Johnston's Army), Joseph tended to two duties quickly, with his usual impetuosity. First, the day following his arrival in Salt Lake City on February 24, 1858, he enlisted in the territorial militia, the Nauvoo Legion, and was immediately assigned to a unit patrolling the area between Fort Bridger and Echo Canyon. Then, that same day, he met his cousin Levira Annett Clark Smith (daughter of his deceased uncle, Samuel H. Smith) and fell in love with her. His unit left immediately, so he made his proposal in a carefully worded letter written to Levira the next day. "I am aware that our acquaintance has been short," he wrote. "To you, I do not know how pleasant. But allow me to say that since I saw you first, the admiration and respect I first conceived for you have daily grown, till they have changed to something stronger and more fervent."

But love must wait on war and other practicalities. Joseph served in a picket guard with a party of men under Orrin Porter Rockwell, and was one of the thousand "valiant young men" assigned to guard deserted Salt Lake City when the Federal army marched through in June 1858. He was involved in assisting relatives and other Saints in their return to their homes after the move south, was appointed sergeant-at-arms in the territorial legislature, was ordained a high priest, and chosen to be a member of the High Council of the Salt Lake Stake. Now firmly established in the church and the community, though still only twenty-one years old, he could pursue his suit of Levira. They were married "for time and eternity" in April 1859. She was seventeen.

Throughout the years following the death of Mary Fielding Smith, her influence on her son was reinforced by that of two mentors who took it upon themselves to be cognizant of Joseph's needs. The first, the one who became surrogate father to the young man, was George A. Smith, cousin to Joseph Smith, Jr., apostle, and frontiersman. It is possible that it was he who arranged for Joseph F.'s mission to Hawaii. A letter from Joseph there addresses him as "Dear and Respected Cousin and Parent" and ends with this line: "I will now bring my scrawl to a close, asking you to not forget me, but continue your counsel unto me, and I will try and obey it."20 George A. in turn expressed hearty approval of Joseph's devotion to the church, and assured his cousin that he, George, was doing his best to look to Levira's welfare.

Concern for Levira at home, as for Joseph abroad, was also expressed to the missionary by Brigham Young, the second of those two mentors who influenced Joseph's life. Joseph's letter to him, reciprocating the church president's letters of fatherly counsel, expressed
respect as well as gratitude.

Since the sickness of Levira and your kind and fatherly care of her, I feel bound to express a little of my gratitude to you. Accept my warmest heartfelt thanks for your very great kindness to me and Levira.21

In his relationship to Joseph, as to his own sons, Brigham Young was warm and tender, a far different man from the unscrupulous villain the contemporary press tried to make him to be and that some still might consider him to have been. Joseph responded to that parental care. In a letter of his more adult years, Joseph F. wrote to Brigham:

I feel it not only a duty but a pleasure to write to you and be most grateful to receive from you any instruction, counsel, admonitions or reproof you may feel to impart. I desire to be known of you and my brethren as a child is known of his parents, and ever to be found a willing and faithful subject in the Kingdom.22

Within a year of his marriage Joseph was again serving his church as a missionary—this time to Great Britain. In order to earn money for his passage he drove a mule team for a freighting concern as far as Des Moines, Iowa. While in the Midwest, Joseph and his traveling companion and cousin, Samuel H. B. Smith, stopped in Nauvoo to visit Emma Smith Bidamon and her children. When Joseph walked into the room, Emma said, “Why as I live it is Joseph. Why Joseph, I would have known you [anywhere], you look so much like your father.”23 As Joseph looked across the river at Nauvoo for the first time in fourteen years, he was able to pick out many buildings that he remembered. He saw the barn, the brick office, the former location of his home, and the “little brick outhouse where I shut myself up to keep from going to prison.”24

Continuing on to his mission across the Atlantic, Joseph wrote his impressions of Britain: “With all the grandeur and wealth of Old England, there is perhaps no place that will exceed it much in degradation and misery.”25 He later wrote that he “should not like to see a dog of mine in this country, unless it was a ‘gentile,’ and then I should not like to see it anywhere else, and I would get away as soon as I could.”26 Things in England, he wrote in a spate of chauvinism, were called by “fictitious names.”

They call a hat, “billycock” and a “stove pipe” a “hat.” Shoes, “boats,” and chalk and water, “milk.” When you get tired they call it “knocked up,” and if you are cold they call it “starved.” When you are hungry they call it “clammed,” and if you want any molasses, you must ask for “treakel.” Bread and butter they call “bread-and-scare,” and a “slice” of bread is cut into twenty-five pieces.27

Joseph remained in Britain three years, during much of which he was president or pastor of the Sheffield conference. The kind of problems he had with the branch is suggested by a remark he made once from the pulpit: “I wish those who are in the habit of drinking liquor on the Sabbath to keep off the stand as long as their breath smells.”28

For the most part Joseph’s letters during his mission to England reveal high spirits and a frisky nature. When his companion became sick with mountain fever, Joseph cheerfully wrote that he was still able to do his “part at everything, even at the Table!”29 “My health is good,” he wrote, “and my appetite just now is goodder.”30 He told Levira that his singing had improved and that he wished she could hear his voice. He wrote that he was learning songs like “Wake up snakes! and come to Judgment! for Mormonism is destined to rule the warts!”31

Joseph often made such jokes, mainly at his own expense. In one letter to Levira he wrote:

Ain’t I generous? What a good (for nothing) husband you have got! I am not very grand in my own estimation, for all I have a tolerable high opinion of myself. I am rather necessitated to hold myself in high estimation as no one else would but you, and bless your dear little soul and body for that!”32

After he had gained considerable public speaking experience he wrote, “I am getting to be a great preacher but it chiefly consists in making a great noise.”33 Concerning his health,

I do not often have the headache, from the fact . . . there is but little in it to ache . . . . I have to wet my head every morning to keep my brain cool! I do not know what I shall come to! “Old George” used to say I’d come to the gallows.34
As to his study habits, he wrote,

You need not fear baldness on my part, for that is generally a consequence of study and hard thought, two evils from which I am remarkably clear! If studying will make anybody bald, my friend on the left (Parley Parker Pratt) will come home, unless he alters, as bald as a hazel nut. He is eternally at it!

Although Joseph clearly loved his wife very much, and demonstrated his affection in every letter, he did not hesitate to joke about his love. He wrote,


Concerning the pleasure of dancing with his wife he noted,

I am glad you get to dance once in a while and I should be glad, glader, gladderer, if I could but dance with you once in a while. I shall have to console myself by thinking I would if I could, if I couldn't how could I? I couldn't without I could, could I? Could you? You see, I am not so eremitical (religious) but what I am somewhat grammatical and poetical.

On the other hand, he wrote Levira, "Do not think Vira I forget you, nor that I am unfeeling. You cannot think this, you know better. . . . I know you remember me, and pray for me. I feel it."

Joseph believed, for himself and for others, in discipline and in constantly bettering one's self. He cautioned Levira not to forget her responsibilities: "Remember . . . your duties to your God and to your mother. Do not give way to too much hiliarity and rudeness. Be a woman! Respect age and take good Council, tho' it be from a fool." Joseph appreciated intelligence in women. He disliked pretentious women such as those he saw in England and New England. He often counseled Levira to be careful in choosing friends and associates—she should not be too free in making close friends.

That Joseph practiced his discipline on himself is indicated by his determination and ability to continue working even when he was ill, and by his continued insistence on using his time wisely to improve himself. Recognizing an important deficiency, for example, he tried to give himself an education in the arts. He attended the theater, and he read books such as Don Quixote. He followed this with his family in later years so that on one occasion, when he became a little preachy about the sinfulness of the world and the glories of eternity, one of his wives replied,

You tell me so much about the beauties of eternity and the immortal fruits beyond the veil and this world of sorrow and trial. I have been taught to call life a good gift, call the world fair, and we have been told that some of us would live to . . . behold our Savior, and other blessings too numerous to mention that are to be bestowed upon us in this life if we are faithful.

Joseph showed no hesitancy in scolding Levira, just as he did not hesitate to scold his other wives and children in later years. The most frequent cause of the scoldings was extravagance. As a church officer, he received only a very small allowance (that's the skim milk Hyrum jokingly said was the lot of the church leader's family) and he conformed his lifestyle to that heavy limitation. "Economy," he wrote Levira, "is one of the noblest and most useful sciences to be learned and you and I need to learn it well." After one Christmas Joseph wrote to tell one of his wives that he had heard about her extravagance and in light of that fact he felt it was "unmitigated presumption" for her to criticize the spending of others. She sent his letter back with a note on it saying, "How kind, how loving! This is from your heart and it has sunk deep in mine. But it is cruel and unjust. How can I be so horribly extravagant on $25 per month!?

Because of the many difficulties encountered in his life, Joseph developed the ability to be stoic and sometimes stern with himself and others. For example, Joseph met the difficulties of separation from home and loved ones by a renewed devotion to duty. After writing about his sadness in his absence from home, he wrote Levira, "Still, my mind is not wholly taken up with thoughts of home. No! No! that would never do. I presume I am troubled as much on this head as almost anyone ought to be, but I feel that my duty is foremost." One of his
wives was not able to face his continued calls to duty with such an attitude. In a state of agitation, she wrote,

Well I hope this will be the last time I will have to write to you until you go farther off. I want you to go, and I want you to stay, and I don't know what I do want, but if we could live in peace and our enemies be fired into hell I would be glad.  

Joseph's self-control extended from discipline in the face of absence to discipline in the face of insults. Harsh accusations and rebuffs were not unfamiliar to Joseph or to many of the other early missionaries of the church. Joseph felt it would have been weakness on his part to become angered by the insults of another person, and he strictly maintained this attitude though he was called "a liar, a bloody fool, a Mormon danite, a deceiver, a swindler, and everything you could name."  

Joseph was gifted with sensitivity as well as sternness, with compassion as well as discipline. The devotion that he exhibited to his families was returned to him in equal measure. His affection extended even beyond his families to his animals, as evidenced in a letter he wrote after the death of their favorite horse.

I expect our poor little Billie has gone to his long rest before this. Poor little fellow, I wonder if we will own him in the next world? He was a good little pony, and if nobody else has a better right to him, I think he will be ours.  

Because of his devotion to the church, because of his unhesitating acceptance of mission calls, because of his noble heritage, one would suppose that Joseph would have been arrogant and self-righteous. Paragraphs in his letters to Levira indicate a more humble attitude:

O that I were good enough or strong and determined to practice what I know! But if the Lord, and the Servants of God will have patience with me, I will with their aid, learn to do right "for the sake of that right; let the consequence be as it may!"  

These words were echoed many times throughout his life. When faced with the reality that he was growing older, he regretted not his increasing age but the fact that he was not progressing personally in proportion to his years.  

Joseph's concept of religion extended beyond spiritual worship to the everyday events and occurrences of life. Sickness, an only too common eventuality in nineteenth-century Utah, fit perfectly into Joseph's vision of the scheme of things. When Levira asked him what medicine to use, he replied, "My medicine is and has always been faith in the power of God, and it has never failed me yet."  

One of the foundations of Joseph's faith was the respect and reverence he felt for the leaders of the church. Joseph strove to follow their counsel and sought to prove himself worthy in their eyes. In 1863 at the age of twenty-five Joseph wrote Levira: "I feel like a boy, I am a boy and I look up to these good, wise old men as Fathers. I never had any other feeling in this respect."  

After his mission to England, Joseph enjoyed a short respite at home, during much of which Levira was ill, before he was called on another mission—this time a return mission to Hawaii. Here he was assigned to go with Apostles Lorenzo Snow and Ezra T. Benson to investigate affairs as they were being malconducted by Walter Murray Gibson. It was under Joseph's direction that the church plantation at Laie was purchased.  

As Joseph's foreign missions continued and the days of his separation from Levira multiplied, she was ill and depressed, and their relationship became strained and difficult. Toward the end of 1864, against Joseph's wishes, Levira went to San Francisco for her health. Joseph felt that Levira, who was staying with relatives, was not living among the kind of associates who would encourage her religious loyalty. Perhaps the fact that her doctor prescribed half a glass of whisky and water three times a day before eating added to Joseph's consternation.  

Joseph's wish that Levira return to Salt Lake City was not met, and their correspondence became snippy and cool. When Levira finally decided to come home the next year she did not notify Joseph directly but instead wired Brigham Young to please inform Joseph. Joseph replied that he guessed he'd have to become accustomed to her "eccentricities and wonderous oddities."  

Finally, on June 10, 1867, Joseph F. and Levira A. Smith covenanted to "dissolve all the relations which have hitherto existed between us as husband and wife, and to keep
ourselves separate and apart from each other, from this time forth." In one final letter, Levira revealed her feelings of sorrow at what had happened. She asked Joseph's permission to keep one letter and one picture:

They will awaken saddest, sweetest, memories of the past tho the life history of one of earth's poor daughters had been burned to ashes. And why? Because one of earth's brave and noble sons could not appreciate or stoop to the musings of a gentle girlish heart.

The separation was permanent, and Levira went to California where she later died.

There are a number of speculations as to the source of the problem between Joseph and Levira. One theory is that along with her physical illness she was also mentally ill. Another concern between them may have arisen from the fact that there had been no children. Perhaps she could not bear to be separated from him for such long periods. Perhaps part of the problem was the principle of plural marriage. Joseph married a plural wife (Julina Lambson) seven years after his marriage to Levira (i.e., in 1866). And of course, after the separation he married others: Edna Lambson, Sarah Ellen Richards, Alice Ann Kimball, and Mary Taylor Schwartz.

One cannot overlook the possibility that part of the problem with Levira was the unrelenting poverty. When Joseph was on his missions, of course, he was neither supported by the church nor by the ward, but, if supported at all, he was supported by Levira, who earned money to send him by selling eggs and milk, sewing, carpetmaking, and other small enterprises. When Joseph himself was at home he worked as a carpenter, as a legislative assistant, and as a clerk in the church historian's office. By the late 1860s he was supporting two households on a wage of $3 a day. His working hours extended from six o'clock in the morning to eleven o'clock at night. One day before the Christmas of 1868 or 1869 Joseph became depressed when he realized that he was not going to be able to provide any Christmas gifts for his family. He left the house the day before Christmas and walked through the business section of Salt Lake City. As he later related the experience to one of his sons:

I wanted something to please my chicks and to mark the Christmas day from all other days—but not a cent to do it with! I walked up and down Main Street, looking into the shop windows—into Amussen's jewelry store, into every store—everywhere—and then slunk out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child, until my poured-out grief relieved my aching heart; and after a while returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with the children, grateful and happy only for them.

Considering their separations, financial difficulties, and polygamous pressures, the Joseph F. Smith family appears to have been remarkably successful. Affectionate correspondence continued between Joseph and his wives from the time he married them until his death in 1918. He wrote occasionally to almost all of the survivors of his forty-three children. Julina echoed Joseph's happy feelings about his family when she wrote,

I hope you will never regret saying you have a happy united family, for it is the truth. I do not believe there is a happier family anywhere than we are. Of course we have feelings like other folks, but for your sake we each one try to do the best we know how.

Joseph did not allow any of his economic difficulties to stand in the way of the obligation he felt to the church. Although he was said to be a great orator, the truest indication of his devotion lies in the years of service he gave to the church.

While Joseph F. could be alternately stern and compassionate when he felt he should be, he did not always repress his emotions, whether they were of tenderness or rage—particularly in his earlier years. He told of an episode which occurred when he was in the Midwest. He was talking to a farmer who lived near Nauvoo. When the farmer learned that Joseph was a Smith he remarked that he had been just five minutes too late to witness the massacre of the Smiths in Carthage Jail. For a few minutes Joseph was filled with rage. Everything around him went black except the man who was standing in front of him. Joseph asked him what his opinion on the matter was. The farmer replied that the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum had been cold-blooded murder. Joseph, relieved, suddenly realized that he had a knife gripped tightly in his hand and that if the man had not redeemed himself in such a manner Joseph would have revenged himself on the farmer.
To me this suggests the heritage of bitterness and anguish which lay dormant in his nature but which was potentially explosive. Joseph recognized this violent tendency in himself as an evil which should be expunged, and he worked to overcome it. He said the following about the persecutors of the Saints in the 1880s:

> It is for us to obtain the spirit of forgiveness, to feel to love those that are so ignorant as to do evil to their fellow-creatures without a cause; we should feel as Christ felt upon the cross when he said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

He went on to ask, “How do we feel towards . . . those who are engaged in persecuting the Saints today?”

> Do we feel that we should retaliate? Do we feel that we should execute vengeance upon them because we know that they are telling falsehoods, and are misrepresenting and slandering the people of this Church? No. For years and years we have sat quietly down and listened to their abuse, insults, slanders, misrepresentations and falsehoods, which they have spread broadcast throughout the land to the utmost of their power. . . . We do not propose to keep ourselves eternally in hot water, wrangling, contending and snarling with our enemies; if we did we should soon become as sour, as vicious, as foul, as low and as contemptible as they are themselves. Well, do you love them? . . . Do you love these slanderers, these liars, these defamers, these persecutors of the innocent and of the unoffending—do you love them? . . . I want to tell you how I feel towards them. I love them so much that if I had it in my power to annihilate them from the earth I would not harm a hair of their heads—not one hair of their heads . . . I would not throw a straw in their way to prosperity and happiness, . . . and yet I detest and abominate their infamous actions and their wicked course. 59

That Joseph F. managed to achieve this goal of Christlike forgiveness in his later life is confirmed by the testimony of many of his contemporaries. One of his sons wrote the following:

> My father was the most tender-hearted man I ever knew. His sympathy was perpetually drawn out towards the down-trodden and oppressed. Especially was his love extended towards little children. He loved them all and could not bear to see them wrongfully treated. This sympathy and tenderness was extended towards the animal kingdom. “I never could see why a man should be imbued with the bloodthirsty desire to kill and destroy animal life . . . . I think it is wicked for men to thirst in their souls to kill almost everything which possesses animal life,” was his constant teaching by example and by precept. 60

While this is a reverential statement of a son about his father, it nevertheless reflects the manner in which Joseph F. was regarded by his children. One of the most remarkable men of the turn of the century, prophet of his church for seventeen years, Joseph F. Smith became great because he conquered bitterness and personal tragedy and thus became an understanding, beloved, and tender grandfather figure whom thousands admired for his courage, his forthrightness, his personal rectitude, and his spirituality. He died in 1918 at the age of eighty.

ENDNOTES

4. Hyrum Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City. In all letters used in this paper, all of which are in the LDS Church Archives, spelling has been corrected and some punctuation supplied.
5. Mary to Mercy and Joseph Fielding, March 18, 1833.
6. Mary to Joseph Fielding, October 7, 1837.
7. Mary to Mercy, ca. 1837.
10. Joseph F. later recalled: “I also remember my thoughts on the day the mob besieged the city of Nauvoo. My widowed mother had been compelled a day or two previously to take her children and ferry them, in an open flat
boat across the Mississippi river into Iowa, where we camped under the trees and listened to the bombardment of the city. We had left our comfortable home with all the furniture remaining in the house, together with all our earthly possessions, with no hope or thought of ever seeing them again; and I well remember the feelings I had when we made our camp on the Iowa side of the river. They were not feelings of regret, sorrow, or disappointment, but of gratitude of God, that we had the shelter of even the trees and the broad bosom of the father of waters to protect us from those who sought our lives. I felt to thank God that we still possessed our lives and freedom, and that there was at least some prospect of the homeless widow and her family of little ones, helpless as they were, to hide themselves somewhere in the wilderness from those who sought their destruction, even though it should be among the wild, so-called savage, native tribes of the desert, but who have proven themselves more humane and Christlike than the so-called Christian and more civilized persecutors of the Saints." Sermon of Joseph F. Smith in General Conference in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, April 9, 1882. Journal of Discourses (26 vols., Liverpool, 1855-1886) 23:74.


12. Concerning this period of struggling preparation Joseph F. later wrote that Emma Smith was offered financial assistance, equipment, and was fairly begged to make the trip, but his mother received no help from anyone at all. This was part of the seed of bitterness that estranged Joseph F. from Emma and her children. See Joseph Fielding Smith, Life of Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City, 1938), 130.

13. Life of Joseph F. Smith, 150.


15. Immediately after Mary's death the children were cared for by Hannah Grinnells, who was also a wife of Hyrum, but she died within a year.

17. Life of Joseph F. Smith, 176.
18. Ibid., 183-4.
20. Joseph F. Smith to George A. Smith, March 19, 1855, LDS Archives.
22. Joseph F. Smith to Brigham Young, February 26, 1875.
23. "Shining Lights, How They Acquired Brightness," The Contributor (Salt Lake City) 16 (January 1895): 170. Although each felt that the other had been misguided in his allegiances, Joseph F. and Joseph Smith III, son of Joseph Smith, Jr., the prophet, did carry on an occasional and friendly correspondence. A number of letters and copies of letters are in the Joseph F. Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City. They extend from as early as 1868 to as late as 1905.
24. Joseph to Levira, June 28, 1860. We've been unable to determine whether this was a real threat of imprisonment, or a five-year-old's imagination.
27. Joseph to Levira, June 16, 1861.
32. Joseph to Levira, February 27, 1861.
34. Joseph to Levira, June 29, 1861.
35. Joseph to Levira, November 1, 1862.
36. Joseph to Levira, February 27, 1861.
37. Joseph to Levira, April 5, 1861.
38. Joseph to Levira, May 14, 1862.
40. Mary to Joseph, August 29, 1885.
41. Joseph to Levira, April 5, 1861.
42. Joseph to Edna, February 13, 1887. And this allowance was in tithing scrip which meant it could be expended only for what was available in one of the church's tithing houses.
43. Joseph to Levira, January 17, 1862.
44. Edna to Joseph, November 26, 1884.
46. Joseph to Julina or one of her children, July 18, 1895.
47. Joseph to Levira, March 1, 1862.
48. Joseph to Levira, November 14, 1862.
49. Joseph to Levira, December 17, 1861.
51. Levira to Joseph, January 6, 1865.
52. Joseph to Levira, July 14, 1865.
53. Levira to Joseph F. Smith, July 17, 1869.
54. Life of Joseph F. Smith, 231.
57. Julina to Joseph, August 6, 1874.
John Whitmer Historical Association Journal

Arlyn R. Love

The First Presidency’s Response to the Civil Rights Movement

During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s the RLDS church faced a divisive social issue—the civil rights movement. The First Presidency and some church members differed significantly regarding the degree of support the church should give to the movement. The Presidency cautiously handled the issue of support; it never announced that it or the church supported the movement, and it did not attempt to persuade church members to support the movement.

As will be demonstrated later in the paper, the Presidency decided not to support the movement, at least in part because they feared that their support would disturb many church members. Thus the Presidency exercised the pastoral function, that is, unifying, protecting, and preserving the church, rather than exerting its prophetic function, that is, educating, leading, and challenging church members.

Historically, the Presidency has had to balance its pastoral and prophetic functions. In doing so, the best interests of the entire World Church have had to be considered. The choice to be pastoral about this issue is particularly interesting for several reasons: (1) many other religious institutions supported the movement; (2) the movement’s ideals appeared to be Christian and noble to many both within and outside the church; (3) the violence that sometimes occurred as a ramification of the movement was accepted as a necessary evil by many religious leaders. In contrast, the Presidency evidently thought that the members would be better served if it did not announce support for the movement and did not advocate that members support it.

The attitudes of the RLDS church members concerning blacks and the civil rights movement were varied. The members were a product of their own culture; therefore, many were prejudiced against blacks. Some of the strongest prejudicial attitudes arose in the South, but also existed elsewhere.

William T. Blue, Sr., a black patriarch, attended church from 1950 to 1969 in Pensacola, Florida. In retrospect he said that the whites in Pensacola and other southern congregations tended to react to blacks in a cool manner. According to Blue, blacks had to build a shell around themselves for protection because they felt excluded from warm fellowship at church, e.g., some white members would not even look at blacks while at church.2

Some members seemingly hated blacks and/or unreasonably feared them. A white male church member in Houston, Texas, said, “I don’t want no black buck comin’ into this church and settin’ by my wife.”2 One from Columbus, Ohio, wrote “[Martin Luther King] is a fansy skunk, and somebody is going to shoot him one of these days . . . a nigger will never be as good as a white man.”3 One from Independence, Missouri, anxiously stated, “I predict that in five years a white man will be under the Negro tyranny to where we will have no freedom at all,” Another from Independence exclaimed, “The Negro as a race never has been able to successfully demonstrate the capacity for self-government, . . . [the NAACP] is communist-inspired, and their first aim is black supremacy—2nd a Soviet South, then a Soviet America.” Concerning black education, she asked, “Education—can it change the color of

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his skin, the kind of hair, the bulge of his lips, the spread of his nose, or the beat of his heart, with a spelling book?” Another person from Independence exclaimed, “I don’t want [integration] period! To put it another way, I do not want our daughters and granddaughters, nor our sons and grandsons . . . either to be RAPED by Negroes, . . . nor to be SEDUCED by them.”

Statements such as these often came from unsophisticated, poorly educated white members. However, even though ignorance about blacks is partially an educational problem, many well educated people in the church were prejudiced. Words such as desegregation and integration simply infuriated many southern white members, according to William Blue writing in Stride magazine.

Some church members who individually supported the civil rights movement wanted the institutional church to support it also. They wanted the First Presidency to specifically endorse the movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King and others, based on the philosophy of nonviolence derived from Jesus and Gandhi. They wanted church members to be involved in and the Presidency to be openly supportive of the nonviolent direct action (e.g., sit-ins and freedom marches) aimed at ending racism. These members claimed that the civil rights movement embodied Christian values in a society that brutally degraded black people. These members believed the church, if it was going to be genuinely prophetic, must support the movement. They wanted the Presidency to be actively prophetic at the cost of some internal dissension.

The members of the Presidency from 1958 until 1966 were President W. Wallace Smith, and counselors F. Henry Edwards and Maurice L. Draper. In 1966 Duane E. Couey replaced Edwards. All of these individuals were interviewed by the author in 1979. To some degree they all acknowledged that blacks had been denied certain rights in voting, housing, education, and job opportunities. But none was in favor of a public statement by the Presidency supporting the civil rights movement and/or encouraging members to support the movement.

The major reasons for Smith and Couey’s lack of support for the movement was the militant methods employed and violence caused by the blacks’ techniques. Smith recalled in 1979 that the Presidency was “not in favor of the civil rights movement as it was being promoted at the time.” He noted that such methods were “forcing civil rights on the public.” Couey recalled that he thought the church must be discreet in determining with whom it was to be identified. He said that by publicly supporting controversial public figures, e.g., leaders of the civil rights movement, the church indirectly supported all of their actions. According to Couey, the church should not have placed itself in the position where it would have been indirectly supporting the violence that sometimes occurred. Furthermore, Couey said the role of the church was to “create a climate of reconciliation.” He stated the church was teaching about reconciliation and the idea of the worth of all persons during the time civil rights was a heated issue. The church ministers told people to respond to the movement according to their own convictions. He also emphasized that the church was pluralistic in its beliefs and contained members in countries to whom the race problem in the United States was essentially irrelevant. Thus, Couey thought it was inappropriate for the Presidency to directly address problems in the American society and thereby commit the World Church to them.

F. Henry Edwards perhaps best summarized the Presidency’s opinion about handling social issues by stating in retrospect, “Socrates was a gadfly, but gadflies don’t build nests.” By this statement, Edwards apparently meant that the First Presidency’s role was not to disturb the church membership by raising controversial issues, but rather to build a solid “nest,” or foundation, for the church. “Gadflies” like Socrates were needed to pester, i.e., raise questions, but that was not the role of the Presidency; it had to maintain a working majority unified around the doctrines of the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if various members defined the role of the church and the message of the gospel differently.

Edwards did not deny that the civil rights issue was a moral and religious issue. But, he considered the issue primarily a social issue, and leading the church to support a social issue was inappropriate for the Presidency. He indicated that the issue was one for individuals to respond to as an expression of their own moral and religious stances, for the role of the church is to teach people that their “sainthood” should be expressed in their lives.
He pointed out that he did not want the Presidency to advocate church involvement in the movement, for potentially many members would have been offended and, consequently, alienated from the church. The Presidency's role was to "build a nest" and maintain it.\textsuperscript{11}

The response of Smith, Couey, and Edwards was clearly pastoral rather than prophetic. Maurice Draper cautiously recommended a more prophetic view and was seemingly more willing for the Presidency to address civil rights actively. Draper regretted that the Presidency was not more articulate on behalf of the "legitimate complaints of the black people in America." He explained that the church was trying to find its way through the chaos of the 1960s; it was reevaluating itself. As an individual, Draper acknowledged that he was excited by Martin Luther King, but was unsure of his movement. King's remarks seemed right to him, but at the same time, the consequences of people's actions, inspired by King's remarks, scared him. His own misgivings coincided with the ambivalence of the church membership about the movement. Thus, Draper remarked, "If you're going to be an extremist, know what you're doing. The church didn't know what it was doing." Therefore, during the period of the civil rights movement, Draper had concluded that the Presidency should not speak for the church in favor of the movement.\textsuperscript{12}

Clifford Cole, president of the Council of Twelve Apostles, reflected his opinion in this comment: "Individuals in the church should participate freely in political, social, and economic movements which they feel are forwarding the cause of Christ in the world. They have a special stewardship to do so." However, he also said that if people chose to support the movement, they should not assume that the church was supporting them in that effort.

Furthermore, Cole said that the church should not maintain a "predisposed position" that would discourage some people from worshiping because they believe their position on a social or political issue is contrary to the accepted stance of the church. He explained that people might not have had this privilege if they had been told what to believe about social issues such as the civil rights movement. The church tries to create an atmosphere in which people can be honest with themselves. It attempts to present Christian values that will influence people's lives and guide them in their judgments. The worship of God will allow the Holy Spirit to interact in people to give them courage to stand for what they believe is right. Therefore, Cole obviously thought that the church should not have told people what to believe concerning the movement.\textsuperscript{13}

The World Conference and the First Presidency made a few official statements about blacks from 1956 to 1968, during the peak of the civil rights movement. These statements give some indications of the extent to which the church and the Presidency supported the movement.

The 1948 General Conference attempted to formulate a church statement on black civil rights. The Chicago District delegation submitted a document containing numerous scriptural endorsements of racial equality. President Israel A. Smith opposed the resolution. He stated, "There is nothing in the law of the church which creates or tends to create racial inequality or racial discrimination." He also argued: "To legislate with respect to a specific race raises, by implication, the presumption that that race heretofore had been unjustly dealt with in our church law and discipline, which we cannot and do not admit."\textsuperscript{14} The document was not approved.

Smith wrote this, even though churches in the South were segregated, the American black membership was very small, few American blacks were ordained, and prejudicial views within the church were widespread.\textsuperscript{15} Smith chose to be pastoral during a crucial transition period following World War II. Many blacks returned from the war and gained education and training provided by the G.I. Bill of Rights. Black political strength increased, e.g., the Democrats heavily pursued black votes in the 1948 election. White reaction became particularly strong after the United States Supreme Court declared "separate but equal" public schools to be inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional in its May 1954 decision in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}.\textsuperscript{16}

At the 1954 General Conference, held shortly before the Brown decision, Muirl Robinson from Battle Creek, Michigan, and James Everett from Salt Lake City, Utah, cosponsored a resolution. It asked "that a special committee be appointed . . . to study and make recommendations on the problems involved . . . in carrying the gospel message to colored peoples" in the United States and Canada.\textsuperscript{17} The Conference referred this matter to the
three quorums of concurrent jurisdiction (the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve, and the Quorum of Seventy). The resolution also asked the church to support the “Declaration of Human Rights” adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 and recommended support for “The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights.” Neither of these requests was adopted. The reaction to the Brown decision ignited a “revival of white racism in the deep South reminiscent of the worst days of Reconstruction” for “segregation was an ancient and hallowed institution in the region.” But blacks refused to be intimidated. On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a black, was arrested for refusing to yield her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Subsequently the Montgomery bus boycott occurred, and the civil rights movement was in full swing. With the bus boycott recently in the news, a General Conference was held in April 1956. The three quorums of concurrent jurisdiction brought their recommendation to the Conference. It was adopted on April 13, 1956, and became General Conference Resolution 995. A portion of the resolution follows:

The gospel is for all mankind. It knows no distinction of race or color. . . . Wherever groups, missions, branches, and congregations are organized they should be formed as a matter of administration and not a matter of racial discrimination.

There are areas where the church must first build up the will to welcome all races. In such situations discretion is important but only as an essential factor in breaking down barriers.

The church welcomes all who respond to the call of the Lord from among all races.

Persons of any race who are ordained to the Priesthood should function freely according to their gifts and callings.

The resolution was not as strong as advocates, such as Wilford Winholtz of Independence, Missouri, would have liked. It did not espouse immediate acceptance of integration and other civil rights for blacks. Statements such as “[the gospel] knows no distinction between race and color,” and “the church welcomes all who respond to the call of the Lord from among all races” were moderate. The resolution neither specifically addressed discriminatory practices in the church nor members’ prejudicial attitudes.

On the other hand, it was stronger than some members would have liked, and it did receive the support of a majority of Conference delegates. But the pastoral role of the church leaders was still evident by the moderate nature of the statement.

No other official statement about race appeared until the Presidency published “Our Position on Race and Color” in the August 1, 1963, Saints' Herald. At this time the nonviolent civil rights movement was at its height. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), led by Martin Luther King, and other civil rights organizations had grown in strength. The Birmingham, Alabama, marches and resultant violence and police brutality occurred during the spring of 1963. During this march, Dr. King and his close associate, Ralph D. Abernathy, were imprisoned. While in prison, King wrote his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” the classic justification for civil disobedience as a tactic in the civil rights movement. On June 11, John F. Kennedy delivered his speech on civil rights, wherein he asserted the need for a new civil rights bill, but urged that changes be made peacefully and constructively for all. Meanwhile, black leaders were making preparations for a late summer March on Washington. In the church, people responded to these events. William D. Russell, an assistant editor of the Saints' Herald, wrote a July editorial entitled “Martin Luther King: Satan or Saint.” A discussion of this editorial appears later in this paper. For now it is sufficient to note that it contained favorable statements about King and the civil rights movement and encouraged support for the movement. Some people were antagonized by such views, especially since they were written in the official church periodical.

The Presidency evidently wrote its statement in response to both the turbulent social climate in the country and to antagonistic members. Since the statement was printed in the Herald shortly after Russell's editorial appeared, it may also have been prompted by the Russell editorial.
In its editorial, the Presidency did not announce support for King and the civil rights movement, nor condone the actions of activists involved in the movement. The Presidency mainly reiterated the principles adopted in Resolution 995 of 1956. There was also an attempt to downplay the church's responsibility:

The internal racial problems in our church have been very minor. Integration has been such a natural process that there would be no need to discuss it in these columns were it not for the national attention that has resulted from the tense integration question.\(^\text{27}\)

When this was written, a considerable number of church members harbored negative attitudes about blacks. The church had few black members, very few black priesthood members, and virtually no black students at Graceland College.

The editorial reveals the reluctance of the Presidency to criticize those church members who were severely opposed to civil rights for blacks. Apparently the Presidency did not seriously consider announcing their support for the civil rights movement and educating church members to support the movement. It is doubtful that the members of the Presidency recognized the extent of white prejudice in the church. If they were aware of prejudice they chose to ignore it. Roy Muir, a Herald House editor at that time, laments that "instead of providing needed leadership for the church in a time of crisis, the First Presidency simply said that there is no issue for us to deal with."\(^\text{28}\)

While the First Presidency avoided antagonizing the church's opponents of civil rights, they hoped to appear to the outside world as favoring equal treatment toward blacks, and avoid the negative publicity being given at the time to the denial of priesthood to blacks by the Mormon church. When George Romney, a Mormon, was elected governor of Michigan in 1962, he was almost immediately considered a potential presidential candidate, and therefore his church's racial practice became an issue. The RLDS church has not been known for avoiding opportunities to distinguish itself from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Thus the First Presidency clarified its position on race for the press. An article, based on the Herald editorial, appeared in the August 2 Kansas City Times, distinguishing the RLDS practice of ordaining blacks from the LDS practice of excluding blacks from the priesthood.\(^\text{29}\)

The next official statement came at the 1968 World Conference. In the five years since the Presidency's 1963 editorial, President Kennedy had been assassinated and his successor, Lyndon Johnson, had pushed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Various violent acts against blacks and white civil rights supporters, and the Selma, Alabama, march in the spring of 1965 led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Several black leaders more radical than King rose to prominence, rallying behind the slogan, "black power." There were riots in several northern cities, and finally the murder of Dr. King on April 4, 1968, during the week of the RLDS World Conference.

At the Conference the First Presidency supported two statements that delegates, representing members throughout the world, approved. One was a resolution for the implementation of racial brotherhood and the other was a statement of recognition of Martin Luther King on the day following his assassination.

The "Implementation of Racial Brotherhood" resolution was initiated at the Conference by William T. Blue, Sr., at the time the only black high priest in the church. A portion of the document resolved that

members be called upon to reach out with a greater expression of Christian love to share [the] message of faith, hope, and brotherhood with all racial and ethnic groups around and among us, with emphasis upon the Negro race and the troubled areas, that this restored gospel might truly provide a pattern of Zionic brotherhood to the world.\(^\text{30}\)

The intent of this resolution was to "help . . . bridge the gap and right the wrong and remove the uneasiness" between blacks and whites in the RLDS church.\(^\text{31}\)

Some suggested that the resolution was provincial, since it specifically emphasized the need to reach out to Negroes. In response, Pauline Frisby, an active black member from Michigan, stated on the Conference floor:
I am deeply aware that this gospel is to be taken to all people, all races. But, . . . there has been even in the attitudes and in the actions and in the non-actions and in the indifference a lack of even being interested in taking the gospel primarily to my people. . . . We need to reach out a little bit more to take [the gospel] to the people who are hungry among the Negro race.\textsuperscript{32}

In this statement, Frisby got to the point of the resolution. It was to be a statement by the church membership expressing that the church was going to make a particular effort to minister to blacks, in addition to its efforts to minister to all races. The resolution was proposed in hopes that the church would strengthen its ministry to all races.

The morning after Martin Luther King's death, President W. Wallace Smith asked the Conference to approve a resolution presented by the Presidency. The resolution asked that the church

\textit{pause in tribute to the passing of this great American and world leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, for his achievements in civil rights, justice, and the dignity of all men, and particularly among the poor and depressed, and that we do hereby express our deepest regrets and sympathies to his widow and children in this time of bereavement. We do share in some of the implications either directly or indirectly which have created a climate for his untimely death, and we do pledge ourselves anew to work to eradicate prejudice and bigotry in the hearts of men through Christ's message to all mankind.}\textsuperscript{33}

The Conference took a standing vote, overwhelmingly approving the resolution and had a period of silent tribute to King. Though general in language, the last sentence suggests the church shares some of the responsibility for the injustices that have existed. However, one cannot assume that the Presidency and those who stood at the business session to pay tribute to this assassinated man also supported the civil rights movement. In addition, this pledge was never converted into direct support for the movement.

The church never made an explicit statement in favor of the civil rights movement. Furthermore, the Presidency did not help educate members to individually support the civil rights movement. They opted for the pastoral rather than the prophetic role.

During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s the church sometimes supported the worth of all persons through preaching, printed church materials, and teaching. But civil rights were usually not specifically discussed through these communication modes. The church curriculum did not directly address the race issue until the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, some members disliked the curriculum presented during this time, partially because it addressed black inequality and other social issues.\textsuperscript{34}

The University Bulletin, the church-related publication for college students, printed two civil rights articles in 1957.\textsuperscript{35} However, it did not print any more such articles until 1965.\textsuperscript{36}

The Saints' Herald and Stride magazines were the two primary church modes through which black equality was discussed.\textsuperscript{37} However, the support came from various editors and writers, not from the Presidency. Because of limited space and the more widespread readership of the Herald, the author will not comment on Stride articles, but will focus on some Herald articles and writers.

Paul Wellington, editor of the Herald, and author of articles supporting the black causes, received complaints from church members because such articles were published in the Herald.\textsuperscript{38} The First Presidency received similar letters from members.\textsuperscript{39} Because articles related to civil rights disturbed some people, the Presidency, as editors-in-chief of the Herald, discouraged further such publications. The Presidency did not consider it a role of the Herald House to support social issues in church publications.

The Presidency wanted the Herald to be a tool for communication of institutional church news and the gospel to the church membership, whereas, Wellington and the rest of the Herald editors seemingly felt a responsibility to educate on social and moral issues through the Herald. They wanted the Herald to be a forum in which opinions could be expressed. Also, they indicated that it was their responsibility to decide what to print.\textsuperscript{40}

Because members of the First Presidency wanted as many Herald subscribers as possible, they wanted to avoid printing controversial articles. The Presidency feared that the controversial articles on the racial issue had lowered the number of Herald subscriptions. Wellington acknowledged that subscriptions fell from 20,000 to between 17,000 and 18,000 from 1965 to 1967. He commented that writings pertaining to "racial issues were probably
one of the major contributing reasons” for this decline.41

“Martin Luther King: Satan or Saint,” mentioned earlier, may have contributed to this reduction. This editorial reflects the view of one Herald editor, William D. Russell, who wrote probably the most controversial Herald articles on civil rights. He was a member of the Herald House editorial staff from July 1960 through June 1966. Russell explained in this editorial that King was hated by the segregationists and loved by his followers. He refuted claims accusing King of being a communist. “Any American who agitates for social change is likely to be called a communist,” he wrote. He disputed the criticism that King caused violence. He noted King’s nonviolent methods and redirected the blame, accusing reactionary whites for most of the violence that occurred during the civil rights movement. Russell also rebutted the criticism that King was moving too fast. He stated, “America is fortunate he is pushing as fast as he has. Were there not a prophetic voice speaking out for nonviolent resistance to racial discrimination the most likely alternative would be violence.”

Russell urged, “Let us pray that this revolution for freedom will be—like Gandhi’s—nonviolent. And let us not remain silent on this issue for to do so is to make the gospel irrelevant to today’s needs.”42 In this statement Russell called the church to support the civil rights movement for he evidently understood this to be one of the church’s responsibilities during that time.

These ideas upset many church members. Consequently, the Presidency became disturbed, for they, Herald House, and Russell received several letters of complaint. One letter written to the Presidency was forwarded to Russell, along with a memo from Maurice Draper.43 Russell then wrote a lengthy letter of rebuttal to Draper. In it, he condemned what he believed to be irrational perspectives about the King editorial:

[The letters] charged Dr. King with being a dupe for the Communists, and thus evade the issue—racial injustice. No acknowledgement of injustice is made, thus no solutions are offered. They deplore the nonviolent civil rights action, but do not deplore the conditions which have brought the action about—injustice in education, voting, use of public facilities, and so forth. They refuse to admit that Dr. King’s movement is nonviolent. Avoiding the use of the term “nonviolent resistance” they use instead terms such as “Dr. King’s mobs.”44

Russell apparently thought that those who wrote these letters failed to see the relevance of the civil rights movement to Christian ideals:

These letters almost always reflect a lack of understanding of the gospel. It seems tragic to me that so many of our lives are shaped primarily by the culture we live in rather than the demands made on us by the Lordship of Jesus Christ.45

Herald House editors writing in support of the civil rights movement and racial equality in church publications wanted to help educate church members to recognize the good purposes of the movement. Roger Yarrington, who was a member of the Herald House staff from the spring of 1955 to December 1962, stated in retrospect,

My own view, and I believe the view of other editors at Herald House, was that the church publications needed to provide leadership in developing a positive attitude in the church on racial brotherhood. I felt the editors were in a unique position to speak to the membership directly on the issue.46

At the time, Russell went so far as to say, “Editorials on the race issue obviously stir up people . . . , but I think this abrasive quality is a necessary prerequisite if learning is to take place.”47

The Presidency’s view of the civil rights movement, its position concerning support for the movement, and its concerns about race-related articles in church publications were summarized by F. Henry Edwards in a memorandum written to Managing Editor Paul A. Wellington on April 29, 1965. First, Edwards indicated that the complaints were extensive enough to be bothersome, for he stated, “We continue to have complaints concerning editorial and news items in the church publications and, particularly, in the Herald. The complaints are increasing rather than decreasing.” According to Edwards: “A high percentage of the letters come from intelligent and cultured persons of tested good judgement.” He stated three reasons that complainers gave for their displeasure with the civil rights related articles:
[These letters] center in the undue prominence being given to the civil rights movement and its leaders and, at times, to the tone of the editorials. We have also had recent complaints concerning the identification of the Herald with articles written by members of your staff apparently as individuals, but published in such a fashion as to seem to reflect the General Church policy.

Concerning the first complaint, church publications had included, prior to Edwards' memo, many articles about blacks, though most of them did not directly advocate support for the civil rights movement and its leaders. Considering the second complaint, some of the articles probably had an emphatic, self-righteous tone to the readers. They may have inferred that supporters of the movement considered themselves more educated, courageous, and more "Christian" than those who did not support the movement. Regarding the third complaint, the mere appearance of editorials or articles published in the Herald probably implied to many that the content represented the church's view. This was so because the Herald is "the official publication" of the church, and the First Presidency serve as "editors-in-chief." However, the same masthead statement in each issue also contained the disclaimer: "Herald editors are not responsible for the views and opinions expressed in articles or communications other than those of editorial authorship." The tension between the "official" nature of the Herald and the disclaimer was not easy to resolve.

To remove any misunderstandings, Edwards clearly stated the church's view, according to the Presidency, concerning racial equality and the civil rights movement:

The church is committed to the principle of racial equality. We believe that men should be protected in the full exercise of their rights as citizens. But the church is not committed to the civil rights movement or to any similar movement.

He continued in this pastoral vein by responding to the third and second complaints respectively. Chastising the editors he asserted,

The church papers should not at any time carry the impressions that the civil rights movement has our approval and should receive the support of all members of the church. Specifically, it should never be stated or implied that church members who do not support the civil rights movement fail in this respect because they lack intelligence or courage or ethical responsibility.

Reflecting the pastoral rather than prophetic approach, Edwards next wrote:

Within limits determined by the church itself, and not by the Presidency or the editors of our publications, church members who act in good conscience, or who in good conscience refuse to act, should be protected against the pressures of majorities or of popular points of view. The rights of citizens as citizens must not be infringed in the name of the church. These rights include the right to differ as to the means of achieving agreed ends.

Immediately after Edwards wrote his lengthy memo, both the May 1 issue of the Herald and the May issue of Stride carried a civil rights related article. Therefore, in a May 14, 1965, letter to Bill Russell, W. Wallace Smith stated,

Our editorial policy should be such as not to stifle initiative on the part of the editors, but should be one in which we make a moderate approach to current issues treating the basic principles involved rather than coming out in support of individuals, causes, or any particular modus operandi which is being promoted.

One can learn from the foregoing that there was disagreement on whether the church should support the civil rights movement. One can sympathize with the Presidency's delicate position concerning this issue and appreciate the stand it took.

First, defining the civil rights movement was difficult. The purposes of the movement were sometimes diverse, given different organizations and leaders. It was perhaps inappropriate for the Presidency to have committed a World Church to support a movement without knowing the future direction the movement might take. For example, by the time the Presidency made the 1963 statement in the Herald, Martin Luther King and other leaders of the nonviolent movement were experiencing opposition to their methods from more radical black leaders. Some of these leaders condoned and even encouraged violence, considering it a necessary means to justified ends. Second, with or without violence, committing the World Church to a domestic issue in one particular country would
perhaps have been a dangerous precedent to set. Finally, the Presidency would have been faced with the possibility of angering unsupportive church members if it had stated that the church supported the movement. These members may have become alienated from the church. The pastoral concern of members of the First Presidency was stronger than any prophetic instinct they might have felt on this issue.

On the other hand one can reason that the Presidency should have more directly supported and urged members to support blacks in their struggle for equality. This may or may not have been done by advocating support for specific individuals. However, one can argue that some black causes warranted support as a matter of consistency with the Christian gospel. If black causes were supported, one can further argue that support for them would have necessitated that the leaders of the particular causes be supported, if individual members and/or the church wanted to help change the undesirable situation.

One can also argue that to support civil rights in the United States would have been appropriate since the church headquarters is in the United States, most members are Americans, and the race problem exists in many other parts of the world.

Finally, civil rights advocates probably wondered whether the Presidency and American members were genuinely concerned about and understood the issues involved with civil rights for blacks. For this reason, advocates wanted to explain the movement’s purposes and advocate support for the movement through church periodicals. Certainly the Presidency could be rightfully criticized if its members were unconcerned and uninformed about civil rights issues; however, it seems clear that they were at least somewhat concerned and informed. They simply chose to act differently than the civil rights advocates wanted.

Thus, the Presidency chose to be pastoral, i.e., to unify, protect, and preserve the church. This position was unsatisfactory to church members who wanted the Presidency to be more prophetic, i.e., to educate, lead, and challenge church members. More specifically, civil rights supporters wanted the church and, thus, the Presidency, to publicly state support for the movement and to encourage editors and other members supportive of the movement to assist in educating members about the movement and calling members to support it. The Presidency apparently considered that support for the movement would have been unwisely prophetic. They felt that such a choice would have placed the church in support of a cause that it may have later regretted.

ENDNOTES

1. Interview with William T. Blue, Sr., Kansas City, Missouri, January 22, 1979.
2. As reported by Barbara Higdon, former resident of Houston, Texas, in an interview, Lamoni, Iowa, January 21, 1979.
3. Anonymous (from Columbus, Ohio) to Herald House, March 16, 1965.
4. The letters from these three individuals are in the possession of Bill Russell, Lamoni, Iowa. I have chosen to leave them unnamed to avoid possible embarrassment to them.
7. Besides periodical articles listed later, these two paragraphs were synthesized from interviews and letters in which persons generalized about the views of those who wanted the church to support the civil rights movement or discussed their own experience as such a supporter. The interviews were conducted in 1979 with William T. Blue, Sr., Warren Chelline, Cecil Ettinger, Barbara Higdon, Barbara and Richard Howard, Richard Hughes, William Russell, Paul Wellington, Lorne White, and Wilford Winholz. The letters received were from Deam Ferris, Wayne Ham, Roy Muir, Joe Pearson, Roger Yarrington, and Lloyd Young.
11. Ibid.
15. Interviews with William T. Blue, Sr., Warren Chelline, Maurice Draper, Cecil Ettinger, Barbara Higdon, Barbara Howard; Anna M. Lavinghouse to Arlyn Love, February 18, 1979, Arlyn Love Civil Rights File, Roseburg, Oregon.
21. Ibid., 33.
25.5.
32. Ibid., 278.
33. Ibid., 144.
37. The author identified eighty-five articles on civil rights in the Saints' Herald and Stride during the period 1956-1970.
40. Interview with Paul A. Wellington.
41. Ibid.
42. William D. Russell, "Martin Luther King: Satan or Saint?" 2.
43. Maurice Draper to Bill Russell, August 6, 1963.
44. Bill Russell to Maurice Draper, August 8, 1963.
45. Ibid.
47. Bill Russell to Maurice Draper, August 8, 1963.
49. See footnote 37.
50. F. Henry Edwards to Paul A. Wellington.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
56. The thesis of Russell, "A Priestly Role for a Prophetic Church," is that throughout its history the RLDS church has followed the trends in secular society with regard to its attitudes on race.
Melvin T. Smith

Faithful History/Secular Religion

The debate about faithful history holds great interest for me, both for personal and for academic reasons. I came to the history profession with the convictions of a "true believer" Mormon, where my pursuit of professional stature as a historian has been fraught with a multitude of challenges.

I remember talking with a young professor of history at Brigham Young University after I had completed the course work and comprehensive examinations for a Ph.D. program there. I asked him, “Well, now that I am a bonafide historian, what do I do with Joseph Smith?” I was surprised by his answer: namely, that for him Joseph Smith presented no particular problems. And frankly, I felt a certain envy at his seemingly secure hold on his own faith, for I was by then seeing gaping holes being poked through my own faithful armor.

I am still asking myself the question, what do we historians do with Joseph Smith, and with others who claim that they have had direct communication with God or other divine beings? I have also seen many of my colleagues struggle with their own versions of this issue.

There has already been extensive debate about faithful history, what it is, and how Latter Day Saints and Mormons who are historians ought to write it. For me, none of the arguments has proven wholly satisfactory. It is for that reason that I am continuing my own probing of the subject. The primary purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale for believing historians whereby they can produce objective professional history rather than “faithful history”—so-called.

My basic premises are quite simple. First of all, I see history as a finite tool used by very human historians to study the lives and behavior and institutions of finite human beings. Even when one includes all of human learning, which in a sense is part of human history, it still is finite. Additionally, the sources of history are only people, no matter how important or brilliant or wise or righteous they may be. Hence, history can only tell us about our finite world and about its finite inhabitants—which message, however, makes the pursuit of good history very worthwhile.

Now to premise number two. I accept that there may be an infinite reality, called the realm of God or the divine. I also allow that God may choose and may have chosen to communicate with finite human beings at various times and for his own purposes. However, the witnessing to divinity is God's domain alone, if such a witness is to be given. Human beings cannot do it, and especially historians with history cannot do it. History tells us about people, not about God. The terms faith and religion as related to the faithful history debate, are inexorably tied to a belief and hope in God. The acquisition of religious or faithful insights into reality are usually reported to be very good by those who have claimed them. Therefore, one's quest for faith and religious witnessing seems worthy of one's best efforts. However, this paper is not an attempt to explore or to explicate the value and meaning of such religious experiences.

My third basic premise suggests that there is value in keeping the information of these two worlds separate while pursuing the truths or insights to be gained from each. Since believing historians, however, are both historian and believer living in one “tabernacle,” as it were,
there will be for them a continuous interplay of the information from each of these sources. Therefore, the historians' major challenge will be to use only historic data in premising their research and in drawing their conclusions. Otherwise their history will be faithful history, about which I will be saying more later.

In my opinion, it is ultimately in each of us that our truths and our realities are dealt with; it is hoped, in positive, constructive ways. To further clarify, let me add that it is after the truths and insights of both human learning (history) and divine witnessing (God) are received, that each person must struggle to give them meaning for herself or himself. Those so struggling may find the services of theologians or philosophers or ministers—priests or bishops or whomever—most useful. Perhaps the scriptural analogy that the kingdom of God is within us is relevant.

Now to return to the faithful history issue. A basic problem arises for believing historians when they see themselves judging their historical data in light of perceived superior facts or truths. All historians of professional stature know the tenuous nature of their conclusions drawn from never-completed research. Thus when that superior truth is perceived to be God's word, faithful historians will become vulnerable, for it appears to them that they are challenging God himself. Additionally, historians will probably feel that their community of believers sees them as challenging God—hardly a climate for objective, effective scholarship.

How can believing historians deal with those problems? The answer lies in desensitizing history. If we accept the fact that history cannot testify of God, we recognize that neither can it testify against God. This attitude allows believing scholars to pursue their historical research unrestrained by so-called superior wisdom or divine disfavor, providing a climate, it is hoped, in which to produce their best histories.

Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to suggest a more useful definition of faithful history. It is simply "history" (so-called) written either to prove or to disprove the things of faith and religion or God, his will and ways. Utah Mormons find they have the well-known writings both of Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History (proof positive), and of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Mormonism, Myth or Reality (proof negative). Neither is good history; and it seems doubtful that either is a viable fountain for faith.

One additional point on this issue. Many define faithful history as history written to promote the faith. At best, such action is a use of history, not a kind of history, and frequently it is simply propaganda and apologetics.

Desensitizing history also allows believing historians to extend the range of the historical evidence. For example, what do historians do with Joseph Smith, wherein he said that divine beings talked with him? How do historians handle that historic fact; namely, his statement?

Some historians elect to go the way of superior truth and insight by declaring that they know Joseph Smith was God's prophet. Therefore, they conclude, of course he talked with God. The problem for such historians rapidly compounds when other conflicting historical evidences are produced that show a variation on what Joseph said actually happened, and when the techniques of scriptural higher criticism that William D. Russell is calling to our attention are applied to their claims. Faithful historians continually face challenges (both to their history and to their faith) because historical conclusions are made with the bias of their religious perceptions of reality, which bias distorts the message of history.

Next a look at a second option for dealing with Joseph Smith. Some historians state that Joseph claimed he talked with God. Their presumption is that he did not; still they have not actually called him a liar. Others do call him a liar. Now, I ask you, how does one prove that Joseph Smith did not talk with God? Where do historians get off calling their witness a liar—unless the historical record itself clearly shows that Joseph lied about talking with God. Historians hardly have the luxury of saying to their historic source, "I'll use this, but I won't use that portion of the evidence." Granted, we must bring to our scrutiny of Joseph's data the same careful evaluations we would bring to any historical resource.

The key to our using the historic witness of one who is testifying to divine experiences, lies in desensitizing that witness's message. I reiterate, history can only measure the historicity of a prophet's statements, not their divinity. So, why look for the divine evidence in history? Secondly, Joseph's witness is itself not a divine witness; it is a historic witness only. It
differs qualitatively from the witness he claimed he received of God. For example, Joseph was puzzled that people in Palmyra did not generally believe his visionary claims. They even persecuted him for "telling the truth," as he perceived it. Joseph identified with the Apostle Paul, whose message of a divine communication was also rejected by many who heard him. What these people heard was Joseph's and Paul's witnesses. It requires little effort to discern that our reading of their accounts (the history) is not in any sense a replication of the experience each claimed of direct, personal communication with the infinite.

Let us continue to explore Joseph's desensitized historic witness for additional insights. Three of the people Joseph testified to were Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. These three men proclaimed later that they saw the angel Moroni who showed them the gold plates and testified to them of these plates' divine purposes. These men bore solemn witness of these experiences, which is written in the preface to the Book of Mormon. Does all this mean the Book of Mormon is true, God's word? The answer is no, for remember that we are looking at the historicity of the record only, not at its divinity.

Joseph reported to his mother soon after their angelic witness that the burden of testifying of God's work no longer was his alone. They now had to bear it with him. Joseph was relieved to the point of ecstasy. Does that prove they saw the angel Moroni and the gold plates? No, but this desensitized look at the history of these events leaves us with some very interesting questions and with new historical insights. Joseph Smith clearly recognized the difference between his witness and Moroni's, a distinction quite apparent to Harris, Whitmer, and Cowdery also. And I suggest that these kinds of experiences confirmed for Joseph in very significant ways his own sense of his prophetic role. For us the question still remains: What did these men experience anyway?

Let me turn to my second point, that God only can witness to the divine. I do not presume to judge, nor is this paper an attempt to judge, whether or not people have had a divine witness. That is very personally their own experience. Yet one often sees examples of "faith" premised on historic evidence or some rationalization made from such data. It is easy to make a qualitative distinction between one's reading of Joseph's account of the angel Moroni's visit (history) and one's experiencing of an actual angelic visit. I suggest that it would be this latter kind of witnessing that gives substance to faith and divinity to religion. Perhaps some Saints may be foregoing genuine religious witnessing from divine sources, because they have been seduced into accepting the "lesser light" of history as witness for their faith. However, this paper is not a formula for religious experiences, nor an explication of them; rather, it is a rationale for desensitized rather than faithful history.

An additional problem arises for people who presume an understanding of God, of how he operates or what his will is from history. Again to Joseph Smith for an example: Many good Christians maintain that God would not speak to Joseph Smith, because he was a money digger, a peep stone artist, and a charlatan. While those facts are still debated, the factual historic record shows that Joseph Smith did dig for buried treasure, did use a peep stone, and could have some of his behavior charlatanized (if there is such a verb).

However, when these same Christians look to the desensitized historical record of the scriptures, they discover that God supposedly spoke to Moses, who killed an Egyptian in a fight, and to King David, the Psalmist who committed adultery and sent the husband into the thick of battle so he would be killed. There is also Saul of Tarsus who actively engaged in persecuting the early-day Saints. Had he lived in the nineteenth century, one may have found him at Haun's Mill or at least in Missouri's courts. Latter Day Saints find little relief when looking at sixteen-year-old Nephi, who beheaded Laban to obtain the brass plates. Or Martin Harris, who was entrusted with the first 116 pages of the newly translated Book of Mormon manuscript, only to lose them. Yet still Moroni visited him with a divine message.

Can Saints presume an understanding of God from the historic record? Better the message be from God. For history, as God's message, maketh uncertain sounds, indeed.

Next, I digress only slightly to reinforce my argument for the desensitizing of history. The scriptural record advises us that the worst fate that could befall any mortal would be to be cast into hell or outer darkness with the devil and his angels, to become a son (or daughter—we don't want to discriminate) of perdition. I ask you to recognize that scripturally this terrible damnation is assigned not to those who have denied the witness of
faithful history, but rather to those who have received the most profound and sacred of
divine witnesses—a visitation from Jesus Christ himself, and then deny it.¹⁴

Imagine the following scenario: Time: A.D. 2050. Place: heaven—judgment bar of God. Enter the late Professor William D. Russell to be judged. The verdict, go below and join your friend, Melvin T. Smith, who jogged down that-a-way some time ago. Bill protests! “Why me!” The answer booms across heaven: “Because you, as Mel Smith earlier, denied the witness of ‘faithful history.’” (One might add, parenthetically, that would be a hell of a thing to happen to a couple of marathoning Restoration historians.)

The other side of the coin suggests that the hoped-for rewards of heaven and eternal life will require more than merely believing in faithful history.

I have been attempting to elaborate some of the nuances implied in the title of this paper, “Faithful History/Secular Religion.” I reiterate my rationale: History is finite, witnessed to by humans only. If one’s religion is based on faithful history, it is only a secular religion.

I would next like to review with you the historic aspects of several events of institutional and personal significance to both the RLDS church and its members and to the LDS church and its members. Remember that what we review are historic perceptions. In fact, the approach used here is that of a “faithful historian” seeking through history to explain God’s purposes, etc.

Problem number one. Whom did God want to succeed the Prophet Joseph Smith? Joseph III, as is suggested in a recent letter which witnesses to the prophet’s ordaining his son to that purpose?¹⁵ That letter suggests the prophet’s hopes, but is that what God wanted also? Does Joseph III’s ordination mean that his line was to provide all succeeding presidents for the RLDS church? Were successors to be only the first born or were other male heirs equally eligible? And where should the RLDS church look now for a successor? To other descendants of Joseph III, or Joseph the prophet? Or to a daughter of the present president? Does that mean that God wants women to hold and share the priesthood roles?

Let me reassure you that I am neither proposing church policy nor trying to determine the will of God in these matters for the RLDS church or anyone else. What I think can be shown is that to read the “historic” record as God’s will and word, clouds the issue unnecessarily. It shows also the extensive rationalization required to obtain acceptable answers. Rationalization itself is a proper human practice. I question, however, that God’s witnessing submits to human rationalizations.

Now, let’s take the succession issue to the LDS church. Was Brigham Young, president and senior apostle in the Quorum of Twelve Apostles when Joseph the prophet was killed, to succeed him?¹⁶ Did he not hold the keys of authority and was not the seniority system God’s way of choosing the next president of the church? Does God still use that method?

So, what is the problem for the LDS church? It certainly has not run out of seniority; in fact, it faces the problem in a new dimension as people live longer and as life support systems are brought to them. Does God also speak through life support systems as an aspect of seniority? (For some time dearly loved Spencer W. Kimball, currently in poor health, has used a heart pacer.) Is that okay with God? Should we include kidney dialysis, and an artificial heart, or in time even a transplanted brain too?

I sense that it is much easier for RLDS students to answer the second set of questions than the first. Why? Because they are easier? I don’t think so. Utah Mormons find the first set of questions quite easy to answer. Why again? Because when we look at each other’s issues, we tend to see them wholly from a historical perspective, unclouded by suppositions of what God has in mind. I can tell you that these LDS questions are for Utah Mormons incredibly difficult, for they recognize that the prophetic office and presidency require not only spiritual qualities, but enormous physical stamina and mental strength as well. Their rationalizations are wide-ranging, and for me equally incredible.

On the other hand, RLDS members could readily recommend a practical, reasonable solution to seniority; namely, retirement and emeritus status. Be assured Utah Mormons are ready to recommend “practical, reasonable” solutions for the RLDS succession issue also. And maybe a few recommendations not quite so practical and reasonable, such as repenting and being baptized in the really true church. (However, if you did that, you would immediately have a seniority problem, so think it over before you do anything rash!)
This kind of juxtaposing of the issues allows one to see what desensitized history, free of religious/faith/bias, is, and how such objectivity allows historians to gain the insights that history can give—insights usually unperceived when faith or religion clouds their scrutiny.

Let's move next to a second issue: Polygamy or plural marriage. Utah Mormons accepted the 132nd Section of their Doctrine and Covenants as the will of God for them. They also produced historical evidence that Joseph the prophet was polygamous. After 1852, they practiced and preached it publicly.¹⁷ Thirty-eight years later Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto (1890),¹⁸ which supposedly was to end plural marriages, yet a second manifesto had to be issued in 1904 by Joseph F. Smith.¹⁹ There are still fundamentalists practicing polygamy in Utah today, though it is not LDS church policy.

Now, what was God's will in the matter? Did God want it to end in 1890 or never? Is God influenced by the law of the land? Will the case before the courts today of Royston E. Potter, a Utah polygamist, who was fired from his law enforcement job because he practiced polygamy, make any difference to God? If the case goes to the U.S. Supreme Court and that body finds antipolygamy laws unconstitutional, would God change his mind again? And would Mormons again practice polygamy?

The questions raised here are only relevant to the perspective that faithful history produces. Desensitized history shows that Mormons in Territorial Utah were working against themselves in their territorial politics. First of all, they wanted as much self-rule as possible, which after Utah Territory was created in 1850 would be achieved by statehood status. The only way they could gain statehood and its self-rule advantages was to give up their peculiarities such as polygamy, cooperative, united order economics, and theocratic politics. By 1896 (statehood) they had done that, generally. History provides evidence that neither Brigham Young nor his successor, John Taylor, could let go of their perceptions of God's will for his Saints. Young died in 1877, propounding all of them. Taylor died on the "polygamy" underground—hiding out—in 1887. He did not insist on continuing the United Order. Wilford Woodruff stated that God no longer required these sacrifices of his Saints and issued the Manifesto in 1890. The historic facts are that the national government had disfranchised Mormons, persecuted and prosecuted them, escheated their properties, threatened disincorporation of the church itself, and closed out the perpetual emigrating fund. The LDS church, as an institution, was on the brink of extinction.²⁰ Objective history shows that the pioneer legacy for Utah and the LDS church was not without problems by any means.

What about the RLDS church on polygamy? Has there not been some embarrassment over the denial of sound historic evidence of the practice by Joseph Smith?

Today both churches support monogamous marriages, but what do they do when converts to the churches are made in lands where polygamy is now practiced legally? A clouded view of faithful history is of little help. God's direct witness or even desensitized human history would be better.

Let me turn to a third and final example, which will require some imagination and role playing by you. However, I believe it provides us a classic, if tragic, example of "faithful history/secular religion."

It is early fall of 1857, the location is Southwestern Utah Territory. You are there because you believe God wants you there to build up the kingdom of God on earth. You know God's will in the matter, because Joseph Smith had prophesied that the Saints would become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains (at least that is what your church leaders have told you),²¹ and you had received a call from President Brigham Young to go south and help build up the Iron Mission. Wasn't it essential that God's chosen Saints in Zion be secure and economically self-sufficient? You believed the earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof. You were one of the elect to help usher in Christ's reign on earth—his millennial reign of 1,000 years of peace.

You knew that the Saints ought to be pure, and you had responded to the reformation preachings of Jedediah Grant and others by confessing your sins and being rebaptized.²² You recognized that something was at fault when the crickets came again in 1855 and grasshoppers along with them, and heavy crop damage from late frosts occurred in 1856.
Why would God permit such bad things to happen to his Saints if there was indeed a law upon which all blessings are predicated, as you believed? Why? It must be because of the sinners and the evil in Zion, as Brother Grant had proclaimed. True, Zion must first be cleansed. You tried to be as faithful as possible, even to become perfect, as it were.

In August 1857 Apostle George A. Smith preached in your meetings, warning you of the coming of an army to destroy the Saints. Just how faithful would you prove to be, he'd asked. You recalled the mobs at Nauvoo, the Missouri persecutions, and absence of protection and redress from the government. You wondered, what did all of this mean? What did God have in mind for you and his Saints? It was now September. What should you do when a wealthy company of Arkansas emigrants came through Southern Utah and camped at Mountain Meadows before heading into the desert enroute to California?

Some were arguing that these were bad people from Arkansas and Missouri and enemies of God's people. Others added that they might return from California with a second army to destroy the Saints. Wasn't this the situation Apostle Smith had alluded to?

And where did the Indians fit into the picture? Surely Mormons needed an alliance with them to help in case of war and to avoid a second front.

What should you do when the matter finally came to a vote, either to destroy the wagon train or to let it go? You believed murder was an unforgivable sin. Thou shalt not kill! You were commanded to love your enemies, to do good to them that persecute you. You knew these commandments and believed them devoutly.

Yet somehow you understood that church leaders apparently would approve of the wagon train's destruction. You reasoned it really was war in some ways, with your enemy, the United States, sending an army to destroy you, or so you understood it, at least. These were bad people, you rationalized. Some of them were even from Missouri. So what should you do? Follow counsel? And what was that counsel officially?

If you happened to be John D. Lee, adopted son to Brigham Young, you elected to do what you understood church leaders approved of (and there were many, many others also making similar choices), for you believed that God's will came to you through his anointed.

So you joined with the Indians who had attacked the wagon train. You saw the Iron County militia arrive. You took part in the council to select a course of action. (Later, at your trial, you claimed you tried to talk them out of their chosen course of action.) You were not successful, and so the next morning you, John D. Lee, took a flag of truce to the emigrants, disarmed them, and set the stage for the brutal massacre that followed: Mormons killing white men, Indian allies killing women and older children. It didn't take long!

The next morning you returned to the site and joined your compatriots in a prayer circle, there taking the most solemn of oaths not to reveal the details of that event.

You become haunted by what you have done, even though in your report to Brigham Young two weeks later you carefully laid the main blame on the Indians. You noted that you did not believe there was any "innocent blood" in the whole bunch. Hadn't you been careful not to kill the innocent little children?

You continued to ask yourself during the remaining twenty years of your life, why? But you held fast to the position that church officials, who had "ordered" you to do it, would be held accountable before God, not you, if only you remained faithful. This you tried to do—fulfilling calls to serve, to pioneer, to build a ferry to cross the Colorado River. Perhaps you sought comfort in the scriptural assurance of the 132nd Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, that though you commit all manner of sins (after receiving the covenant of celestial marriage), save the "shedding of innocent blood," you might even be destroyed in the flesh and turned over to the buffetng of Satan, but still you would come forth with your blessings on the morning of the first resurrection. It seemed to be all you had, after your excommunication from the church in 1870. (Lee never did turn against church leaders, and on March 23, 1877, he was "destroyed in the flesh" by a firing squad at Mountain Meadows.)

Lee's is only one of the many tragedies of Mountain Meadows. Another was Nephi Johnson, age eighteen in 1857. He was also there. In his deathbed delirium as an old man, he cried out, "Blood! Blood! Blood!" How terrible this tragedy! How doubly terrible that believers in God placed themselves in such jeopardy.
How did it happen? I have not heard any historian, even writers of faithful history, argue that God commanded them to do it. Then how? I maintain this is a classic example of people reading and hearing history, a kind of faithful history, that is the record and statements of humans, including some of their church leaders, and construing what they heard to be the will of God. The results were the tragic deaths of more than one hundred California-bound emigrants, the debasing of those Mormon people, particularly those who were involved directly, and a stain upon both the Mormon church and its leadership during those years.

The issue was not just the fault of bad Mormon leadership, though in this instance it was surely bad. It must be remembered that these faithful Saints also had to override their belief in the commandments of God—Thou shalt not kill! Do good to them that persecute you! Remember, those commandments came from very good scriptures.

For those Mormons, their versions of faithful history left them bereft of their individual morality and human judgments and of the values to be found in objective, desensitized history. It also secularized their religion with grievous consequences for all. Thus, these faithful followers found themselves at Mountain Meadows in September 1857 with the worst of both their worlds. How very tragic indeed.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale to believers who are historians writing about Mormon and Latter Day Saint history. The arguments that faithful history, as defined herein, secularizes religion to the degree that it is the basis of the religion, is made not to discredit any particular religion or religious rationale. Rather it is an attempt to provide a justification to believing historians for desensitizing their histories and concluding from their studies what history by itself can tell us. It is hoped, thereby, that all of us will have the best facts and insights that history can provide.

Those historic “truths” along with whatever divinely witnessed “truths” one may have received, present each believing student of history with the raw materials from which he or she will draw conclusions about the whole of life—what it is, what are its purposes? What does one really know, and what now does one do with what he or she knows?

It is not an easy struggle, at least not for me, but it is a fascinating one which provides us with a great range of choices—the choice to believe, to follow, to support, to affiliate, and to question, the choice to “be engaged in good causes,” to explore fully both human wisdom and God’s witnessing for what each can mean in one’s life.

This attitude allows each of us to enlist the help of specialists, of those wiser than we are in these matters—theologians, philosophers, psychologists, geneticists, biologists, anthropologists, et al. What does all that we know really mean anyway? The big, profound, and final question, the question which religions generally attempt to answer, and the question ever present in the minds of the believing historians, is a question best answered by them when they acknowledge the limits of history, desensitize their study of those evidences which refer to God and the infinite, and draw their historical conclusions from historic data only. With the good history they produce, thereby, they and others are better able to wrestle with that “big question” than if they produced faithful history.

The struggle will not disappear, but it is better to have good evidences (tools) with which to struggle, be they historic or divine. Neither faithful history nor secular faith or religion are useful tools in the human search for understanding.

ENDNOTES

3. Joseph Smith, Jr., The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), Joseph Smith 2:17, 30-42-44-46, 49.
17. Ibid., Vol. 5, 294-300.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 256-57.

Richard Lloyd Anderson has compiled a useful book about the eleven witnesses whose testimonies appear at the front of the Book of Mormon. In addition, he provides an account of the acquisition of the plates by Joseph Smith, the translation process, and the accounts of members of the Smith family who were not "official" witnesses.

The book would appear convincing if viewed in terms of its basic premise, namely, that the witnesses of the Book of Mormon were intelligent, honest, and forthright people who were highly regarded in their secular pursuits and who remained steadfast in their testimony in the face of persecution. Even those who left the church continued to affirm their earlier testimonies. Yet, can the accounts of these witnesses be taken seriously? That is the primary question to which Anderson addresses himself. Not surprisingly, his answer is yes. "After years of working with their lives and their words," he says, "I am deeply convinced that their printed testimonies must be taken at face value" (p. xii). Just what "face value" means is a question to be addressed later.

The book begins with an account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and describes the accounts of what I would call the "informal witnesses," primarily members of the Smith family who were present at the time but not a part of either the Three Witnesses or the Eight Witnesses. Each of the Three Witnesses — Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris — receives two chapters. The Three Witnesses all played prominent roles in the translation process. All three became disaffected with the movement and were excommunicated, although Cowdery and Harris were both rebaptized later in life. All three had respectable careers following their apostasy and were subjected to considerable questioning concerning their earlier involvement with the church and the Book of Mormon.

The Eight Witnesses are dealt with together in two chapters, one on the witnesses from the Smith family and another on the witnesses from the Whitmer family (including brother-in-law Hiram Page). Several of the Eight Witnesses died young, and only John Whitmer received anything approaching the attention paid to the Three Witnesses.

The book is clearly organized and contains a fine index. Editorially, it contains several annoying lapses, including a typographical error which has Joseph coming into possession of the plates on September 22, 1823. This is four years early and the date of Joseph's first vision of the Angel Moroni.

Anderson's research is impressive. He has acquired virtually every written account of the witnesses' statements of their involvement with the Book of Mormon, and he has compiled a thorough account of the secular careers of the witnesses who left the church. Allegations of changes in the testimonies and of character flaws are addressed in a generally convincing manner, except for the discussion of an incident in which Oliver Cowdery was supposedly challenged in court about his role as a Book of Mormon witness. After his excommunication, Cowdery became a lawyer in Ohio. An opposing lawyer is said to have challenged Cowdery's character during a court proceeding. This gave Cowdery an opportunity to make a moving affirmation of his earlier testimony. All of the accounts are second-hand at best and show some evidence of being embellished in the re-telling. While the story probably has some basis in fact, it is difficult to separate the facts from the embellishments. In the end, the story is not particularly crucial to Anderson's premise anyway.

More substantively, I would have hoped for a richer analysis of the apostasy of the Three Witnesses. Anderson treats the witnesses kindly, but it is clear where his allegiance lies. The three left, he says,
because of “egotism.” Having had a prominent place at the church’s founding, they could not graciously step aside when new leadership was called for. According to Anderson, David Whitmer was a man who “resisted change” and who was jealous of the influence of Sidney Rigdon. Martin Harris was overly concerned when he lost property in the collapse of the Kirtland Bank. Only the brief references to Harris’s concern about his early steps toward polygamy and to questions about the financial dealings of the Whitmers hint at a broader movement within the church.

We can safely assume that many leaders who stayed with the church shared shortcomings with the apostate witnesses. The departure of the witnesses, then, is more understandable when it is seen in terms of competing visions of what the church was and of where it should be going. By the late 1830s the church was a pluralistic body. Several factions were expounding their understanding of the church and seeking the blessing of the prophet. It would appear that Joseph flourished in an environment where all kinds of new and exciting ideas flowed to him. He absorbed them and made his own inspired synthesis, which was more appealing to some than to others. The winners stayed. Prominent losers left. Anderson’s account seems to me to underplay the pluralistic nature of the church at the time.

In his preface, Anderson says that he is convinced that the testimony of the witnesses should be taken at “face value.” On one level, we can interpret this statement within the narrow scope of historical inquiry. That is, the evidence indicates that the witnesses were honest, sensible, respectable people. There is every reason to believe that they were sincere in their testimonies and that they were not attempting to perpetrate a fraud. Moreover, it is unlikely that they would be particularly susceptible to being tricked into their testimony by Joseph Smith.

The term “face value” could also be pressed further to imply that we should believe that the witnesses actually did see the plates and that they heard God vouch for the authority and accuracy of the translation. This would further imply that the information we have on the witnesses should lead one to a belief in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. Anderson does not clarify just which interpretation he favors, although he is clearly a believer in the Book of Mormon.

Anderson’s belief may be the key point here. It seems to me that, while the good character and general reliability of the witnesses has been established, one must already be a believer in the Book of Mormon to be finally convinced of its divine origin. That is, Anderson provides confirming evidence to believers while providing historically valuable information to non-believers. In the end, faith is not derived directly from a particular set of historical facts. The origins of faith are much more mysterious.

Finally, it is important to note, I think, that the quality of the witnesses’ testimony is not the most difficult question related to the veracity of the Book of Mormon. A decided lack of directly confirming archeological evidence, a rather pervasive secular mood in Western culture at the present time, and questions about the translation process itself are far more difficult. Nevertheless, the testimony of the witnesses is compelling and deserves to be taken seriously.

A. Bruce Lindgren
RLDS Temple School


This essay collection authored by Mormon women reveals the perplexities of the problems women encounter as they begin to measure women’s traditional church roles and expectations against the call of their inner authentic selves.

The essayists write from their unique Mormon orientation. They employ themes such as birthing, forgiveness, the problem of pain, female friendships, racism, sexism, family, career, “endurance,” and “breaking away,” to explore their lives as women caught in the flux of radical change. Editor Bradford used the symbol of the mandala—a sphere divided into four parts, depicting family, religion, service, and self, and held together by a protective circle—to organize the essays.
into thematic sections. "All the women must come to terms with the role expectations at home and at church" she writes (p. 9), and this is each woman's journey toward personal "wholeness."

The essays are well-written; each represents honest soul-searching; some are intensely personal. The authors write of their doubts and longings, their intuitive insights about themselves, their gifts, their roles, and their struggles with their church's restrictions and prescriptions for them. With a few exceptions their inner journeys begin with dissatisfaction and disquieting questions. Some feel that the church should "do more . . . to help women explore new responsibilities and opportunities" (p. 114).

A key question underlying much of their writing is summed up in Jerrie W. Hurd's statement: "I want to know why we think doing things for others makes us reliable but doing things for ourselves makes us selfish" (p. 138). This tension between selfishness and selflessness and how it can be resolved in a responsible way (Why don't we ever hear about men struggling with this?) is experienced by many women who are seeking answers to the problem of how their discovery of self-worth is worked out in their intimate relationships. Cherie Taylor Pederson suggests that neither the women's movement nor the church can provide the answer; each woman must find her own (p. 192).

That is what this book is about: those inner searchings—the significant questions about self that thinking women today are attempting to resolve.

The writers of these essays have demonstrated courage; they have nudged themselves to the edge of risk because they have not been afraid to question. The consequence of that questioning has resulted in life-style changes for a few; others have become, through their life choices, apologists for Mormon beliefs.

The difficulty Mormon women have in extricating themselves from the heavy influence of traditional images imposed by the Relief Society and the voice of the priesthood to them through years of indoctrination is evident in their writings. These sources of authority and the particular theology they express speak loud and clear to women and are strong factors in their decision making. (How can I decide not to have another baby with all those souls waiting to be born?) Underlying doubts heavily laden with guilt inform their decisions. (Is this a selfish goal? Am I fulfilling my duties in the Relief Society? Am I putting family first?)

Immersed in a tradition of faith and belief that "claims" them, some of the writers try to rationalize the concept of women held by their church. However, the fact that many of them are having some success in critically balancing conflicting messages from church and self is evidenced by phrases used throughout the book such as "redefinition of self," "validation of self-worth," "fully realize my potential," and the wholesome declaration by Marlene Payne: "I listened to Church talks, hearing what I wanted to hear, and reconstructing the Gospel anew in my life in a pattern consistent with my nature" (p. 196).

As an RLDS woman I understand some of the obstacles these women face in their "search for self." As an RLDS feminist I am disturbed by the number of outer-directed lives described in this volume—those who allow the priesthood, or the Relief Society, or tradition, or family to tell them what they should do. In attempting to fulfill "duty" demands as well as the call of their personal "voices" they have fallen into the trap of trying to be super-women. More sophisticated feminist philosophy helps women pare down such impossible goals and work out more reasonable solutions. There are well-known feminist theologians (e.g. Rosemary Reuther, Virginia Mallenkott, Phyllis Trible, Dorothee Soelle, and many others) who offer tremendous insights and enlightened support to women as they struggle to develop an adequate theology for their lives. Yet there is an astonishing unawareness of such sources in these essays.

I thoroughly enjoyed the description of two particular aspects of women's ministry to women. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher in "Birthing" refers to an earlier time in the Mormon church when midwives blessed the mother during her confinement. This was a sacred washing and anointing of women and included each member of the body and each function as they spoke: "... that every cord and muscle may be strong . . . that the marrow of your bones be warmed up by the spirit of God . . . that your heart might be comforted . . . that [your womb] might be strengthened . . . that your child might be perfect in every limb and joint and muscle" (pp. 50, 51).

Ann Edwards-Cannon, "In Celebration of Female Friends," expresses deep joy in sisterhood: "I need other women to laugh with. . . . I find something incredibly comfortable and warm about sharing laughter with my own sex. . . . Good women friends . . . can empathize about things that a man, no matter how sympathetic, can never understand. . . . I need my women friends
for their enthusiasm . . . shared experiences . . . mutual support” (pp. 111-113).

Thoughtful questions abound in the pages of this book. If the “protective circle” of the mandala is allowed to expand, perhaps even to open up a bit, there may be further questioning, more searching, greater risk-taking, deeper pain, and, therefore, increased faith in themselves and the possibility of healing and wholeness.

Imogene Goodyear
Independence, Missouri


As I sit here preparing to write my annual book review of Brother Gibbons “colon (:)
biographies,” I wonder which of us will retire first. Let me begin by saying that Francis M. Gibbons has managed to maintain his usual style and approach in this, the latest of the “Prophet of God” series. The series now includes Joseph Smith (the Martyr), Heber J. Grant (Man of Steel), Brigham Young (Modern Moses), and now Lorenzo Snow (Spiritual Giant).

Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was obviously a powerful leader whose contribution to the church in both practical and spiritual matters was beyond question. Brother Snow was a good man with a vivid and significant heritage. Such a man, complex as he must have been, deserves the respect and dignity of a serious, honest, and critical biography. In this case President Snow has not received the sensitive and human treatment he deserves.

The marketing department of Deseret Book draws our attention to the author’s qualifications as a previous secretary to the First Presidency, and as a lawyer (corporate, trial, and appellate). Perhaps this background explains the legal brief and corporate apologetic which is presented as a biography.

If further comment is desired I would suggest you consult my review of Brigham Young: Modern Moses: Prophet of God published in Volume 3 (1983) of the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal in order to save us both time. This work is essentially the same as the others, sharing equally in the difficulties and advantages. I would not recommend reading this work, and wonder why I did.

Paul M. Edwards
RLDS Temple School


Detail consumed much of William Clayton’s life. As camp clerk for the original Pioneer Company to the Great Salt Lake Valley, he recorded the distance they traveled each day. Disputes arose frequently over mileage. Clayton, not easily satisfied with estimates, had an ingenuous idea. On a subsequent trip, he measured a wagon wheel and discovered it measured \( \frac{\pi}{200} \) of a mile. After tying a piece of red flannel to the wheel, he counted revolutions. This enabled him to accurately measure and record daily mileage. With the help of Orson Pratt an odometer was soon designed, built, and used for the balance of the trip.
Clayton's dogged perseverance and diligence not only characterized his life but also distinguished his *The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide*, published in 1848. Besides providing the emigrant with accurate mileage, Clayton recorded details of campsites, water, timber, and instructions for fording streams and rivers. Considered by many as the best of its time, the Guide was purchased by many non-Mormons. Perhaps the greatest compliment was plagiarism and the fact that the Guide sold for several times the original price even second and third hand.

We are fortunate that Stanley B. Kimball, the foremost authority on the Mormon Trail, has edited this new publication of the Guide. Clayton's remarks in the Guide are practical and thoughtful. He gives the reader a colorful portrait and a sense of the hardships endured. Professor Kimball's comprehensive annotation is equally entertaining. He provides a side-by-side account of modern-day towns, rivers, and creeks for most of Clayton's entries. It is noteworthy that Orson Pratt made the original longitude and latitude calculations and that Kimball re-checked and corrected the same. The fact that Professor Kimball has traveled the trail numerous times is apparent through his extensive commentary. Several photographs of famous landmarks, e.g. Chimney Rock, Porter's Rock, wagon wheel ruts, accompany the text. After reading the Guide and Kimball's commentary, one cannot help but feel they have traveled on the trail. The full-color photograph on the dust jacket enhances that feeling.

Professor James B. Allen provides an authoritative but somewhat brief biographical introduction of William Clayton. We come to know Clayton as a man of incredible faith and loyalty, meticulous and persevering of nature with a well-earned reputation as clerk and records keeper. This is a tantalizing glimpse of a fascinating man. Clayton never held a position of leadership in the church but had a lasting impact on the lives of many Saints.

This volume contains twenty-two photographs, nine maps, an index, and Clayton's hymn written on the trail, "Come, Come Ye Saints." Each page of *The Emigrants' Guide* is facsimile reproduced from the original. The book is attractively bound and printed on quality paper.

In the preface of Clayton's Guide, he tells us that "when its merits have been tested by experience, no person will repent of having purchased it." Similarly, this new edition edited by Professor Kimball will be a worthy addition to a library of Mormon History, Western Americana, or Trail History.

Greg Smith

Independence, Missouri

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Murray Kempton once opined that sociology is merely the remorseless pursuit of what everyone knew all along. It must be said that Maurice Draper's book does nothing to disprove this thesis. *Isles and Continents* is a revised version of Draper's Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Kansas.

The book can be described as an unfortunate plural marriage of scientific lingo, cybernetic modeling, typographical errors, and *inter alia*, a description of the RLDS missionary effort in foreign fields during the period 1958 to 1978.

One will look in vain, however, for new revelations about the missionary work of the period and the cultural or social change attendant to it. Rather one is hit in the face with sentences which cause the reader to look for satirical motives in the author. Draper gives us such thoughts as the following. "Lauer (1973:5), for example, states that change is normal" (p. 21). Further, we are to understand that "Warriner (1978:3) points out that ancient civilizations 'had at least some instances of organizations'" (p. 253). Earlier we learn that "some churches are complex social organizations" (p. 25).

One learns again and again that the RLDS church is an "open systems organization" (pp. 54, 55, 264, 271). When a-historical forms of sociology search for a-historical models, we borrow the patois of the computer. Hence, a social organization
is a system which, naturally enough, connects to other systems. If we were to view the RLDS church as a bureaucratic structure, we could say this quite as well but we would have lost the scientific imagery of "open systems."

This is the guiding principle of Maurice Draper’s book, scientific imagery, of a sort. "The research design," Draper offers, "entails an ex-post-facto, before/after case study without a control group" (p. 52). One does not need, then, an appropriately stained lab jacket to study the foreign missionary activities of the RLDS church and the social change therefrom.

In passing, Draper’s work gives us a surfeit of flow charts on the formal structure of the RLDS church. He also charts the numerical growth of the church which is slow in the United States, nonexistent in Europe, and rather rapid in certain impoverished Third World areas.

The third chapter of the book, "Membership Distribution: 1958-1978," begins on page 60. (The Table of Contents puts its beginning at page 100.) It gives two- to three-page summations of RLDS missionary work in India, Haiti, etc. Here there is a pastiche of information on the individuals who actually made contact with indigenous cultures for the church. We get, for example, a glimpse of the work of Dr. John Blumenschein and his family, who settled in a remote area of Honduras. After Dr. Blumenschein’s death, his widow and children remained, creating the Buena Fe Foundation and working in a clinic and school. More information on the struggles of families such as this would humanize the book.

The book’s theme suggests a social and cultural interchange between the missionary church and those “from isles and continents afar” who convert to the institution. This is not an uninteresting topic. When the leadership of the Reorganized church found themselves converting Indian people who practiced polygamy, the situation was dealt with in an interesting way: "The marriage issue was resolved by recognizing the de facto situation of plural wives for some of the Orissa tribesmen but reiterating at the same time the church’s basic commitment to monogamy as a Christian principle" (p. 258). Was this an act of tolerance or spiritual realpolitik? What sorts of negotiations went into this decision? We get no clues from this book.

It is not a tragedy, in a world of tragedies, to write a bad book. It becomes slightly sad to do so, however, when one has access to great information. Maurice Draper, a member of the First Presidency for twenty years, has had access to this information. He has written passable prose at other times. As for this book, I cannot recommend it.

Ron E. Roberts
University of Northern Iowa

BOOK NOTE

Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community has been published in paperback by the University of Illinois Press, Box 5081, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820, at a list price of $9.95. This book was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1981 as Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century. It was reviewed in Volume 1 of the JWHA Journal by Richard Howard.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September 28-30, 1984  Annual Meeting, John Whitmer Historical Association, Des Moines, Iowa

Spring 1985  Twelfth Annual Restoration History Lecture Series, Lamoni, Iowa, and Independence, Missouri

May 2-5, 1985  Annual Meeting, Mormon History Association, Independence, Missouri

September 27-29, 1985  Annual Meeting, John Whitmer Historical Association, Place to be announced

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